

80 Generations
September 2023 (3-30 September)



80 Generations

80 GENERATIONS

Join us this September as we consider the genealogy of our faith and the mindboggling fact that only 80 generations stand between our lives and when Jesus lived his human life among us.

Last month in **Habitats of Hope** we were looking *around* at where we find ourselves and now this month we are looking *back* at where we have come from. Not only *where*, but *who* we have come from. We'll be thinking about time, tradition, innovation, redemption, deliverance, burning bushes, manna from heaven, and the things that sustain us.

This month we are trying to put time, meaning and purpose into perspective, using the title 80 Generations. If a generation is 25 years, did you know that it is only 80 generations since Jesus walked this earth in person? In other words, if each generation could shake hands, you would only need to shake 80 hands until you would shake the hand of Jesus. What is even more powerful than that is the nail pierced hand of Jesus can reach out across the generations to touch each of us now. Proverbs 18: 24 reminds us there is one who sticks closer to us than even a brother.

In Psalm 90 the writer goes further, referring to God's timing as "A thousand years in your sight is as one watch of the night." In the ancient world one watch of the night was about three or four hours. So in God's economy of time, Jesus rose from the dead six hours ago. And when it comes to the stories of the Exodus well they just happened ten and half hours ago.

During September we are going to take four of these interesting stories of deliverance from the book of Exodus and view them as unfinished scenarios, that still have a contemporary connection with our lives, in that they describe the human condition.

We are all people enslaved in time searching for purpose and perspective.

1. *The Burning Bush Story*, is all about broken dreams revisited - Moses called to be a Saviour/Deliverer. What might happen if God revisited our broken dreams?
2. *The Passover Story*, is all about an action or ritual that expresses faith. Jesus took the ritual of the Passover and gave it a new perspective, meaning and purpose.
3. *The story of the 'Brazen Serpent'* links creative imagery with, judgement, forgiveness and faith healing, that goes beyond the power of image. Jesus took the image of a serpent healer, to describe the faith healing message of the cross and life beyond.
4. *The Story of Manna from Heaven*, is all about God's provision for the journey of life. Jesus takes this life sustaining model of bread, and uses it to describe his presence and purpose giving me sanding to the life of the believer.

As we live out our life, scenarios that have still to reach their fulfilment, these four stories help us understand how the history of deliverance and redemption is fulfilled.

In the burning bush, we see lost dreams can be restored. The story of the passover ritual speaks of a redemptive action. In the story of the brazen serpent we see redemptive action points to the response of faith. In the story of the manna from heaven we see God's provision is never far away.

When it comes to understanding a true perspective on our meaning and purpose, Christians believe it is revealed in one overarching narrative of deliverance: the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus plugged his life into these unfinished stories of deliverance in order that we might understand their conclusion.

It is hoped this time of study will help us to reach out and shake the hand of Jesus across the generations. But also to see that the Jesus story speaks into the lives of all of us who are enslaved in 21st century materialism and injustice.

SETTING THE SCENE: A visual motif for each week. An optional additional focus point for preparing worship services or multimedia inspired by the material.

SEEDS TO SOW: Open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps a song, some drawing, or creative writing! They are short and sweet, simply a starting off place for you and your imagination. Expand, tailor and develop as suits you. Often they take the form of a question, to encourage reflection.

Each week of the 4 week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and prompts for thought.

The Burning Bush (3 September)

In week one our key story is 'The Burning Bush'. We are asking the writer of this week's material to help us explore the scenario around the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:1-15). Each generation needs its own 'Burning Bush Encounter'. We need our broken dreams restored. Moses failed when he acted as an Egyptian liberator. He succeeded because of the burning bush encounter.

Using the additional lectionary readings we will see how Jesus identified and re-connected himself with the 'I Am' of the 'Burning Bush' (check out this video on [John 13-21 from the Bible Project](#)). He is the light of the world — calling men and women to acts of service, freedom and deliverance. To redeem their broken dreams for justice. The early church was able to draw parallels with Israel's wilderness journey to freedom and the Christian's life of faith. Our writer this week will help us make these connections. It is faith that links the generations. Our life experiences of faith are closer than we might imagine.

SETTING THE SCENE: A BUSH BURNING WITHOUT BEING CONSUMED

SEEDS TO SOW: HOW MUST MOSES HAVE FELT STANDING THERE BEFORE THE BURNING BUSH?

1. Exodus 3: 1-15
 2. Revelation 3: 1-6
 3. Revelation 3: 7-13
1. **The Bush Still Burns.** I AM speaks from a burning bush - He gives a commission *go set my people free*. Jesus gives the church a commission with an I Am signature - *Go into all the world share the good news and make disciples, I AM with you to the end of the end of the age.* (Matthew 28: 19-20). Like Moses we are commissioned. Like Moses what excuses are we making? (Check out: [Bible Project video on names for God](#)).
 2. **The Wake Up Call.** The risen Christ, the I AM, speaks to the Church in Sardis — it's a warning. You're not facing the reality, you have a reputation of being alive but you're not. Waken up and strengthen what still remains but is about to die. If ever there was a word for the church today this must be it. 80 generations are we still asleep?
 3. **There Is Always A Way Out.** I AM speaks again — the risen Christ, who in John's Gospel calls himself the door (John 10: 9), now speaks to the church a Philadelphia. This is a word of encouragement. They may have little strength but God has placed a way for them to escape. He has given them an open door. He has given them himself. When we feel there is no way out let's remember we have Jesus the door — he is our way out. For Moses the story was unfinished he had Aaron, but the story of redemption is now completed in Jesus. The internet has now become our open door 80 generations on.

The Burning Bush (3 September)

Continued...

4. Revelation 3: 14-21
 5. Romans 10: 14-21
 6. 2 Corinthians 12: 11-21
 7. Romans 12: 9-18
4. **Take your shoes off - you'll be here for a while.** Here again the risen Lord, the I AM, stands knocking at the door of the Church at Laodicea. This is a church that is lukewarm. They are being given another chance to have supper with the Lord. Here in this passage the invitation is open to anyone. If you are hearing this open up welcome him in. This is the "Moses Experience" extended to all, "Take off your shoes from off your feet for the place your standing is holy ground". 80 generations on he still speaks.
 5. **Just Go - never mind the excuses.** Here is the call of Moses being recycled for the church. Moses had to go in order for the people to hear and be delivered from slavery. Here the Apostle Paul is reminding us that God uses people to do his work. Is this your burning bush right now.? As you listening? Are you being called to go? It's not for us to count the success. We are simply commissioned to go. So what's stopping You? 80 generations on the need is still as great.
 6. **Facing the facts.** The place of service is never easy in church life. Let's face the facts, there will be people who will misunderstand your motives for service. In this reading Paul discusses openly what he knows about some people at Corinth. Nevertheless it doesn't stop him from loving the people of God. Moses would encounter all kinds of grumblings but he never gave up. Our commission comes from I AM and that is enough, that is all we need to know. After all it is only around 130 handshakes to get to Moses.
 7. **The Ministry Handbook.** Here are words of encouragement from someone who knew what it was like to be always on the go. To be misunderstood. To be beaten and bruised for his faith. He seeks to follow Jesus's example. We are called to be servants not kings. Following in the footsteps of Moses and many others.

The Passover (10 September)

In week two our key story is The Passover. We ask the writer, using the additional readings from Old and New Testament, to help us discover how Jesus places himself within the story of Passover with an inclusive act of deliverance for all generations of both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus takes the story of passover and reveals God's grace and kindness. The message is forgiveness is costly, only God can pass over sin but God does so at a great cost. (Check out this podcast from the Bible Project for more context about the [Passover Meal](#).)

80 Generations on, in an act of Communion we encounter the hand of Jesus passing us the bread and saying this is my body broken for you, and the cup saying drink this for the forgiveness of sins. Our past has been passed over and we've been given a new future.

SETTING THE SCENE: **DISCIPLES GATHERED TOGETHER BREAKING BREAD**

SEEDS TO SOW: **WHAT DO YOU THINK JESUS'S FIRST DISCIPLES WOULD MAKE OF OUR COMMUNIONS TODAY?**

1. Exodus 12: 1-14
 2. John 1: 29-34
 3. Mark 14: 12-26
 4. Exodus 6: 6-7
1. **The story of Passover.** This is a summary of a nation's freedom brought about after a great amount of bloodshed and hardship. It's grizzly tale of sabotage, justice, fear and redemption. It is from this story of redemption that Jesus chooses to align his reason for coming into the world. (Mark 10: 41-45).
 2. **The story of Passover continues.** John bears witness that Jesus is the pascal lamb. He also points to the eternal existence of Jesus. He talks about Jesus having been before he was. Jesus makes a similar claim when he says, "before Abraham was, I am" (see John 8: 56-58). Here Jesus is placing himself outside of history in relation to a historical character but inside history in order that we might shake his hand through the generations..
 3. **Jesus becomes the Passover.** Here in this passage Jesus no longer is celebrating the passover instead he is completing the passover. Jesus becomes the passover lamb for all humanity. 80 generations on we who are gentiles are now included in a new meaning for Passover.
 4. **The promises of Passover.** In Exodus 6 God makes four promises to Israel: "I will bring you out", "I will deliver you", "I will redeem you", and "I will take you". These promises are symbolised in the passover ceremony by replenishing the wine cup four times to give thanks to God for each of these promises. When Jesus lifted the cup of salvation or redemption, the evening of his 'Last Supper' he was giving it a new meaning. He would through his death and blood shed redeem humanity to God and deliver us out of time into eternity.

The Passover (10 September)

Continued...

5. 1 Corinthians
10: 14-33

6. 1 Corinthians
11: 17-26

7. Acts 2: 42-47

5. **Understanding The Lord's Supper.** In this section Paul warns the Christians not to participate in feasts where offerings are being made to false gods. In doing so he gives us an insight into how the early Church viewed the Lord's Supper. It was an intimate communal participation in which the believers together gave thanks to God for their redemption. This intimate act of love and fellowship could not be and must not be confused with feasts offered to demons. 80 generations on have we allowed the meal to become something else?

6. **The Institution of the Lord's Supper.** Here Paul lays out what the early Christians understood they were doing when they met together to share in fellowship and worship. 80 generations on what would Paul say to us about our participation in the Lord's Supper?

7. **Fellowship of breaking bread.** In this famous passage we are confronted with the fellowship, zeal and commitment of the first followers of the risen Jesus. They had a purpose and a meaning and perspective that allowed them to explore the challenge of communal living. As we look back through the generations could we have lessons to learn about how we view our wealth and possessions. Do we need delivered from a materialism that is enslaving us?

The Bronze Serpent (17 September)

In week three our key story is a strange one. We encounter the Israelites complaining to Moses that their deliverance from Egypt has been too costly. Now what is interesting about this story is not the judgement of God (Although it seems harsh to us today. We live in a generation that finds it hard to accept God might judge a nation). It is how God resolves the issue, you might say, how he delivers the people from his judgement that seems strange. Moses is instructed to make, a graven image of the fiery serpent out of bronze, put it on a pole, and tell the people to look to the serpent on the pole and God will heal their wounds. So, given the response of God to the making of the golden calf, in previous chapters, why make another graven image so soon after, even if the sight of it relieves human suffering? The difference here is God is taking control of the serpent. It was a serpent that caused the rift in the garden, now God takes the serpent and uses it for his purposes of healing. The symbol of his judgement becomes a sign of his grace. But there is more to come. The story has another unfolding. In 2 Kings 18: 3-27 it is recorded that Hezekiah broke the serpent into pieces because it had become an idol.

In John 3:14 Jesus reaches down through the generations to the wilderness experience and reconnects with this image of the brazen serpent re-imagining or likening himself as the one lifted high taking upon himself both the judgement and justice of God for the sin of humanity and on the other hand offering healing that removes and forgives sins.

You might say Jesus is God's double agent. He is both God and humanity suffering and bringing healing into a divine relationship that has been broken. In our readings this week we discover there is something about the cross of Christ that demands our attention. We will consider various people who took a second look at Jesus and discovered a new perspective on life. The opportunity to do so is still available now for generations still to come.

SETTING THE SCENE: LOOKING TO THE CROSS

SEEDS TO SOW: WHAT DOES THE WORD 'DELIVERANCE' MEAN TO YOU?

The daily readings and prompts are on the next page.

The Bronze Serpent (17 September)

Continued...

1. Numbers 21: 4-9
and John 3: 13-17

2. Mark 10: 45

3. Matthew 27: 50-
54

4. Luke 23: 39-43

5. Acts 2: 5-36

*(Our writer is invited
to choose a shorter
selection of verses
to focus on)*

6. Acts 26: 24-29

7. 2 Corinthians 5:17

1. **Lifted high.** The power of the famous John 3: 16 has a greater significance when it is linked to the healing narrative of Numbers 21:8. The narrative of the wilderness experience is re-ordered and completed in the cross of Christ lifted high drawing all kinds of people to himself. To gaze on the crucified Christ is to receive healing and forgiveness coming down through the generations.
2. **Lifted high on the cross.** Here in this verse Mark cuts to the central meaning of the cross. This one act of amazing bravery and love and generosity draws from us a response of gratitude. God takes upon himself to pay the ransom the law demands and we go free.
3. **Lifted high — drawing all folks to you.** Here is the mystery and the majesty and the power. All kinds of people are drawn to Jesus. Take a moment to think about the gaze of the centurion. What faith was stirred in him to make his confession? A hardened soldier not easily moved is touched by a man lifted high.
4. **Heads turned, gazing from the cross.** And what of this man? He turns his head and in his gaze asks to be remembered. Even criminals are drawn to him and love is received. No one is beyond the gaze of forgiveness.
5. **Lifted high and crowds draw near.** Peter lifts the cross of Jesus high in the public square and all types shapes and sizes are drawn to hear and receive and encounter forgiveness.
6. **Lifted high and a king turns away.** A king finds himself so near yet so far. "Paul you almost persuade me to be a Christian". Agrippa like many is drawn to gaze but faith is a gift not an answer.
7. **Lifted high and all things become new.** What an amazing summary of the finished work of healing that the cross of Christ brings to wounded and hurting, fearful people. If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation.

Bread of Heaven (24 September)

The key story this week is found in Exodus 16: 1-8. The people released from slavery now grumble about the harsh conditions in the wilderness and their lack of food. In this passage we are reminded of the role God plays in the life of Israel. He responds to their grumblings and gives them food in the form of manna. In Psalm 78:23-25 manna is describe as the grain of heaven, the food angels eat. In Jesus's day there was a strong rabbinic belief that when the Messiah would come he would give manna to the people as a sign of his identity. Jesus now links himself to the manna story in the book of Exodus, but goes further and shows them how he is able to fulfil the deeper spiritual longings of the human heart.

80 generations on the life of Jesus continues to inspire and sustain meaning and purpose for today's generation. (Here is what [Stormzy](#) the well know rapper has to say about Jesus.) In our reflections this week we will be challenged to encounter Jesus for ourselves and all his life to feed and sustain us.

SETTING THE SCENE: A LUNCHBOX

SEEDS TO SOW: WHAT DO YOU PICTURE WHEN YOU HEAR THE PHRASE 'BREAD OF HEAVEN'?

1. Exodus 16: 2-15
1. **Manna from heaven.** Reflect upon the beautiful generous idea that God shares his heavenly food with grumbling complaining humans.
2. John 6: 1-15
2. **Manna in a lunchbox.** Jesus' compassion for the needs of humanity is in fact the manna story re-visited in a different way. The bread of heaven is found in the lunch of a small boy with five loaves and two fish.
3. John 6: 25-27
3. **Looking for cheap grace.** Looking for Jesus for worldly benefits. It's too easy to look for the benefits of being a Christian, receiving cheap grace rather than embracing the cost of following Jesus.
4. John 6: 28-34
4. **Looking for a sign and missing the road.** Is it possible to miss what is right in front of you. In our faith journey do we miss out because we can't see the wood for the trees?
5. John 6: 35-40
4. **Looking for a sign and missing the road.** Is it possible to miss what is right in front of you. In our faith journey do we miss out because we can't see the wood for the trees?
6. John 6: 40-51
5. **Give us this day our daily bread.** Jesus declares he is the bread of Life - ask ourselves what does it mean to feed of Christ?
7. John 6: 48-59
6. **Are we too earth bound?** The bread to eat and never die. What does it mean to live eternally?
7. **From ritual to revelation.** The power received through the sacrament of bread and wine. Have we made Communion into an under-considered ritual rather than receiving a gift of sustaining energy and power?