

## **Lent 2021: On the Bible's back roads Where old stories and our stories meet.**

### **Introduction**

In his semi-autobiographical novel *David Copperfield*, Charles Dickens brings to life a wonderful collection of minor characters who the eponymous hero encounters as the novel progresses. They include Barkis who asserts his willingness to marry Clara Peggotty; the scheming and manipulative Uriah Heep, always ever so 'umble; Mr Micawber, who never quite gets his personal finances in order until he goes to Australia and Betsy Trotwood, perpetually worried by encroaching donkeys. They all play their part in the narrative of *David Copperfield's* life and his story wouldn't be the same without them.

As we read the Bible there are, of course, a number of major characters such as Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Peter, Paul and, above all, Jesus himself who shape the narrative and are fundamental to our understanding of what it all means. But there are also a host of minor characters, some of whom, like the strange and unknown priest Melchizedek who greets Abraham at Salem (the future Jerusalem) following his success in battle, only appear briefly (in his case in three verses, Genesis 14 v 18-20) and yet they enrich the story and open windows through which we can see more fully the nature and purposes of God. Melchizedek's importance includes the way in which the writer to the Hebrews uses him to offer a window into the nature of Christ's priesthood; something which occupies more verses than his original appearance to provide refreshments for Abraham.

In this series of reflections we are going to look at a number of these minor characters, some of whom may be quite unfamiliar, and see what we can learn from them as we journey through Lent. They were not all paragons of virtue and, like us, were flawed human beings. But their stories are included in the biblical narrative for a reason; they have found a place in God's word to us because they help us to better understand the story of God's revelation to us in Jesus Christ.

*At the end of each reflection there are some questions you might like to consider. There may, of course, be other questions that come to mind that are worth exploring. There is also a short prayer but please feel free to make your own prayer response.*

*A note on referencing. When referencing from the passage for the day when it is contained within a single chapter the verse or verses only will be referenced, as in (v 6; v 3-5). If the reading contains verses from two chapters it will be chapter and verse, as in (6 v 7). All other references contain book, chapter and verse(s) as in (Rom 8 v 17).*

*The photos included with each reflection were taken on pilgrimages to the Holy Land and reflect the beauty and the sometimes painful realities of life today in the land where those who appear on the Bible's back roads lived so many years ago. Many of them have a (sometimes tenuous!) link with the stories and the reflections on them.*