

# Living Faith in Suffolk



# Living Themes in the Old Testament

## Images

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Living Themes in the Old Testament is one of the Living Faith in Suffolk resources produced by the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and available on [www.cofesuffolk.org](http://www.cofesuffolk.org)

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## Introduction

Living Themes in the Old Testament is a Living Faith in Suffolk course providing opportunity to reflect on some of the key themes in the Old Testament which the worldview of the New Testament. It is written under the following headings:

- God – considering images of God in the Old Testament;
- Covenant – a theme which shapes people’s understanding of their relationship with God and underlies Jesus’ teachings;
- People of God – what it means to be the People of God, and how this develops through the ‘big story’ of the Bible;
- Holiness ] two “technical terms” representing key concepts which are important
- Grace ] throughout the Old Testament and through Jesus’ life too.

Each session is complete in itself and can be used by individuals or by groups; if you are using it in a group setting then please see the information below.

### For facilitators

The material provided here should be used flexibly to suit the needs of your group. The central element of each session is the Bible reading with the related questions underneath, enabling people to reflect on the passage and make decisions about its application. The surrounding material can be used as much or as little as is appropriate to your setting. It may provide useful background information for you as facilitator or further reading for those who wish to go deeper after each session. Some or all of it could be used to inform the discussion of the central questions or as additional discussion points. The important thing to remember is that there is no need to try to cover everything.

### Acknowledgements

The following resources were used when preparing this course:

- Coggins, Richard *Introducing the Old Testament* (Oxford: OUP 2003)
- Mills, Mary *Images of God in the Old Testament* (London: Cassell 1998)
- Wenham, Gordon *Exploring the Old Testament Volume 1: The Pentateuch* (London: SPCK 2003)
- Insights from the diocesan “Exploring the Old Testament” module delivered by Hugh Williamson.

“WE BELIEVE...”

Some passages in the Old Testament read almost like credal statements, setting out God’s character. This reading from Exodus is one such passage, the characteristics from which are echoed across the Old Testament traditions and worship (see for example Numbers 14:18, Jeremiah 32:18, Joel 2:13, Psalm 136). While individual stories cannot produce one single, coherent set of doctrines, statements such as this can draw together some of the “headline” beliefs. Underlying these beliefs are certain assumptions – that God exists, for example, and that God is powerful.

- What other assumptions appear to underlie the Old Testament’s writings about God?

ONE GOD?

We take it for granted that there is only one God, but the surrounding cultures believed in a tiered system of deities, with gods and goddesses, lesser gods and goddesses, and headed up by a “royal couple”. It’s likely, then, that the Israelites believed not that theirs was the only God, but that theirs was supreme over all others. He was also different from other gods in that he had no parents, siblings, consort or children – but he had an intimate connection with humans, the “sons of God” who, in other cultures, were an afterthought or a workforce to provide for the gods.

- What does this tell you about the relationship between God and people differed for the Israelites?

ONE GOD, MANY IMAGES...

It is often said that the Old Testament God is a God of wrath while the New Testament God is a God of love. It is worth remembering that the God worshipped by Jesus and his disciples, and the early church, is the God of the Old Testament! The Torah portrays God as the creator and founder of a nation, making personal commitments with its leaders in successive generations, both lovingly nurturing it and jealously guarding it even to the extent of destroying other nations (the tendency to assume that God is on our side leads inevitably to a perspective of God opposing enemies). The prophets used a wide range of imagery to portray God, including as husband, father, pregnant woman and nursing mother. The writings include descriptions of God as wisdom, as king, as promoting justice and righteousness. God is presented as holy and “other”, and as personal; as concerned with individuals and with the nation.

- Spend some time exploring the variety of images of God noted here (the box opposite may help), and consider where they might find parallels in the New Testament.

# Session I God

Read Exodus 33:18-34:8

- As you read this passage, what do you notice? What stands out for you?
- There is a clear sense, in this passage, of the holiness, the otherness, of God. How does this fit with other stories of encounters with God? How does it fit with the images of God in the New Testament? To what extent do we still, today, have an understanding of God’s holiness?
- There is a concept of justice conveyed in this passage, but it is one with which we might be uncomfortable as it spans generations, although it might help to think about this in terms of consequences of actions. What are your thoughts about God and justice? How true is it to say that upholding justice must include allocating punishment?
- The images of God that we read in the Old Testament come from the understanding and experiences of the storytellers and authors. What images would you use to describe God?
- How might we explain the variety and diversity of ways in which God is described? To what extent is the diversity a help or a hindrance in our discipleship and in mission?

FRAME OF REFERENCE

The Old Testament doesn’t provide us with one single, unified account of the nature of God. Rather, it contains a variety of ideas in various stages of development, written in books of different genres, representing many centuries of thought in changing social, geographical and historical situations. It “represents human beings talking to human beings about God” (Mills, *Images of God in the Old Testament* p.141) using the language of their times, places and cultures to express their views about God and to work through their questions.

These views are shaped by the other ideas prevalent at the time – the importance of proper performance of religious rites; the understanding of divine beings as all-knowing, powerful, intervening in situations to achieve certain ends, acting out of both love and temper...

Much of the language used in these writings is not literal, but makes use of myth, symbol, metaphor, analogy... Often these images are presented through story, with God as a character both in each individual story and in the overarching story of God’s People. This means that God is understood in a personal, rather than an abstract way – but it also means that we are presented with a myriad of sometimes conflicting images of which to make sense. Just as the writers were shaped by their own times and experiences, so we as readers are shaped by our own cultural assumptions, history, use of language, and experiences. In addition, there are many similarities between the ways in which God is described, and the ideal characteristics expected of humans: God is thus a model for God’s people.

- What might be some of the benefits of the wide range of ways of talking about God? What might be some of its limitations, and the difficulties it presents for us?

PASSAGES TO EXPLORE...

Exodus 17:8-16; Psalm 8; Isaiah 40:28-31; Micah 6:6-8; Job 1:6-12 and 38:1-11 and 42:1-6, 10. Genesis 1:1-2:3; Hosea 11:1-4; Isaiah 42:10-17; Exodus 15:25-26; Genesis 2:4-23; Isaiah 6:1-7; Isaiah 66:12-14; I Chronicles 29:10-13;

- How do you respond to this variety of images of God?

# Session 2 Covenant

Read Genesis 17:1-8

## SEALED IN BLOOD

In Genesis 15:1-18, in response to some self-doubt on Abram's part, God instructs Abram to perform what seems to be a rather gruesome ceremony involving a range of animal carcasses cut in two. This was part of a familiar commitment-making ceremony, a way of confirming a solemn agreement. Passing between the two halves of the killed animal was a declaration of the seriousness of intention, and in essence inviting God to do to the promiser what had been done to the animal if they broke their commitment. This, then, was God demonstrating to Abram just how seriously God was taking this covenant between them. This is mirrored in Exodus 24 when another blood ceremony takes place to confirm the covenant between God and the Israelites. In the New Covenant, however, it is the blood of Jesus which seals the covenant between God and humankind.

- What light does this shed, for you, on the significance of Jesus' death in our relationship with God?

## COVENANTS BROKEN AND RESTORED

Throughout the story of the Old Testament, we read of God's people turning away from God, forgetting God's rules, engaging in hollow worship and treating others poorly. In successive generations the leaders, judges, kings and prophets called people to repent, to remember who and whose they were, to turn back to God and be forgiven, to restore the covenant relationship. As the Old Testament progresses a picture develops of God loving those who have turned away, and longing for them to return.

- Read Hosea 11:1-4, 8-9. What does this tell you about God's desire for those who have turned away?

## MESSIAH?

At the time of the covenant with King David, the understanding was that it would always be one of David's direct descendants on the throne of Israel. Over time this was not the case, and gradually (in the time of the later prophets and, particularly, in between the Old and New Testaments), the anticipation developed of a new king, of David's line, who would renew people's faith, set them free and bring them back to God: the Messiah. The New Testament focuses on showing Jesus as fulfilling this role.

- How does this help our understanding of how Jesus fits into the wider story of the Old and New Testaments?

- As you read this passage, what do you notice? What stands out for you?
  - A covenant is a formal procedure to confirm a solemn commitment between one party and another. It is generally two-way, with each party agreeing to do something in connection with the behaviour of the other. What do you make of the two sides of the covenant here? Are there any occasions when you have entered into an agreement with God?
  - Names were very significant in Hebrew culture. Names have meanings and they were intended to convey a message: something about the person (who they are or who they will be), or about God, or a situation... "Abram" means "exalted ancestor" while "Abraham" means "ancestor of a multitude". Note that the name-change takes place before the conception of the promised son, in anticipation of the promise being fulfilled, meaning that Abram had to trust God for this to happen. What are your reflections on this? When have you had to trust God for something yet to happen?
  - Covenants such as this were usually sealed in blood (see Genesis 15:1-18 and box "Sealed in blood") to emphasise their solemnity. What does this tell you about how God views God's people?
  - Throughout the Old Testament this covenant is revealed, broken by the people, and renewed – repeatedly. In the New Testament we read of Jesus establishing a new covenant which builds on the old but makes it available to all, offering forgiveness, freedom, blessing and intimate relationship with God. How does today's learning about the covenant develop your understanding of Jesus' actions?

## COVENANTS IN THE BIBLE

A covenant is a kind of contract, giving the basis for the relationship between two parties (individuals, or groups of people) – promises and conditions of the relationship and perhaps the consequences if these are broken. Marriage is an example of a covenant.

There are several covenants in the Bible, as the relationship between God and God's people develops:

- With Noah (Genesis 9), in which God promises never again to destroy all living creatures with a flood, and gives a rainbow as the sign of this promise. This covenant is unusual because it is one-sided: it doesn't require anything of Noah.
- With Abram/Abraham (Genesis 12 and developing through the following chapters), in which God promises land, descendants and blessing which will extend to Abraham's descendants and, through them, to all the people of earth. Initially this is unconditional, but as the story progresses Abraham is instructed by God to "walk before me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1) and circumcision is given as a sign of this covenant.
- With the people of Israel (Exodus 19 and 24), in which the people are given the Law (instruction about how to live as God's people) and, if they obey, will be God's people and God will be their God.
- With King David (2 Samuel 7), in which God promises a king of David's line to rule over the people of God, if David and his descendants remain faithful to God. From this promised developed the idea of the promised Messiah.
- The "New Covenant" (promised in Jeremiah 31), in which the broken relationship between people and God will be restored.

This last, "new covenant" becomes a focus of much of the New Testament (see box below).

- What might it mean, for us, to be in a "covenant relationship" with God?

## THE NEW COVENANT

In Luke 22:14-20 and its parallel passages, Jesus clarifies that his death will be the beginning of the New Covenant. This is what will restore the broken relationship between God and God's people – all people, the whole of creation.

- How does this help you to understand our faith as building on what went before?

## PASSOVER

The final plague on the Egyptians is the death of their firstborn children and animals. The Israelites are protected from this plague by sacrificing perfect lambs and painting the lamb's blood on their door posts so that the angel of death passes over their houses. Finally Pharaoh allows them to leave Egypt, then chases them with his army who are drowned when the Red Sea parts to allow the Israelites through but crashes down on the pursuing Egyptians.

This is the defining story for the Israelites, retold throughout their history and commemorated, according to God's instructions, each year.

- One understanding of Jesus' death is that he was the once-for-all-time Passover Lamb, killed so that we can be saved from the death that comes because of our sin. How does the story of the first Passover help you to understand this significance of Jesus' death?

## LEARNING TO BE GOD'S FREE PEOPLE

This generation of Israelites has only ever known slavery in Egypt. It takes time for them to learn how to live as free people. They also need to learn to be "a people", not just a collection of individuals; and to be God's people, living that covenant relationship. After leaving Egypt they spend forty years (maybe literally forty years, alternatively the Bible often uses this number to denote a significant period of time) in the wilderness learning to live God's way. A key part of that learning is around reliance on God:

- They are guided by God, through a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night, only travelling when the pillar moves, and setting up camp – for a day, a week, a month, a year – whenever the pillar remains (see, for example, Exodus 13:17-22 and Numbers 9:15-23);
- God provides fresh water for them to drink (see Exodus 15:22-26, Exodus 17:1-7, Numbers 20:2-11);
- God provides them with food, both manna which is provided throughout the forty years and ceases only when they enter the promised land (see Exodus 16:1-35 and Joshua 5:10-12) and quail (see Numbers 11:4-34).

They are also given a rhythm of life – a system of Sabbath rest, festivals, worship – and instructions about how to live; and God provides them with protection and healing.

- As you look back over your story – individually and collectively – in what ways do you see God's presence, God's guiding, God's provision?
- In what ways is your life shaped by God?

# Session 3 People of God

Read Exodus 11:1-8, 12:21-34

- As you read this passage, what do you notice?  
What stands out for you?

- There is a clear distinction in this story (of which today's reading is just a part) between those who are God's people and those who are not. What are your reflections on this? What might it mean to be so clearly in one 'camp' or the other? To what extent do we make such distinctions today?

- These events are told from the perspective of the Israelites as they remember their history as God's people. What might they be trying to convey about who they are? What aspects of God's character might they be wishing to portray in this telling?

What can you take from this?

- What might it have been like to be part of this story?

What importance do you think this story might have for Jewish people down the generations? In what ways could it be significant for us also?

- The story goes on to tell of how the Israelites have decades ahead of them, living in the wilderness, learning to rely on God and how to live as God's free people [see side boxes]. How would this time, and these events, have formed them as the people of God?

What has helped to form you – individually and collectively – into being the people of God? What might help you to continue to grow in this way?

## CONTEXT

The early chapters of the Bible tell stories which give important truths about who God is, who we are, and why we are here. The covenant given to Abram then sets the tone for the rest of the story: Abram, and his descendants, will be God's people – people chosen to have a relationship with God in order to show God to the surrounding nations so that they, too, will wish to be part of the relationship with God.

The promise is passed down through Abram's / Abraham's descendants Isaac and Jacob. Jacob's son Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt, where he later rises to a position of power and, later still, his eleven brothers discover him there and, with their wives, families and father Jacob, all move to Egypt where they are given their own area of land.

Over the generations, however, Joseph's significance is forgotten and, as the Israelites grow more numerous, the Egyptians are afraid of them and so turn them all into slaves. They cry out to God for help and God sends Moses, also an Israelite, to confront Pharaoh and lead God's people out of Egypt. After a series of plagues to demonstrate God's power and authority, all of which Pharaoh ignores, come the events surrounding the final plague resulting in their freedom – see "Passover" box.

- When circumstances are difficult it can seem as though God is absent or ignoring us. What messages can we take from a story such as this, which might help us on such occasions?

## HISTORY CONTINUES

After forty years the Israelites move into the Promised Land and, bit by bit, spread across it and conquer some of the tribes already living there. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament we see a cycle of them forgetting God and living their own way, things going wrong, them being reminded to return to God, the relationship being restored, and the cycle repeated. They are ruled first by judges and then by kings; the nation splits in two and the larger, northern, kingdom ceases to exist when it is absorbed into a local ruling power; the smaller southern kingdom is later exiled but eventually some return to the Jerusalem area albeit ruled by a succession of superpowers. This is the environment into which Jesus is later born (see Appendix 1).

- How does it help to understand the "big story", the back story, of our faith? How might this shape your understanding of Jesus and the New Testament teachings?

## BEING HOLY

God's people are called to be holy because they are God's people: it is necessary in order to come close to God, and in order to be distinctive as God's people. This holiness is an extension of God's holiness, and is often expressed in terms of cleanness (**not** cleanliness). The opposite of being holy is being unclean. Uncleanliness comes from things and behaviours which are designated as "unclean" (see "Law Codes" box); and just as holiness affects the things which come into contact with it by transforming them, destroying or purifying (cleansing), so uncleanliness affects its environment by contaminating it.

In the Old Testament God's people are instructed to "be holy" as part of the covenant (Exodus 19:6; Leviticus 11:45, 19:2, 20:26...). In the New Testament this is reiterated in 1 Peter 1:15-16.

- Is it still the case that holiness matters? If not, why not? If so, how can we take this seriously?

## LAW CODES

A significant chunk of the Torah (the early part of the Old Testament) is made up of the Law Codes. The text appears to be quite repetitive, but in fact is made up of three different, but related, codes which are all written as though given to the Israelites at a similar time but which actually represent the development of these codes during Israelite history. That found in much of Exodus relates to the Israelites' early time in the promised land (the time of the judges); that in Deuteronomy had the greatest impact towards the end of the monarchy and was designed to persuade people of the importance of the code; and that found towards the end of Exodus, through Leviticus and in parts of Numbers demonstrates the foci which became prominent during and after the exile and underlie what we read in the New Testament, explicitly focusing on holiness (see "Holiness..." box).

Although we call these the "Law Codes", they were intended less as comprehensive legalistic codes and more as encouragement to reflect on the underlying attitudes it promotes, and to give a pattern for living. Rather than being necessary for salvation, these codes provide instruction on how to live in response to having been saved – they are, after all, given to people who have received the covenant promise of the promised land. They are instruction to help see what holiness looks like; to know how to be "pure", clean; and to know how to approach the holy God.

- How helpful is it to have such instruction?
- What difference does it make to see this as a response to, rather than condition of, salvation?

# Session 4 Holiness

Read Leviticus 19:1-18

- As you read this passage, what do you notice? What stands out for you?
- Today's reading is one small part of a very broad set of instructions about how to live as God's people. For people in the later Old Testament world an important question was how to define and mark their identity (see "Holiness" box), how to be distinctive. What makes us distinctive, standing out as God's people rather than blending in?
  - These instructions are focused around the idea of holiness. Do we still have a sense of God as holy? How do we demonstrate this? How do we balance this with God's approachability?
  - These instructions are not intended to be legalistic but to give principles for living (see "Law Codes" box). What are some of the general principles or boundaries we could take from today's reading to help us work out the detail of how to live?

## HOLINESS...

Holiness is not the same as perfection. To be "holy" means to be distinct or unique from, set apart. It entails beauty, power, goodness; the ultimate level of all those things. It relates to being sacred, which is the opposite of being ordinary; to being pure, and whole.

The later Israelites in, and returning from, exile and writing down the stories which form much of the Old Testament, were no longer made distinctive by geography and by being a nation state, and so they needed to work out what, of their heritage, particularly mattered in defining their identity. Holiness was the key concept that they emphasised.

## GOD'S HOLINESS

God is holy – and God's holiness is unlike that to which we are called: it is unique, all-good and all-powerful. It is also overwhelming: rather like the energy of the sun, which is good, helpful and life-giving, but which is dangerous if we get too close, so God's holiness is good and life-giving but is so overwhelmingly powerful that it can be dangerous to come too close to it. People and places which are closely connected to God can become holy – but God's holiness destroys anything impure that encounters it (a "refining fire" – see for example Malachi 3:3). For this reason, it is important that God is approached in the right way (see for example Exodus 3:5, Isaiah 6:5-7).

The Old Testament system of worship was centred around first the tabernacle and then the temple. The central part of the temple / tabernacle was the Holy of Holies: this was the place where God dwelt. It could be entered only once a year, by the High Priest, who would undergo certain rituals beforehand to ensure that he was sufficiently pure so as not to endanger himself by going into God's presence. The Holy of Holies was separated from the surrounding area by a curtain, to ensure that no one inadvertently entered that holy space. Before reaching that curtain one passed, in the holy place, an altar for incense which purifies; outside, before entering the holy place, was another altar, for sacrifice.

In the New Testament we see God's holiness, in Jesus, transforming the things with which it comes into contact, as people are healed, raised from the dead, set free from demons... and at the point of Jesus' death the curtain separating off the Holy of Holies is torn in two, enabling us, through Jesus' death which purifies us, to be able to approach God directly.

- How does this information develop your understanding of God's holiness?
- What are your thoughts about God's holiness as destroying, purifying, and transforming?

## GRACE

A call to be holy does not make us perfect! Paul wrote of the battle between intention and reality (Romans 7:15-20); and often even the intention is absent. The story of the People of God contains a repeated cycle of falling away from God, abandoning the covenant and needing to repent and return.

In Deuteronomy 30:1-5 God spells out to the people that, when they realise they have become out of step with God and they turn back, God will welcome them. Jesus reiterates this in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). This is grace: God's undeserved kindness, favour and blessing towards us.

- How does this picture of God contribute to how we understand the Old Testament God?

# Session 5 Grace

Read Leviticus 1:1-9

## HOLINESS AND POLLUTION

We noted in Session 4 the importance of holiness, and the need for God's people to be holy in order to come close to God and to be distinctive as God's people.

Sin, being out of step with God, prevents holiness; whether deliberate or unintentional it makes a person unclean, impure, unable to approach God. It was understood, by the Israelites, as polluting, rather as though it gave off a toxic vapour. This contaminated not only people, but places, in which God was then unable to dwell. These people and places therefore needed purification.

Purification came about via a blood sacrifice (see "Offerings and Sacrifices" box). Sacrifice involves giving of the best one has (animals should be perfect); it is costly. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, sacrifice also involves transformation: in this context that occurs through destruction – usually burning – in order to move the offering from something in the physical realm to something in God's realm.

Blood is the lifeblood of the animal and so it is sacred. Getting rid of the pollution of sin, purification, requires the shedding of blood in the sacrifice; no other offering is adequate. This theme is picked up in the New Testament, for example when Jesus speaks of his blood being "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28), John writes that "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7), and Paul writes of God "making peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20).

- How might we recognise, now, the idea that sin pollutes, and that cleansing is necessary?
- How does this understanding of holiness and pollution help us to understand Jesus' death?

- As you read this passage, what do you notice? What stands out for you?
- This burnt offering provides a very public way of admitting sin and demonstrating repentance. How does this compare to the way we acknowledge these things today? What might be useful to us in this Old Testament practice? What could help us to grasp the reality of God's forgiveness?
- There is some powerful symbolism in this ritual. How might we regain some of the tangible nature of this worship?
- The understanding that sin pollutes people, and places, is powerful. The need for shed lifeblood to cleanse from this pollution is a dramatic image. There is a stark contrast here between that which is holy and that which is not, with no blurred edges between the two. How far have we moved from this understanding of sin and its effects? How has this coloured the way we relate to God?
- How does this burnt offering – and the wider system of offerings – demonstrate God's grace? How does this relate to the picture of grace elsewhere in the Bible – Old and New Testaments?

## OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES

The book of Leviticus gives a comprehensive system of offerings and sacrifices to assist the Israelite worship. Rather than seeing these as a complicated set of requirements, it is useful to understand them as a demonstration of God's grace: humans are physical beings who need tangible ways to express worship, repentance, gratitude, sorrow... and tangible ways to receive blessing and forgiveness. This system provides just that.

- The **burnt offering** is the most extravagant offering because, once the blood is shed, every part of the offering is burnt. Before killing the animal, the worshipper lays his hand on the head of the animal to symbolise that his sin is being transferred and the animal is being presented to God to represent the worshipper; instead of giving his life as a penalty for sin, the animal is paying his ransom.
- The **sin offering** was made in repentance after an unintentional sin. Different actions were performed with the lifeblood of the animal, sprinkling it around a wide area to cleanse it of the pollution of sin. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would also cleanse the Holy of Holies in the same way.
- The **offering of wellbeing**, or **peace offering** or **fellowship offering** again includes the shedding of blood – because this is necessary in order to be at peace with God. Only a small part of the animal is burnt as an offering to God, however; of the rest, some is given to the priests, and some is taken home by the worshipper to be shared with family and friends: a fellowship meal, with God participating alongside family and friends in the feast.

Other offerings include the **freewill offering**, given simply out of the desire to worship; the **voluntary offering** given in relation to a particular occasion; and the regular – twice-daily – offerings of incense and lambs in worship.

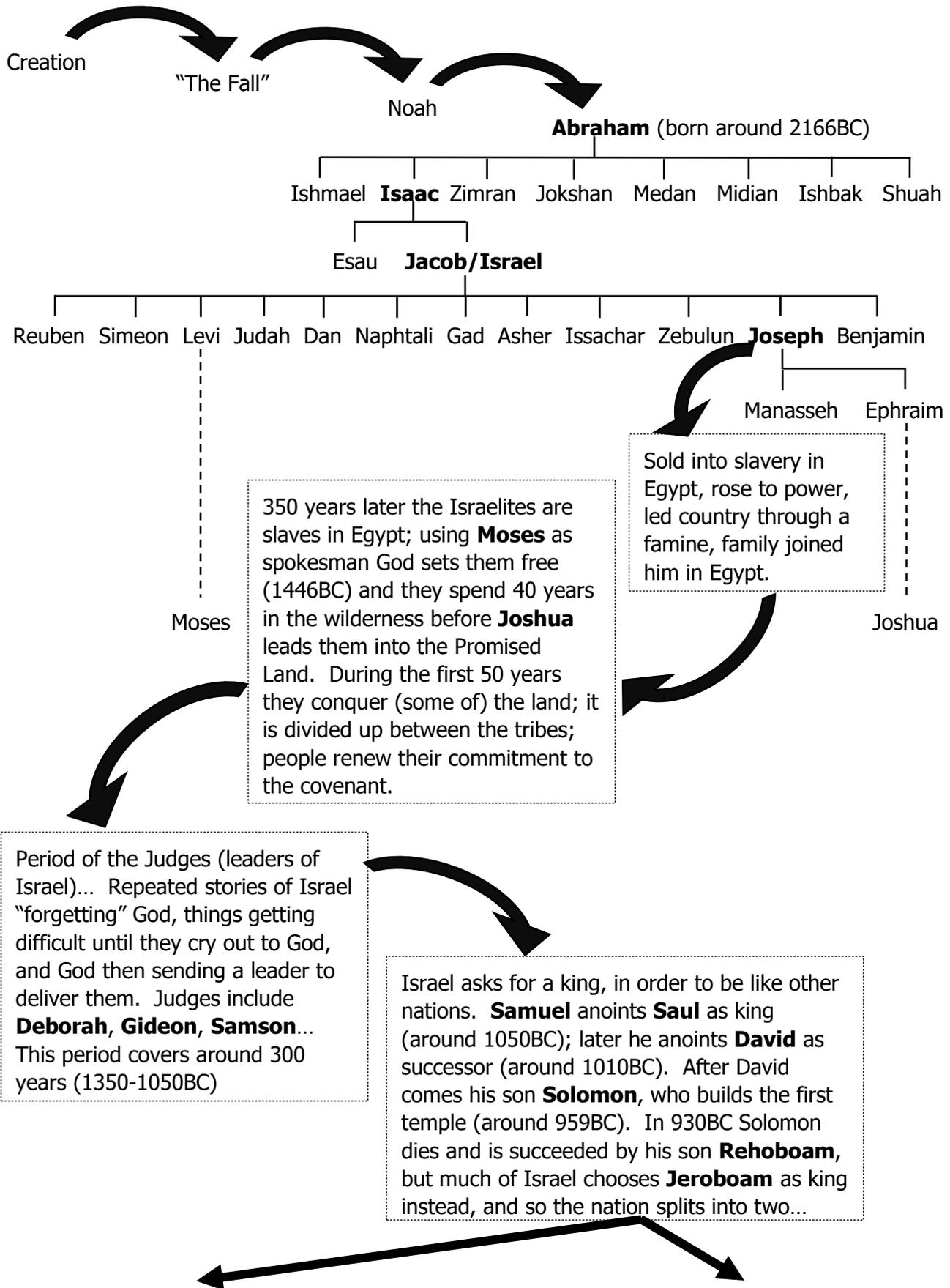
- In what ways is it useful to have God set out for us the ways in which we can express ourselves in worship, repentance, gratitude etc?
- What might be our equivalents, today, of the peace offering (offering of wellbeing, fellowship offering)?

## OTHER ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP

As well as the system of offerings and sacrifices, God gave the Israelites an annual cycle of festivals, a weekly Sabbath, a focus for worship in the tabernacle (later the temple), and a priesthood to assist in maintaining this worship.

- How much is our worship shaped by God, rather than by our preferences?

# Appendix 1: From Creation to Jesus...



Northern Kingdom (known as "Israel") ruled by Jeroboam, consisting of the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun and Levi, and the half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.



Prophets:

c.900-801BC – Elijah

c.851BC – Elisha

758-722BC – Hosea

c.750BC – Jonah

722 BC – Israel is exiled Assyria and ceases to exist as a separate nation.

When the northern kingdom was exiled there were some Jews who remained, and who lived alongside the various nationalities who resettled the area. They created a religion which mixed Judaism with the other nationalities' religions, and eventually built a temple on Mount Gerazim in Samaria, which became the focus of worship instead of the Jerusalem temple. For these reasons (following a different king, hybrid religion, different focus of worship), the Jews of the southern kingdom rejected the Samaritans – and this was still apparent in Jesus' time.

Southern Kingdom (known as "Judah", though confusingly still sometimes referred to as "Israel" too) ruled by Rehoboam, consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.



Prophets:

c.760BC – Amos

740-687BC – Isaiah

740-686BC – Micah

640-609BC – Zephaniah

627-585BC – Jeremiah

before 612BC – Nahum

612-599BC – Habakkuk

593-571BC – Ezekiel

586BC – Obadiah

586BC – Judah is exiled to Babylon and the temple destroyed; they return from exile in 538BC onwards and rebuild the temple.

c.520BC – Daniel?

c.520BC – Zechariah

c.520BC – Haggai

c.500BC? – Joel

c.460BC - Malachi

After the return from exile in Babylon, Judah/Israel was ruled first by the Persians (from 516BC), then by the Greeks (from 330BC), then by the Hasmoneans (from 140BC) and then, finally, by the Romans (from 37BC) – it was into this setting that Jesus was born.