

The Big Journey

A Bible overview series for teaching and discipleship in local churches

Summary

The Big Journey is a 16-session Bible overview designed for use as a discipleship and teaching resource, especially in local churches. It could be used, for example, as a follow-up to the Christianity Explored and Alpha courses.

The Big Journey tells the **Bible's storyline** – creation, fall, redemption and new creation. Along the way it also provides an introduction to:

- **The key themes that run through the Bible** (for example, the Kingdom of God, the covenants, the Messiah, etc.). It also explains how these themes link together.
- **Key Christian doctrines** – for example, Creation; the Fall and sin; Jesus's incarnation; His atoning death, resurrection and ascension; salvation; the Church; baptism and the Lord's Supper; the end times; and Heaven and Hell.

It aims to be accessible but, at the same time, theologically reasonably thorough. It's designed to be usable by a wide range of believers - from those who have recently come to faith, through to mature Christians who would like a 'refresher' on the Christian faith. The written materials are fully illustrated in colour.

From my limited research it seems that not many UK churches run a course of this kind as part of their ministry. *The Big Journey* may be a tool that churches might find useful in grounding believers in the Bible story and key Christian doctrines.

History

Initial presentation in Countess Free Church, Ely, Cambridgeshire

The Big Journey series began life in 2007 as a series of talks given at our local church at the time (Countess Free Church, Ely, Cambridgeshire). It is an evangelical church, with (at the time) around 75 members. The teaching ministry in our church followed a pattern fairly typical of British evangelical churches:

- At both the Sunday morning and evening services, there was generally an expositional sermon. There was an emphasis on systematic preaching through different books of the Bible.
- The fortnightly midweek home groups generally followed questions based on passages currently being preached from.
- From time to time, the church ran *Alpha* courses, and on one or two occasions a *Christianity Explored* course. The church also once ran a *Walk Thru the Bible* seminar series. This series aimed to give participants a 'bird's eye view' of the people, places and events of the Bible, but did not cover much doctrinal material.

I felt there was a need to provide a more in-depth survey of the whole Bible and its key doctrines. I gave a series of 15 talks at our evening service, in place of the regular sermon. These were given at monthly intervals. Each talk was illustrated by a PowerPoint presentation containing key texts, bulleted summaries and a good number of images. After each talk, an 8- to 12-page pamphlet illustrated in colour was made available. These gave a more in-depth look at what was covered in the talk.

There was a positive response to these talks. For example, one person wrote “*I have found it extremely useful to link the whole of the bible together. We 'dip' in here and there usually and I have learnt a lot of the bible stories etc. over the 49 years of hearing them but it was really good to get the overall picture of how they connect and to see God's plan working through it all from the beginning to our future.*”

Website publication

A revised version of the pamphlets was subsequently made available on the Internet at www.creationtonewcreation.com.

Discipleship course in Harborough Evangelical Church, Market Harborough, Leicestershire

The Big Journey is currently being used in my present local church, Harborough Evangelical Church, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, for a men's discipleship group. This group is discussion based (there is only a very brief introductory talk).

The discussion is supported by printed pamphlets illustrated in colour. These are similar to those on the website's homepage, but are being revised for this current course. These pamphlets are given to participants at the end of each session for further reading.

I am also providing introductory handouts. These are given to participants in advance of each session. They give a brief introduction to the session, together with Bible passages and questions. The discussion focuses on answering these questions.

These revised materials are being published at the following links (four are available to date; the others will follow at intervals):

Session 1 – Charting Our Course

Introduction, Bible passages and questions

<http://creationtonewcreation.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/big-journey-1-introduction-and-questions.pdf>

Full notes

<http://creationtonewcreation.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/big-journey-1-for-small-groups.pdf>

Session 2 – In the Beginning

Introduction, Bible passages and questions

<http://creationtonewcreation.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/big-journey-2-for-small-groups-introduction.pdf>

Full notes

<http://creationtonewcreation.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/big-journey-2-for-small-groups.pdf>

Session 3 – In God's Image

Introduction, Bible passages and questions

<http://creationtonewcreation.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/big-journey-3-for-small-groups-introduction.pdf>

Full notes

<http://creationtonewcreation.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/big-journey-3-for-small-groups.pdf>

Session 4 – The Fall

Introduction, Bible passages and questions

<http://creationtonewcreation.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/big-journey-4-for-small-groups-introduction.pdf>

Full notes

<http://creationtonewcreation.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/big-journey-4-for-small-groups.pdf>

Leader's Guides are also being developed for this series.

Electronic and audio publication

In time, **E-Book, Kindle and audio versions** of the main series of pamphlets could be produced, as well. I have already been approached by a local Christian radio station (which supports a Christian conference) about the provision of an audio version for transmission in Summer 2015.

Approach

The Bible is fundamentally historical in nature. In other words, it's a *story* – a story that moves from creation to new creation. *The Big Journey* follows this pattern **by embedding theology within the framework of the Bible narrative**. In other words, it embeds 'systematic' theology within a framework of 'Biblical' theology.

The Big Journey aims to be accessible but, at the same time, theologically rigorous - for example in key foundational doctrines, such as the Fall, Jesus's atoning death, and salvation. With this in mind, it's been checked with a wide range of commentaries, systematic theologies, and other books. For example, the commentaries on Genesis consulted were those by Bruce Waltke, Victor P. Hamilton, Allen P. Ross, Gordon J. Wenham, Kenneth A. Mathews and Derek Kidner. Books consulted include *Sacrifice in the Bible* by Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman, *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* by T. Desmond Alexander, and *The Search for Order* by William J. Dumbrell. I have also consulted numerous theological articles.

There are many Bible references, giving easy access to the actual Bible text relevant to each point.

Detailed outline of contents

The Big Journey aims to give participants a basic understanding of the following:

- **The Bible's grand narrative** – creation, fall, redemption, new creation.
- **The key themes that run through the Bible** (for example, the Kingdom of God, the covenants, the Messiah, the Sabbath/Jubilee theme, the Temple theme, etc.) and to see how all these themes link together.
- **Key Christian doctrines** – for example, Creation; mankind; the angels; the Fall; Jesus's incarnation; His atoning death, resurrection and ascension; salvation (redemption, justification, propitiation, adoption, new birth, Spirit baptism, and sanctification); the Church; water baptism and the Lord's Supper; the Antichrist and the end times; and Heaven and Hell.
- **The Law; the Old Testament priesthood and sacrificial system, and how it relates to Jesus's sacrificial death; the Jewish feasts**
- **The purposes and special emphases of the four Gospels**
- **The local church**, including its offices, its meetings and sacraments, and the gifts of the Spirit.
- **Some basic principles of how to understand the prophetic and apocalyptic passages of the Bible.**
- **The purpose of the Book of Revelation, and a little of its key content.**
- **An elementary understanding of Church history.**

And it's hoped that participants would gain something of a sense of **the wonder of the Gospel**, and **the glory of God's plan of salvation**.

Presentation options

The Big Journey could be used in two ways – **(1) as a series of illustrated talks followed by a discussion time** (similar to the format of the Alpha and Christianity Explored courses); or **(2) a small group that is largely discussion based**.

These are the materials that could be provided on-line and (where appropriate) in printed form for each approach:

1 Illustrated talks, followed by discussion

- **Powerpoint and speaker's script** for 30-40 minute talk (the script would be briefer than the printed notes, and formatted for ease of preaching)
- **Very brief outline of talk and a set of questions** for use in the discussion time
- **Leader's guide** for discussing these questions
- **Printed notes** (similar to ones now being developed for use in Harborough Evangelical Church).

2 Small group discussion series

- **Very brief introduction plus questions**, to give to participants in advance
- **Leader's guide** for discussing these questions
- **Notes** – the same as those for the Alpha-style presentation, but perhaps also supplemented by a **bullet-point summary**.