

PROMISES KEPT BIBLE OVERVIEW, WEEK EIGHT (ACTS – REVELATION 19)

OPENING QUESTION (2 MINS)

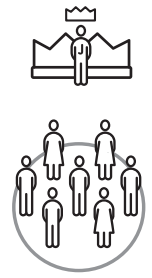
Being in heaven is better than being in this present world. All Christ's followers will have life in heaven. So why do you think God doesn't take Christians to heaven now?!

This is to help us think about a strange, but very good question: why doesn't God simply take to heaven anyone who comes to faith in him? Why the gap between conversion and glory? At this stage, there's no "right" answer!

VIDEO TALK (17 MINS)

RECAP (1 MIN)

King Jesus is in heaven, with his Father. His people, indwelt and empowered by his Spirit, spread the gospel around the world.



APPLY TIME... (7 MINS)

1. How have you seen the three responses to the Christians in Acts 2 in your Christian life?

Encourage people briefly to recount how they've: seen people be intrigued by how they live; been laughed at as a Christian; seen people listen to the gospel and turn to Jesus.

2. How does this encourage us to get on with living for and talking about Jesus?

Rejection and abuse aren't new! But alongside these, we see people being intrigued and asking questions, and even coming to faith. That was the experience of the first Christians, of giants such as Peter—we have the privilege of following in their footsteps. We don't need to worry if people laugh at and reject us, as long as we're living and speaking for Christ.

GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE AGE OF THE SPIRIT (8 MINS)

Note: In this session we are not seeing a promise kept in this study—but whereas the video talk focussed on the work of the Spirit in this age, here we're looking more at the people the Spirit works to form and then work's through—the church.

Read Acts 2 v 42-47

1. This is the first Christian church. What do we see here about what church is, and what church does?

- v 42: Church is a group of people who listen to the apostles' teaching (the New Testament, and the Old Testament on which they based their teaching about Jesus, just as Peter did in v 16-21).
- v 42: Church is about fellowship, a family.
- v 42: Church shares Communion and prays together.
- v 43: A church is full of awe at how God works (or, in our days, has worked) through the apostles he chose.
- v 44-45: Church members are united, and so we share everything we have, and are prepared to give up anything we have in order to support each other.
- v 46: Church is about meeting together publicly (as we do on Sundays), and regularly and privately (in homes—as we should throughout the week).

2. What is challenging about the word "devoted" in v 42?

This is the Spirit-inspired attitude Christians have to their church community. There is nothing half-hearted or

moderate here. We are often tempted to hold back; to see church as something which gives, not something to which we give; to make church one of a number of equal priorities in life. The word “devoted” challenges these views.

3. What does verse 47 tell us about the way the Lord works through his people? Why is this exciting?

Church is the way God works through his Spirit to save people. As a church praises God and serves one another, people see this, and God works to add them to his people. Why wouldn't being part of this be exciting?!

APPLY TIME... (9 MINS)

1. What have we seen about the priorities Christians should have between Jesus' ascension and his return?

(1) Being part of the way the news of Jesus reaches everywhere in the world. Mission is our priority.

(2) Being devoted to fellow Christians. Church is our priority.

Note: These priorities overlap, because part of the point of church is to tell people about the Lord; and as church members devote themselves to each other and their church, God will work to save outsiders who see how the church lives.

2. What can make it hard to have these priorities?

Many things! Our own hearts, which suggest there are other more important things to live for. Our lives, which are often busy with other things, so that church ends up being an optional extra. Those around us, who reject our message (and, sometimes, us) and laugh at our commitment to church. Even our churches themselves, where we can often frown on radical, sacrificial devotion, preferring to promote moderation and comfort.

3. How do Acts 1 and 2 help us and encourage us in our task?

We each have the Spirit's power, equipping us to do these things (1 v 8, 2 v 1-4); that Jesus will one day return (1 v 11); that as we speak of Jesus, though some mock, some will be saved (2 v 13, 41); that as we devote ourselves to our church, it will become the community of 2 v 42-46; that God uses devoted churches to save others (v 47). The group may want to focus on just a couple of these encouragements, or you can point them to particular verses to pick out the encouragements listed above.

QUESTIONS FOR OUR HEARTS AND LIVES (11 MINS)

Feel free to pick one of these two if you are short of time, whichever you think your group will most benefit from thinking about and answering.

What counts as a “good day” for you? A day where you have devoted yourself to your church family in some way? A day where you have told someone else about Jesus the Messiah, his life, death and resurrection—even if they've laughed at you? Or something else?

This question is designed to challenge our actual approach to life. It's easy to sign up to devotion to our church and commitment to witnessing in theory, but for it not to survive much contact with actual daily life. Ensure that you focus on the heart-motives behind the way we live—the solution is not “I need to share the gospel more” or “I need to serve my church more” but rather “I need to change my view of what I'm here for—what a ‘good day’ is.”

It must have been wonderful to have been part of the Acts 2 church! All too often, our churches fall far short of that one. But let's not make the mistake of thinking our churches...

- could never be like that, or
- would be like that if only others would be more committed.

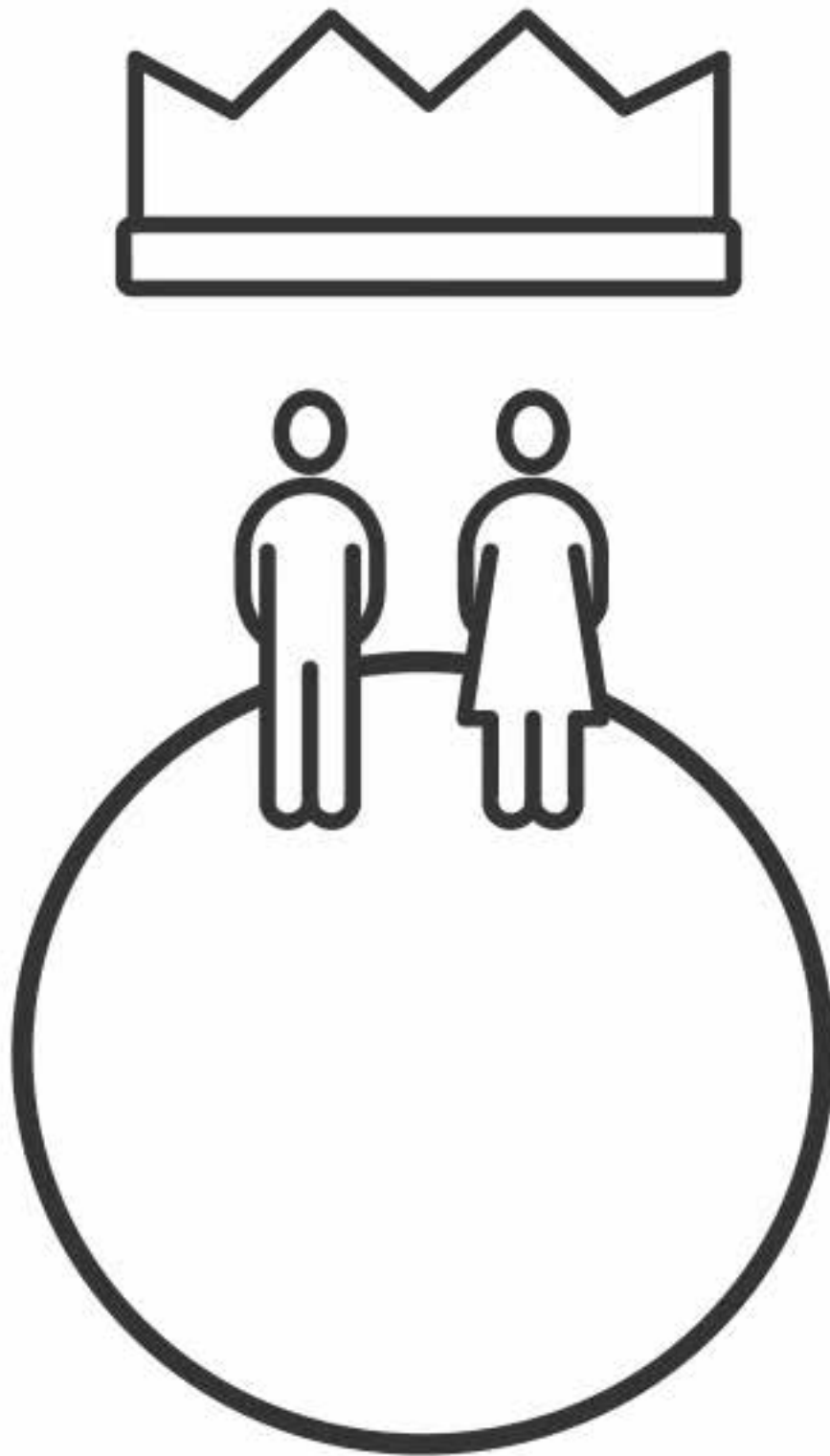
Our churches will change and grow as we become more devoted to them. So what practical things could you start doing, or do more of, out of devotion to your Christian community?

Note the word “practical”!—whereas the previous question requires a focus on heart attitudes, this one requires more of a focus on how we will actually change our actions.

PRAY (5 MINS)

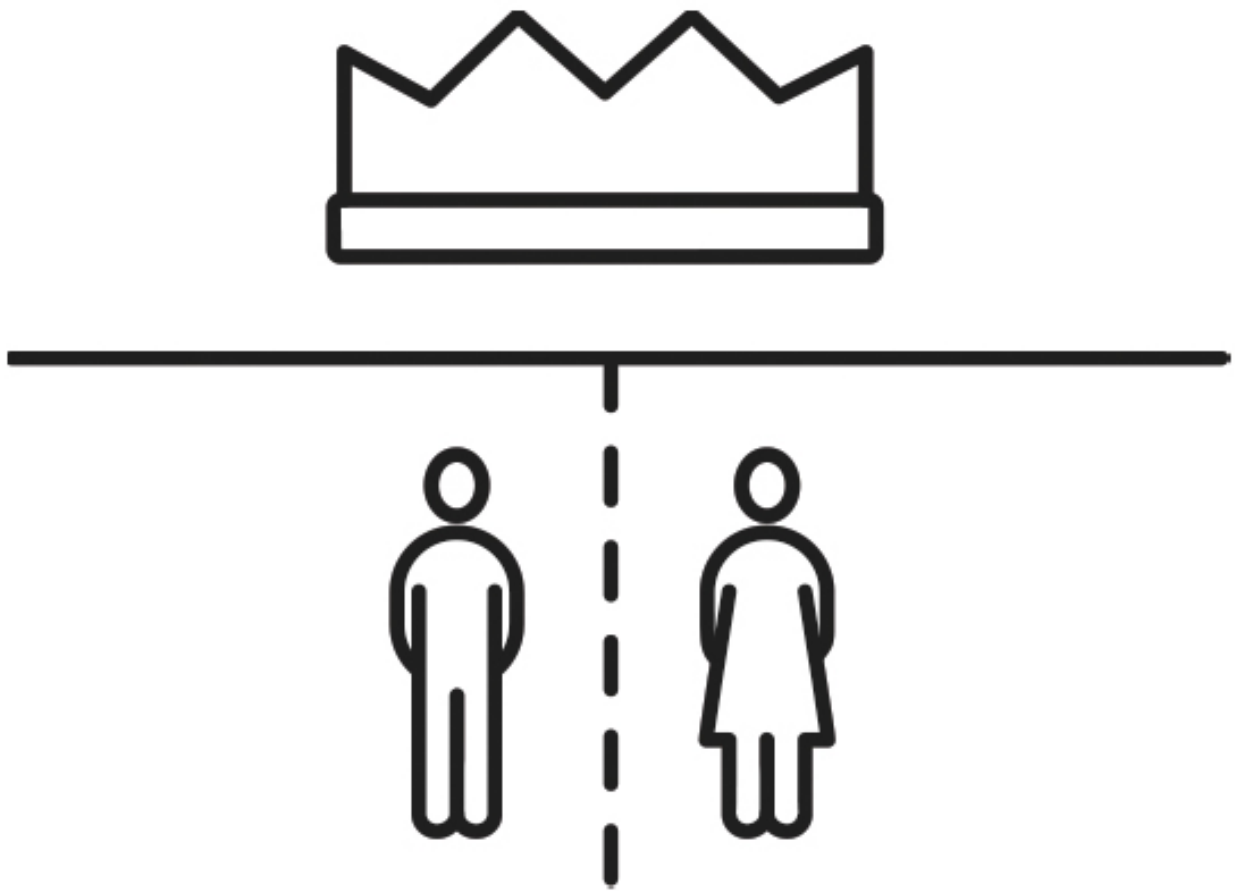
Thank God for giving you a place in his mission to have the whole world hear the message about Jesus the Messiah, and for the power of his Spirit to enable you to do your part. Thank God for giving you a church community to be devoted to.

Share the names of some people you would like to tell about Jesus. Why not commit to praying for each other for the next year? Ask God to give each of you opportunities to talk about his Son, and the courage to take them.



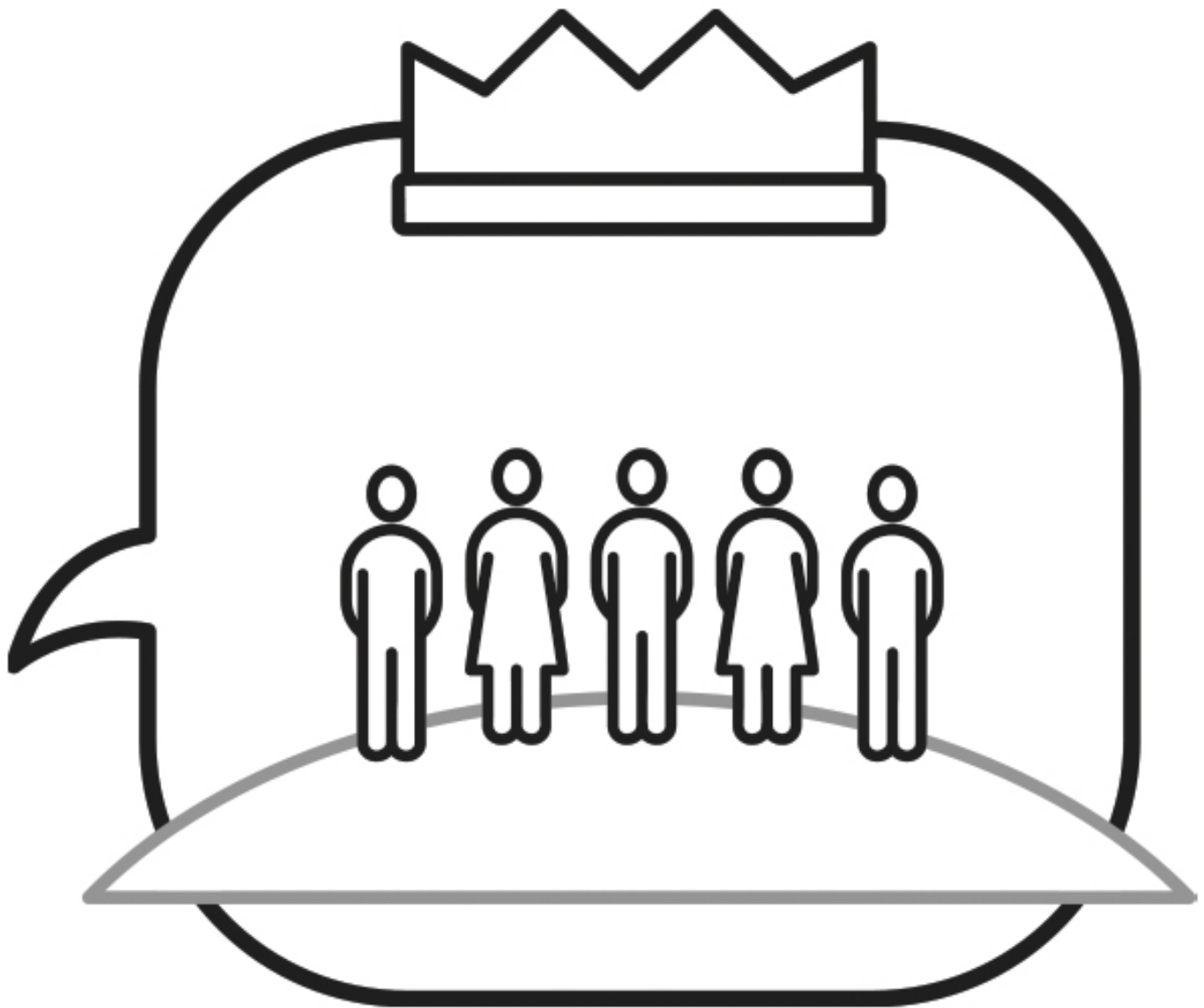
The Promise:

A very good world of blessing in God's presence



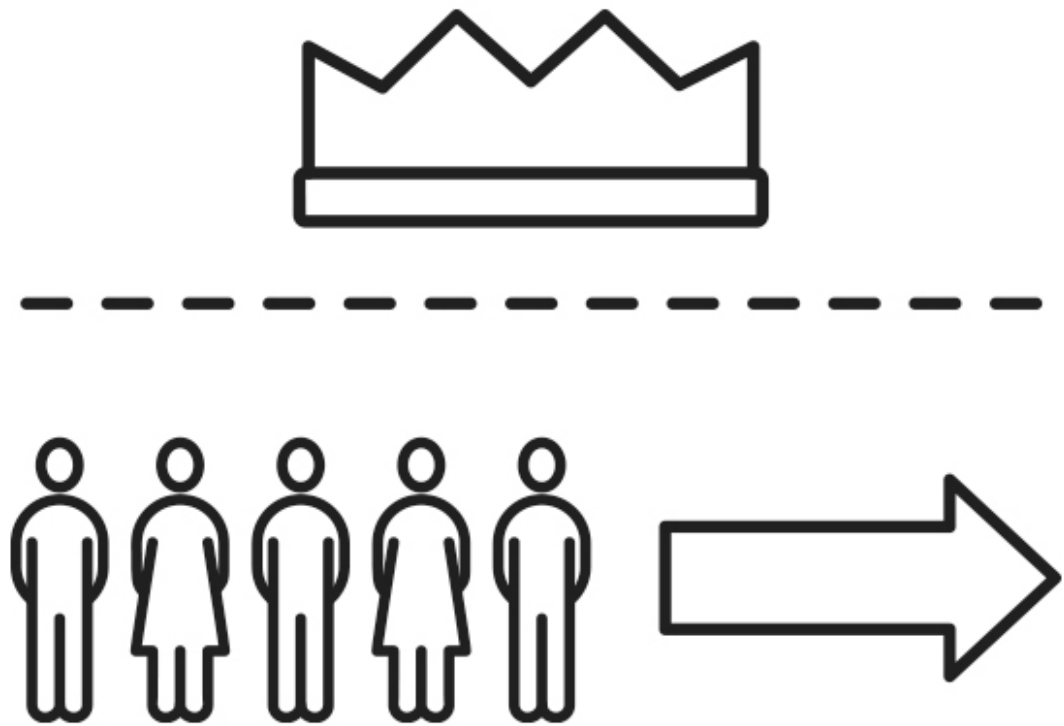
The Promise:

A serpent-crusher, descended from Eve, to undo the ruin of the fall



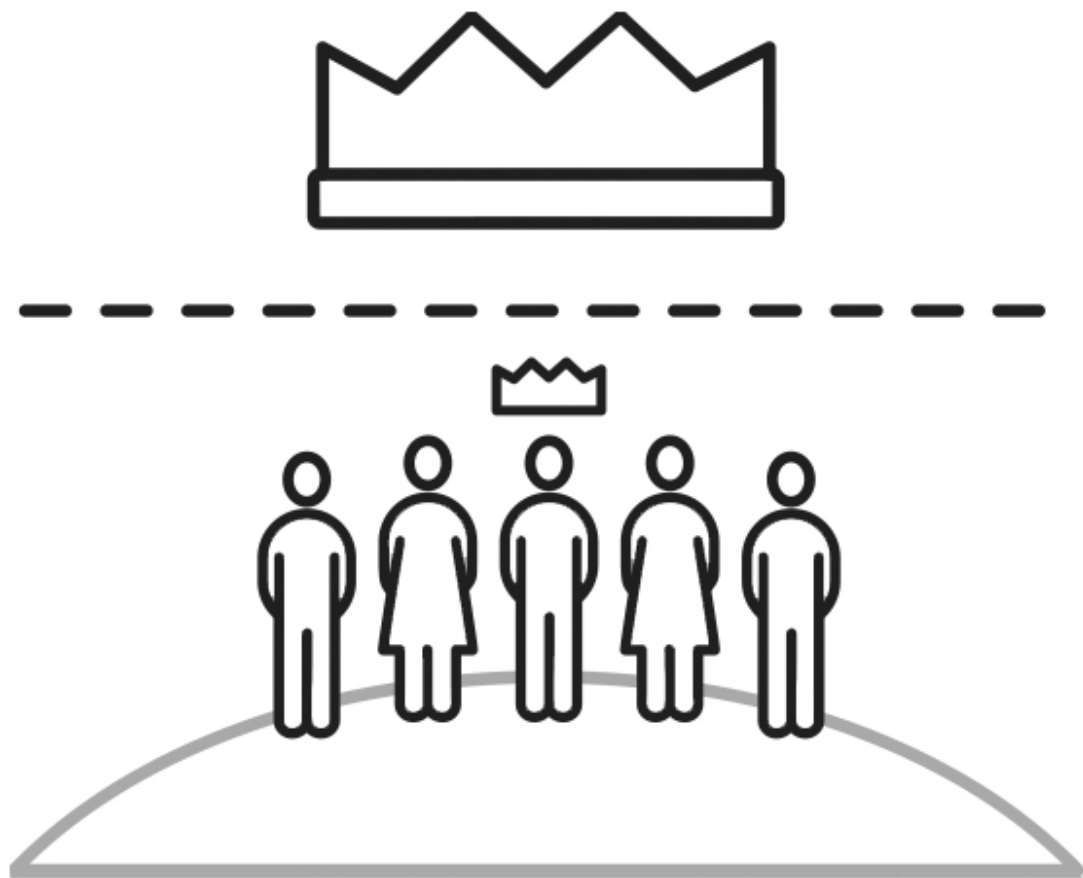
The Promise:

God's people in God's land – a blessing brought to all peoples through Abraham's descendant



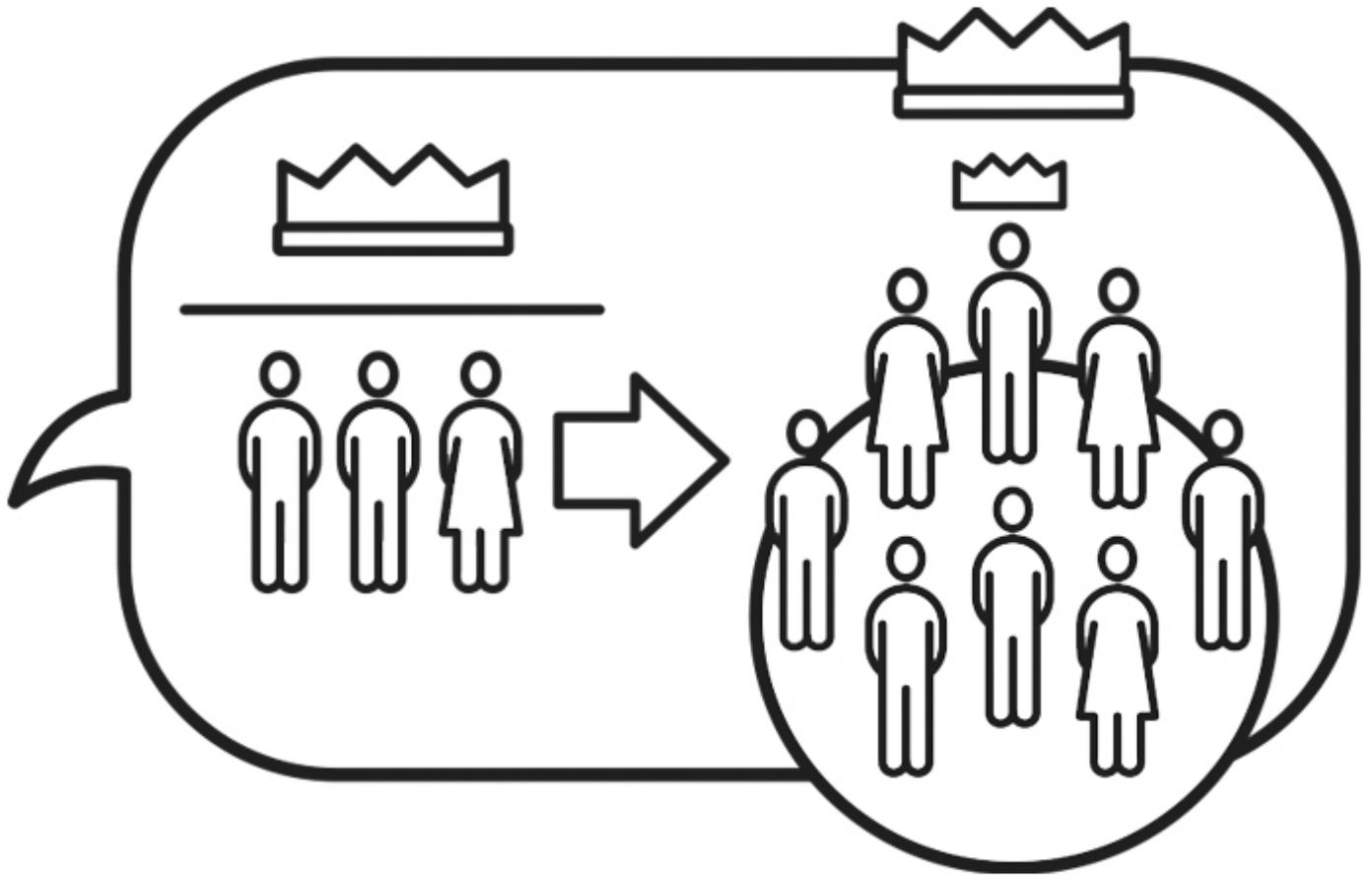
The Promise:

A substitute to die in the place of sinners, taking God's judgment so they can be God's people



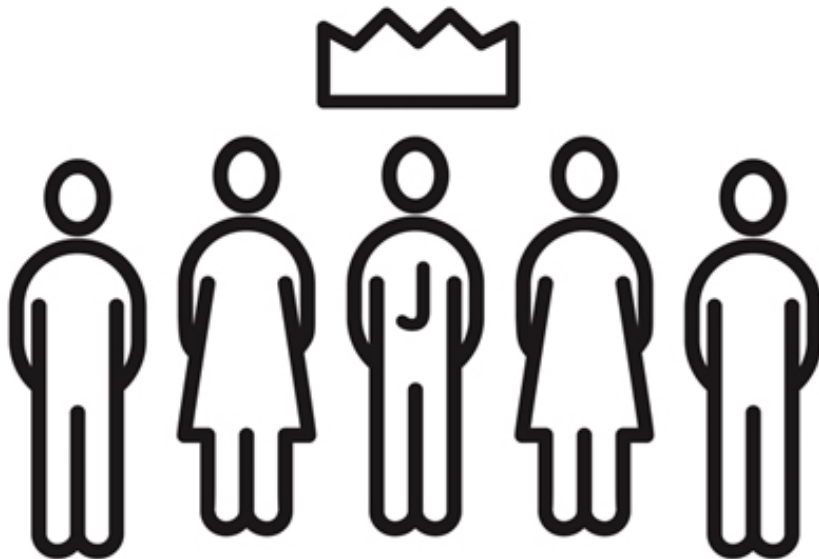
The Promise:

A perfect King, descended from David, who will rule God's people for ever



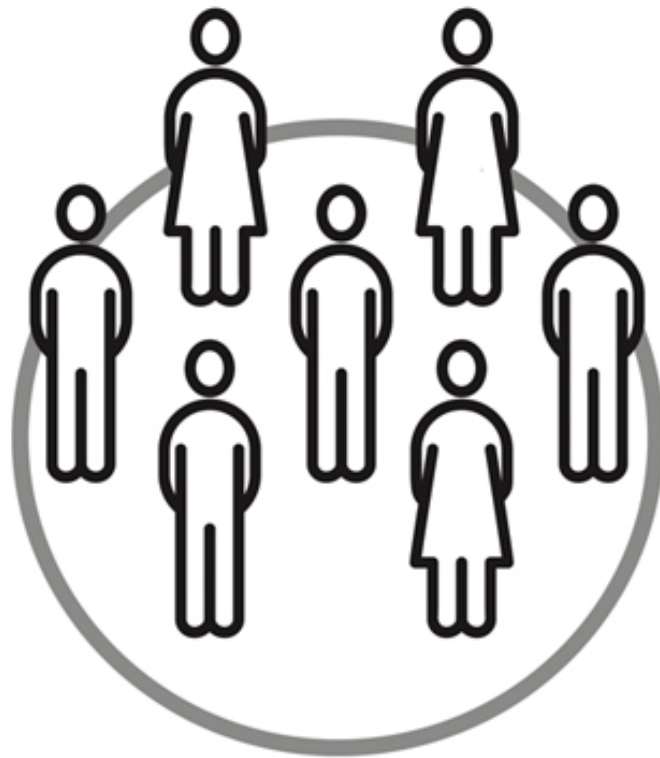
The Promise:

A future world of God's people enjoying God's blessing, under God's king, for eternity



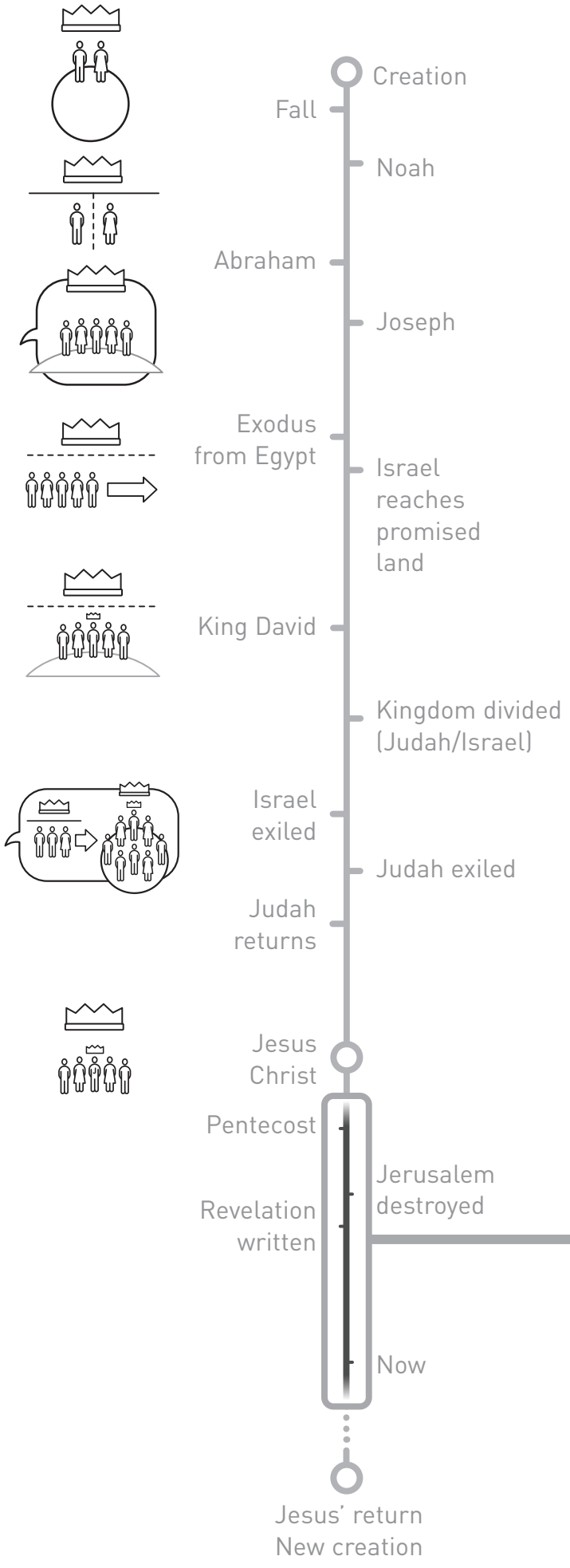
The Promise:

A Messiah who will be rejected, be killed, and then rise from the dead. Promise kept!



The Promise:

Jesus will give his people his Spirit so they can witness to the truth about him throughout the world.



BIBLE TIMELINE

Where are we in the whole story of God's word?

SESSION EIGHT TODAY

BIBLE SECTION

Acts, Romans

1 & 2 Corinthians

Galatians, Ephesians

Philippians, Colossians

1 & 2 Thessalonians

1 & 2 Timothy, Titus

Philemon, Hebrews

James, 1 & 2 Peter

1, 2 & 3 John, Jude

Revelation 1 - 19

MAIN CHARACTERS

The apostles: particularly Peter, Paul, James and John

The early church: particularly Stephen and Philip

The first church leaders: particularly Timothy and Titus