Why this course?

► **Firstly, we hope it will make the Bible story clearer.** Many things in the Bible seem rather haphazard and obscure – especially in the Old Testament. But when we see them in the context of the whole story, we see their true significance.

► **We hope it will help you to see the Bible in a new way.** We want to teach more than simply the Bible’s storyline. We hope to open up new horizons in your understanding of the Bible - and of character of the One Who inspired it, and of our destiny as His people.

► **We hope it will help to explain to others what we believe and why we believe it** – the Bible makes sense of life, the universe and everything!

► **But finally, it will help us in our personal walk with God.** As the word ‘walk’ suggests, each of us is on a journey. From conception to dying moment and beyond, God has a purpose for our lives. When we see God’s plan for creation revealed in the Bible, we see the significance of our own individual lives more clearly. And when we see how faithfully and purposefully God has dealt with His people through history, we can trust God to do the same for each of us.

The Bible is, at its heart, a story. Its 66 books were written by around 40 authors over 1,500 years. It includes all kinds of literature - history and biographies, genealogies, legal codes and moral guidelines, songs and poems, prophecies and letters. But through all them all runs a single story – a story that begins at Creation and ends in the New Creation.

And you’ve never heard a story like the one the Bible tells. Dorothy Sayers pronounced the Christian faith to be “the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man . . .“. It’s a drama played out on a cosmic stage, a drama that spans all eternity.
A Hindu scholar captured the wonder of the Bible's message when he commented to the Christian missionary Lesslie Newbigin: “I can’t understand why you missionaries present the Bible to us in India as a book of religion. It is not a book of religion - and anyway we have plenty of books of religion in India. We don’t need any more! I find in your Bible a unique interpretation of universal history, the history of the whole of creation and the history of the human race. And therefore a unique interpretation of the human person as a responsible actor in history. That is unique. There is nothing else in the whole religious literature of the world to put alongside it.”

The Bible tells us how things came into being. It explains what's gone wrong with this world, and how God is going to put it all right. The Bible shows me who I really am, why I am here, and where I am going. Bernard Bell comments: “Psychologists know that a sense of purpose is essential to emotional and psychological health. We look for... an overarching story that makes sense of all of the little stories of our lives.” In the Bible I discover that my life has meaning and purpose and significance beyond what I could ever dream of. We can only really make sense of the stories of our individual lives in the context of God’s great Story, the Story we read in the Bible.

A map for the journey

A party of tourists arrives in Britain for the very first time. They decide to travel throughout the island from Land's End to John O'Groats. What kind of map do they need to plan their journey? The standard-scale maps aren't much use to begin with. What they need first of all is a map covering the whole of Britain – showing where they're starting from and their destination in the far north of Scotland.

Genesis to Revelation is a very long journey. Like that tourist, we need a map that shows the whole journey from beginning to end. This series of studies aims to be that map. Over 16 sessions we’ll view the whole Bible story in one great panorama – taking us the whole way from Genesis to journey's end in glory.

In the preface to his series 'Unlocking the Bible' pastor and writer David Pawson said this: “I suppose this all started in Arabia, in 1957. I was then a chaplain in the Royal Air Force, . . . . How could I get these men interested in the Christian faith and then committed to it? Something (I would now say: Someone) prompted me to announce that I would give a series of talks over a few months, which would take us right through the Bible . . . . It was to prove a voyage of discovery for all of us. The Bible became a new book when seen as a whole. To use a well-worn cliché, we had failed to see the wood for the trees. Now God's plan and purpose were unfolding in a fresh way. The men were getting something big enough to sink their teeth into. . . . . . the results surpassed my expectations and set the course for the rest of my life and ministry.” To travel through the whole Bible was a voyage of discovery for David Pawson and his hearers. We hope that you, too, will catch the thrill of this great adventure as we journey from creation to New Creation!

Along the way, we’ll trace some of the Bible’s key themes, such as the covenants and the Messiah, and see how they all lead to God’s ultimate purpose – the establishment of His perfect Kingdom on Earth.

And as we travel, too we’ll pause to look at some basic Christian doctrines. For example, what does it really mean that we’re made in God’s image? What really happened on the Cross when Jesus died? And what happens when Jesus returns to Earth? Such questions are too important to hurry by, and we’ll take a little time to look more deeply at them.
Learning for life

On our journey through the Bible, what will we learn?

**We’ll learn about God**

A.W. Tozer said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." What we believe shapes our destiny. At the beginning of human history, Satan tempted Adam and Eve to think wrongly about God. They fell for that lie and the consequences of that fall have blighted our race and our planet ever since.

But from that moment, God began to reveal Himself to mankind. He showed us His passionate love, His burning holiness, His omniscience and limitless power. And one day, God Himself came to earth in the Person of His Son. He revealed Himself in flesh and blood. Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1.15) and "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Hebrews 1.3). He declared: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14.9). Jesus shows us what God is really like.

**We’ll learn about creation**

Secondly, we’ll learn about the universe we live in. We’ll discover how – and why - God made this world. And we’ll glimpse something of the glorious destiny He has in store for our world.

We’ll discover, too, that Earth and the heavens we see around us are only part of a much bigger created realm. There are heavenly places we cannot see. Jesus reigns there, and we are - even as we read these words - seated there with Him (Ephesians 2.6)! What happens in these heavenly places affects us in ways of which we are only dimly aware. And what happens here in our visible world impacts that unseen world, too.

**We’ll learn about ourselves**

David the psalmist himself asked: “what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8.4). We’re all eager to know who we really are, where we come from and what has made us the way we are. Alex Haley’s best-selling book ‘Roots’, and the TV series ‘Who Do You Think You Are?’ are testament to that.

Who are we? Oswald Chambers once pointed out, "the most marvellous thing in the whole of creation" is not the heavens, the moon and the stars – it is ourselves. God created us in His own image and likeness. God has crowned mankind "with glory and honour" (Psalm 8.5). The Psalmist sang: “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.” (Psalm 139.13-14).

In our essential nature, we still bear God’s image (see Genesis 9.6, James 3.9). Sin, of course, has scarred us. But God is now restoring us, His people, to bear His image perfectly. Our pattern is Jesus. In His selfless love, His unpretentious dignity and calm authority, His penetrating insight, His cloudless fellowship with His Father and His simple unquestioning obedience to Him, we see what God wants us all to be. One day, we shall be like Him! And one day we’ll rule all creation with Him. What an astonishing destiny!

So along our journey, we plan to stop for a while to explore what it really means to be human.

**We’ll learn about Satan**

Finally, we’ll learn about our enemy, Satan, and his dark kingdom. Neil Cole, in his book ‘Organic Church’ relates a scene from the film ‘The Two Towers’, the
second of the trilogy 'The Lord of the Rings'. The nation of Rohan finds itself facing the wicked army of Goblins. When Theoden, king of Rohan, realises the Goblins are determined to wipe out his kingdom, he resolves to avoid war in order to shelter his people from danger. He declares: "I'll not risk open war with my people". But Aragorn the warrior warns him: "Open war is upon you whether you would risk it or not".

Open war is upon us, too. We cannot avoid it. In the heavenly places, as Paul explains, there is a terrific spiritual battle going on between Satan and his forces and Jesus Christ and His people. We are involved! We're called to be soldiers. We need to learn how to wage war.

And to wage war, we must know our enemy. Every military commander must understand how his enemy thinks, and what his strategy is. He needs to know his enemy's strengths and weaknesses. It's the same for us. In the Bible, God teaches us about our enemy. God reveals Satan's aims and strategies, and exposes his lies.

### Reading and reflecting


- There are a number of links between these passages in Genesis and Revelation. What are they?
- What is the key contrast between Eden before the Fall and the new creation described in Revelation 21 and 22?
- Why do you think New Jerusalem is pictured as a Bride (Revelation 21.2, 21.9)?
- Dorothy Sayers said, "the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man . . .". What is a drama? In what way is the Bible a drama?
- How does seeing the Bible as a single story help us in our Gospel witness?
- If a non-Christian friend of yours asked you to tell them what the Bible was about in just a couple of minutes, how would you reply?
- What do these passages in Genesis and Revelation teach us about God?