

# **GENESIS TO REVELATION: AN OVERVIEW**

by Todd Bolen

## **QUESTIONS WE WILL SEEK TO ANSWER**

What is the Bible all about?

What is the “center” of the Bible?

How do the parts of the Bible fit together?

What is God’s purpose in creation?

How is the New Testament related to the Old Testament?

How does Israel relate to the world? How does the church relate to Israel? How does the church relate to the Old Testament?

## **WHAT THIS STUDY IS NOT**

This is not a survey of all of the books of the Bible. We will make no attempt to be comprehensive or to answer every question.

This is not a top-down theology study where we study subjects and see what the Bible says about them.

This study is not driven by apologetic interests to prove that the Bible is true. We begin with the presupposition that all of Scripture is inspired by God and useful for training in righteousness.

## **WHAT THIS STUDY IS**

We will focus attention on key passages, words, and themes in order to see the development of God’s purposes as revealed progressively through time to man.

This study will attempt to correct misperceptions and distortions caused by long-time, selective reading of Scripture.

This is a study in which you will benefit by the more you do before and after our Sunday morning meeting.

## **PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE OF STUDIES**

Creation

Fall

Cain, Noah and Babel

Abrahamic Covenant

Isaac, Jacob, Joseph

Redemption from Egypt

Mosaic Covenant

Tabernacle and wilderness  
Deuteronomy  
Joshua  
Judges and Ruth  
Monarchy  
Davidic Covenant  
Psalms  
Proverbs  
The kingdom in the OT  
Preparation for exile  
The prophets in context  
The messianic hope  
Restoration from exile  
Chronicles  
Zechariah  
The nations in the OT  
Jesus the fulfillment  
Jesus' ministry  
Matthew  
Romans 9-11  
Ascension and Christ's present ministry  
Acts 2  
Galatians 3-4  
Paul's letters in context  
The church in the world (suffering, submission)  
The Believer and the Law  
Salvation  
Revelation

## QUOTATIONS

“In short, the deeper you go into understanding the Old Testament, the closer you come to the heart of Jesus” (Wright 1992: ix).

“For the Old Testament is much more than a promise box full of blessed prediction about Jesus. It is primarily a story – the story of the acts of God in human history out of which those promises arose and in relation to which only they make sense.

If we think of the Old Testament only in terms of promises that are fulfilled we may fall into the trap of regarding the content of the Old Testament as of little value in itself. If it is all ‘fulfilled’, is it worth anything now?” (Wright 1992: 27).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “I don’t think it is Christian to want to get to the New Testament too soon and directly” (cited in Dempster 2003: 36).

## GOD’S KINGDOM-BUILDING PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

Old Testament Narrative History	1. Creation, fall, & flood (ca. ? B.C.)	<b>K</b>	<u>K</u> ickoff & rebellion
	2. Patriarchs (ca. 2100–1850 B.C.)	<b>I</b>	<u>I</u> nstrument of blessing
	3. Exodus, Sinai, & wilderness (ca. 1450–1400 B.C.)	<b>N</b>	<u>N</u> ation redeemed & commissioned
	4. Conquest & kingdoms (united & divided) (ca. 1400–600 B.C.)	<b>G</b>	<u>G</u> overnment in the Promised Land
	5. Exile & initial restoration (ca. 600–400 B.C.)	<b>D</b>	<u>D</u> ispersion & return
New Testament Narrative History	6. Christ's work & the Church age (ca. 4 B.C.–A.D. ?)	<b>O</b>	<u>O</u> verlap of the ages
	7. Christ's return & kingdom consummation (ca. A.D. ?–eternity)	<b>M</b>	<u>M</u> ission accomplished

(Chart by Jason DeRouchie)

### SOURCES CITED

T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 2nd ed., 2002.

Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 2003.

Jason DeRouchie, *What the OT Authors Really Cared About*, 2013.

Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, 1992.

### PREPARATION FOR FIRST STUDY

Read Genesis 1-2. Try to determine the author's purpose(s) in writing this section of Scripture.

What is the heart of the passage?

What does this passage teach us about God? Creation? Humanity? Marriage?

Study Genesis 1:26-28. What does it mean that God made man in his own image? Why did God give the commands in verse 28?

## STUDY #1: GENESIS 1-2: CREATION AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

### OUTLINE

- I. God's creation of the world is marred by the sinfulness of man (1:1–11:26).
  - A. The creation of the world: God creates a good world in seven days through his mighty word (1:1–2:3).
    1. In the beginning God creates the heavens and the earth (1:1-2).
    2. On the first three days God creates the forms of heaven and earth (1:3-13).
      - a. On the first day God creates light & darkness (1:3-5).
      - b. On the second day God creates waters above and below (1:6-8).
      - c. On the third day God creates vegetation on the land (1:9-13).
    3. On the second three days God fills the heavens and earth (1:14-31).
      - a. On the fourth day God fills the sky with the objects of light (1:14-19).
      - b. On the fifth day God fills the air with birds and the sea with creatures (1:20-23).
      - c. On the sixth day God fills the land with animals and man (1:24-31).
    4. On the seventh day God rests from his work (2:1-3).
  - B. The account of the heavens and the earth: God creates man as his own image who then rebels against him (2:4–4:26).
    1. God created man and woman and put them in the garden of Eden (2:4-25).
      - a. God creates man at the very beginning (2:4-7).
      - b. God plants a garden for the enjoyment of man (2:8-17).
        - 1) God places man in a beautiful garden (2:8-14).
        - 2) God gives man charge over the beautiful garden (2:15).
        - 3) God restricts man from eating from one tree in the beautiful garden (2:16-17).
      - c. God reveals that man needs a helper (2:18-20).
      - d. God creates woman to be one flesh with the man (2:21-25).

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Genesis 1-2. Try to determine the author's purpose(s) in writing this section of Scripture. What is the heart of the passage?

What does this passage teach us about God? Creation? Humanity? Marriage?

Study Genesis 1:26-28. What does it mean that God made man in his own image? Why did God give the commands in verse 28?

### OBSERVATIONS

1. God created a good world marked by order.
2. The pinnacle of God's creation was man, the only creature made in the image of God.
3. God gave man dominion over the earth, making him ruler over all of creation. As such, God delegated his sovereignty over creation to man. Being made in God's image, man exercises God's rule as his *mediator*.
4. God created both male and female in his image. There is no distinction in *intrinsic value* between the sexes. In chapter 2, God establishes that there is a created distinction in *function*, for the woman was made as a helper for man.
5. As part of the mandate to subdue the earth, man was commanded to be fruitful and to fill it.

6. God gave this created world to man to use and enjoy.
7. God blessed fish/birds, man, and the seventh day.
8. Genesis 1:1–2:3 reveals God’s creation of the earth as a whole. Genesis 2:4-25 focuses on God’s creation of man and woman.
9. In chapter 1, God is named as *Elohim*, emphasizing his majestic supremacy. In chapter 2, he is called *Yahweh Elohim*, pointing to his identity as the personal God of Israel.

God forms the formless	God fills the empty
Day 1: Light	Day 4: Bodies of light: Sun, moon, stars
Day 2: Sky/Seas	Day 5: Birds and fish
Day 3: Fertile earth	Day 6: Animals and man
Day 7: Sabbath	

10. God formed man from the earth. Man is part of the earth (an “earthling”). God formed woman from the man. Though not “born of man,” in this way God establishes the original unity of Adam and Eve.
11. The garden of Eden was the center of the earth; the rivers flowed down to give life to the whole earth.
12. God created the garden, and man was to work and take care of the garden. Work precedes and is not a result of the curse.
13. Man was to remember that his sovereignty was limited; he was always under God. The restriction on eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil would test man’s submission to God’s authority.
14. By naming the animals, Adam demonstrated his authority and ownership of them. One can only name what belongs to him.
15. God designed man and woman for each other and in their unity they became one flesh.
16. Creation was repeatedly deemed “good” until after the creation of man when God saw that it was “very good.”
17. Creation is portrayed as a simple task for God. He is not shown as straining or requiring extra time. He creates by speaking except in the case of man whom he forms from the dust and breathes into him the breath of life.
18. God is depicted as entirely outside his creation. He is not in creation like all the other gods of the ancient world. Worship of the sun, moon, or anything other than God is clearly shown to be worship of an object that God created.
19. Man was created to not die. He would only die if he disobeyed God.

### GENESIS 1:26-28 IN LATER REVELATION

**Psalm 8:** While man appears so small in the created world, the psalmist recalls that God made man as the pinnacle of his creation and gave him rule over all created beings. Man’s mandate to rule continued after the Fall (cf. Gen 9:1-7).

**Daniel 2:37-38; 4:12, 17:** Because Nebuchadnezzar did not give glory to God in exercising his rule, his humanity was taken away. He was restored to his kingdom when he recognized God’s sovereignty.

**Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 24:30; Rev 5:9-10:** One like a man is given everlasting dominion over the earth.

**Matthew 28:18-20:** Jesus commands his disciples to bring people of all nations into submission to him before he returns.

### QUOTATIONS

“The main point of [Genesis 1–2], could be stated as follows: God has prepared human beings, male and female, with the spiritual capacity and communal assistance to serve him and to keep his commands so that they might live and enjoy the bounty of his creation” (Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 127).

“We see [the image of God] expressed in concepts such as the possibility of fellowship and communication with God, the exercise of responsible dominion and leadership over the creation owned by God, and the fact that in some way unspecified as yet [in the Bible], God is the prototype of which man and woman are merely copies, replicas (*selem*, ‘carved or hewn statue or copy’) and facsimiles (*d<sup>e</sup>mût*, ‘likeness’)” (Kaiser, *Promise-Plan of God*, 40).

### GOING FURTHER

1. How should the truth of man’s being made in the image of God affect your view of God’s purpose for your life, your view of others, and your understanding of Jesus?
2. Read each of the passages in the “Later Revelation” section in light of Genesis 1:26-28. How do you understand each?
3. How do modern views of evolution and homosexuality attack the foundation of a biblical worldview?

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

1. Read Genesis 3. Try to determine the author’s main point.
2. What is the nature of the sin? How is Eve guilty? How is Adam?
3. How do the curses in Gen 3:14-19 relate to Gen 1-2?
4. Study Gen 3:15. What does it mean?

## STUDY #2: GENESIS 3: THE FALL AND THE SEED

### OUTLINE

- II. God's creation of the world is marred by the sinfulness of man (1:1–11:26).
  - A. The account of the heavens and the earth: God creates man as his own image who then rebels against him (2:4–4:26).
    - 1. God expels man and woman from the Garden of Eden because they disobey (3:1-24).
      - a. The man and woman follow the counsel of the serpent over God and their eyes are opened (3:1-7).
      - b. The man and woman hide from God in shame (3:8-13).
      - c. God curses the serpent and predicts a final defeat by the seed of woman (3:14-16).
      - d. God curses the ground and predicts the final death of man (3:17-19).
      - e. God graciously provides clothing for man (3:20-21).
      - f. God graciously removes man from the Garden of Eden (3:22-24).

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

1. Read Genesis 3. Try to determine the author's main point.
2. What is the nature of the sin? How is Eve guilty? How is Adam?
3. How do the curses in Gen 3:14-19 relate to Gen 1-2?
4. Study Gen 3:15. What does it mean?

### NOTES

The man and the woman both fall because they want more than what God has given them. They are not content with his provision, and they effectively question his goodness.

When Adam and Eve choose to disobey God, they know evil personally and experientially, not from the fruit itself but from their action.

The woman was deceived because she believed what the serpent told her. The man was not deceived; he knew what was right but decided to rebel against God.

The act of sin is so simple and so brief (one verse), but its consequences so lengthy and devastating (1,185 chapters).

The man and the woman do not repent when (1) they see their nakedness; (2) they hear God coming; (3) God questions them. Instead, they cover up, hide, and blame others.

Adam and Eve recognize their shame but do not recognize the cause of it: disobedience.

The seed of the serpent are not literal descendants (baby snakes) because the serpent is a supernatural creature who does not give birth. But those who follow in his ways are his spiritual descendants. And they will be at war with the seed of the woman. This is seen in the nations warring against Israel, in Haman's attack on the Jews, the "brood of vipers" in Matt 3:7 and 23:33, and ultimately in the crucifixion of Jesus.

The curse of the serpent entails the promise of a redeemer, the seed of the woman that would be harmed by the serpent but would in the process destroy him.

Even at the moment of the undoing of God's creation, God is ready at hand with a promise to restore it, and to do so through a man.

Gen 3:15 is the Protoevangelium – the first good news. Indeed, this is the first bit of good news, though the fullness of what it means will be developed in later revelation. Clearly victory is promised and it will come through one born of Eve, not through an alien, not apart from her, but through her.

That which God made good and gave to the man as his gift is now cursed. The ground isn't cursed for what it did, but for what Adam did. But Adam will suffer because of it. Adam isn't separated from the ground, but the ground is resistant to him (just as Adam had been resistant to God).

The immediate restoration of Adam and Eve requires clothing and removal from the garden.

### QUOTATIONS

“The flagrant rebellion against the divine word by the pinnacle of creation, which has just been invested with the divine rule, is a heinous crime against the cosmos and its Creator” (Dempster 2003: 66).

“In the light of the immediate context, the triumph of the woman's seed would suggest a return to the Edenic state, before the serpent had wrought its damage, and wresting of the dominion of the world from the serpent” (Dempster 2003: 68).

“The seed of the woman will restore the lost glory. Human – and therefore divine – dominion will be established over the world. The realization of the kingdom of God is linked to the future of the human race” (Dempster 2003: 69).

“Since in the future every birth will be accomplished only through pain, this pronouncement reverses in part God's initial blessing that human beings should be fruitful and increase in number (1:28)” (Alexander 2002: 117).

“The story of the fall brings to a bitter end the harmony that was the hallmark of God's creative activity. We witness in particular a breakdown in relations between animals and human beings, between men and women, and, most importantly of all, between God and humanity” (Alexander 2002: 117).

### GENESIS 3 IN LATER REVELATION

The concept of “seed” (often translated as “descendants” or “offspring”) is absolutely critical throughout the Bible. “Seed” can refer to a collective group (numerous descendants) or to a single individual (see Gal 3:16).



The conflict between the seed of the woman (the righteous remnant culminating in the Messiah) and the seed of the serpent (his spiritual offspring who are at enmity with the faithful) runs throughout Scripture (see some references in “Going Farther”).

Creation has been subject to futility in hope of its liberation (Rom 8:20-21).

### GOING FURTHER

Because of man’s sin in Genesis 3, what is man’s need and how does God address it in (1) the rest of Genesis; (2) the rest of the Old Testament; (3) the New Testament?

How is the promise of the skull-crushing seed developed in Genesis 22:17-18, 24:60, Num 24:17; 1 Sam 2:10; 2 Sam 7:12-16; 2 Sam 22:43; Jer 30:23; Ps 2; 110:6 (chiefs=head); Mic 7:17; Luke 10:18-19; Rom 16:20; Rev 12?

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Genesis 4–11. Given that God begins something new with the promises to Abraham in 12:1-3, what is the point of Gen 4–11? Why is it here? How does it prepare us for 12:1-3?

How is the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent apparent in these chapters?

Study Gen 9:24-27. What is this all about? What does it mean “may he live in the tents of Shem” (v27)?

### SOURCES CITED

T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 2002.

Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 2003.

James Hamilton, “[The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman](#),” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 2006.

## STUDY #3: GENESIS 4-11: THE SPREAD OF SIN AND A SEED OF HOPE

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Genesis 4–11. Given that God begins something new with the promises to Abraham in 12:1-3, what is the point of Gen 4–11? Why is it here? How does it prepare us for 12:1-3?

How is the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent apparent in these chapters?

Study Gen 9:24-27. What is this all about? What does it mean “may he live in the tents of Shem” (v27)?

### NOTES

**Genesis 4** – This chapter shows the spread of sin through the line of Cain, first through the murder of a brother and then his descendant boasting over killing a lad for a mere wound. Yet there is hope: Eve has “another seed,” one who, unlike Cain, may crush the serpent.

**Genesis 5** – This chapter shows Noah’s relationship to Adam (through Seth, not Cain). The constant refrain is the effect of sin: “and he died.” Yet there is hope: Enoch walked with God and God took him away.

**Genesis 6-8** – The world is so full of man’s wickedness that it needs a complete cleansing. Yet there is hope: God saves a righteous man, his family, and creatures to start afresh.

“The tiny spark has grown into a raging inferno” (Dempster 2003: 67).

“Although the earth has been recreated, the same is not true of human nature, for, as God comments, ‘every inclination of his (man’s) heart is evil from childhood’ (8:21)” (Alexander 2002: 134).

“The Flood has not been forgotten by almost any people under heaven, but its moral result is nil” (Dods 1902: 66-67).

**Genesis 9** – God is always faithful, but man is not. God promises never to destroy the earth by flood, but Noah abuses God’s gift of the vine and his son dishonors him. Yet there is hope: The Lord is the God of Shem, and Shem will rule over Canaan.

“Of significance is the fact that this is the first occasion in Genesis when a human being pronounces a blessing or a curse; preciously it was always God who blessed or cursed. Yet, in cursing Canaan and blessing Shem and Japheth, Noah’s words obviously carry divine authority. For the first time we meet something which is repeated later in Genesis: those within the chosen line of ‘seed’ are divinely empowered to bless or curse others” (Alexander 2002: 119).

“Noah...determined that the attributes of their descendants were embodied in his sons’ personalities” (Ross 1998: 210).

**Genesis 10-11** – Noah’s family is fruitful, but mankind refuses to spread out across the earth, instead choosing to defy God and make a name for themselves (not God, and apart from God). God scatters and confuses them to stop them. Yet there is hope: God will bless the world through Abraham.

“The primeval history reaches its fruitless climax as man, conscious of new abilities, prepares to glorify and fortify himself by collective effort. The elements of the story are timelessly characteristic of the spirit of the world. The project is typically grandiose; men describe it excitedly to one another as if it were the ultimate achievement—very much as modern man glories in his space projects” (Kidner 1967: 109).

“Humanity is thus ‘exiled’ by the LORD and hindered from establishing a community that might challenge his authority over the earth” (Alexander 2002: 136).

“It is the will of God...to employ nationalism in the reduction of sin” (Stigers in Ross 1998: 234).

<b>Genesis 1–6</b>	<b>Genesis 7–12</b>
Creation (Gen 1-2)	Re-creation (Gen 7-8)
Adam sins with the fruit (Gen 3:6)	Noah sins with the vine (Gen 9:20)
In the midst of a curse, God provides hope (Gen 3:15)	In the midst of a curse, God provides hope (Gen 9:26)
God commands Adam to be fruitful (Gen 1:28)	God commands Noah to be fruitful (Gen 9:1)
God forbids eating from one tree (Gen 2:17)	God forbids eating blood (Gen 9:4)
The population of the earth increases (Gen 4-5)	The population of the earth increases (Gen 10)
God judges man’s wickedness with the flood (Gen 6)	God judges man’s wickedness at Babel (Gen 11)
God preserves a righteous family (Gen 6)	God prepares a righteous family (Gen 12)

### HOPE IN GENESIS 4-11

God shows grace even to one who murders his brother by protecting him (Gen 4:15).

God provides another seed for Adam and Eve after Abel’s death (Gen 4:25).

God walks with Enoch and takes him away, pointing to the possibility of temporal and eternal fellowship with God (Gen 5:24).

God shows grace to Noah and saves him, his family, and the created animals (Gen 6:8ff).

God promises not to curse the ground again, even though he knows man is wicked (Gen 8:21).

God promises to remember his covenant with all living creatures not to use the waters to destroy all life (Gen 9:15-16).

Noah blesses the God of Shem, pointing to the faith of his son and the continuation of the woman's seed who would not submit to the serpent (Gen 9:26).

### **GENESIS 4-11 IN LATER REVELATION**

The flood is proof that God can and will judge the earth (Matt 24:37-41; 2 Pet 2-3).

The Canaanites served the descendants of Shem (Judg 1:28).

Babel/Babylon is the center and symbol of opposition to God (Isa 13, 47; Rev 16-18).

The confusion of languages and dispersal of peoples will be reversed in the future (Zeph 3:9-11).  
Tongues at Pentecost was a foretaste (Acts 2:6-21).

See also Matt 23:35; Luke 3:36-38; Acts 15:29; Rom 6:12; 1 Cor 11:7; 1 Tim 4:3; Heb 11:4-7; James 5:4; 1 Pet 3:20; 1 John 3:12; Jude 11.

### **GOING FURTHER**

How do these chapters prepare us for God's call of Abraham?

What do these chapters teach about (a) the sinfulness of man, (b) the judgment of God; (c) God's purpose for man?

How do these chapters relate to Jesus' return?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Genesis 12-22. Pay careful attention to: (1) anything God says; (2) anything related to seed/offspring; (3) the promises and covenants that God makes with Abraham.

Note how Abraham repeatedly interferes with God's work, placing the promise in jeopardy at some points.

### **SOURCES CITED**

T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 2002.

Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 2003.

Marcus Dods, *The Book of Genesis*, 1902.

Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC, 1967.

Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 1998.

## STUDY #4: GENESIS 12-24: ABRAHAM'S FAITH AND GOD'S COVENANT

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Genesis 12-24. Pay careful attention to: (1) anything God says; (2) anything related to seed/offspring; (3) the promises and covenant that God makes with Abraham.

Note how Abraham repeatedly interferes with God's work, placing the promise in jeopardy at some points.

### GENESIS 12: A CRUCIAL PIVOT

Genesis 12 is a *pivot*, connecting chapters 1-11 with everything to follow. This chapter looks *backwards* and *forwards* in crucial ways.

Abraham is the seed of the woman, Seth, Noah, and Shem; he is of the blessed line that will crush the serpent.

In contrast to the men of Babel who wished to make a name for themselves (11:4), God promises to make Abraham's name great (12:2).

Though mankind is against God, God has a plan to bless man through (a) man.

### THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

**Seed:** God will give Abraham seed and make him into a great nation.

**Land:** The seed needs a land. Indeed, God made man to rule over the land (Gen 1). The chosen seed, as it submits to God, will do just that. God has chosen a particular land for his people (and it fulfills a prophecy made in judgment of Canaan in ch. 9).

**Blessing:** This has two parts: (1) God will bless Abraham; (2) God will bless all families on earth through Abraham. The greatest blessing that man needs is the crushing of the serpent and deliverance from sin. This will come through Abraham and his seed.

### SEED, LAND, AND BLESSING THROUGH ABRAHAM'S LIFE

Abram in Egypt (12): Abram's fear (=opposite of faith) brings a threat to the seed. The one who dishonors Abram is cursed.

Abram and Lot (13): Lot removes himself from the promised land; the promise of land is developed (all that you see, forever); the promise of seed is developed (like dust, uncountable).

Invasion of the kings (14): God gives Abram victory in the land; Abram submits to a greater priest; Abram will not prosper from the riches of sin (Sodom).

God's covenant (15): The seed will come from Abram's body (not adopted), will be numerous, will be enslaved and delivered to this land, the borders of which are now given. The vision signifies God's

unbreakable promise to do what he said (cf. Jer 34:18). Abram is declared righteous because of his faith, not his works.

Hagar (16): The insemination of Sarai's servant is an attempt to help God to fulfill his promise to provide a seed. Such action is the opposite of faith, and its results will long haunt the seed.

Circumcision (17): God repeats and expands his promises: Abraham will be father of nations and kings; the covenant will be everlasting; all of the land of Canaan will belong to the seed; Sarah will be the mother of nations and kings. Isaac is distinguished from Ishmael; the latter is blessed but only Isaac receives the covenant promises. Circumcision is the sign of those belonging to the covenant. No circumcision = outside the covenant.

Angelic visit (18): Sarah personally hears that she will have a son. At the root of faith is this question: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" For the first time, a timeline is given: a son within a year.

Sodom (18–19): As God's image (representative) on earth, ready to exercise dominion righteously as God intended, Abraham is consulted by God in his plans to judge Sodom. Abraham intercedes with God for man, balancing righteousness with mercy, and modeling for his seed the work of a faithful king-priest. Lot is permanently separated from the land promised to Abraham.

Abimelech (20): Abraham's faith again wavers and the seed is threatened (again, by a foreign king). Again, God intercedes and protects. Because Abimelech blesses Abraham, he is blessed.

Birth of Isaac (21): God fulfills the promise of a seed at just the right time. The seed is marked with the sign of the covenant (circumcision). The laughter of disbelief is now the laughter of joy.

Ishmael exiled (21): The mocking son of the slave is a threat to the seed and is sent out of the promised land. God promises to protect Ishmael but makes it clear that Isaac is the seed of the promise who will receive the promises of the covenant. (Abraham has something of the "Midas touch": whatever he touches [or fathers] is blessed.)

Treaty at Beersheba (21): A foreign king recognizes that God is blessing Abraham and he seeks to receive that blessing. Abimelech models the way that foreigners should relate to Abraham and his seed.

Abraham's sacrifice (22): Abraham's faith has been tested ever since he was called to leave his family and land; now he faces the ultimate test when God commands him to sacrifice his seed, thus putting in jeopardy God's own promises. Abraham proves that God is absolutely trustworthy and a greater treasure than his promises.

Sarah's burial (23): The first piece of land that Abraham owns in Canaan is a tomb for his wife. One day, it will all be his.

Isaac's wife (24): There is still a threat to the perpetuation of the seed as long as Isaac does not have a wife. This is Abraham's last mission, and it is imperative that the wife of the seed be of a godly line (of Seth, not of Canaan; ch. 9). Abraham, "blessed in every way," is given an ideal wife for Isaac.

## QUOTATIONS

“To borrow a not unfamiliar phrase from John’s Gospel: God so loved the world that he chose Israel” (Wright 1992: 39).

“The overwhelming impression . . . is God’s unwavering intention to bless” (Wright 1992: 101).

“If Israel, as Yahweh’s first-born son, would live by his standards and obey his laws, then God could pursue his goal of bringing blessing to the nations” (Wright 1992: 130).

## GOING FURTHER

Think carefully about the relationship between faith and righteousness, including Gen 15:6. What role does works play? How are works appropriate or inappropriate? Don’t start with Romans 4, but don’t ignore it either. See also Galatians 4:21–5:15.

Do you think that Jesus understood the voice from heaven (Matt 3:17) as an echo of Genesis 22:2? What would this mean?

Abraham’s faith is commended in Hebrews 11. Trace Abraham’s faith through his life. What lessons can you learn?

Imagine how God could bless all the families of the earth through Abraham and his seed. How did Abraham/Israel succeed and fail? How will the Seed/Israel succeed (cf. Zech 14; Gal 3:8ff)?

## PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Genesis 25–50. Keep an eye out for anything related to the covenant (land, seed, blessing). Pay extra attention to any conversation between God and man. Notice how God is sovereign in election. If you have extra time, trace the character development of two figures in particular: Jacob and Judah. Be prepared to be amazed at our awesome God and his wonderful revelation!

## SOURCE CITED

Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, 2nd ed., 1992.

## STUDY #5: GENESIS 25-50: GOD'S PRESERVATION OF HIS PROMISES TO THE PATRIARCHS

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Genesis 25–50. Keep an eye out for anything related to the covenant (land, seed, blessing). Pay extra attention to any conversation between God and man. Notice how God is sovereign in election. If you have extra time, trace the character development of two figures in particular: Jacob and Judah. Be prepared to be amazed at our awesome God and his wonderful revelation!

### OUTLINE

- I. The account of Ishmael's family line: The family of Ishmael lives outside of the Promised Land and outside of the promised blessing (25:12-18).
- II. The account of Isaac's family line—**Jacob**: God chooses Jacob and develops his character and faith through crises (25:19–35:29).
- III. The account of Esau's family line: Esau's descendants live outside of the Promised Land and their kingly line foreshadows the kings who would rule in Israel (36:1-43).
- IV. The account of Jacob's family line—**12 sons, especially Judah and Joseph**: God preserves the chosen family from death or assimilation by providing for them in Egypt (37:1–50:26).

### QUESTIONS THE READERS HAD

Who is this Yahweh?

What is the relationship of Yahweh to us and our ancestors?

Who are the patriarchs and what were they like?

Why did God choose us?

How did the patriarchs relate to God, and how should I?

Why is our world the way that it is?

### THE FAMILY LINE OF ISAAC (GEN 25-35)

Isaac's life is skipped (there is no "family line" of Abraham in the book). Isaac attempts to thwart God's sovereign election of Jacob.

The story of Isaac's line begins with notice that Rebekah is barren. Barrenness is a condition that only God can solve, and he graciously gives this trial to each of the wives of the patriarchs so that their descendants will be reckoned as gifts from God.

The Lord gives Rebekah twins in response to Isaac's prayer, and before the boys are born, the Lord declares that the boys represent two nations, and that the older would serve younger. Esau is characterized as one who cares not for the great promises that God has made to Abraham and Isaac,



and he discards his birthright for a meal. In this way, God's sovereign will is reconciled with human responsibility, and the readers understand not only why Esau and Jacob become separate nations (unlike the 12 sons who together formed a single nation), but also why God chose the younger.

Isaac tries to thwart God's revealed plan by passing the divine inheritance on to the one who despises it. God's plan prevails, albeit through deception, and Jacob is granted superiority over his brother and the Abrahamic blessing. The cost of the deception is family estrangement for the next 20 years, but even in this God is working to provide Jacob with a family.

While on his way out of the Promised Land, God appears to Jacob and makes him the recipient of the promises made to Abraham and Isaac. That this choice is clearly of grace is evident from the defects of Jacob's character: self-reliance, prayerlessness, and deceptive ways. Yet God blesses Jacob abundantly, giving him numerous children and extensive flocks.

The real transformation in Jacob's character occurs when he wrestles with God and prevails by divine dependence, desperate for God's blessing.

Jacob's return to Bethel highlights the complete transformation of Jacob from his first visit, now accompanied by a large family and one who has put aside self-sufficient ways. In response, the Lord confirms his promise to make Jacob (now "Israel") into a mighty nation who owns this land. In addition, we have here, as we did with Abraham, notice that the patriarch will beget kings. This raises the question of which son will produce the kingly line.

### **THE FAMILY LINE OF JACOB (GEN 37-50)**

The final section of Genesis explains (1) how God protected Jacob's 12 sons from intermarrying with unfaithful foreigners; (2) how Jacob's family ended up living in Egypt; (3) how Judah came to be chosen as the family of kings; and (4) how discord in Jacob's family was healed by grace and repentance.

The selling of Joseph into slavery shows (1) the father's inappropriate favoritism; (2) the sons' murderous hearts; and (3) God's sovereignty over evil.

The story of Judah and Tamar shows (1) the real danger of Jacob's sons intermarrying and assimilating with the Canaanites, thus threatening the promises; (2) Judah's disregard for carrying on the family line; and (3) God's protection of the family line through a faithful Canaanite woman.

While Joseph's stellar character through his years in Egypt is to be commended (and emulated), the real hero of the story is Judah. Joseph essentially functions as "God" in the story, testing his brothers to reveal what is in their hearts. He is largely a static character, the foil against which we see the transformation of his brothers and particularly Judah. The true character of the repentant brothers is evident in the way they treat Benjamin, even when he is favored by their father and (apparently) by Joseph. Their treatment of him in a manner opposite to the way they treated Joseph proves their heart change.

Judah is the leader of the brothers, first convincing his father that the livelihood of the family depended upon their journey, and then by being willing to sacrifice himself for Benjamin. The one

who sold a brother as a slave now offers to become a slave in place of another brother. His loving sacrifice makes him an ideal king, and he is given the promise of a kingly line when his first three brothers are disqualified by grave (unkingly) sin.

Joseph is rewarded with the portion of the firstborn (not given to Leah's firstborn but to Rachel's). His two sons are reckoned as Jacob's sons and the youngest (Ephraim) will become a dominant tribe.

The family of Jacob/Israel migrates to Egypt as an embryonic nation, living in the choicest part of the land under the favor of the pharaoh. But the promises of Canaan are not forgotten and the book concludes with Jacob's burial in the patriarchal cave and Joseph's insistence that he be buried in the Promised Land.

### **GOING FURTHER**

How is the blessing/covenant passed from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to the twelve sons?

Read Gen 49:8-12. What does the blessing to Judah mean and how will it be fulfilled?

In what ways does the book of Genesis prepare the reader for the book of Exodus?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Exodus 1-18. Give special attention to 6:1-8.

How does God reveal his character in these chapters?

Think about why God chooses to deliver Israel in the way that he does.

Think about the "redemption" of Israel. How does the redemption apply to the nation as a whole and to each individual? (Or does it?)

## STUDY #6: ISRAEL REDEEMED FROM EGYPT (EXODUS 1-18)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Exodus 1–18. Give special attention to 6:1–8.

How does God reveal his character in these chapters?

Think about why God chooses to deliver Israel in the way that he does.

Think about the “redemption” of Israel. How does the redemption apply to the nation as a whole and to each individual? (Or does it?)

### OUTLINE

- I. Israel is redeemed as God’s possession by deliverance from slavery in Egypt (1:1–18:27).
  - A. Israel is oppressed by slavery and the slaughter of male babies (1:1–22).
  - B. Moses is raised up to serve as God’s mediator (2:1–6:30).
  - C. Egypt is humbled by a series of plagues (7:1–10:29).
  - D. Israel is delivered by the death of the firstborn (11:1–13:16).
  - E. Israel is saved through the Red Sea (13:17–15:21).
  - F. Israel is tested on the way to Mount Sinai (15:22–18:27).
- II. Israel is confirmed as God’s nation by the establishment of the covenant (19:1–24:18).
- III. Israel is validated as God’s people by the indwelling of the tabernacle (25:1–40:38).

### “GENESIS, PART TWO”

The book of Genesis closes with a “to be continued” notice. The readers are left hanging as to what is going to happen to God’s people in a foreign land, distant from the place that God had promised to give to Abraham and his seed. God had also made some specific promises concerning Egypt that we want to see fulfilled:

Gen 15:13–14: Abraham’s descendants will be slaves in another country for 400 years but they will come out with great possessions.

Gen 46:3–4: God promises Jacob that he will go to Egypt with him and surely bring him back again (cf. 48:21; 50:24).

When we open Exodus, we see that Israel has been fruitful and multiplied (Exod 1:7) in obedience to God’s command (Gen 1:28) and in accordance with God’s promise (Gen 12:2; 15:5).

Why does God deliver Israel from Egypt? “God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob” (2:24).

### KEY VERSES

3:12–15; 4:22–23; 5:2; 6:6–8; 7:5; 8:10; 14:4; 14:18; 14:30–31; 15:11; 15:13

### NOTES

“As the book opens, the patriarchal covenant promises are in jeopardy” (Arnold and Beyer 2008: 105).

Chapter 1 provides another example (after many in Genesis) of the truth that those who bless Israel, God will bless, and those who curse Israel will be cursed. Pharaoh mistreats Israel and is thwarted; the midwives bless Israel and are themselves blessed.

Moses' failed effort to avenge the death of a Hebrew proves that it is not Moses who will deliver Israel but God.

Israel is not just redeemed *from* something (slavery in Egypt) but *to* something (a blessed life in the Promised Land; 3:8).

When chosen by God (3:11-12), Moses asks the wrong question (“Who am I?”). The issue is not who Moses is, but who God is, as the Lord's response affirms.

In response to Moses' fear, God “simply says, ‘I will be with you.’ This phrase is a shorthand reminder of God's covenant promise” (Longman 2009: 103). Jesus echoes this promise when he declares to his disciples, “And surely I am with you always” (Matt 28:20).

“The English translation [LORD] fails to convey the idea that the Hebrew *Yahweh* is a personal name. Due to the veneration of the divine name *Yahweh*, it became the practice of Jews to substitute the Hebrew word *'adonay* ‘Lord’ for the divine name; hence the English translation. When vowels were eventually added in the medieval period to the consonantal texts of the Hebrew Bible, the vowels of *'adonay* were used in conjunction with the consonants YHWH. This in turn probably led to the name *Yahweh* being wrongly read as *Jehovah*” (Alexander 2002: 159).

“Israel is my first-born son” (4:22). Egypt mistreats God's firstborn son and so he kills their firstborn sons. Israel fails to fulfill God's purpose as God's firstborn son and so God sends the Servant Israel, God's first-born Son (Isa 49:3). Jesus is God's firstborn son who fulfills the purpose for God's firstborn son Israel.

The length of time that Israel was oppressed by the Egyptians cannot be determined, but it lasted a minimum of eighty years, to judge from the time when Moses was born until his return to Egypt (cf. 7:7). The Lord's primary concern was not the immediate release of Israel from suffering, but rather to bring his nation to himself at the time of his choosing.

Why did God send ten plagues and harden Pharaoh's heart? For his own glory. God wanted to act in such a way that his name would be proclaimed in all the earth (9:16). It worked (Josh 2:9-10; 1 Sam 4:8).

The gifts that the Egyptians bestow on the Israelites can be understood as payment for the years of slavery in which they were not compensated for their service.

The redemption of the nation is a picture of individual redemption. But they are not the same. A person can be in the nation and redeemed physically (out of Egypt) but not be redeemed spiritually, as is seen in the people's lack of faith and worship of the golden calf.

In the song of Moses (15:1-18), the nation celebrates the destruction of the Egyptian army. The past faithfulness of God is regarded as assurance of his faithfulness to future promises.

God knew they needed drinking water. He didn't provide it for them so he could see their reaction. Would they approach him in faith or would they complain to one another in disbelief?

### GOING FURTHER

Trace the theme of "knowing Yahweh" throughout these chapters (4:5; 5:2; 6:6-8; 7:5; 9:29; 10:2; 11:7; 14:4; 14:30-31; 16:6; 18:11). Why is it so important that (1) the Egyptians know Yahweh? (2) the Israelites know Yahweh? What is God's ultimate purpose(s)?

In what ways did Moses and the Israelites demonstrate faith? In what ways did they fail? How can you learn from their experiences? See also Hebrews 11:23-29.

How does an understanding of the first Passover help us to better understand Jesus as the Passover sacrifice? In the NT, see Luke 22:7-23, 1 Cor 5:7-8, 1 Peter 1:18-19.

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Exodus 19-24. Give extra attention to chapters 19 and 24. Think about the covenant ceremony, the nature of the covenant, and the purpose of the covenant.

Think about the Ten Commandments *in their context*. How does the context of a covenant ceremony with Israel affect the church's relationship to the Ten Commandments?

### SOURCES CITED

T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 2002.

Bill T. Arnold and Bryan Beyer. *Encountering the Old Testament*. 2nd ed. 2008.

## STUDY #7: THE COVENANT OF YAHWEH AND ISRAEL (EXODUS 19-24)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Exodus 19–24. Give extra attention to chapters 19 and 24. Think about the covenant ceremony, the nature of the covenant, and the purpose of the covenant.

Think about the Ten Commandments *in their context*. How does the context of a covenant ceremony with Israel affect the church’s relationship to the Ten Commandments?

### OUTLINE

- I. Israel is redeemed as God’s possession by deliverance from slavery in Egypt (1:1–18:27).
- II. Israel is confirmed as God’s nation by the establishment of the covenant (19:1–24:18).
  - A. The Lord’s offer to make Israel his people is accepted (19:1-8).
  - B. The Israelites are prepared to meet with God (19:9-25).
  - C. The Lord speaks the Book of the Covenant (20:1–23:33).
  - D. The covenant is confirmed between the Lord and Israel (24:1-18).
- III. Israel is validated as God’s people by the indwelling of the tabernacle (25:1–40:38).

### NOTES

“Israel’s obligation to keep the law is not to form a relationship with God, but rather to show gratitude to and maintain the relationship that it already enjoys with him” (Longman 2009: 121).

“Priests both declare God’s will to people and also pray for them and offer sacrifice on their behalf, and this is what Israel is expected to do for the surrounding peoples” (Wenham 2003: 68).

“The challenge to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ represented the responsibility inherent in the original promise to Abraham in Gen 12:2–3: ‘You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’” (Stuart 2006: 423).

“What the chapter [20] contains—in particular, the Ten “Words” [Commandments]—is more like the content of a national constitution than merely the content of one section of codified law or another. If the American legal corpus is used as an analogy, it could be said that the ten “words” of Exod 20 are somewhat like the Constitution of the United States (legally binding in a most basic, foundational way but more than a mere set of individual laws) and the laws that follow (cf. 21:1, “These are the laws you are to set before them”) somewhat analogous to the various sections of federal law dealing with all sorts of particular matters that have been enacted legislatively over time. The one group is absolutely “constitutional” or “foundational”; the other is specifically regulatory, following from the principles articulated in the more basic “constitution”” (Stuart 2006: 440-41).

“The case laws are applications of the principles of the Ten Commandments to the specific social and redemptive historical situation of Israel” (Longman 2009: 126).

“In the ancient biblical world, covenants were normally concluded with a special covenant meal in which animals were symbolically cut in half (symbolizing the shared responsibility of the two parties as well as the severity of the penalty for breaking the covenant), then the parties to the

covenant walked between the pieces, and then the meal was eaten together as a sign of friendship and alliance” (Stuart 2006: 552).

“Moses sprinkled blood on the people in order to symbolize their being parties to the covenant. Some droplets would remain on their skin for days; some that fell on their clothing would be visible, if faded, for as long as the clothing lasted. The ceremony itself was so vivid and extraordinary as to be memorable, and its memory was intended to keep in the consciousness of the people the fact that God had joined with the people of Israel in a formal, official covenant to which both he and they were bound by oath” (Stuart 2006: 555).

### THE MOSAIC COVENANT AND THE CHURCH

1. The Mosaic covenant was made between two parties: Yahweh and Israel.
2. The Mosaic covenant had many stipulations, *all* of which were binding on Israel.
3. If the church is Israel, then the church continues in the Mosaic Covenant and is responsible to obey all of its laws (cf. James 2:10). The church cannot pick and choose which laws of the Mosaic Covenant that it wants to keep. The church does not have the option of being faithful to one part of the covenant but not to other parts.
4. The church, however, is not Israel. The church is a new body of believers, both Jews and Gentiles, who have accepted Jesus’ sacrificial death and follow him as their Head. The church was created as a new group of people because the ethnic descendants of Jacob by and large rejected Jesus as their Messiah. The church is a new group of people intended to arouse Israel to jealousy so that Israel “wants its Messiah back” and gets its Messiah back by repenting of their sin.
5. Since the church is not Israel, the church is not party to the covenant made with Israel. Therefore the church is not under obligation to keep the commands of the Mosaic Covenant.
6. Though *none* of the Mosaic Covenant is binding upon the church, the Mosaic Covenant is one means by which we see God’s character and desires. That some portions of the Mosaic Covenant are clearly timeless is evident from the fact that they are found in God’s revelation outside the Mosaic Covenant (e.g., do not murder because man is made in God’s image). Other parts of the Mosaic Covenant are clearly not timeless as is clear from revelation outside the Mosaic Covenant (e.g., God made pigs and he said they were good).
7. We must read the Bible as a book written by one great Author who revealed himself progressively in different contexts. We must be careful to understand each part of the Bible in its context. This requires some hard work, but it is worthwhile.

### GOING FURTHER

Reflect on how relationship and law are related in Exodus. Then consider how our experience is similar.

Consider whether or not the Ten Commandments should be a defining Christian symbol in our nation or world. If not, what would be better?

What similarities do you see between the ratification of the Old Covenant and the ratification of the New Covenant (in the Lord's supper)?

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Exodus 25–40. You may skim some of the details. Read Leviticus 8–10. You may also read/skim the rest of the book of Leviticus, as time permits.

What is the point of Exodus 25–40? How does it relate to Exodus 1–18 and 19–24? Why does Exodus 35–40 largely “repeat” Exodus 25–31? What is the significance of the “interruption” in chapters 32–34? How does it relate to Exodus 19–24? What is God's ultimate response and how does he express his character? (Don't miss this.) Finally, how is chapter 40 an absolutely fitting climax to the book?

### SOURCES CITED

Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Exodus*, 2009.

Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*. New American Commentary, 2006.

Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch*, 2003.



## STUDY #8: GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE (EXOD 25-LEV 27)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Exodus 25–40. You may skim some of the details. Read Leviticus 8–10. You may also read/skim the rest of the book of Leviticus, as time permits.

What is the point of Exodus 25-40? How does it relate to Exodus 1-18 and 19-24? Why does Exodus 35-40 largely “repeat” Exodus 25–31? What is the significance of the “interruption” in chapters 32–34? How does it relate to Exodus 19–24? What is God’s ultimate response and how does he express his character? (Don’t miss this.) Finally, how is chapter 40 an absolutely fitting climax to the book?

### OUTLINE OF EXODUS 25-40

- III. Israel is validated as God’s people by the indwelling of the tabernacle (25:1–40:38).
  - A. The Lord gives instructions for building the tabernacle (25:1–31:18).
  - B. The covenant is threatened by the idolatry of the nation (32:1–34:35).
    - 1. Aaron leads the people in worshipping a golden calf (32:1-6).
    - 2. Moses appeals to the Lord to forgive the people (32:7-14).
    - 3. Moses confronts the people with their sin (32:15-30).
    - 4. The Lord punishes the people for their sin (32:31–33:6).
    - 5. The Lord agrees to send his presence with his people (33:7-17).
    - 6. The Lord reveals his glory to Moses (33:18–34:35).
  - C. The tabernacle is constructed according to the revealed plans (35:1–40:33).
  - D. The tabernacle is filled by the glory of the Lord (40:34-38).

### TABERNACLE INSTRUCTIONS (EXODUS 25-31)

“In Israel’s idolatrous world, the design and construction of a temple would be the responsibility of knowledgeable priests, who would not only oversee the temple’s construction, but would also make, dress, and consecrate the idol in a special ceremony. In the present unit this expectation is turned on its head. It is Israel’s God, not its priests, who oversees the design and construction of his temple” (Dorsey 1999: 75).

“The tabernacle resembled a royal palace with its throne room, the holy of holies right at the heart of the structure. It thus expressed the idea that the LORD was Israel’s king dwelling among his people” (Wenham 2003: 75).

“The center of the camp was an appropriate place for the structure that represents God’s dwelling since in the ancient Near East the king or war leader’s tent would occupy the central location, surrounded by his bodyguard (the Levites) and then the rest of the army” (Longman 2009: 134).

“The reason for the two tablets has nothing to do with the length of the commandments as opposed to the size of the tablets (as if it were necessary to employ two tablets to fit all the commandments onto them, half on one and half on the other). The full text of the Ten Words/Commandments was written on each tablet, one copy being God’s and one copy being Israel’s. This reflects the standard ancient Near Eastern treaty covenant practice of providing a copy of the covenant both to the vassal and to the sovereign” (Stuart 2006: 656).

## NATIONAL TREASON—THE GOLDEN CALF (EXODUS 32-34)

Israel's sin with the golden calf "is rather like committing adultery on one's wedding night" (Moberly 2005: 214).

"Apparently they wanted God to look like the familiar gods of Egypt and Canaan. So, while Yahweh was creating a nation that would reflect his moral likeness, the Israelites were trying to create God in their image" (Arnold and Beyer 2008: 107).

"Moses' shattering the tablets represented the breaking of relationship between God and Israel" (Longman 2009: 133).

33:19–34:8 "The reader would be mistaken to assume that what Moses actually saw would be significantly revelatory; it was rather what he *learned* through God's words that would most help him to understand that his request to be taught God's ways (33:13) and to be shown God's glory (33:18) had indeed been granted" (Stuart 2006: 705).

"There is little room for mysticism in biblical religion; we do not know God by having some sort of inexplicable ethereal communion with him, in which our feelings are used as the evidence for our closeness to him. We know him by learning his ways (i.e., his revealed standards, revealed methods, and revealed benefits)—in other words by objective, rather than subjective, emotional, means" (Stuart 2006: 701).

## TABERNACLE BUILT (EXODUS 35-40)

"The sin of the golden calf could have led to the nation's destruction, had it not been for Moses' intercession. Even then they might have had to enter the land unaccompanied by symbols of God's presence. The creation of the tabernacle showed that the divine programme had been reinstated. Israel's divine king was willing to dwell among them. The Garden of Eden had been brought back to earth. The LORD was going to walk among his people as he had in Eden" (Wenham 2003: 79).

40:34-38 "In essence, the book of Exodus has been driving to this point, and thus the narrative concludes with a strong sense of closure. The people are freed from bondage. They have entered into a covenant with God that establishes them as a nation. Now the tabernacle is fully constructed and God has made his presence known by covering the tabernacle with the cloud" (Longman 2009: 141).

40:36-38 "Once built, the tabernacle became the symbol of Yahweh's presence among his people; and his glory cloud atop the tabernacle, a further symbol of his presence and also of his guidance. The book of Exodus comes to an end here, with the reader implicitly invited to appreciate that a new grand chapter in the history of the Israelites was about to get underway—their travels toward Sinai as their God would lead them" (Stuart 2006: 793-94).

## LEVITICUS

Key Verse: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people" (26:12).

Message of the book: Living with a holy God requires careful adherence to laws of cultic practice and personal purity.

### GOING FURTHER

The tabernacle provides God with a way to live with his people. Trace God's presence with his people through Scripture, including these passages and their contexts: 1 Sam 4:22; 1 Kgs 8:10; Ezek 8-11; Isa 7:14; 60:20; Zech 2:10; Matt 1:23; John 1:14; 2:21; Rev 21.

All of the detailed laws concerning the construction of the tabernacle, the sacrifices, dietary restrictions, and personal purity reflect the holiness of God and the holiness necessary to approach him. Is this still true today? What has changed and what has not?

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

In Numbers, read at least chapters 13-14, 22, 24. This book describes judgment on the first generation and raising up of a new one.

In Deuteronomy, read at least chapters 1-13, 29-34. Jesus quoted this book so much, he probably had memorized it. Why would he do that? (Hint: this book is *amazing!*) How is it clear that God's demand is first *faith* and then obedience? What does it mean to "circumcise your heart"?

### SOURCES CITED

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## STUDY #9: THE HEART OF THE COVENANT (DEUTERONOMY)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

In Numbers, read at least chapters 13-14, 22, 24. This book describes judgment on the first generation and the raising up of a new one.

In Deuteronomy, read at least chapters 1-13, 29-34. Jesus quoted this book so much, he probably had memorized it. Why would he do that? (Hint: this book is *amazing!*) How is it clear that God's demand is first *faith* and then obedience? What does it mean to "circumcise your heart"?

### OUTLINE

- I. Preamble: The covenant parties and setting are given (1:1-5).
- II. Historical Prologue: Faithfulness to the covenant is motivated by the Lord's faithfulness (1:6-4:49).
- III. Covenant Stipulations: Faithfulness to the covenant is accomplished by careful obedience (5:1-26:19).
  - A. General Stipulations: Faithfulness to the covenant requires wholehearted love of the Lord (5:1-11:32).
  - B. Specific Stipulations: Faithfulness to the covenant requires strict compliance with the Lord's decrees (12:1-26:19).
- IV. Blessings and Curses: Faithfulness to the covenant is rewarded by abundant life (27:1-29:1).
- V. Covenant Renewal: Faithfulness to the covenant is required by all generations (29:2-30:20).
- VI. Leadership Transition: Faithfulness to the covenant is facilitated by Moses' final arrangements (31:1-34:12).

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEUTERONOMY

Because Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy more than any other OT book, some believe that it may have been his favorite. Scholars today consider Deuteronomy to be "one of the great theological documents . . . of any time" and "at the heart of the Old Testament theological witness." "Deuteronomy has perhaps had more influence on the rest of the biblical story (both Old and New Testaments) than any other book of the Bible." Some consider Deuteronomy to be the "Romans" of the Old Testament, offering "the most systematic presentation of truth in the entire OT. . . . In short, Deuteronomy provides the theological base for virtually the entire OT and the paradigm for much of its literary style."

Deuteronomy looks backward to Mount Sinai in its renewal of the covenant, but it looks forward to the covenant relationship of Yahweh and Israel in the Promised Land. As such, the book of Deuteronomy is a vital hinge in sacred history, revealing the Lord's will for his people in the familiar context of a suzerain-vassal treaty.

### THE MESSAGE OF DEUTERONOMY

Poised to enter the Promised Land, the Israelites are exhorted to be faithful to their covenant with Yahweh, loving him with all of their heart, keeping his commands, and trusting his promises.

### **Structure: Sermon series that echoed suzerain vassal treaty**

Though its overall organization resembles the pattern found in suzerain-vassal treaties known from the Hittite empire, Deuteronomy is actually a series of sermons given by Moses to the nation of Israel. The inclusion and ordering of the major elements in Moses' discourses in a similar format to Hittite treaties suggests that the book was intended to call to mind this well-known treaty type. The close parallels certainly cannot be accidental, and they suggest that Israel's relationship with Yahweh could be compared to that of a vassal's relationship with a sovereign king.

"Deuteronomy is thus full of the rhetoric of the preacher. It is pressing. It is repetitive. When it is talking about the law, its purpose is not to explain its niceties but to persuade the listener to keep it" (Wenham 124).

### **Basis of covenant: God's relationship with his people**

Deut 5:6-7 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."

"In both the Old and New Covenants, real obedience to the Lord flows out of a heart that is awed by his greatness, takes seriously his Word, is surrendered to his ways, trusts in his promises, and looks to him for help" (DeRouchie).

### **Essence of the covenant: Love God and love your neighbor**

Deut 6:4-5 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Deut 28:47 "Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity."

"Love for God is the spring from which love of neighbor flows (10:12, 19; cf. Lev. 19:18). Neighbor love summarizes *what* God's people were to do; the Ten Words (the "testimonies") and all the additional "statutes and rules" clarify *how* God's people were to do it (see Deut. 4:45; 12:1; 26:16). Love toward God and neighbor is the essence of covenant relationship" (DeRouchie).

### **Result of covenant faithfulness: God's glory revealed to the nations**

Covenantal loyalty would result in the wonder of the nations, whereas covenantal disloyalty would lead to Israel's dispersal *among* the nations.

Deut 4:6-8 "Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?"

### **Expectation of the covenant: Disobedience, exile, restoration, new hearts**

“The covenant that they have received is personal, understandable and accessible (29:9-15; 30:11-14). Moses’ constant use of ‘you’ accentuates this point” (House 193). Success is a matter of obedience, and no Israelite can ever claim that the Lord taunted him with impossible demands. Whatever the Lord requires, that he stands ready to supply.

Deut 30:1–6 “When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you...and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart...then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you....He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers....The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.”

### GOING FURTHER

Consider the relationship between faith and obedience in the following passages: Deut 4:31-40; 5:28-29; 6:24-25; 8:1-20; 10:12-22.

How does your study of Deut help you to better understand the following passages: Jer 11; 31:31-34; Matt 4:1-11; Rom 9:30-10:4?

If you were to memorize a portion of Deut, what would you choose?

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

For our study of salvation in the Old Testament, re-read Gen 3, 15; Exod 6:1-8; Deut 5-6, 10; 30. Read also Ps 34; Isa 12, 55; Joel 2.

Consider: How was one saved in the Old Testament? What role did obedience play in salvation? How is salvation different today?

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## STUDY #10: SALVATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

For our study of salvation in the Old Testament, re-read Gen 3, 15; Exod 6:1-8; Deut 5-6, 10; 30. Read also Ps 34; Isa 12, 55; Joel 2.

Consider: How was one saved in the Old Testament? What role did obedience play in salvation? How is salvation different today?

### WAS SALVATION BY WORKS IN THE OT?

“Too many contemporary readers come to the unfortunate conclusion that the salvation offered in the OT is on a do-it-yourself basis and therefore totally out of harmony with the offer graciously extended in the NT” (Kaiser 1987: 121).

Old Scofield Reference Bible: “As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 3:24-26; 4:24, 25). The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of salvation” (cited in Feinberg 1981: 42). This is wrong.

Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of DTS: “True to the Jewish dispensation, He said with reference to the law of Moses: ‘This do and thou shalt live’; but when contemplating the cross and Himself as the bread come down from heaven to give His life for the world, He said: ‘This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he [God] hath sent’ (John 6:29). These opposing principles are not to be reconciled. They indicate that fundamental distinction which must exist between those principles that obtain in an age of law, on the one hand, and an age of grace, on the other hand” (cited in Kaiser 1987: 126). This is wrong.

The sinfulness of all men is readily apparent throughout the OT. It is demonstrated in the lives of even such great men as Noah, Abraham, and Moses. It is explicit in Gen 6:5, Ps 14:3, 53:2-3.

God’s laws in the Mosaic Covenant do not allow for a perfunctory performance of duty. One could not “just obey” without believing in a way that pleased God. God commanded the Israelites to “rejoice,” (Deut 12:7), to “fear” him (Deut 6:13), to put these commandments upon their hearts (Deut 6:6), and to delight in his Word (Ps 1, 119). This required faith.

The laws were difficult to obey because of the sinfulness of man’s heart. Every man would stumble and fall short. Every man would realize that he was not capable of loving God fully (by not sinning).

God commanded the people to “circumcise their hearts” (Deut 10:16). This metaphor speaks to the removal of the skin of stubbornness in man’s intellect, emotions, and will. Man was commanded to submit to God in a heart operation. The circumcision of the flesh pointed to the need for the circumcision of the heart. A heart circumcision was the only way that the people could love God with all their heart (Deut 30:6).

### WHAT FAITH WAS NECESSARY IN THE OT?

The content of God's revelation changed through time. Man was responsible to believe the revealed word of God, not more and not less. As God gradually revealed himself, man was responsible to believe his word.

Noah believed God and built an ark in which God saved him. Abraham believed God's promise to him of a seed and it was credited to him as righteousness. He acted on that faith in demonstrating his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac, believing that God would fulfill his promises even so. Moses believed God and led the Israelites out of Egypt.

God gradually revealed more details of how he would save the one who believed in him. He revealed that he would bring one who was the seed of woman, he would be a righteous sufferer, he would die for the sins of others (Isa 53).

Man was responsible to believe what God had revealed. If he rejected some of that, he demonstrated his lack of faith in God. He could not know and did not need to know content that would be revealed in the future.

“According to the OT, faith in God involved believing what God has promised or commanded and believing in him and his person and character” (Kaiser 1987: 123).

“It is important to remember that since in each economy the content is what God has revealed, belief in the content for that age is belief in the ultimate object of faith, God” (Feinberg 1981: 57).

“It is not, for example, the performance of the sacrifices or a belief in the sacrificial system per se that saved someone living under the Mosaic law. Instead, what saved a person then was a commitment to the God who had revealed that sin was to be expiated through sacrifices made in faith that God would give atonement” (Feinberg 1981: 57).

“During the time of law it became more clearly evident that a person would have to be sacrificed for sin (Isa. 53; Dan. 9:24-26). God's suffering servant, the promised Messiah, would have to die for the sins of His people (cf. Dan. 9:24-26—commentators generally agree that in order for the things mentioned in verse 24 to be accomplished, Messiah the prince would be cut off, as mentioned in verse 26)” (Feinberg 1981: 60).

“As revelation progressed, more information was given so that in the sacrifices one could discern a prefiguring of a Messiah who would be sacrificed, even if no one (unlikely) in fact ever did fully understand that typology” (Feinberg 1981: 68).

### **IF SALVATION IS BY FAITH, WHAT IS ROLE OF WORKS?**

Man's faith in God resulted in works. There are no cases of a faith does not act.

“Likewise, faith is linked with obedience, for unbelief is matched with rebellion against the commandment of the Lord (Deut 9:23). Unbelief and disobedience, then, are twins” (Kaiser 1987: 123).

Acceptable works are those which flow from faith. Works without faith are unacceptable (Isa 1:11-19; Jer 7:21-23; Hos 6:6; Mic 6:6-8).



“The natural *outworking* of such saving faith in God was the performance of the sacrifices in believing faith, since God had said that He would cleanse the sin of the one who brought such sacrifices” (Feinberg 1981: 69).

### IF SALVATION IS BY FAITH, WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE LAW?

Isaiah 1:11-19

The Mosaic Covenant (the Law) does not contradict the truth that salvation comes by faith. The Mosaic Covenant is based upon an established relationship. It was made between God and people who *believed* in him. The covenant (laws) were thus (supposed to be) *works based on faith*. Because Joe Israelite trusted God, he did what God commanded. Obedience to the laws could not provide salvation. When Deut 6:25 says, “If we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness,” it’s not talking about justification before God but daily practical righteousness. If we obey God, we will demonstrate a righteous life (because God’s commands are righteous and lead to righteousness).

### HOW DID SACRIFICES WORK IN THE OT?

“The only solution is to take both the OT and NT statements seriously. We conclude then, with Hobart Freeman, that the OT sacrifices were *subjectively efficacious*, in that the sinner did receive full relief based on the clear declaration of God’s appointed servant. But it is just as clear that the sacrifices of bulls and goats *were not in themselves* expiatory and efficacious. The most these sacrifices could do was to point to the need for a perfect, living substitute who would, in the timing of God, ransom and deliver all from the debt, guilt, and effects of their sin. Thus the OT sacrifices were not *objectively* efficacious; but then neither did the OT ever claim that the blood of these bulls and goats was inherently effective” (Kaiser 1987: 134).

“God did know at all times that Christ’s death was as good as accomplished. Consequently, He could grant salvation on the basis of it” (Feinberg 1981: 55).

“Although the Old Testament sacrifices had a relation to justification, their main function, soteriologically speaking, was in the sanctification process” (Feinberg 1981: 69).

“In order to grow, [the New Testament believer] must confess his sin in believing faith that on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice God will cleanse him from sin (1 John 1:9). The Old Testament believer also confessed his sin, but in addition, he brought in believing faith a sacrifice, since God had revealed that sin would be handled in that way. Before Christ’s sacrifice, the public offering had to accompany the repentance of the believer. Once the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ had been made, the repentant believer need not give another sacrifice in order to have cleansing” (Feinberg 1981: 70).

“Old Testament sacrifices were, so to speak, the down payment for sin, whereas Christ’s sacrifice was the full and final payment. Why, once the sacrifice of Christ pays the debt in full owed for sin, continue to make ‘down payments’ on sin? The sacrificial system must be done away with” (Feinberg 1981: 72).

“On the ground of His sacrifice to which the Old Testament sacrifices pointed, the Old Testament believer who in repentant faith brought a sacrifice could be assured that God would cover, cleanse, and forgive such sin (soteriological function). But the objective deed, from God’s standpoint, that would completely pay for and remove sin was only offered on Calvary” (Feinberg 1981: 72).

Forgiveness was granted in the OT on the basis of Christ’s future sacrifice, but applied to the believer on the basis of their faith in offering a sacrifice according to God’s revealed will of what was required.

An OT believer received forgiveness when he offered a sacrifice in accordance with what God had commanded, but the basis for that forgiveness was the future death of the Messiah.

“In Hebrews 10:4 the writer states that the blood of bulls and goats cannot remove sin; it does not state that when such sacrifices were given, there was no forgiveness. The testimony of the Old Testament is that there was forgiveness when sacrifices were given in faith. The point, then, must be that mere animal sacrifices, though acts external (objective) to the sinner, could never from God’s perspective take care of the objective dimensions of the atonement. Only Christ’s objective work could provide the full and final payment for salvation from sin and make it potentially available... On the basis of the believer’s trust in the revealed content for faith for his particular age, God could and did subjectively apply salvation and forgiveness to the repentant sinner” (Feinberg 1981: 74).

### **WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OT?**

The Holy Spirit was at work in all who believed. Every man since Adam has been born dead in sins, and every man who has believed has needed to be regenerated. This is the work of the Spirit. There is no indication that the believer in the OT was indwelt with the Holy Spirit as we are since Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be with his church.

### **GOING FURTHER**

How does your understanding of faith and salvation in the OT affect your thinking about your own faith and salvation?

What is similar and what is different with regard to obedience for the OT and NT believer?

If you are thankful that you are not living in the time of the OT, explain why.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read the book of Joshua, preferably in one sitting. (You may skim the lists in chapters 12-21.) What is the message of the book? How does Joshua relate to Gen-Deut? As you read, be thinking about promise/fulfillment, rest, and covenant faithfulness.

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## STUDY #11: GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN THE GIFT OF THE LAND (JOSHUA)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read the book of Joshua, preferably in one sitting. (You may skim the lists in chapters 12-21.) What is the message of the book? How does Joshua relate to Gen-Deut? As you read, be thinking about promise/fulfillment, rest, and covenant faithfulness.

### OUTLINE OF JOSHUA

- I. The Lord prepares the tribes to enter the Land in a state of holiness (1:1-5:15).
- II. The Lord gives the Land to Israel in a series of campaigns (6:1-12:24).
- III. The tribes receive the Land with both faith and disobedience (13:1-21:45).
- IV. The tribes recognize that their blessings in the Land depend upon covenant loyalty (22:1-24:33).

### THE MESSAGE OF JOSHUA

Joshua leads the Israelites into the Promised Land where they defeat the inhabitants and subdue the land. The land is divided among the 9.5 remaining tribes, and Joshua exhorts the people to remain faithful in order to prosper.

Emphasis #1: The Lord fought for Israel. He went before them and defeated the Canaanites. The Lord did not serve Israel, but Israel served the Lord (ch. 5). Jericho trembled in fear of the Lord (ch. 6). More of the Canaanite coalition died from hailstones than from swords (ch. 10). The Lord gave a vast army in the north into the hands of Israel (ch. 11).

Emphasis #2: The Lord was entirely faithful to Israel. God did everything he promised to do. Not one enemy was successful against the Lord (21:43-45).

Emphasis #3: Israel's faithlessness resulted in defeat. Violating God's commands caused the death of Israelites (ch. 7). Failing to consult the Lord resulted in long-term frustration (ch. 9).

### CHAPTER 22

This story is a very encouraging one, indicating that all twelve tribes were zealous for faithful adherence to the covenant. Altars are typically used for sacrifices, and the 9.5 tribes feared that their brothers had already strayed from the Lord and were guilty of rebellion (22:16-18). The raising of this concern, with the people's conscious recognition of their idolatrous past, is precisely what the Lord desired from the people (cf. Deut 13). Fortunately, the Transjordan tribes were not guilty of idolatry or disloyalty. They explained that the purpose of the altar was memorial (22:27). The importance of covenant loyalty both caused and diffused the crisis.

### CHAPTER 23

The book's tension between the Lord's faithfulness and the people's responsibility reaches a crescendo in Joshua's farewell message to the nation's leaders. Joshua explains that the Lord had fought for his people and yet the people must be strong and careful to obey God's commands. The past faithfulness of the Lord must motivate the present obedience of the people. Future blessing by

the Lord required the present obedience of the nation. The Lord has fulfilled all of his promises, but if the nation violates the covenant, then they will not survive in the good land he has given them (23:14-15). Covenant loyalty will determine the future of Israel.

## CHAPTER 24

Joshua challenges the people to make a firm commitment to serve the Lord, and to do so with all of their hearts (24:14-15). Their leader understands the people's predilections and so he insists on an unambiguous answer by challenging their resolve (24:19). The people respond affirmatively a second and a third time, with the result that Joshua decrees that their words will testify against them if they rebel (24:22). The covenant that Joshua made here is best understood as a renewal of the previous covenant that the people had made with the Lord at Mount Sinai. They affirmed their agreement to honor this covenant and to keep its stipulations.

### LOOKING BACKWARDS (GEN-DEUT)

God had promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants after the cup of the Amorites was full (Gen 15:13-21; Deut 9:4-6). This began to be fulfilled in Joshua.

God had promised to bring Jacob's descendants back to Canaan from the land of Egypt (Gen 46:4). This began to be fulfilled in Joshua.

God delivered Israel from Egypt in order to make them his people and bring them into the land promised to the patriarchs (Exod 6:6-8). This was fulfilled in Joshua.

The rest that had been lost when the ground was cursed, when Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden of Eden, and when the twelve tribes were enslaved in Egypt is to be given to a faithful Israel living in a land of abundance (Deut 8:7-9; 12:9-10).

The covenant that God had made with Israel was to guide the nation. They were to meditate on it day and night, to obey it, to read it in the assembly, and to write it on stones on Mount Ebal (Josh 1:8; 8:30-35).

### LOOKING FORWARDS (JUDGES-REVELATION)

While the Lord had defeated Israel's enemies, the task of settling the land was not complete during Joshua's lifetime (Josh 18:3; 23:4-5). When Israel was unfaithful to the covenant, as they were in the years of the judges, they would be oppressed by foreigners. When Israel was faithful to the Lord, God would give great victory, as he did with David and his battles against Goliath and the Philistines.

Israel was generally faithful to the Lord while Joshua was alive, but without godly leadership, Israel refused to obey. Thus the refrain in Judges is that "in those days Israel had no king; every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25). When Israel had a righteous king, they were led to covenant obedience and therefore to success and peace (2 Sam 8:14; 1 Kgs 4:20-25).

Even though God had given Israel the land, this was no guarantee that they would always live in the land. Joshua warned the nation that God would be faithful to his promises to *remove* them from the

land if they violated the covenant (Josh 23:14-16). When Israel became as wicked as the Canaanites they dispossessed, God declared that the time had come for a reverse-Conquest in which foreign nations would carry Israel into exile (Jer 5; Ezek 16).

At the time of David (Ps 95) and in the time of Jesus (Matt 11:28-30), the promise of rest still remained because it had not been fulfilled in the past. This rest is the rest from all effects of sin and it will be given to all those who remain faithful to the Lord and do not fall away (Heb 4). This rest will be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom when the Messiah subdues all his enemies (Psalms 2, 110; Matt 13:41, 49) and his followers inherit the earth (Matt 5:3-12; 25:31-34; Rev 20:4)

In the future when God makes a New Covenant with his people, he will bring them out of exile (Isa 11:11-16), remove the enemies who have taken over the Land (Obad 15-21), and plant Israel, “never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them” (Amos 9:15).

### **GOING FURTHER**

How does the story of Rahab communicate the main themes of the book (ch. 2)?

Why is it so important to list in such great detail the borders and cities (chs. 12-21)?

How are chapters 23 and 24 a fitting climax to the book?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read the book of Judges. Pay careful attention to chapters 1-2. As you read the whole book, think about what Israel’s problems are. How does this book contrast with Joshua? What is the solution?

Read the book of Ruth, a beautiful story which occurred “in the days when the judges ruled.” How does this book contrast with Judges? What does it say about Israel’s hope?

## STUDY #12: THE NATION WITHOUT A RIGHTEOUS KING (JUDGES, RUTH)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read the book of Judges. Pay careful attention to chapters 1-2. As you read the whole book, think about what Israel's problems are. How does this book contrast with Joshua? What is the solution?

Read the book of Ruth, a beautiful story which occurred "in the days when the judges ruled." How does this book contrast with Judges? What does it say about Israel's hope?

### OUTLINE OF JUDGES

- I. The persistent failure of the Israelites to keep the covenant results in their living among the nations (1:1-3:6).
- II. The persistent failure of the Israelites to keep the covenant results in external oppression that the Lord delivers them from repeatedly (3:7-16:31).
- III. The persistent failure of the Israelites to keep the covenant results in internal dissolution of societal and moral standards (17:1-21:25).

### OUTLINE OF RUTH

- I. Ruth demonstrates devotion to Yahweh in clinging to Naomi when she is left empty (1:1-22).
- II. Ruth and Boaz demonstrate devotion to Yahweh in their provision for Naomi's physical needs (2:1-23).
- III. Ruth and Boaz demonstrate devotion to Yahweh in their agreement to marry (3:1-18).
- IV. Yahweh demonstrates *hesed* [lovingkindness] to Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz in giving them a child who would produce the nation's great king (4:1-22).

### MAJOR THEMES OF JUDGES AND RUTH

The book of Judges is about the sinfulness of the people, the grace of God, and the need for a righteous king. The book of Ruth shows God's grace to a righteous family leading to the gift of a godly king.

### THE SINFULNESS OF THE PEOPLE

The book looks backwards to Deuteronomy and Joshua where the righteous commands were given and obeyed. The obvious problem with the Israelites in the book of Judges is that they are not faithful to their covenant with God, as Moses had instructed them and Joshua had reminded them. God was faithful, and the faithful response to covenant-breaking was the covenant curses (Deut 28). Thus God brought foreign armies and famine to provoke his people to repentance and restoration.

### THE GRACE OF GOD

Every page of the Bible resounds with the grace of God and the book of Judges is no different. While the Lord was faithful to punish his people for rebelling against his kingship, he was gracious to deliver them when they cried out for help. The book of Judges records many cases of God saving his people and no instances when he failed to listen to their cry. As is God's style, he delivered his people through a human leader that he raised up. In these years of rot and decay in Israel, God often raised up leaders that shared the sins and weaknesses of the people. Samson was grossly

immoral and Jephthah lacked any kind of moral compass. Gideon was a faithless coward and Deborah led the nation in the absence of male leadership. Yet God used these weak vessels to deliver his nation and bring them back into fellowship with him.

### THE NEED FOR A RIGHTEOUS KING

The book of Judges is in many ways a preparation for the monarchy. Indeed, without the book of Judges, one would not appreciate the request of Israel's elders for a king when Samuel was getting old. The horror of returning to the days when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" because "Israel had no king" motivated the nation to move to monarchical rule. Judges shows both the strengths and weaknesses of submitting to human leadership. On the one hand, the book regularly records that "during [the judge's] lifetime, the land enjoyed peace forty years." In the absence of a leader raised up by God, the nation was quick to rebel against the Lord and enter oppression. On the other hand, the leaders were failures in significant ways. The book then is an argument not just for a *king*, but for a *righteous king*.

### THE DOWNWARD CYCLE

Though Judges is often seen as a book of cycles (sin, suffering, supplication, salvation), it is better seen as a downward spiral. The progression is evident in many ways, including the character of the leaders. Two of the early judges, Othniel and Deborah, seem to do no wrong, but the last two, Jephthah and Samson, violate the most basic principles of morality. The progression is seen in the prayer for deliverance, such that in the last cycle the Israelites never even cry out to the Lord. The final notice that the land was at peace is in the time of Gideon (8:28). The length of the rules of the judges or of the peace that they brought generally decreases over the course of the book. The first four recorded lengths average fifty years, whereas the final four average a mere eleven.

The representation of the tribe of Ephraim illustrates the general decline. Near the beginning, the Ephraimites are faithful in assisting Ehud to rid the land of the Moabites (3:27). But with Gideon's campaign, they do not come to the battle until the victory has been won (8:1). Jephthah appeals to them for help in fighting the Ammonites, but they show up only in time to collect the spoils and with a belligerent attitude (12:1-3).

Finally, the book concludes with two episodes which reveal in sordid detail how the Israelites have become like the Canaanites they were to replace. The sin of idolatry is not just the sin of a single man or family, but in chapters 17-18 the *entire tribe* of Dan hires a priest and steals a shrine in order to establish their own worship apart from the Lord who brought them out of Egypt (a fact mentioned 8x in the book). In chapter 19, one town in Benjamin gang-rapes an Israelite woman. The situation deteriorates when the *entire tribe* of Benjamin chooses to defend the perpetrators.

### RUTH

As one finishes reading the book of Judges, you have to wonder how God is going to fulfill his promises through such wicked people. The book of Ruth shows the faithfulness of an ordinary family through whom God would raise up a godly seed to rule over his nation.



The setting is familiar: Israel is being disciplined for sin by a famine sent by God. One family chooses self-exile (instead of repentance) and all of the men die. The Israelites learn a lesson in faithfulness and devotion from a non-Israelite who leaves her family and idols to commit herself to God and his people (in Naomi). The Lord blesses that great faith by giving her a righteous husband and a family that would produce Israel's righteous king.

### **GOING FURTHER**

What are the problems in reading the book of Judges as a series of moral tales of people to be imitated or not?

Who is the hero of the book of Judges? How is this clear in the book? What response should it provoke?

What application can be made from the book today? What effect should comparing our world to the world of the judges have on us? (Think in terms of "king," and be more specific than "our nation should repent.")

What would we lose if the book of Ruth was not in the Bible?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read 1 Samuel. Think about how it relates to the book of Judges and the promises God has made in Genesis–Ruth. What is God doing? Why does he raise up Samuel? Why does he raise up Saul? What is so special about David? God could have cut all of the "intermediate" action out and just crowned David from the start. According to hints in the book, why did he do it this way?

## STUDY #13: THE SELECTION OF A KING (1 SAMUEL)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read 1 Samuel. Think about how it relates to the book of Judges and the promises God has made in Genesis–Ruth. What is God doing? Why does he raise up Samuel? Why does he raise up Saul? What is so special about David? God could have cut all of the “intermediate” action out and just crowned David from the start. According to hints in the book, why did he do it this way?

### INTRODUCTION

The book of 1 Samuel transitions the nation from the time of the judges to the time of kings. Expressed most simply, the book is a defense for the kingship of David. Samuel’s story is told because he anoints King David. David’s legitimacy hangs on the legitimacy of Samuel’s role as prophet. As a prophet, Samuel spoke for God, and thus his selection of David signified God’s selection of David. Saul’s story is told so it would be clear that God had rejected his kingship and dynasty. While moral lessons can certainly be learned along the way, the main point must be kept in mind in reading through the book: God is choosing a king to lead the nation in fulfillment of his good promises.

### PREPARATION FOR KINGSHIP BEFORE SAMUEL

At first glance, one might think that God was opposed to kingship in Israel. When the elders of Israel approached Samuel for a king, God responded that the nation had rejected him as king (1 Sam 8). While that is true, it does not mean that God had not been planning for a human mediator to rule as king on earth. The problem was not the nature of the request for a king, but the motivation behind it: Israel was unhappy with their relationship with God and they wanted to be like the other nations. God’s design for a king was previously revealed beginning in Genesis:

1. God created man to rule over his creation. Designed in/as the image of God, man was to be king over creation, serving as God’s agent on earth (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8).
2. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of kings (Gen 17:6).
3. Jacob gave Judah the blessing of the firstborn, promising that the scepter would not depart from the house of Judah until it came to the one to whom it belonged (Gen 49:8-12).
4. Under inspiration of God, the foreign prophet Balaam predicted that Israel’s king “will be greater than Agag,” and that “a scepter will rise out of Israel” that would crush the nations (Num 24).
5. God gave laws for kings in the nation of Israel (Deut 17:14-20). Though there was no king in the time of Moses and Joshua, the Lord anticipated the day when there would be a king.
6. Though living in the difficult days of the judges, Hannah expected that God would fulfill his promises and provide a king to rule over his people (1 Sam 2:10).

### SAMUEL THE PROPHET

All of the stories about Samuel are intended to establish one thing: Samuel was a true prophet of the Lord and thus could anoint a king on God's behalf. First, we learn that Samuel's birth was the work of the Lord when he opened the womb of the godly Hannah (1 Sam 1). Second, we see how God spoke directly to Samuel, a relationship which was acknowledged by others (1 Sam 3). Third, we watch Samuel serve as an effective leader, speaking the words of God, leading the nation in repentance, and defeating the enemies (1 Sam 7). When Samuel chooses first Saul and then David, it should be recognized by all that he is doing God's will. Samuel also warns the people of the perils of an unrighteous king (1 Sam 8), a critical lesson that should point the nation away from Saul and to David.

### **SAUL'S FAILED KINGSHIP**

After his anointing and initial victory (1 Sam 10-11), Saul's kingship was an unmitigated failure. His refusal to submit to God was manifest in his illicit sacrifice (1 Sam 13), his jealous effort to murder his faithful and victorious son (1 Sam 14), and his violation of the ban imposed on the Amalekites (the same sin that Achan committed!; 1 Sam 15).

Why did God choose someone who would be such a disaster? My conclusion is that when the nation of Israel was impatient to have a new king because of Samuel's old age, God provided them with a king who was "ideal" given the desires of their hearts. Thus, they were given a king who was tall, of a distinguished family, and ready to lead the nation in battle. If they had waited on God's timing (Samuel, after all, lived for many more years, only dying in 1 Sam 25:1), David would have been the first anointed king. In choosing Saul, the people received a king after their own heart, and the result was failure. God rescued his people from this failed leader by anointing a man after his own heart.

### **THE APOLOGY FOR DAVID'S RULE**

From the anointing of David at the midpoint of the book (1 Sam 16), the book becomes exclusively an apology for David's kingship. That such an apology is important is clear from the length given to it by the author who repeats story after story and testimony after testimony that David is the rightful king of Israel, in contrast to Saul. That this repetition was necessary becomes clear when one sees how slow the nation was to accept David as their king. (In 2 Samuel 5 we see that it was a full seven years after Saul's death before all twelve tribes recognized David as their king.) David is shown as a superior king to Saul in many ways. Here are a few:

1. The Spirit of the Lord departs from Saul and comes upon David (1 Sam 16).
2. David defeats the giant Goliath while Saul, the physical giant of Israel, cowers in his tent (1 Sam 17).
3. Saul tries to kill David though the youth has only tried to help him (1 Sam 18).
4. Saul's own son and heir recognizes that David will be the next king (1 Sam 20).
5. Saul slaughters God's priests, while the surviving priest brings David the means to communicate directly with God through the Urim and Thummim (1 Sam 21-22).

6. David delivers an Israelite city from the Philistines, a task that belonged to the king but which was not fulfilled by Saul because he was pursuing David (1 Sam 23).
7. David's heart is tender and he refuses to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed, trusting God to give him the throne. Saul explicitly declares that David is a better man and will be the next king (1 Sam 24, 26).
8. David has a secure alibi when Saul is killed in battle with the Philistines (1 Sam 28-31).

That God chose David to be the king (and not Saul or Jonathan), and that God established him on the throne (and not David by his own hand) is critical because of the eternal covenant that God will make with David in 2 Samuel. In other words, 1 Samuel is necessary background for the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7.

### **GOING FURTHER**

Why is Saul a bad king? How does his rule prepare Israel for a better king?

What indications does 1 Samuel give that David will be a good king?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read 2 Samuel. Consider why the author describes so carefully how the nation (slowly) unites around David. Pay careful attention to chapter 7. How do David's later sins (and consequences) affect (or not affect) God's promise to David?

## STUDY #14: THE DAVIDIC COVENANT (2 SAMUEL)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read 2 Samuel. Consider why the author describes so carefully how the nation (slowly) unites around David. Pay careful attention to chapter 7. How do David's later sins (and consequences) affect (or not affect) God's promise to David?

### THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

God chose Abraham for the purpose of making him into a great nation to bless the world (Gen 12, 15, 17, 22). This intention is advanced when God establishes the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai (Exod 19), but the Mosaic covenant will fail because it requires upon the obedience of the people (Deut 29). The nation's failure is owing in part to the lack of a king to lead them in righteousness (Judg 21:25). The nation's need for a righteous king is answered by God who anoints David (1 Sam 16).

### THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

The covenant that God makes with David will bring to fruition the promises made to Abraham (2 Sam 7). Just as God promised to Abraham a great name, a land of his own, and blessing through him to the world, so God promises to bring these about through King David's family. Several elements of the Davidic covenant are significant:

**Seed:** God's promise to raise up a "seed" for David recalls the promise of the "seed" of Eve who would crush the serpent (Gen 3:15) and the promise of the seed that God would give Abraham (Gen 12:7). As prophesied, David is of the tribe of Judah, the one promised the scepter (Gen 49:10).

**An eternal dynasty:** Though monarchies are by nature hereditary, Saul lost his dynastic rule because of his disobedience. David was promised that his descendants would always rule on the throne (2 Sam 7). Disobedience would result in discipline but not in a revocation of the covenant. The northern kingdom suffered many coups where all sons of the king were killed, but David's house always survived.

**A charter for mankind:** In David's prayer of response to the covenant, he recognizes the global consequences of God's promise to him. The last sentence of 2 Samuel 7:19 should be translated, "This is a charter for mankind."

**A line of descendants or a single son?:** God promised David that he would raise up David's seed and "establish the throne of his kingdom forever." This required that every king to rule over Israel would be from David's line, but it also hinted at a single son who would qualify to rule forever. This is so not only because of the unsatisfying notion of an eternal succession of unrighteous rulers, but also because (1) God had promised a seed that would crush the serpent (Gen 3:15); (2) God had promised to bless all nations through Abraham's seed (Gen 22:18); (3) the scepter would belong to Judah "until he comes to whom it belongs," a promise pointing to a single deserving individual (Gen 49:10); (4) the promise of a king greater than Agog (or Gog; Num 24:7). Later prophecies make

it abundantly clear that a single individual would come who would rule over the house of David forever (e.g., Isa 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-6; Ezek 37:24; Hos 3:5; Hag 2:23).

**God's glory:** God's ultimate goal in his covenant with David was his own glory, and David recognized this when he prayed: "Do as you promised, so that your name will be great forever" (2 Sam 7:25-26).

**Fulfillment:** When Gabriel appeared to Mary, he described the child that would be born in language straight out of 2 Samuel 7 that left no doubt that Jesus was the long-awaited fulfillment of the Davidic covenant: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32-33).

### ISSUES RELATED TO THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

**Discipline:** God's covenant with David was not broken when Israel was carried off into exile and no king ruled on the throne. The Lord had already predicted that Israel would be unfaithful and be banished from the land for a time (Deut 29-30). David's descendants were guilty and would be punished (Jer 22), but from the ruins of exile God would raise up an heir, born of a virgin, to "reign on David's throne" and "of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end" (Isa 7-9).

**David's sin:** Proof of the unconditionality of the covenant is given in the detailed recording of David's sins of adultery and murder. Though he suffered painful consequences, his dynasty was not cut off as it was with Saul. Similarly, Solomon failed to be faithful and though he was disciplined, the dynasty persevered.

**The Davidic Covenant in Chronicles:** God's promises to David are recorded nearly verbatim in 1 Chronicles 17, but mention of discipline is omitted. This is best explained by the writer's knowledge (writing after the exile and the words of many prophets) that a single righteous king would be the glorious fulfillment of God's promise to David.

**It's a Boy!** It was a clear work of God that for a thousand years every Davidic king (or heir during the years of exile—see the list in Matt 1) had a son. Royal dynasties in England, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Japan have never had such "luck."

**How did God's people respond when they were in exile and a Davidic king was not on the throne?** Psalm 89 is just such a response. Here they (1) celebrate God's covenant with David; (2) acknowledge that disobedience would be punished; (3) ask God how long his wrath will last; (4) trust that God will fulfill his promises.

**What does it mean to rule on David's throne?:** The following elements are essential: (1) an exercise of rule over the people of Israel; (2) a rule that is centered in Jerusalem; (3) a national homeland for the people; (4) a time of peace and prosperity.

**Is Jesus now ruling on David's throne?:** No. (1) None of the above elements are true today and there is no warrant for spiritualizing them; (2) the New Testament never says that Jesus is ruling over his kingdom today; (3) Hebrews says that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father *until* the Father makes his enemies a footstool for his feet (Heb 1:13). Therefore, Jesus is today in heaven, serving as

our priest and waiting for the Father to make the nations the Son's inheritance (Heb 5; Ps 2, 110). One day Jesus will return and establish God's kingdom on earth, ruling from Jerusalem, giving peace to his people, and blessing the nations (Zech 8, 14; Isa 2, 60, 65).

### GOING FURTHER

The book of 1–2 Chronicles is largely a commentary on the Davidic covenant. Whether you read it now or later, make sure that you have the covenant in the front of your mind as you read.

Several psalms provide commentary on the Davidic covenant. What additional insights can you gain about the Davidic covenant from Psalms 2, 45, 72, 89, 110, and 132?

Look for the Davidic Covenant in the New Testament, including in Matthew 1–2, Luke 1–2, Acts 2, 13, Hebrews 1–2, Revelation 5, 19.

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Next week we will consider the notion that the book of Psalms is more than a private prayer book for Christians but served a *royal* purpose. Read a variety of psalms of your choosing and think about the authorship, the subject, and their relation to God's promises in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. How would a son of David read/sing/pray these psalms (differently than we would)? Recommended psalms include 1, 2, 8, 16, 19–22, 45, 47–48, 60, 61, 69, 72, 89, 99, 101, 110, 118, 122, 125, 132, 144, 149.

## STUDY #15: PSALMS AND THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

We will consider the notion that the book of Psalms is more than a private prayer book for Christians but served a *royal* purpose. Read a variety of psalms of your choosing and think about the authorship, the subject, and their relation to God's promises in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. How would a son of David read/sing/pray these psalms (differently than we would)? Recommended psalms include 1, 2, 8, 16, 19–22, 45, 47–48, 60, 61, 69, 72, 89, 99, 101, 110, 118, 122, 125, 132, 144, 149.

### MISSING THE MEANING OF THE PSALMS

A common approach to reading the psalms is to read them personally, as if they were detached from time and written primarily to help us express ourselves in worship. Because the psalms are so easy to apply, and because historical context is often so obscure, we often find the path smooth in making the psalms our “own.” But this approach runs the danger of missing the meaning of some of the psalms, resulting in incorrect application.

### THE ROLE OF THE KING

Superscriptions name David as the author of 73 psalms, and the New Testament attributes 2 more to him (Pss 2, 95), making him responsible for at least half of the 150 psalms. Since David was anointed at a young age, it is safe to assume that all of these psalms were written either while he was king or while he was awaiting his coronation (while Saul was alive). Thus all of David's psalms can be classified as “royal” at least with regard to authorship.

Some of the psalms should be read as psalms pertaining to the king. Some matters true for the king would be true for the people, but not all such matters. Israel's king was the people's representative to God and he led the nation in righteousness and set an example. In this regard, some of David's psalms were intended to lead the nation in worship, confession, and wisdom. These psalms are most easily utilized by us today without much danger of misapplication. Examples include 5, 6, 11, 13.

Some psalms reflect David's role as leader, providing his instruction and exhortation of the nation. For example, Psalm 34 gives David's testimony of God's deliverance and calls upon the people to fear, trust, and taste God. Psalm 19 is a worship hymn that exalts God's creation and his word with an appropriate response of confession.

Other psalms reflect David's role as the nation's representative. When David cried out for victory in battle, he wasn't asking for some personal reward, but rather for God's blessing upon his chosen nation. Examples of this type of psalm include 9 and 108.

### THE DAVIDIC COVENANT



Still other psalms are focused on the king himself. Their personal “application” is in how the people pray for God to fulfill his plans for the king. These are not psalms that we can appropriate for ourselves, for we are not the anointed Davidic king.

The significance of the Davidic covenant cannot be overstated. In this one promise (2 Sam 7), God revealed just how he would fulfill his plan for the world by giving them a righteous king to bring about worldwide peace and crush the serpent who led man into sin. This promise changed David’s life and affected many of his psalms. When he wrote of his certainty that God would deliver him from danger and set his son on the throne, David was revealing his faith in God’s promise. Likewise, when David wrote about a future king who would crush the enemy nations and serve as a priest in the order of Melchizedek, he was not just fantasizing but he was reflecting on what God had already promised.

The point of this study is this: the psalms should be read with an eye open to their possible connection to the Davidic covenant. The value of such an approach is that we will understand these psalms correctly and avoid applying them directly to ourselves. Furthermore, when we read the New Testament and see Jesus and the apostles quoting these psalms as fulfilled in Jesus, we will not err in claiming that the NT did not respect the context. In fact, the NT writers recognized the context that we have ignored or denied.

### HOW IT MATTERS: SOME EXAMPLES

**Psalm 20** is not a generic psalm to be applied to all people, but it is a prayer for the king as he is leading the nation in battle and in worship. Since this was written by David but speaks of the king in the second person, it may be best to consider this as a psalm that David wrote for his descendants who would be king.

**Psalm 72** is a prayer for the king. Read apart from the Davidic covenant, the promises are often taken as hyperbole (e.g., “he will endure as long as the sun”), but a better interpretation is that this psalm was written in faith that God would fulfill his promises to the house of David. Ultimately this will be fulfilled in Jesus when he rules from sea to sea, all kings bow down to him, all nations are blessed through him, and his name endures forever.

Some interpreters stumble when the NT claims that certain verses in **Psalm 22** were fulfilled at Jesus’ death (John 19:24; cf. Matt 27:39, 43, 46; John 19:28; Heb 2:12) because they believe that David wrote the psalm about his own suffering. One solution: Jesus experienced the same sufferings as the earlier king of Israel but in a greater and more truer way. A better solution is that David knew (as a prophet) that his promised heir would suffer greatly (cf. Isa 53) and he wrote this psalm for him. This psalm is certainly true for Jesus in a way that it was never true for David (e.g., “They cast lots for my clothing”). The conclusion of the psalm strongly supports the view that it was written for one greater than David: “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord.”

**Psalm 110** is perhaps the clearest example that David wrote psalms in light of the Davidic covenant. If one accepts Davidic authorship of this psalm (as Jesus did), David is speaking about a person who is his “lord/master.” Given that David stood as mediator between God and Israel/the nations, there was no earthly person who was his superior. But if David understood God’s promises to him to be

speaking about a future descendant who would rule forever in righteousness, he recognized that this descendant was greater than himself. So if we accept Jesus' interpretation of the psalm (Matt 22:41-46), we have here confirmation that David knew of a greater descendant and wrote a psalm that spoke of him. Therefore it is reasonable to believe that other psalms may have been written about the Davidic covenant and about David's son(s). David's description of his lord's victories correspond with 2 Samuel 7, where God promises a great name, a place for his people Israel, rest from enemies, and the establishment of an eternal throne.

**Psalm 1** certainly applies to all people, but in light of this investigation it is worth re-considering whether this psalm was intended first and foremost for the king. This certainly makes sense in light of the commands of Deuteronomy 17 for the king to copy, carry, and obey the law. Psalm 1 also echoes the command given to the national leader in Joshua 1. Historically the kings who delighted in God's law flourished and those who didn't failed. Jesus took these words to heart and demonstrated that he is worthy to be the king by his knowledge and observance of God's Word.

### CONCLUSION

Given God's promises made in the Davidic covenant, David and other prophets anticipated the future rule of a righteous king who would bring peace to the land, blessings to all nations, and prosperity to his loyal followers. Some psalms are subject to misinterpretation when they are not read as prophetic in light of the Davidic covenant (cf. Luke 24:44; John 5:39).

### GOING FURTHER

Read Psalm 22 and consider whether this psalm was originally intended to apply to David or to his messianic heir.

Read Psalm 45 and figure out what it means.

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Proverbs 1-9, Ecclesiastes 1, 6, 12, Job 1-2, 38-42. As you do, think about why these books (and wisdom literature in general) are included in the Bible. How does it fit (or seem not to fit) with our study of God's work in the world and plan of redemption?

## STUDY #16: PROVERBS FOR A KING

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Proverbs 1–9, Ecclesiastes 1, 6, 12, Job 1–2, 38–42. As you do, think about why these books (and wisdom literature in general) are included in the Bible. How does it fit (or seem not to fit) with our study of God’s work in the world and plan of redemption?

### THE ROYAL NATURE OF PROVERBS

Scholars who are seeking to identify a single theme or “center” for the Old Testament struggle in particular with how Wisdom Literature fits in. Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs don’t seem to fit easily into the theme and thrust of the narrative and prophetic books. Consequently many themes suggested for the Old Testament have been rejected by scholarship because they cannot account for the place of the Wisdom books.

Perhaps the key to understanding the place of Proverbs is found in the first verse in the book, “The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel.” This suggests several important issues must be understood as one approaches this book.

1. Proverbs was written by a king. Thus it is a royal book (like Psalms, as we discussed last week). It was written by a king for his sons. The royal son(s) is addressed 19 times in the first 9 chapters, beginning in 1:8. The second section of the book begins in 10:1 with a proverb about a wise son and a foolish son. But though these have application to all sons everywhere, in their original context they were addressed by Israel’s king to his heir.

2. Solomon is identified as the “son of David.” This recalls the glorious promise that God made to David that he would “establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam 7:13). But the Lord also promised to discipline disobedient kings. The book of Proverbs was intended to help Israel’s kings keep on the straight path, pursuing wisdom and leading the nation in covenant faithfulness. If one of David’s sons was going to rule over the kingdom forever, he would have to be characterized by the wisdom described in this book.

3. These proverbs were intended for the king of Israel, a nation that God intended to use to bless the world. All people would be blessed through Abraham’s seed, and Israel was to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Gen 12:3; Exod 19:6). Placed in the center of the nations, Israel was to obey God’s law carefully, “for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deut 4:6). Israel’s destiny was to be a wise people and for that they needed a wise king who would lead them in understanding.

In other words, rather than think of Proverbs as a “Manual for Christian Living,” we should first consider it to be a “Guide to Wisdom for Israel’s Kings.” But as Israel’s righteous kings naturally wanted the people to pursue wisdom themselves, the book was made available to all and it served as a “Guide to Kingdom Living.” The nation desired to know peace and prosperity, and God desired

to give this to them (1:33). Proverbs and all of the Wisdom Books offered such a destiny to the nation who followed its precepts.

### **PROVERBS FOR KINGS AND THEIR SUBJECTS**

Though much of the book was written and compiled by Solomon, two other kings played roles in the book. Hezekiah, king of Judah, had his men compile more proverbs of Solomon (25:1) and the last chapter of the book was written by King Lemuel, an unknown figure. About 40 proverbs mention a king or ruler explicitly. These encouraged the king to govern wisely and exhorted the people to respond appropriately to the one God had put in authority.

For the king: kings reign by wisdom, speak with authority, are protected by love, provide stability for the country, practice justice, and avoid wine (8:15; 16:10; 20:28; 29:4, 14; 31:4).

For the king's subjects: fear the king, be honest with the king, a pure heart makes the king one's friend, and be persistent with the king (17:7; 22:11; 24:21).

### **PROVERBS AND THREE KINGS**

Parts of Proverbs are more stirring in light of the sins of Solomon, his father David, and his son Rehoboam. The strong warnings in chapters 5, 6, and 7 against an adulterous woman recall David's sleeping with Uriah's wife. The proverbs that promise stability and strength to the kingdom point to Solomon's failures and the gradual dissolution of his empire (Prov 28:16; 29:4; 31:3; 1 Kgs 11–12). Rehoboam ignored the admonitions to choose one's friends and advisers wisely and he was left ruling only a single tribe as a result (Prov 13:20; 25:5; 29:12). If these kings had heeded the way of wisdom articulated in this book, they would have avoided great heartache for themselves and their nation.

### **PROVERBS 4: A KING'S ADMONITION**

Proverbs 4 comes alive when heard from Solomon's voice. Here the king is exhorting his sons to listen to his instruction. He recalls his boyhood in his father David's house when his dad told him to pursue wisdom at all costs. Solomon heeded that advice for when the Lord asked him what he desired, Solomon requested a discerning heart to govern the people (1 Kgs 3:9).

Now Solomon is passing that same advice on to his son who will follow in his footsteps as Israel's king. He tells him that if he follows his way he will enjoy a long life, echoing what God said to him (1 Kgs 3:14). He also instructs him to "hold on to instruction," perhaps a personal reflection of Solomon's decision to abandon wisdom and seek his own pleasures, as he described in Ecclesiastes. The chapter ends with a stern admonition to walk in the way of wisdom, guarding one's heart and sticking to the straight path. The rulers of Israel who did that would be blessed, but unfortunately most of them chose to disregard Solomon's counsel and pursue foolishness.

### **FINAL WORDS**

Proverbs is a word for the king and by the king. The king who rules by wisdom will bless his people, and the people who practice these principles will be prosperous.

Since wisdom comes from the Lord, pursuing wisdom is pursuing God's revelation to man. It is not one thing to seek wisdom and something else to seek the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. There is no wisdom apart from the Lord. One can gain knowledge, but the application of truth in a way that results in blessing comes only in submission to the Lord.

### **OTHER WISDOM BOOKS: GUIDES FOR KINGDOM LIVING**

All of the Wisdom Books are guides for kingdom living. How is one to live now that Israel is a nation living in its own land? How can we experience joy and blessing in our lives? Ecclesiastes describes the peril of living life apart from God and extols the blessings of living in fear of God and enjoying his good gifts. Job helps man to trust God when life doesn't make sense and he cannot understand the causes of his suffering. Song of Songs describes the exquisite pleasure that a man and his wife can enjoy in a faithful marriage. Altogether the Bible's Wisdom Literature helps the reader to find satisfaction and blessing in life on earth.

### **GOING FURTHER**

How could Proverbs have led the nation of Israel into a glorious era of prosperity and peace?

How does Proverbs communicate that gaining wisdom is ultimately about a relationship?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Prepare for next week's study of the Messiah in the Old Testament by reading Luke 24:13-49, with particular attention to verses 25, 26, and 44 and thinking (or writing) about what Jesus said to the disciples. For extra credit: listen to Handel's Messiah. Use my guide if you like:

[www.toddbolen.com/messiah.pdf](http://www.toddbolen.com/messiah.pdf)

## STUDY #17: THE MESSIANIC OLD TESTAMENT

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Prepare for next week's study of the Messiah in the Old Testament by reading Luke 24:13-49, with particular attention to verses 25, 26, and 44 and thinking (or writing) about what Jesus said to the disciples. For extra credit: listen to Handel's Messiah.

### PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The main goal of this lesson is to convince you:

not that the Old Testament *has* some messianic prophecies

but that the Old Testament *is* a thoroughly messianic book.

This is important for several reasons:

1. To counter the false idea that Christians cite verses out of context in order to prove that Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecy.
2. To help you to understand the Old Testament correctly; that is, to understand the Old Testament as Jesus understood it.
3. To give you a greater appreciation for the parts of the Old Testament by giving you a better understanding of the whole.
4. To help you to see how Jesus is truly the center of the Bible and not an afterthought or a change of plan.

### “THE SCRIPTURES POINT TO ME” (JOHN 5:39)

After the resurrection, Jesus spoke with two disciples on the road to Emmaus and “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). He also rebuked them for not believing what the Old Testament said. Later when talking with the 11 disciples he reminded them, “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). If we do not understand how all of the OT speaks about Jesus, then we do not understand the OT. Our outline for this study will be the three parts of the OT, as given by Jesus: the Law of Moses (Gen-Deut), the Prophets (Josh-2 Kgs; Isa-Mal), and the Psalms (including all of Wisdom Literature and a few other books).

### THE LAW OF MOSES IS MESSIANIC

1. From the moment of the Fall, man needed a redeemer to give him life and restore him to fellowship with God. The earth also was cursed and needed redemption. God promised to give the woman a seed which would crush the serpent.
2. With the increase of mankind across the earth, God chose a family to bring blessing to all the earth. The hope of all people was now through Abraham's seed.

3. God promised to make Jacob's 12 descendants into a great nation and Judah would be the father of the kingly line until the comes to whom the scepter belongs.

4. From just the first book of the Bible alone, we see an increasingly desperate need for salvation from sin and we have God's promise to deliver through a man, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, a king to whom the scepter belongs.

5. The exodus shows God's power to save, but the travels in the wilderness reveals the evil hearts of God's people. God makes a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai to show them their need for a circumcised heart.

### **THE PROPHETS ARE MESSIANIC**

1. The Former Prophets begin with Joshua where we see the potential for God's kingdom on earth when the people trust God. But their faith is weak and the following generations are idolatrous. Judges shows their desperate need for a king.

2. God gives the nation a king (Saul) and they learn that just any king is not good enough. They need a righteous king. David shows promise but his failure shows the need for someone greater. God promises to give David an everlasting dynasty, a promise pointing to a righteous ruler who will completely please God.

3. The suspense increases with each king and one after another, beginning with Solomon, they show that they cannot lead the people in righteousness. The people groan under oppression as they long for the one God has promised.

4. The prophets blast the king and national leadership for rejecting God's law and crushing the people. They predict judgment for the wicked but salvation through the Messiah.

5. Isaiah predicts a royal son born in poverty who will rule with righteousness forever. He also foresees that this ruler will suffer at the hands of his people to atone for their sin. Micah indicts the wicked leadership and predicts a glorious kingdom to be ruled by one born in Bethlehem. Jeremiah knows that the nation will be carried off to Babylon but he also knows that God will raise up David's son to lead the nation to peace. Hosea, Amos, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all speak about the future Messiah and his glorious work in establishing God's kingdom on earth.

### **THE PSALMS ARE MESSIANIC**

1. David wrote some of the psalms about and for his descendant that God had promised would rule forever. He knew that God would fulfill his covenant and he described the day when all kings would bow down to the Messiah, all nations would be blessed through him, and his name would endure forever.

2. The psalms anticipate a Messiah of the line of Judah who is also a priest in the order of Melchizedek. This anticipates the surpassing of the Levitical priesthood by David's greater descendant who would serve the people not only as a righteous ruler but as a sympathetic high priest.

3. David expected that his greater descendant would suffer greatly and he wrote psalms about this suffering. He knew that the Messiah would not be left in the grave and he knew that he would sit at God's right hand until the time when his enemies were subdued.

4. The Psalms that Jesus mentioned in Luke 24 was not just a reference to a single book but to a whole section of books. Proverbs and the Wisdom Literature model what a righteous king will look like. Chiefly he is characterized by a fear of the Lord which leads to complete obedience.

5. Daniel predicts that four earthly kingdoms that defy God will be replaced by God's kingdom which comes from heaven. The ruler is one who is like a "son of man" but who acts like God. He crushes all defiance, sees the resurrection of all people, and reigns in righteousness forever.

### **CONCLUSION**

All of the Old Testament points to Jesus. Ever since the Fall, those submitted to God have been longing for deliverance and they have seen God progressively reveal the way in which he will crush the serpent, redeem mankind, and establish his kingdom. At the center of this is an individual who will rule but also suffer. Suffering was necessary in order to establish the New Covenant in which all of the people would be given circumcised hearts to obey God. The failure of the disciples to understand was essentially a problem of selective hearing. They understood the Scriptures that spoke of desirable matters, but they did not appreciate ones which were less appealing.

### **GOING FURTHER**

How do the Gospels show the Scriptures fulfilled in Jesus?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

For our study of Israel's descent towards exile, read 1-2 Kings. If time is limited, read especially: 1 Kgs 4, 11-14, 18; 2 Kgs 9-11, 17-25. As you read, think about the purposes of the author. Why did he write what he did? What did he want his readers to understand?



## STUDY #18: DESCENT INTO EXILE (1-2 KINGS)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read 1-2 Kings. If time is limited, read especially: 1 Kgs 4, 8, 11-14, 18; 2 Kgs 9-11, 17-25. As you read, think about the purposes of the author. Why did he write what he did? What did he want his readers to understand?

### OUTLINE OF 1-2 KINGS

- I. Solomon leads the nation in building the temple and abandoning true worship (1 Kgs 1-11).
- II. Jeroboam leads the northern kingdom in building idolatrous high places (1 Kgs 12-13).
- III. The kings of Israel and Judah lead the people in unfaithfulness to the covenant (1 Kgs 14-16).
- IV. Elijah and Elisha confront Ahab's family and allies in order to restore the nations to covenant loyalty (1 Kgs 17-2 Kgs 10).
- V. The kings of Israel and Judah lead the people in unfaithfulness that merits exile (2 Kgs 11-17).
- VI. The kings of Judah lead the nation in faltering faithfulness until the exile (2 Kgs 18-25).

### 1-2 KINGS IN LIGHT OF THE COVENANTS

With regard to the **Abrahamic Covenant**, 1-2 Kings shows the potential of Israel blessing the nations through the reign of Solomon. God intended for the nations to marvel at Israel's wisdom as they did when the wise men traveled to hear Solomon's wisdom (1 Kgs 4:29-34). God intended to bless the nations with peace, and all the kingdoms under Solomon's expansive rule enjoyed peace (1 Kgs 4:24). Though it was limited and short-lived because of Solomon's sin, 1-2 Kings provides a glimpse of what it will look like when God fulfills his promise made to Abraham.

With regard to the **Mosaic Covenant**, 1-2 Kings shows the result of the failure to keep the law. The kings were commanded in Deut 17 to abide by the law and to trust God wholeheartedly by not multiplying horses (for military strength), not multiplying wives (for international alliances), and not multiplying wealth (for solving one's own problems). Solomon leads off the book by violating every one of those prohibitions (1 Kgs 10:26-11:8). Just as each king thereafter failed to obey God's Word, so the nation followed suit. The result was that the prophesied curses came to pass, culminating ultimately in exile.

With regard to the **Davidic Covenant**, 1-2 Kings shows that despite the nation's lack of loyalty to the Mosaic Covenant, God was faithful to keep his promise to David. Unlike the northern kingdom, which had one coup after another for a total of eight dynasties, the Davidic house always produced an heir and was never overthrown. Some kings were assassinated, but they were always replaced by the next son in line. One time all the children of the king were slain, but God preserved one infant (Joash) who recovered the throne from Athaliah. Though the book makes clear God's faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant in sending the people into exile, it also ends with notice that God was preserving the Davidic line for a future restoration to the throne (2 Kgs 25:27-30).

### THE GLORY OF THE KINGDOM

From Genesis 1, God's intention was to create a *good* world that the creature made in the image of God would rule over as God's representative, doing God's will for his glory. With the Fall, God set

about restoring the groaning creation through the seed of Abraham. David is an imperfect model of a righteous king whose trust in God brings victories over those opposed to God. This leads to the establishment of a glorious kingdom under Solomon's rule. Blessed by God, this kingdom has the potential of blessing the world. It does so as long as Solomon leads the nation in covenant obedience. The glory of this kingdom includes God's presence dwelling with his people (like the Garden of Eden; 1 Kgs 8:11), abundant wealth and prosperity (1 Kgs 4:20-28), and a powerful witness to the nations (1 Kgs 4:29-34). This glorious kingdom does not last because of Solomon's disobedience. The need for the nation is thus clear: Israel needs a king who will be faithful to the end.

### **THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM**

The split of the nation into the ten tribes of the north (Israel) and the one tribe of the south (Judah) was God's punishment on Solomon for covenant unfaithfulness. Yet it was also divine mercy in preserving the Davidic house according to God's promise. When kings in the north were unfaithful, the entire house was wiped out. When kings of Judah were unfaithful, they were attacked, became ill, or were assassinated. Yet "for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up a son to succeed him" (1 Kgs 15:4).

### **THE EXILE OF THE NORTHERN TRIBES**

The northern kingdom is a powerful testimony to God's longsuffering. Not one of the 20 kings was faithful to the covenant and yet God patiently waited for repentance for 200 years. The Lord not only waited but he also sent prophets: Nathan, Ahijah, the unnamed man of God (1 Kgs 13), Jehu, Obadiah, Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Jonah (2 Kgs 14:25), Amos, and Hosea. In the chapter that explains why the northern tribes were deported, it addresses this specifically: "The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: 'Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.' But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their fathers, who did not trust in the LORD their God. They rejected his decrees and the covenant" (2 Kgs 17:13-15). The result was that "the LORD removed them from his presence, as he had warned through all his servants the prophets" (2 Kgs 17:23).

### **RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED KINGS**

All of the kings of Israel were guilty of covenant unfaithfulness, as all led the nation in idolatrous worship of the golden calves of Dan and Bethel. In Judah, 8 of the 20 kings received some positive comment, but they all failed in important respects. (Most of these failed to remove the high places and the people continued to practice false worship.) Two of the kings were described in superlative terms. Hezekiah led a great revival and trusted the Lord when under attack by the Assyrians. Yet ultimately his heart was divided and he sought a treaty with the Babylonians because he doubted God's sufficiency. Josiah led the people in covenant renewal and of him it was written: "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses" (2 Kgs 23:25). The blessings to Josiah were great but he failed when he took international affairs into his own hands and was struck down at the age of 39. The "recipe" for Israel's exaltation was clear but

most kings rejected God's law and none obeyed completely. Israel needed a king greater than David, greater than Solomon, Hezekiah, or Josiah.

### **JUSTIFICATION FOR THE EXILE**

The primary purpose of 1–2 Kings (as distinctly opposed, for instance, to Israel's history in 1–2 Chronicles) is to explain to the Israelites in exile why they were there. In this way, the book really is a "theodicy"—a defense of God's actions of "evil." The explanation is quite simple: the Israelites were unfaithful to the Mosaic Covenant and therefore God gave them all that he promised in that same covenant. The fault did not lie with God but with the nation. Furthermore, the book powerfully reveals just how patient God was, waiting generation after generation and enduring centuries of idolatry and disloyalty.

### **GOING FURTHER**

Re-read 1–2 Kings and look for the themes mentioned above.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

The chief message of the prophets God sent before the exile was a call to return to the covenant. Thus harsh words of judgment comprise the majority of Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah as well as large sections of Isaiah and Joel. Read Isa 1, Jer 1-3, Hos 1-3, Amos 3-4, and Micah 1-2 in light of the Mosaic Covenant.

## STUDY #19: THE PROPHETS: RETURN TO THE (MOSAIC) COVENANT

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

The chief message of the prophets God sent before the exile was a call to return to the covenant. Thus harsh words of judgment comprise the majority of Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah as well as large sections of Isaiah and Joel. Read Isa 1, Jer 1-3, Hos 1-3, Amos 3-4, and Micah 1-2 in light of the Mosaic Covenant.

### WHAT IS A PROPHET?

A prophet is one who speaks for God (Deut 18:18). His ministry may include predicting the future, but prophecy is any words spoken for God, predictive or not. Prophets could be shepherds (like Amos), priests (like Jeremiah), or part of the royal family (like Zephaniah). Their ministry could be short (like Amos) or last 50 years (like Isaiah). They addressed Israel (before its fall in 722), Judah (before, during and after the exile in 586), and all of the other nations (because all people are accountable to their sovereign Creator).

### DIFFERENT KINDS OF PROPHECY

1. Description of sin (e.g., Amos 5)
2. Prediction of judgment (e.g., Jer 4)
3. Call to repent (e.g., Joel 2:12-17)
4. Oracle against a foreign nation (e.g., Isa 13-23)
5. Prediction of future restoration (e.g., Ezek 33-48).

Messages of judgment predominate in advance of punishment. For example, the book of Amos has 9 chapters of doom and gloom and only the last 5 verses provide hope. On the other hand, those who were experiencing their punishment received larger doses of hope. For example, nearly half of Ezekiel (during the exile) predicts future glory; nearly all of Zechariah (after the exile) addresses the future kingdom.

### PROPHETS COME IN CLUSTERS

We typically see a flurry of prophetic activity with a major apostasy or impending judgment. God sent (1) Ahijah and an unnamed prophet when Jeroboam set up the golden calves; (2) Elijah and Elisha when Israel turned to Baal; (3) Jonah, Hosea, and Amos to prepare the northern kingdom for its destruction; (4) Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah to prepare the southern kingdom for its destruction; (5) Ezekiel and Daniel to help the distraught exiles.

### THE MERCY OF A HARSH WORD

Predictions of doom also implicitly provided hope if the nation would repent. Even if the judgment seemed certain, repentance would stay God's hand. One example: Jonah prophesied "forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned"; the Ninevites repented and were spared (3:10). In many

cases, God knew the nation was too committed to its sin to repent and thus he could safely predict impending judgment. But it must be recognized that in sending prophets of judgment, the Lord was displaying mercy to his covenant people.

### INDIVIDUAL OR CORPORATE?

The message of the prophets applied to the nation, not to individuals directly. The nation would be judged if the nation did not repent. Individuals might repent, but unless the nation as a whole repented, all would still be judged. There was always a righteous remnant, but these suffered along with the nation. For example, the prophet Obadiah suffered in the days of Ahab when Elijah commanded was a drought for three years; Ezekiel and Daniel were deported to Babylon along with others.

### THE PROPHETS AND THE COVENANTS

The prophets make a lot more sense when read in light of God's covenants with his people. Because God made an unconditional promise to **Abraham** to give his descendants the land of Canaan and to bless the world through him, we can understand why the prophets predicted Israel's restoration. Because God promised **David** that he would have a son to rule forever over Israel, we should not be surprised to hear predictions of a future righteous ruler. Prophecies related to the Abraham and Davidic covenants are positive in nature and will be studied at a later time.

The majority of the prophets' messages related to the **Mosaic covenant**. When God bound himself to the nation in this covenant, he promised blessings for obedience and curses for disloyalty (Deut 27-28). When the prophets speak of the nation's sin, they are calling the nation to obey the laws of the Mosaic covenant. When the prophets predict judgment and exile, they are declaring that God will be faithful to punish disobedience as he promised.

The prophets addressed national disobedience to the **two greatest commandments**: love for God and love for neighbor. One way to read the prophets would be to classify each violation according to the Ten Commandments. Israel worshiped other gods (#1), fashioned worthless idols (#2), profaned God's name among the nations (#3), refused to keep the Sabbath (#4), and perpetuated great evils against their own brothers (#5-10). Some prophets are more concerned with unfaithfulness to God (like Hosea) and others are more focused on social injustice (like Amos). But the two went together; if the nation was guilty in one, they were guilty in the other.

Though the Lord is "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness," the nation refused his mercy and denied his kingship. Just as the Lord predicted, the nation would be deported from the land, but in the same breath God declared that (on the basis of his promises) they would be restored (Deut 29-30).

### PROPHETS AND KINGS

The role of the king was to represent God to the people and the people to God. The king was specifically to lead the nation in obedience to the covenant. For that reason he was commanded to copy, carry, read, and obey the covenant (Deut 17). When the king was faithful, he led the nation to obey by (1) calling the nation to repentance; (2) modeling covenant obedience; and (3) destroying

the idolatrous worship sites. When the king was unfaithful, God sent prophets to rebuke and restore him.

Sometimes the king heeded the prophet's words and the nation was blessed (like Rehoboam who repented before the prophet Shemaiah in 2 Chr 12). Sometimes the king ignored the prophet (Ahab in 1 Kgs 22), imprisoned the prophet (Asa in 2 Chr 16), and even murdered the prophet (Jehoiakim in Jer 26). According to tradition, Manasseh had Isaiah sawn in two (cf. Heb 11:37). Some prophets were false prophets who spoke what the king and people wanted to hear and not what God commanded (Hananiah predicted return from exile within two years; Jeremiah responded that Hananiah would die that same year; Jer 28).

### **PROPHETIC OBJECT LESSONS**

The Lord desperately wanted to get his people's attention so that they could avoid the horrors of exile. Sometimes he had the prophets write songs (Isa 5), prepare legal briefs (Micah 6), and inscribe prayers (Hab 3). Sometimes the prophets had to act out some strange scenarios, such as burying a loincloth (Jer 13), lying on one's side for a year (Ezek 4), and going around stripped and barefoot for three years (Isa 20). The commands could be quite personal: Jeremiah was forbidden to marry (Jer 16), Hosea was told to marry a harlot (Hos 1), and Ezekiel was forbidden to mourn when his wife died (Ezek 24). Through these unusual and sometimes extreme actions, God used the prophets to communicate to his people the range of his deep emotions.

### **GOING FURTHER**

Given that the prophets are calling Israel back to the Mosaic covenant and we in the church are not Israel nor party to their covenant, how are the messages of the prophets relevant for us?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read some of the oracles against foreign nations, such as Isa 13–23, Jer 46–51, Ezek 25–32, Nahum, and Obadiah. Think about who the audience is and what the purpose is. Why is this so important?

## STUDY #20: THE NATIONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read some of the oracles against foreign nations, such as Isa 13–23, Jer 46–51, Ezek 25–32, Nahum, and Obadiah. Think about whom the audience is and what the purpose is. Why is this so important?

### GENTILES AND THE NATIONS: A WORD OF DEFINITION

In the OT, Gentiles=nations. The word *goy* can be translated as either nation or Gentile. In English, Gentiles are all those outside of ethnic descent from Jacob. The nations are all those outside of the political state of Israel.

### PURPOSES OF THE ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS

Oracles against the nations are found in Isa 13-23; Jer 46-51; Ezek 25-32; Amos 1-2; Obad; Nahum; Zeph 2.

1. For Israel, to warn the people against joining with the nations opposed to God. To dissuade Israel from making alliances by revealing the destiny of the nations.
2. For the nations, to inform them of the coming judgment and thereby encourage them to repent and follow the Lord. To rebuke them for cursing Israel and proclaim the destiny of those who do.
3. For all, to demonstrate God's sovereignty over all nations, particularly in a day in which people believed that each nation had its own god and the Lord was only the God of Israel. All nations are accountable to their Creator.

### OT BOOKS ABOUT THE NATIONS

The message of **Obadiah**, an oracle against Edom: The nations that exalt themselves against the Lord and his people will be destroyed, but Israel will be restored and blessed abundantly.

The message of **Nahum**, an oracle against Assyria: The destruction of God's enemies is demanded by his character and results in the deliverance of his people.

The message of **Zephaniah**: The Day of the Lord will bring God's judgment upon all nations and restoration of a purified remnant.

The message of **Daniel** (4 kingdoms of man): The Lord's sovereignty is revealed in his present protection of his people and humbling of the nation's kings, and it will ultimately be displayed in his foreordained destruction of the defiant nations and the establishment of his kingdom on earth.

### HEART, NOT SKIN

Even in the Old Testament, the important issue in one's standing before God was not one's ethnicity. One could be a Canaanite and accepted by God as was Rahab. By contrast, one could be an Israelite and by virtue of allying with the nations, be cursed by God. Achan is such an example, for

he preferred the treasures of the world more than submission to God's word. Thus in the battle of Jericho, one Canaanite (and family) was saved and one Israelite (and family) was cursed.

### **GOD'S GRACE TO GENTILES**

Occasionally in the OT, God provided deliverance to a Gentile but not an Israelite. Elijah provided food for the widow and son in Zarephath (near Sidon) though people in Israel were dying (1 Kgs 17). God healed the Aramean commander Naaman of leprosy but not Israelites (2 Kgs 5). When Jesus pointed out God's grace to the nations in a sermon in Nazareth, the people tried to kill him (Luke 4).

God can be gracious to the nations because he is sovereign; sometimes he is gracious to them because of Israel's unfaithfulness. In Jonah's day, the Lord sent the prophet to preach repentance to Nineveh with the result that the Ninevites came and destroyed wicked Israel. In Jesus' day, the Lord sent his apostles to make disciples among the nations because of Israel's rejection.

### **GOD'S PLAN FOR THE NATIONS**

God created all mankind to serve and worship him in ruling over his creation on earth. When man rebelled, God planned to restore all peoples to himself through crushing the serpent. Yet man often followed the serpent, beginning with Cain and then those unrighteous destroyed by the flood and then the nations who defied God at Babel. God chose Abraham to bless "all peoples on earth" and those who bless Abraham and his seed will be blessed. Many have chosen to live in enmity with God and his people, including Ishmael who mocked and fathered the Arab peoples, Esau who despised God's promise and fathered the Edomites, the Egyptians who enslaved God's people, and the Canaanites who filled the cup of iniquity to its full measure.

God desires to save the nations and will do so through Abraham and his seed. Those who blessed Abraham's seed and submitted to God were blessed, including Rahab, Ruth, and many of David's men (e.g., Uriah the Hittite). Nations who fight against God's chosen will be destroyed (Ps 2), though God can use them as a tool in his hand to discipline his people before he executes judgment on them (Isa 10; Hab 2). Nations who submit to God will be blessed and will enjoy God's kingdom on earth. God's intention to bless the nations will be accomplished; many oracles of the prophets anticipate this day.

In the New Testament, the Messiah comes to the people of Israel but is rejected. In response, Jesus commands the good news to be taken to the nations in order that God might form a body of believers under Christ's headship. The church will constitute God's people and receive God's blessing in order that the chosen nation of Israel will be provoked to jealousy by God's work among the nations. Ultimately God will establish his kingdom on earth in which Israel receives the promised blessings and the nations marvel at God's faithfulness.

### **THE HOPE OF THE NATIONS**

The nations are commanded to repent of their sins and to follow the God of Israel. Jonah preaches and the Ninevehites respond (Jonah 3:10; 4:11). Rahab and Ruth are two foreigners who submit to God and join Israel. Others include Tamar, Uriah, and Naaman. The example of the Syro-phenician woman is an excellent model of how the nations should humbly submit (Matt 16:21-28).



The nations have the hope of future glory when they submit to God. One day Egypt will be a place where Hebrew is spoken and God is worshiped (Isa 19). Nations will be attracted to God's glory in Jerusalem and will bring their extravagant gifts as offerings (Isa 60). The Israelites will proclaim God's glory among the nations and bring their brothers as an offering to the Lord (Isa 66). When God establishes his kingdom on earth, the nations will go up every year to worship the Lord and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech 14:16). People from the whole world will travel to Zion to be taught and judged by God (Isa 2).

The Servant of Israel was to be a "light to the nations" (Isa 42:6) to bring God's "salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6). Kings will bow down to the Servant who was despised by Israel (Isa 49:7). The Servant will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him (Isa 52:15). The Lord will not exclude from his kingdom the foreigner who has bound himself to the Lord (Isa 56:3, 6-7).

The nations' submission to the Jewish Messiah is foreshadowed in the visit of the Magi to the newborn Jesus. Compare Matt 2 with Isa 60. See also Hag 2:7; Zech 14:14; Mal 1:11; Ps 72:10.

### **GOING FURTHER**

Consider why God worked this way with the nations. You might read Rev 5:9; 7:9; 15:4; 21:24.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read passages about God's promises to establish his kingdom on earth, including Isa 2:1-5; 11; 25; 65:17-25; Jer 33:14-26; Ezek 36; Dan 2, 7; Amos 9:11-15; Joel 3; Zeph 3; Hag 2; Zech 8; 14; Mal 4. What do these mean? What is the time of their fulfillment?

## STUDY #21: THE KINGDOM REVEALED IN THE PROPHETS (EXPANDED)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read passages about God's promises to establish his kingdom on earth, including Isa 2:1-5; 11; 25; 65:17-25; Jer 33:14-26; Ezek 36; Dan 2, 7; Amos 9:11-15; Joel 3; Zeph 3; Hag 2; Zech 8; 14; Mal 4. What do these mean? What is the time of their fulfillment?

### WHAT IS THE KINGDOM?

The kingdom is God's rule over the earth and its people through his Messiah. The kingdom consists of a ruler, a reign, and a realm. Our expectation for the future fulfillment of this is based on the past fulfillment: **Adam** was a physically present ruler exercising dominion (reign) over the earth (realm). **David** was a physically present ruler exercising dominion over the nation of Israel. The kingdom does not now exist, as **Jesus** is not physically present on earth and he is not exercising his reign over any portion of this earth. While he has subjects who are submitted to him, this is insufficient to constitute a fulfillment of the promises in Scripture of God's kingdom on earth.

### THE KINGDOM AND THE COVENANTS

The hope of the prophets was based in the conviction that God would re-establish Eden on earth as promised in the **Abrahamic covenant** of blessings to all people (Gen 12, 15, 17, 22) and the **Davidic covenant** of a righteous son of David ruling over God's kingdom forever providing the people with lasting peace (2 Sam 7). David himself knew that he was not this righteous ruler, and he wrote **psalms** about this king and his glorious kingdom. In the kingdom, the Lord's Messiah would rule forever, the enemies would be subdued, the weak would be delivered, all the earth would be subject to God, and the land would flourish (Ps 2, 8, 45, 47, 72, 110).

### GENESIS 1-2: GOD'S KINGDOM ON EARTH

The kingdom is not called such in **Genesis 1-2**. The "kingdom" is simply creation as God intended it. Thus there are no prophecies or looking forward to anything better, because the best thing existed. But after the Fall, the hope of all righteous people will be a return to the situation in the Garden of Eden: God dwelling in fellowship with his people who rule over a good creation that is not under the Curse.

### THE PENTATEUCH: THE FIRST KINGDOM PROMISES

Through the **Pentateuch**, the hopes for the kingdom anticipate the settlement of Israel in the land promised to Abraham. God's people are not looking beyond that time for they expect that the conquest of Canaan will result in the fulfillment of all of God's promises. God had promised to make Abraham's descendants numerous (Gen 15:5), to give them the land of Canaan with kings ruling over it (Gen 17:6-8), and to provide a seed (a single descendant) through whom all nations on earth would be blessed (Gen 22:18). Judah would be the tribe of kings until one would come who deserved the throne and the obedience of nations (Gen 49:10). He would rule in idyllic conditions of peace and prosperity (Gen 49:11-12). In this kingdom, God would dwell with his people in the tabernacle

(Exod 40). The enemies of God would be defeated by Israel's great king who would live in obedience to God's Word (Num 24:17-19).

### JOSHUA, DAVID, AND SOLOMON: GOD'S KINGDOM UNREALIZED

When God brought Israel into the land of Canaan under **Joshua's** leadership, there was the expectation that God would restore the kingdom and the promises would be fulfilled. Indeed, many promises were fulfilled, for the nation had increased in number and were living in a land where they had once been strangers. But the kingdom didn't come (= Eden wasn't restored; =the promises weren't all fulfilled) because the people were not faithful to God: they failed to subdue the land from the remaining Canaanites and they began to worship idols (Judg 1-2). One cause of the failure was the lack of righteous leadership and so God provided Saul and then David. But even **David** failed to obey God's Word and so the glorious kingdom that Solomon inherited was soon a fading glimmer. God now lived among his people in the magnificent temple, but the king led the nation in worshiping false gods (1 Kgs 11).

### AMOS: JUDGMENT AND HOPE

With the **division of the kingdom** and the increasing waywardness of the people, the **prophets** began to predict the nation's exile. But it is important to note that with predictions of exile came predictions of a glorious future era. **Amos** knew the people were guilty of gross sin, but he knew that the faithfulness of God would overcome that and restore the people to a land which would be abundantly prosperous and a blessing to all nations (Amos 9:11-15).

### MICAH AND ISAIAH: MT. ZION DESTROYED AND EXALTED

After Amos, two other **8th-century prophets** expand on the kingdom promises. **Micah** looks forward to a righteous king shepherding God's flock in security over all the earth while many nations journey to Jerusalem to learn at the temple (Micah 4-5).

**Isaiah's** message of Israel's sin and certain exile is accompanied with glorious promises of the future king and his kingdom. David's son will rule in righteousness (9) over a land in which the curse is removed and the earth is as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea is full of water (11). The poor and needy will find refuge and a rich banquet with the finest of foods. Death will be swallowed up, tears will be wiped away, and disgrace will be removed (25). The dead will be raised, the wicked will be judged, idolatry will cease, and Israel will fill the world with fruit (26-27). The king will reign in righteousness, the Spirit will be poured out from on high, and the people will live in blissful peace (32). The people will see the king in his beauty and their sins will be forgiven (33). The desert will burst forth with life, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap, and the ransomed will enter Zion with everlasting joy (35). After the death and resurrection of the Servant (53), the people will be restored to their land and experience the everlasting compassion of God, living in a city built with precious stones (54). The kingdom will be open to foreigners and outcasts who submit to the Lord (56). The wealth of the world will pour into Jerusalem, the gates of the city will never be shut, and God himself will replace the sun and moon (60). Righteous Israel will be the praise of the earth and the Lord will delight in his people (62). God will create a new heavens and a new earth in which the one who dies at 100 will be considered a mere youth (65-66).

## JOEL AND ZEPHANIAH: THE DAY OF THE LORD

The longing for the kingdom continues with the **7th-century prophets** who are now anticipating imminent exile to Babylon. **Joel** graphically describes the Day of the Lord and calls the nation to repent so that the enemies will be driven away, the harvest will be restored, and the people will know that the Lord is God (Joel 2). God will judge the nations who fight against him but be a refuge for those who seek him. Judah will be inhabited forever and Judah's bloodguilt will be pardoned (Joel 3). **Zephaniah** also emphasizes the coming Day of the Lord as incentive to seek the Lord and be protected from his anger when he pours it out on the nations. At that time God will restore the exiles, forgive his people, live among them, and take delight in his people.

## OBADIAH, JEREMIAH, AND EZEKIEL: RESTORATION TO THE LAND

Three prophets provide hope in the days of Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians. **Obadiah** gives the short version: those who have cursed Israel will themselves be cursed and God's people will return to inhabit their land and that of their enemies. **Jeremiah's** message is largely one of condemnation as he declares the nation's sin that is worthy of exile. He sounds three notes of hope: (1) the exile will last 70 years (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10); (2) God will raise up a "righteous Branch," that is, a king who will reign wisely and be called "The Lord Our Righteousness" (Jer 23:5-6); (3) the Old Covenant that the Israelites failed to keep would be replaced by the New Covenant (Jer 30-33).

Because **Ezekiel's** message is directed to those already in Babylon in exile (upon whom judgment had already come), it contains a large dose of hope. The land that was lost will be regained. The people who were deported will be re-gathered. The temple that was destroyed will be rebuilt. God promises to shepherd his people and to provide for them a shepherd, God's servant David (Ezek 33:23-24). God will give his people a new heart and put his Spirit within them (Ezek 36:26-27). The twelve tribes will be reunited and will live under one king with God dwelling with them forever (Ezek 37). The extraordinary detail of the new temple, the restored priesthood, the re-apportioned land, and the transformed earth (fish in the Dead Sea!) requires that these prophecies be fulfilled in a literal manner (Ezek 40-48).

## DANIEL: THE TIMING OF THE KINGDOM

**Daniel** addresses the nation that is in exile and longing for return. His particular contribution is with regard to the *timing* of God's kingdom, first revealing that four kingdoms would precede the establishment of God's kingdom. Before the exile, the Israelites expected that God would establish his kingdom on earth at any time with a righteous ruler from the house of David. Then they expected that God would establish the kingdom after the 70 years of exile. But God revealed through Daniel that the exile would last not 70 years but 70 sevens of years (weeks of years). Thus we have two chronological markers for the coming of God's kingdom: after the fourth kingdom (Dan 2, 7) and at the end of 70 sevens (Dan 9).

## RELATED STUDIES

Future studies are necessary to fill in and add new details. (1) Next week we will study the **New Covenant** and its role in the kingdom. (2) The following week we will study the **post-exilic period** (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther) and prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) to see how they explain

why God's kingdom did not arrive after the 70 years of exile in Babylon. Then we will see how John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles speak about God's coming kingdom.

### **GOING FURTHER**

As you re-read the prophets, consider whether it seems possible that God's promises would not be fulfilled to Israel. Is it possible that they could be fulfilled to the church instead?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Jeremiah 30-33 and think carefully about what the New Covenant is and is not. Do not allow the New Testament to influence your thinking at this point.

## STUDY #22: THE NEW COVENANT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Jer 30-33 and think carefully about what the New Covenant is and is not. Do not allow the NT to influence your thinking at this point.

### THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

To understand the “New” Covenant, one must understand the covenants that came before. In the Abrahamic Covenant, the Lord outlined a plan in which he would bless the world through one man and his seed living in the land God gave to them. Abraham believed God would do what he said and his faith was credited to him as righteousness (Gen 12, 15, 17).

### THE MOSAIC COVENANT

God redeemed Abraham’s seed from slavery in Egypt and brought the nation to Mount Sinai where they entered a covenant relationship. God promised that if the Israelites obeyed his commandments, they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The Mosaic covenant was essentially an *administrative* covenant by which God would fulfill the Abrahamic covenant. That is, God would do what he said in the Abrahamic covenant (bless, multiply, and give land) through the mechanism of the Mosaic Covenant. Israel would inhabit the land if they were obedient, they would have numerous descendants if they followed God’s law, and they would bless the on-coming world who would marvel at a people who had a God so near.

### THE NEED FOR A NEW COVENANT

Moses knew before he died that the Mosaic Covenant was “old.” He knew that it could not last, not because God’s law was faulty but because the hearts of the people were sinful. Moses explains this in Deut 29–30, predicting that the people will abandon the covenant and experience the curses of the covenant. When the nations come and ask why Israel has become like Sodom and Gomorrah, they will be told, “It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD . . . They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them . . . Therefore the LORD’s anger burned against this land, so that he brought on it all the curses written in this book. . . and in great wrath the LORD uprooted them from their land” (Deut 29:25-28).

Moses knew this will happen, writing “when” (not “if”): “*When* all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, and *when* you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart . . . , *then* the LORD . . . will restore your fortunes” (Deut 30:1-3).

Moses describes what God will do at this time: (1) He will bring the Israelites back, even from the most distant land; (2) He will again give Israel the land promised to Abraham; (3) He will make the Israelites more prosperous and numerous than their fathers; (4) He will circumcise their hearts “so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live”; (5) He will curse those who curse Israel; and (6) He will bless the people (Deut 30:4-10).

## THE CIRCUMCISED HEART IN THE MOSAIC COVENANT

The Lord commanded the Israelites to “circumcise your hearts and do not be stiff-necked any longer” (Deut 10:16). The Israelites entered the Abrahamic covenant by physical circumcision; by this cutting of the flesh, the newborn became part of God’s people. But one could be circumcised and yet despise God and his promises (e.g., Ishmael and Esau). Another circumcision was necessary, and the Lord commanded that each person be *spiritually* circumcised. The physical removal of the foreskin symbolized the need to remove the stony, stubborn exterior of the heart. The Mosaic Covenant *commanded* circumcision of the heart, but it did not provide it automatically. As a result, some Israelites would not have regenerated hearts and they would not be able to keep God’s law. Thus the covenant would be broken and the people exiled. Moses predicts the day when “the LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants” (Deut 30:6).

## THE CONTEXT OF JEREMIAH

The books of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah are “bookends” to the history of the nation of Israel. Deuteronomy commands obedience and Jeremiah shows how the nation failed to obey and would be exiled. The book of Jeremiah is primarily about the Old Covenant and how God was faithful to punish the people just as Moses had predicted in Deut 29.

## THE NEW COVENANT IN JEREMIAH

But Jeremiah also knew of the promise of transformation in Deut 30, and in the so-called “Book of the Consolation” (Jer 30–33) he expanded on these predictions:

1. The Lord will restore Israel from captivity (30:1-4).
2. The Lord will deliver Israel to serve the Lord and David their king (30:5-11).
3. Israel’s incurable wound requires punishment, but the Lord will cure the wound (30:12-17).
4. The Lord will restore the relationship with his people (30:18-24).
5. The Lord will show tender compassion to his people (31:1-6).
6. The Lord will bring the remnant back from the ends of the earth to enjoy their land (31:7-14).
7. The Lord assures his people that there is hope for the future (31:15-22).
8. The Lord will plant his people in their land (31:23-30).
9. The Lord will make a new covenant with his people (31:31-34).
10. The Lord guarantees Israel’s future as long as the sun rises (31:35-37).
11. Jerusalem will be restored and never again destroyed (31:38-40).

One of the features of the restoration is the New Covenant (#9 above). This New Covenant is given in a context of the restoration and blessing of Israel. The features of the New Covenant include:

1. The Parties: The house of Israel and the house of Judah (v31)
2. Distinct: It will not be like the Mosaic Covenant which Israel broke (v32)
3. Internal Law: The law will be written on their hearts (v33a)
4. Faithfulness: They will be God’s people (v33b)
5. Knowledge of the Lord: They will all know God (v34a)
6. Forgiveness: The Lord will forgive their wickedness (v34b)
7. Preservation: The Lord will surely protect Israel forever (vv35-37)

8. Physical Context: These blessings will be realized in the same city once destroyed (vv38-40). God commands Jeremiah to purchase a plot of land as evidence that they will return to this same place (ch. 32).

These promises are summarized in 32:37-41 where God promises to hand the Israelites over to Babylon but also to bring them back to the land of Israel where he will give them singleness of heart so that they will always fear God. God will make an everlasting covenant with them and never stop doing good to them. In chapter 33, the Lord declares that he will heal the people and the land so that Jerusalem “will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it” (33:9). The Lord will send a righteous king from the house of David and the Lord will be the people’s righteousness (33:15-16). Just as the rainbow is a visible sign of God’s promise not to destroy the earth, so the shining of the sun, moon and stars is a visible sign that God has not rejected his people (31:35-37; 33:25-26).

### **THE NEW COVENANT IN OTHER PROPHETS**

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah, but he spoke to those already in exile. His words in chapter 36 are similar: God will judge Israel and disperse them among the nations, but for his own sake God will bring honor to his name among the nations by regathering Israel to its land, cleansing the people, giving them a new heart, and putting his Spirit in them so that they will keep God’s laws. He will bless their obedience with abundant prosperity so that the land becomes like the Garden of Eden. The term “new covenant” is not used but the description matches what Moses and Jeremiah predicted.

As is clear from Deut, Jer, and Ezekiel, the restoration of God’s people so that they can fulfill his law and be blessed abundantly depends upon a transformed heart. Though it is not always explicitly mentioned, every passage that describes God’s delight in his people and his glory being put on display to all the nations presumes the existence of the New Covenant (e.g., Isa 54-55; 60-62; Zeph 3:14-20; Hag 2:19; Zech 8-14; Mal 3-4).

### **THE NEW COVENANT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The New Covenant is addressed by Jesus, Paul, and Hebrews without any explanation or redefinition. It is to be assumed that they were speaking about the New Covenant as described in the OT. Any interpretation which ignores or denies God’s promises in the OT is to be rejected.

### **THE SEED OF ABRAHAM AND SON OF DAVID FULFILLS THE OLD (MOSAIC) COVENANT AND ESTABLISHES THE NEW COVENANT**

The New Covenant replaces the Mosaic Covenant and is the means by which God fulfills his promises made to Abraham and David. The New Testament will clearly reveal that it is the awaited son of David who will make possible the forgiveness promised in the New Covenant by offering himself as the sacrifice for the people’s sin. Having given his life for the nation, he will be the ideal ruler to shepherd God’s people. Jesus thus enables (and becomes) God’s fulfillment of all of the covenants.



## **GOING FURTHER**

Are God's promises in the New Covenant being fulfilled today?

## **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Ezra 9–10, Neh 13, Esther 8–9, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Consider: were God's promises to Israel fulfilled upon the return from exile? Why not? What's next?

## STUDY #23: RETURN FROM EXILE, BUT NO KINGDOM

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Ezra 9–10, Nehemiah 13, Esther 8–9, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Consider: were God’s promises to Israel fulfilled upon the return from exile? Why not? What’s next?

### BACKGROUND

Jerusalem was destroyed and the Israelites carried into exile in 586 BC. Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied to the Israelites in Babylon revealing in greater specificity God’s glorious plans for the future. When Persia conquered Babylon, Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return (in fulfillment of Isa 44–45).

### SUMMARY OF POST-EXILIC HISTORY

538 BC	First return, temple foundation laid	Ezra 1–4
516 BC	Temple finally completed	Ezra 5–6; Haggai, Zechariah
480 BC	Israelites guilty of many sins	Malachi
474 BC	Haman plots to kill the Jews	Esther
458 BC	Ezra leads return and discovers intermarriage	Ezra 7–10
445 BC	Nehemiah returns to rebuild Jerusalem and lead people in repentance	Nehemiah

### THE BOOK OF EZRA

In chapters 1–6, the first exiles return to Jerusalem and lay the foundation of the temple. But they are defeated by opposition and the temple isn’t finished until God sends Haggai and Zechariah to motivate them. This is indeed a disappointing return: (1) for 20 years there is no temple; (2) then the temple is a faint echo of the glory of the former one; (3) the Israelites are subject to the Persians; (4) there is no son of David sitting on the throne; (5) the deliverance from Babylon is quite unlike the miraculous exodus from Egypt. Why are God’s promises of a glorious return not fulfilled?

The second half of Ezra (chs. 7–10) skips forward 60 years to the time when Ezra the priest leads another group of exiles back to Jerusalem. There Ezra is dismayed to learn that those living in Judah have intermarried with idolatrous foreigners. Ezra leads the people in repentance and sending away the foreign wives so that a God-worshiping remnant would be preserved. Key verses: 3:12; 4:24; 5:5; 6:12; 6:22; 7:10; 7:23; 9:2, 13–15; 10:2.

### THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

The Jews in Jerusalem are plagued by curses that were sent by God because of their disobedience (ch. 1). When the people obey and build the (unimpressive) temple, the Lord promises a glorious future (ch. 2), including (1) a temple full of the glory of God and the wealth of the nations; (2) an

obedient people worthy of blessing; and (3) defeat of the nations and the establishment of a son of David on Israel's throne. Key verses: 1:9; 2:9; 2:23.

### **THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH**

A contemporary of Haggai, the prophet Zechariah developed at greater length God's future blessings for an obedient remnant. In a series of 8 visions (chs. 1–6), the prophet saw God's plan to defeat the nations, remove wickedness from the land, rebuild Jerusalem, and raise up a priest-king to rebuild the temple and rule over the nations. These visions of the future should compel present obedience demonstrated in social justice and courageous faith (chs. 7–8). Zechariah concludes with two oracles in which a complicated future is predicted: Israel's king will come on a donkey but be rejected with thirty pieces of silver (chs. 9–11). Israel will grieve bitterly for the one they have pierced so that a fountain of forgiveness will be opened to cleanse them from their sin (chs. 12–13). The nations will rise up to destroy Jerusalem but the Lord will descend to the Mount of Olives to protect his city and become king over the whole earth. Jerusalem will be secure for all time and the survivors of the nations will go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty (ch. 14). Key verses: 1:3–6; 2:10; 6:12–13; 8:3; 14:9.

### **THE BOOK OF MALACHI**

The glorious promises of Haggai and Zechariah do not motivate the people to single-minded faithfulness and when the prophet Malachi arises (480 BC?), the priests are corrupt, the people are intermarrying idolatrous foreigners, and the covenant is ignored. Malachi calls the people to repentance and obedience and he warns them of God's coming judgment which will be heralded by a messenger like Elijah. Key verses: 1:10–11; 2:2; 3:1; 3:12.

### **THE BOOK OF ESTHER**

In a book that is something of a “meanwhile back on the ranch (of exile in Persia) account,” the book of Esther reveals the grave dangers that exist for the Jewish people living outside of Israel among the nations. When Haman attempts to exterminate the Jews, the Lord delivers them entirely by “natural” (providential) means without a single miracle (suspension of the natural order). The name of the Lord is intentionally never mentioned in order to show just how God is quietly at work preserving his people and his promises against the schemes of the “seed of the serpent.” Key verses: 4:14; 6:13; 9:24–25.

### **THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH**

That the Jew Nehemiah occupied a high position in the Persian government and enjoyed the favor of the king shows the possibility of Israel thriving while under subjection. Yet the city of Jerusalem still lies in ruins, with its modest temple unprotected by a defensive city wall. Nehemiah is filled with shame for the deplorable condition of the city where David ruled, God dwelled, and his ancestors were buried. His return shows that faithfulness to God results in blessing, but hostile opposition is close at hand (chs. 1–6). With the godly leaders of the priest Ezra and the governor Nehemiah, the people confess their sins and devote themselves to the covenant (chs. 8–10). They celebrate the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls (ch. 12), but when Nehemiah returns from a trip to

Persia, he is dismayed to see the people have returned to covenant unfaithfulness (ch. 13). Key verses: 1:3, 7; 2:17; 4:2; 5:8; 6:16; 8:18; 9:36-37; 10:29; 12:43; 13:18.

### **THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES**

Those who think that 1–2 Chronicles is just a repeat of 1–2 Kings fail to see the pronounced differences that reflect the different audiences of each work. Kings was written to a nation in exile to explain why they deserved such punishment. Chronicles was written to a remnant who had returned to explain God’s covenant promises to David with its implications for a future Davidic king and glorious house of God in Jerusalem. The writer emphasized that the enjoyment of covenant blessings required faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant. Key verses: 1 Chr 17:11-12; 2 Chr 6:14; 7:14; 15:15.

### **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

Though a small portion of the Israelites returned from exile in Babylon, God’s glorious promises given through Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets were not fulfilled. The temple was slow to be built, Jerusalem long lay in ruins, and the nations were a persistent threat to Israel’s survival. The Israelites were surely not living in the promised kingdom with the new David on the throne, ruling over the nations, with every man sitting under his own vine and fig tree. The prophets explained that the bleak situation (1) did not indicate that God would not fulfill all of his promises and (2) was the result of the people’s persistent unfaithfulness to the covenant. They also explained that judgment would come before the Lord established his kingdom on earth with a pierced Messiah sitting on the throne.

### **GOING FURTHER**

Trace throughout the post-exilic books just how the people were being prepared for the Messiah.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read and savor Matthew 1-7. How does the OT inform our interpretation of Jesus’ birth, the visit of the Magi, the message of John, the temptation, the announcement of Jesus, and the Sermon on the Mount?

## STUDY #24: THE ARRIVAL OF THE KING (MATT 1-4)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read and savor Matthew 1-4. How does the OT inform our interpretation of Jesus' birth, the visit of the Magi, the message of John, the temptation, and the announcement of Jesus?

### THE KING'S LINEAGE (MATT 1:1-17)

The first verses of the NT alert the reader to a crucial fact: you're not going to understand a lot of the NT if you don't understand the OT. The NT was written to those who loved the OT. Jesus came to those who were *longing* for him, to a nation who had endured God's silence for 400 years but were confident that he was faithful.

What is to some of us a boring list of long names was a precious record to God's remnant. These names proved that David was a son of Abraham, and thus heir to the glorious promises God made to Abraham. These names proved that Jesus was the *son of David* and the *son of Abraham* and thus heir to both covenants. The list from David to Jeconiah names Israel's kings until the exile. The list from Jeconiah to Joseph names those who would have been Israel's kings if the nation did not remain in exile—without national sovereignty and spiritually separated from God. Matthew repeats the crucial elements of the list: Abraham, David, exile, and Jesus the Messiah.

### THE KING'S BIRTH (MATT 1:18-25)

Throughout the OT, God loved to display his glory in extraordinary births: a 90-year-old Sarah gives birth to Isaac, a barren Hannah gives birth to Samuel, and others. But here God exceeds all: a woman conceives without the seed of a man. Only one child in the history of the universe would be born in such a miraculous way, and he is appropriately called Immanuel—God with us. He is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: a virgin of the royal house would conceive and give birth to a child who would not enjoy palace fare but would eat a subsistence diet (curds and honey) because the land had been overrun by the enemy (Isa 7). But this child would be the king on David's throne, ruling forever in righteousness (Isa 9). He is the Prince of Peace, but he would bring peace by bearing the punishment of his people to save them from their sins (Isa 53). For this reason he was to be named Jesus, which means salvation.

### THE KING HONORED (MATT 2:1-12)

Micah predicted that the new shepherd that God would raise up for Israel would be born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:1-5). David's descendants (mostly unrighteous kings) were born in the capital city of Jerusalem, but the new David would be a fresh start (Isa 11:1), born in the same city as the one promised an eternal dynasty.

The OT predicted that when God established his kingdom on earth, the nations would bring their wealth to it (Isa 60). This begins with the visit of the Magi who bring the most valuable gifts of the day: gold and frankincense. Myrrh was useful for anointing the dead; it was entirely appropriate for the king who would die for his people. To those familiar with the OT, the identity of Jesus as the awaited king who would be rejected by his people is already clear.

### **THE KING DELIVERED FROM “PHARAOH” (MATT 2:13-18)**

Just as Israel was persecuted by the nations, so Jesus was persecuted by God’s enemies. Pharaoh killed the male Israelite infants to thwart the fulfillment of God’s promises and Herod killed the male Israelite infants to destroy God’s anointed king. Just as God delivered Israel, his firstborn son, from Pharaoh, he saved Jesus, his firstborn son, from an oppressive king (Exod 4:22). Though the land wept with the slaughter of the innocent children, Matthew’s quotation of Rachel weeping comes from a context of hope: after the death of the children, God will bring comfort, return from exile, and a new covenant (Jer 31:15-37).

### **THE KING’S DESPISED RESIDENCE (MATT 2:19-23)**

Jesus was not raised in Bethlehem or Jerusalem where one would expect the son of David and heir to the throne to grow up. Matthew explains that this is because the rule of Herod’s son threatened the life of the legitimate king. Thus Joseph took Jesus to a despised town in Galilee. Today we think highly of Galilee because of the NT, but before Jesus, all the great Israelites came from Judah and Ephraim. The tribes in Galilee were distant and without honor. But the prophets had predicted that the Messiah would be despised and scorned and this is fulfilled in Jesus’ move to Nazareth (Ps 22:6-8; Isa 49:7; 53:2-3).

### **THE KING ANNOUNCED (MATT 3:1-12)**

Isaiah and Malachi predicted that the Lord’s coming to establish his kingdom would be heralded by a messenger (Isa 40:3-5; Mal 3:1-5; 4:1-6). Since God’s righteous kingdom would require purification of the earth from God’s enemies, the message of the Messiah’s forerunner was one of repentance. If the people did not get right with God, they would be consumed by the fire of God’s judgment. John the Baptist was the new Elijah who challenged Israel’s idolatry and called on all to “repent, for the kingdom of God is near.” The kingdom was near because the king was about to appear.

### **THE KING IDENTIFIED BY GOD (MATT 3:13-17)**

In being baptized by John, Jesus identified with John’s message. (To have avoided it could have suggested they were not united in purpose and teaching.) When the Father spoke from heaven, his words identified Jesus as his royal son (Ps 2), the servant in whom he delighted (Isa 42:1), and his beloved son who would be sacrificed (Gen 22:2). The Father’s words underscore Jesus’ identity in Matt 1:1: Jesus is the son of David, the son of Abraham. He would succeed where David’s son failed; he would be sacrificed as Abraham’s son was not.

### **THE KING TEMPTED BY SATAN (MATT 4:1-11)**

Jesus came as the new Adam to reverse sin’s grip on humanity, and he was himself “Israel,” God’s chosen servant to restore Israel and be a light to the Gentiles (Isa 49:5-6). Thus to show that he was greater than Adam or Israel, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the serpent. His temptation was greater than that of Adam (who quickly succumbed in the *garden*) or of Israel (who was not weak with hunger after 40 days of fasting). Yet he triumphed over Satan and the greatest of all temptations by faith in God’s word. Jesus was shown worthy to be God’s regent on earth and the blameless Servant who could die for the sin of his people.

## **THE KING ANNOUNCES THE KINGDOM (MATT 4:12-25)**

The fact that the Messiah would announce the kingdom in Galilee and not in Judah or Jerusalem would be unexpected were it not for Isaiah's prophecy that the land of the northern tribes, first to be carried off into exile, would be the first to see the great light of the Messiah (Isa 9:1-7). Jesus' message was exactly the same as that of the forerunner: the kingdom was coming and repentance was required. Jesus called disciples to help get the word out, and as was typical in God's way of working, he chose ordinary men instead of the religious leaders or wealthy elite. Jesus' ministry is summarized in three verses (4:23-25) and then expanded at length in chapters 5-12. In short, Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom ("the kingdom is almost here!") and demonstrated his identity as the promised king who reverses the effects of sin by healing diseases and casting out demons. As intended, this attracted large crowds.

### **CONCLUSION**

Matthew wrote his gospel to make it clear how Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promises to send a king who would bless all the peoples of the world. In the first four chapters, Matthew focuses on Jesus' identity as the rightful king of the house of David who was honored, persecuted, and tempted. The coming of the king naturally anticipated the establishment of his kingdom and thus the people were called to repent of their sin and to submit to God's anointed one.

### **GOING FURTHER**

Review some OT passages that underlie Matthew's introduction of Jesus: Gen 12, 22; 2 Sam 7; Ps 2, 72; Isa 7-11, 53; Mic 4-5; Mal 3-4.

How do the other Gospels show (in different ways) Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises in the OT?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Matthew 5-11. What does the writer want you to understand about Jesus? What is the significance of Jesus' miracles? What is the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount? How does the OT help us to understand these chapters?

## STUDY #25: TEACHING AND MIRACLES OF THE KINGDOM (MATT 5-11)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Matt 5-11. What does the writer want you to understand about Jesus? What is the significance of Jesus' miracles? What is the meaning of the Sermon on the Mt? How does the OT help us to understand these chapters?

### BACKGROUND

In Matt 1-4, Jesus was introduced as the long-awaited king who would rule on the throne of David in fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. As Jesus traveled around Galilee, he preached the "good news of the kingdom": repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom *from* heaven—it is God's kingdom established on earth. Daniel saw God's kingdom come as a rock to smash the statue of man's kingdoms (Dan 2). Zechariah described the day when the Lord would descend to the Mount of Olives, defeat Jerusalem's enemies, and "the Lord will be king over the whole earth" (Zech 14). Jesus came as the Anointed One to establish God's kingdom on earth. The kingdom was near because Jesus was here.

### SUMMARY

Jesus presented himself as the Messiah to the nation of Israel in two primary ways: teaching and miracles. The teaching explained the requirements to enter the kingdom. The miracles proved his identity as one sent by God (John 3:2; Acts 2:22; Heb 2:3-4).

### SERMON ON THE MOUNT (MATT 5-7)

**The Beatitudes (5:1-12):** The eight beatitudes do not describe eight different kinds of people (poor in spirit, mournful, meek, etc.) and eight different kinds of rewards (kingdom of heaven, comfort, inherit the earth, etc.). Rather they describe the qualities of one person who will receive one reward—entrance into God's kingdom. Those who receive the kingdom of heaven are those who inherit the earth, are comforted, will see God, and will be called sons of God. These people are indeed blessed, though until the kingdom comes they may face great persecution, just as the prophets did.

**Salt and Light (5:13-16):** God chose Israel and placed them in the center of the world to be a kingdom of priests and a light to the nations. They were in danger of failing their commission.

**The Heart of the Sermon (5:17-20):** Jesus' message was not a discarding of the Mosaic Law, for he taught obedience to it in the truest way, adhering to its spirit and not merely its letter. Here Jesus made the entrance requirement to the kingdom crystal clear: they must be more righteous than the Pharisees or they would not enter. As the perfectly righteous one, Jesus would fulfill the Mosaic Law, meeting its demands in full and accomplishing what the Law looked forward to. (In this way the Law would be "filled up" in Jesus so that those who are "in Christ" have fulfilled the demands of the Law and are thus worthy to enter the kingdom.)



**Two Kinds of Righteousness (5:21–6:18):** This section is an expansion of 5:20, for Jesus' claim that the righteousness of the Pharisees was not good enough for the kingdom must have been shocking. So Jesus contrasts their brand of righteousness with God's demands. They said that one was only guilty of murder if he killed a person. Jesus explained that the sixth commandment was broken if someone murdered another in their thoughts. The Pharisees said that divorce was acceptable if a certificate was given, but Jesus explained that divorce results in adultery. Jesus repudiates the Pharisaic version of the Mosaic Law, making it clear that what God truly demanded in the Mosaic Law was much more difficult to fulfill. Who can enter the kingdom of God? Those who are like God.

**Waiting for the Kingdom (6:19–7:12):** How is one to live while waiting for God to establish his kingdom on earth? Jesus teaches us to resist idols and to seek God's kingdom first, trusting God to provide. He warns against hypocritical judging and calls them to trust their heavenly Father. He sums it all up: love your neighbor as yourself.

**Conclusion: An Invitation (7:13-29):** Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by making it clear that the people have a choice. They can either follow the Pharisees down the broad road to destruction or they can follow Jesus on the narrow path into the kingdom. The real proof of one's life is not what one claims with his mouth but what one produces in his life. Those who are wise will take Jesus' words to heart and build their lives upon them. Those who ignore Jesus' call to righteousness will be destroyed like the house built on the sand.

## THE MIRACLES OF JESUS (MATT 8-9)

Anyone can make the bold claims that Jesus did, but he backed up his words with divine works that attested to his identity. As the Messiah sent by God, Jesus could do the works of God. By doing miracles characteristic of the kingdom, he was providing his credentials as the prophesied king.

1. He made the lame to walk, a characteristic of the kingdom when "the lame will leap like a deer" (Matt 8:6; Isa 35:6).
2. He healed the sick, just as Isaiah predicted of the Servant, "He carried our diseases" (Matt 8:14-17; Isa 53:4).
3. He gave sight to the blind, just as was predicted of the kingdom: "The eyes of the blind will be opened" (Matt 9:30; Isa 35:5).
4. He raised the dead, a foretaste of the kingdom when "he will swallow up death forever" (Matt 9:25; Isa 25:8).
5. In performing miracles, he demonstrated his knowledge of and submission to God's Word, qualifying himself as Israel's faithful king (Matt 8:4; Deut 17:19).
6. In casting out demons, Jesus showed himself as the one who would crush the serpent and his seed (Matt 8:32; Gen 3:15).
7. In declaring sins to be forgiven, he was making a bold statement that he had authority to forgive sins, a prerogative that all knew belonged to God alone (Matt 9:6).

These miracles are not primarily to show Jesus' compassion for his people, for if this was true he would heal all. They were intended to demonstrate Jesus' authority over disease, nature, sin, and

even death. Everyone needed to see what the blind could see: Jesus was the Son of David, God's appointed king. The miracles are also not merely academic—something to cause wonder but leave the witness unmoved. Rather they require a response—full submission to the one who does the works of God. As Jesus did miracles, he made demands: trust me fully (like the centurion), follow me at all costs, and tell others the good news of the kingdom.

### **JESUS SENDS OUT APOSTLES (MATT 10)**

With opposition rising, Jesus knew that his time to get the word out was limited. Thus he chose to multiply his efforts by sending six pairs of apostles throughout the cities of Israel to announce that the kingdom of God was near. The instructions he gave are pertinent to this particular situation and not normative for all time: the urgency (“take no bag”) was because of the opposition, the restriction from Gentiles was because the Messiah was first for Israel, and the miracles attested to Jesus' identity.

### **JOHN THE BAPTIST (MATT 11)**

When John questions whether Jesus is the Messiah or not, Jesus' answer is crystal clear to the one who knows the OT prophecies: by healing the sick, raising the dead, and preaching to the poor, Jesus demonstrated that he is the one. Jesus then explained the role of John the Baptist as the fulfillment of the predicted forerunner. Yet in lamenting the peoples' response to John and himself, Jesus knew that rejection that was coming.

### **GOING FURTHER**

How do these passages mean more when read in the context of Jesus' ministry? What are some wrong interpretations?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Matt 12–20. Think carefully about Israel's rejection of Jesus. How did Jesus respond? What changes resulted in his ministry and teaching?

## STUDY #26: REJECTION OF THE KING (MATTHEW 12-20)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Matthew 12–20. Think carefully about Israel’s rejection of Jesus. How did Jesus respond? What changes resulted in his ministry and teaching?

### BACKGROUND

Many people reason that because Jesus established the church that this was always his original mission. They reject the notion that Jesus presented himself to Israel as the king come to fulfill God’s promises of an earthly kingdom. This reasoning has several problems: (1) it denies or re-interprets the OT prophecies that predict a glorious kingdom of God on earth; (2) it fails to understand Jesus’ ministry in its historical context. Today’s study focuses on the second point, showing how the establishment of the kingdom was postponed because Israel rejected its Messiah.

### THE KING’S IDENTITY AND DEMANDS (MATT 1–11)

Jesus’ birth was the first of many fulfillments of OT prophecies about the king God would send to establish his kingdom on earth. When Jesus began preaching, his message was “Repent, for the kingdom of God is near.” By this he meant that he, the king, had come and that the nation should submit to his lordship and his demands. He demonstrated his identity by doing miracles that showed his power to establish the kingdom. In his teaching, he revealed the high standard of the law that all failed to meet. Thus, the only righteous course of action was to repent and follow Jesus.

### THE SATAN ACCUSATION (MATT 12)

The opposition against Jesus was led by the religious leaders who refused to accept Jesus’ authority over them. A line was crossed when the Pharisees accused Jesus of doing miracles by the power of Satan (12:24). This was no small difference of opinion, but a blasphemous outrage against God’s Spirit who worked these miracles through Jesus. This ludicrous charge signified a turning point in Jesus’ ministry. From this point on, he knew that the opposition had hardened and would only increase. Jesus and the kingdom he came to establish were being rejected by the people as undesirable. They preferred the broad road of the Pharisees rather than the narrow road of Jesus with its humble submission to God’s word. In this way they were no different than their ancestors who rejected the prophets’ call to obedience in order to receive God’s blessing.

### PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM (MATT 13)

Having been publicly rejected in a decisive way, Jesus began to speak in parables in order (1) to hide truth from those who rejected him and (2) to reveal truth to those who followed him. Jesus’ parables in this chapter reveal new truths (“mysteries”) about God’s kingdom in light of the national rejection of Jesus. In the parable of the sower, Jesus reveals that his teaching is going to be largely rejected (only one of four soils receives the seed and bears fruit; 13:1-23). In the parable of the weeds, he reveals that Israel is mixed with righteous and wicked which will be sorted out in the judgment before the kingdom is established (13:24-30, 36-43). In other words, because his teaching

is not accepted, there will be a period of time in which good and evil flourish before Jesus establishes the kingdom.

This doesn't mean that the kingdom would be small and insignificant, for one day it would flourish like a tree and permeate the whole earth (13:31-35). The kingdom is worth all amount of sacrifice, and pursuing its entrance is no less necessary even though there would be a delay in its establishment (13:44-46). Indeed, those who do not enter the kingdom will experience horrible judgment (13:47-50). The disciples must understand these new truths about the kingdom together with the previous revelation given in the Scriptures as they teach others (13:51-52). As if to underscore the nation's rejection of their Messiah, Matthew records that even the people of Jesus' hometown refused to accept his claims (13:53-58).

### **INTENSIFYING OPPOSITION (MATT 14:1-16:12)**

The death of John the Baptist is described here as a foreshadowing of what the opposition will ultimately do to Jesus (14:1-12). Jesus' withdrawal into a solitary place with his disciples is intentional, for Jesus is no longer seeking to publicize his messianic claims (14:13-21). Since it is clear that he is being rejected, Jesus is now going to control the timetable (of his death) and use the time for private instruction of his disciples so that they are prepared for establishing his church when he goes away. Even Jesus' walking on the water is an effort to avoid the crowds and hard-hearted leaders (14:22-36).

Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees (15:1-20) accomplishes two things: (1) It demonstrates the clear difference between Pharisaic religion and true faith that pleases God; (2) It intensifies the opposition to Jesus so that the movement to kill Jesus will gain strength. His departure to the Gentile lands of Tyre and Sidon was (1) not to bring the gospel of the kingdom to non-Jews (though one lady of remarkable faith does receive a miracle) but was (2) to escape the opposition who wouldn't follow him that far so that he could have time to instruct his disciples (15:21-28). Arriving back in Israel, Jesus again refuses to do a miracle for the hard-hearted and he warns the disciples that the opposition of the Jewish leaders will permeate the nation (16:1-12).

### **CONFESSION AND TRANSFIGURATION (MATT 16:13-17:13)**

Fleeing the crowds again, Jesus makes his identity explicitly clear privately to his disciples. Previously he demonstrated his actions by his works, but now he leaves no room for doubt: he is the Messiah, the Son of God. But he also reveals two crucial and related new truths: (1) Jesus will build his church; (2) Jesus will be killed by Israel's leaders. This is an outrageous idea for Peter who correctly expects Jesus to establish his kingdom but who fails to submit to Jesus *at all points*. Jesus will establish his kingdom but he must die first and his followers must be prepared to die. The Transfiguration serves as confirmation that Jesus will establish the kingdom (three disciples see a glimpse of it) but also emphasizes the disciples' need to submit to Jesus ("This is my Son...Listen to him!"). Jesus commands them not to tell others because it would be like casting pearls before swine: those who have rejected Jesus would only sneer at claims that he had appeared in glory with Moses and Elijah.

### **TRAINING THE TWELVE (MATT 17:14-20:34)**

The focus of the remaining period before Jesus enters Jerusalem is on Jesus' teaching his disciples. This includes instruction on humility, leading another into sin, and the horror of hell (18:1-9). He explains the value of rescuing one sinner, restoring a brother, and forgiving one another (18:10-35). Jesus emphasizes the permanence of marriage, the danger of idols, and the reward that his followers will receive when he establishes his throne on earth (19:1-30). In the parable of the vineyard workers, Jesus teaches that God is sovereign over his kingdom and his dispensing of grace will be a shock to some (20:1-16). Once again Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to Jerusalem where will be killed and raised to life (20:17-19). This is not to deny that Jesus will establish his kingdom on earth, but he explains that the way to greatness in God's kingdom is not through prideful demands but through humble service (20:20-28). In the final scene before his entrance into Jerusalem, two more blind men see more clearly than others when they recognize Jesus as the Son of David (20:29-34).

### **GOING FURTHER**

Read the corresponding sections in the other Gospels (Mark 3-10; Luke 4-19; John 6-11) and identify the similar themes of (1) rejection, (2) parables; (3) explanation of kingdom delay; (4) predictions of death; (5) private instruction of the disciples.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Matthew 21-25. Figure out the main point of each unit. Pay attention to Jesus' claims about himself, his response to opposition, and his predictions of the future.

## **STUDY #27: JESUS' ENTRANCE TO JERUSALEM AS KING (MATT 21-25)**

### **PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY**

Read Matthew 21–25. Figure out the main point of each unit. Pay attention to Jesus' claims about himself, his response to opposition, and his predictions of the future.

### **THE CONTEXT**

In this study, we are seeking to understand God's work in history as it unfolded progressively. We study each new development in light of previous revelation in order to understand it correctly. In looking today at Jesus' great entry into Jerusalem, we are keeping in mind both the immediate context (Jesus' ministry) and the greater context (the OT).

In the greater context, God had promised to provide a righteous king who would follow his commands and establish peace on earth. In the context of Matthew (along with the other Gospels), Jesus fulfilled prophecy that the Messiah's light would shine in Galilee. In Matthew 4-20, Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, preaching and doing miracles associated with God's coming kingdom.

### **JESUS' INTENTION IN THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY**

But Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, the home of the temple, and the place where any claimant to the throne must be accepted. We know from the Gospel of John that Jesus visited several times earlier in his ministry, but these were more low-key and before he had fully preached his message. This coming to Jerusalem that we know of as Palm Sunday was a dramatic entrance intended to force the nation to come to a decision about him (Matt 21:1-11).

Jesus' entrance was intentionally bold. He timed his arrival for Passover, Israel's festival celebrating release from slavery in Egypt. By riding on a donkey, Jesus was making an unmistakable claim to be the prophesied king of Zechariah 9 (the Romans wouldn't understand but the Jewish people would). He then took over the temple courts, removing the unrighteous leaders and asserting his own authority (21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18). He vindicated his authority by doing miracles prophesied of the Messiah (Matt 21:14).

### **THE NATION'S RESPONSE TO JESUS' ENTRY**

Everyone understood the claims Jesus was making. The crowd responded by waving palm branches (as they did for military victors), throwing down their cloaks (as they did for new kings), and hailing Jesus as the Son of David, the king who brings the kingdom. All of Jerusalem knew of Jesus' coming. The Jewish leaders sought to shut Jesus down by every means possible. They challenged his authority, made every effort to trap him, sought to turn the people against him, and plotted to arrest him.

### **JESUS FORCES THE OPPOSITION'S HAND**

Jesus' actions following the donkey ride were not only intended to make bold his claim to be Messiah, but they also were meant to galvanize the opposition against him. Normally the Pharisees and Sadducees were enemies, but Jesus offended both groups so severely and publicly that they

were united in their hatred of him. How did Jesus offend? By speaking the truth, plainly and directly. He bested them in the traps they set for him and demonstrated his moral superiority.

He offended them by telling parables that revealed that (1) he knew they wanted to kill him; (2) he considered prostitutes ahead of them in line for the kingdom; and (3) the kingdom would be taken away from them (21:28-22:14). He followed all of this up with a blistering attack that exposed the Jewish leaders as self-righteous hypocrites who negated the word of God and were just like their fathers who killed the prophets. He predicted that they would go to hell and their house would be left desolate (Matt 23).

Within a few days in Jerusalem, then, Jesus proclaimed his identity as God's Messiah and ensured that the nation's leaders would put him to death not because they didn't know who he was but because they did.

## THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Jesus also took advantage of some private time to prepare his disciples. The Olivet Discourse is Jesus' explanation of the end of the age and his coming (Matt 24-25). He explained the signs that would precede his return:

- Birth pains would begin: wars, famines, earthquakes (24:4-8).
- Many would leave the faith and believers would be persecuted (24:9-14).
- The temple would be defiled and believers would flee (24:15-29).
- Jesus' return would be sudden and powerful (24:30-35).

Jesus told the disciples that the timing of his return is known only to the Father and therefore they should always be ready. Jesus compared his return to the instantaneous coming of the flood (24:36-41), the unexpected coming of a thief (24:42-44), the surprise coming of a master (24:45-51), and the sudden coming of a bridegroom (25:1-13). He spoke about the interim period before he would return to establish the kingdom, emphasizing the need for them to be faithful in his absence (25:14-30). Then he described the judgment that would precede the establishment of the kingdom (25:31-46).

In the context of Jesus' ministry, the main point of this lengthy teaching is that though Jesus would be rejected, the OT prophecies would be fulfilled. What's new is that the Messiah would come and go away before he established his kingdom. The kingdom that was near is revealed to be yet future because of Israel's rejection.

## COMMON QUESTIONS

### **Did Jesus say that the kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to the Church?**

Knowing that the Jewish leaders would kill him, Jesus gives three parables pronouncing judgment on them. Some misinterpretations are made because foreign ideas (outside of the context of Jesus' earthly ministry) are read into these parables. In the parable of the two sons, Jesus' point is that the tax collectors are more righteous/repentant than the Jewish leaders. In the parable of the tenants, Jesus' point is that those who reject him will not inherit the kingdom but it will be given to others.

In the parable of the wedding banquet, Jesus explains that those invited refused to come and so their places would be filled by others.

In sum, those who reject Jesus are the Jewish leaders of his day; they will not receive the kingdom. Others will, but this does not deny OT prophecy which calls for God fulfilling his promises to national Israel. The OT anticipated rejection of the Messiah while also predicting Israel's national repentance and acceptance (Isa 53; Zech 11-12). Later Peter (in Acts 2-3) and Paul (in Romans 9-11) would make it clear that Israel's rejection of Jesus does not mean that Israel fell beyond recovery.

### **Is the Olivet Discourse for believers?**

In response to the disciples' questions, Jesus explains the events surrounding his return and the end of the present age (before the kingdom begins). Jesus answers the question directly without deviating into the place of the church or the matter of the rapture. Instead, Jesus provides an answer which is largely an explanation from the book of Daniel about what will happen before he establishes his kingdom. Daniel does not address the issues of the church and the rapture, nor does Jesus. These truths will be developed in later Scripture, including 1 Thess 4 and 2 Thess 2.

## **GOING FURTHER**

How do Mark 11-13, Luke 19-21, and John 12 make similar points to Matthew? How are they different?

## **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Matthew 26-28. Think about how Matthew shows Jesus' death as the fulfillment of the OT. How does Matthew's presentation correspond with Isaiah 53?



## STUDY #28: CRUCIFIXION, RESURRECTION, AND THE OT (MATT 26-28)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Matthew 26–28. Think about how Matthew shows Jesus' death as the fulfillment of the OT. How does Matthew's presentation correspond with Isaiah 53?

### JESUS' AUTHORITY OVER HIS DEATH

Jesus has come to Jerusalem to die, just as the Old Testament predicted. In contrast to everyone else, Jesus knows what is going to happen and is entirely in control of events leading to his death. For instance, though the Pharisees think they're in control, they don't know how the people will react, and so they plan to kill Jesus after the Passover. Jesus knows that he will be crucified on Passover (Matt 26:1-5). Jesus and the woman understand that the anointing is for Jesus' burial, but the disciples do not understand and are indignant at the "waste" (Matt 26:6-13).

Jesus knows that the way the Jewish leaders will be able to capture him is through betrayal (Matt 26:21). Even when they learn this, the disciples do not know who the betrayer is (Matt 26:22). Jesus knows that his disciples will all fall away from him and that Peter will disown him three times, though they all deny it (Matt 26:31). (Jesus' prophecies come true even if the ones involved know the prophecy and intend to thwart it.) Jesus knows that he will rise from the dead after three days and meet the disciples in Galilee (Matt 26:32; 27:63; 28:6).

### THE FULFILLMENT OF SCRIPTURE IN JESUS' DEATH

Jesus predicts that his disciples will fall away because he knows Zechariah's prophecy that when the shepherd is struck, the sheep will be scattered (Matt 26:31). Jesus knew that in not resisting, Scripture was fulfilled (Matt 26:54). The price of 30 pieces of silver paid for the rejected shepherd was the fulfillment of Zechariah 11:12-13, and the purchase of the potter's field pointed the reader to Jeremiah 18-19 and the national judgment Israel was under (Matt 27:6-10). Jesus recognized that his experience of death was in fulfillment of Psalm 22, seen most dramatically in his loud cry of the first verse, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46).

When Matthew reports that Jesus asked his disciples, "But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?," the reader is to think not only of Jesus' arrest in the garden (26:54) but of all of the events of his death. Matthew's Gospel reveals in explicit quotations and implicit allusions that "this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled" (26:56).

### JESUS' ROYAL IDENTITY

Jesus testified under oath that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. He claimed to be the divine-human person described in Daniel 7 who rode on the clouds to the Father to receive authority to rule over God's kingdom on earth. There was no ambiguity in Jesus' claims and they would have been blasphemous if they were not true (Matt 26:63-65). In response to Pilate, Jesus acknowledged that he was the king of the Jews (Matt 27:11). Pilate said of Jesus that he was the one called the Messiah (Matt 27:22).

Jesus was not killed because his persecutors did not understand the claims he was making, for even the Roman soldiers dressed him up as royalty and mocked him as “king of the Jews” (Matt 27:27-31). The placard above his head stated his crime: “This is Jesus, the king of the Jews” (Matt 27:37). Passersby taunted him as one who would release himself from the cross if he was the Son of God (Matt 27:40). The Jewish leaders knew he claimed to be the king of Israel and the Son of God (Matt 27:42-43). In response to the miracles at Jesus’ death, the Roman soldiers guarding Jesus declared that Jesus was surely the Son of God (Matt 27:54).

## JESUS, THE SERVANT OF ISAIAH

Matthew presents Jesus as the Servant that Isaiah described in chapters 42–53. Matthew had already alerted the reader to this identification when he quoted from the first Servant Song of Isaiah (Matt 12:15-21). But it becomes crystal clear when Jesus does his Servant-work of dying for his people.

1. Matthew presents Jesus as one who is **perfectly righteous** (27:19) but who does not protest his innocence when put on trial. Jesus goes as a **lamb to the slaughter** (Isa 50:5, 7; 53:7). Though he could have called twelve legions of angels to rescue him, he rebuked his disciple for resisting (Matt 26:52-53). Jesus refused to defend himself before the Roman governor (Matt 27:14). Jesus kept silent while evil men taunted him during his crucifixion (Matt 27:39-44).
2. Isaiah predicted that the servant would be **beaten, mocked, and spit upon** (Isa 50:6). Matthew records that both the servants of the high priest and the Roman soldiers spit in Jesus’ face and struck him with their fists while mocking him (Matt 26:67-68; 27:28-31).
3. Isaiah spoke explicitly of the servant’s being “cut off from the land of the living” and being “assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death” (Isa 53:8-9). Matthew describes Jesus’ **death** between two thieves and his **burial** in the tomb of a rich man (Matt 27:38, 44, 50, 57-60).
4. The fourth Servant Song begins and ends with proclamation of the servant’s **exaltation** (Isa 52:13; 53:12), and Matthew shows that not only does Jesus rise from the dead but he is given all authority in heaven and on earth by the Father (Matt 28:5-7, 18).

## THE GREAT COMMISSION

Do the last three verses of the book (Matt 28:18-20) suggest that Jesus is now ruling as king over his kingdom on earth? This is one possible interpretation. Jesus does say that he has been given all authority. Previously Jesus had identified himself as the Son of Man of Daniel 7 (Matt 27:64) and this figure is given “authority, glory, and sovereign power” over “all peoples and nations” (Dan 7:13-14). So is Jesus saying that the present age in which we are making disciples of all nations is the kingdom age in which all of the OT promises are fulfilled?

Some observations will clarify the issue. (1) Jesus does not identify himself as Israel’s king or mention the establishment of a kingdom in these verses. (2) The judgment that precedes the establishment of the kingdom, as predicted by the prophets, John the Baptist, and Jesus, has not yet occurred. (3) Nothing in these verses corresponds with the OT predictions of the kingdom: the kingdoms of men are not destroyed, the exiles are not restored, prosperity does not abound, and

the day has not arrived when “no longer will a man teach his neighbor...because they will all know me” (Jer 31:34). Instead, Jesus is commanding his followers to make disciples from all nations. (4) Jesus does not explain that the Scriptures will *not* be fulfilled.

(5) Jesus’ promise to be with his disciples to the end of the age gives comfort *until the time* when he is with them personally, ruling on his throne with the twelve disciples sitting on twelve thrones (Matt 19:28). (6) The kingdom is the time in the future when Jesus will again drink wine with his disciples (Matt 26:29). (7) The command to make disciples presupposes a world still in darkness with many opposed to God. (8) The apostolic writings of the NT do not suggest that Jesus was now ruling as king in fulfillment of the OT prophecies, but rather they look forward to the day when Jesus returns, defeats his enemies, and rewards the righteous in his kingdom.

Conclusion: the greater context precludes the interpretation that Jesus’ authority is equivalent with the establishment of the kingdom.

### GOING FURTHER

Read Psalms 22 and 69. How were these psalms fulfilled in Jesus’ death? What other OT passages were fulfilled at the crucifixion?

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read John 1-12. Keep an eye out for the (seven?) signs and try to determine their significance. (For instance, why does Jesus change water into wine?) What do they tell us about who Jesus is?

## STUDY #29: THE SEVEN SIGNS OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read John 1-12. Keep an eye out for the (seven?) signs and try to determine their significance. (For instance, why does Jesus change water into wine?) What do they tell us about who Jesus is?

### THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel of John was written to present Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God in order that people would believe in him (20:30-31). This faith is necessary in order to move the reader from darkness into light and from death into life. John presents Jesus as the source of life who gave his life in order that others might have life. Jesus is the Lamb of God who comes from the Father in order to lay down his life as a substitute for sinful men.

The Gospel of John consists of two parts. The first half (1:1–12:19) describes the signs that Jesus did which point to his true identity. Jesus explained the meaning of these signs and revealed how he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures and festivals. The book turns with his decisive rejection by the Jewish leadership following the seventh sign (12:20-50). The second half is thus concerned with the crucifixion (chs. 13–21). John is doing more than just recording a life of Jesus; he is reflecting on the identity and character of his Savior in order to present him as one fully worthy of complete faith.

### THE PURPOSE OF THE SEVEN SIGNS

The reader has already been told that Jesus is God, but through the signs Jesus demonstrates that his works are in accord with the character, purpose, and design of the Father. As Jesus will say, “Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father” (10:37-38). Signs did not compel faith, and thus it could be said, “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him” (12:37). John’s intention in writing this Gospel is that another generation will recognize from the signs that Jesus is Messiah and Son of God, worthy of being completely entrusted with their lives.

The signs that Jesus did were not simply powerful works of God, but they were markers that pointed to Jesus’ identity. His signs showed not that he was a miracle worker or a prophet, but God himself. A sign has three characteristics: (1) a public work; (2) identified by John as a sign; (3) that reveals Jesus as God’s representative.

Most interpreters agree that John intended to provide seven signs that point to Jesus’ character. This use of the number seven is found in the “I am” statements, possibly in the number of witnesses, and throughout John’s book of Revelation. Six of the signs are generally agreed upon, but the seventh is in dispute. Instead of walking on the water or the resurrection, I believe that the seventh sign is the clearing of the temple.

### SIGNS #1-3: JESUS IS THE MESSIAH AND SON OF GOD WHO GIVES LIFE (2:1-4:54)

### **Sign #1: Jesus changes water to wine (2:1-12)**

Significance: to point to Jesus' identity as the Messiah who establishes the kingdom

Comment: Jesus' first sign was not simply a miracle for the convenience of the wedding host. By producing wine from water, Jesus revealed that he was the Messiah who would establish the kingdom which would be characterized by exceeding joy, as reflected in the symbol of abundant wine (Isa 25:6; Amos 9:13-14). Many interpreters draw attention to parts of the story that are less than significant; this sign is not primarily about Mary, the jars, the quality of the wine, or the delight of the master of the banquet. It is, as John notes in the conclusion of the story, in the revelation of Jesus' glory such that his disciples believed in him (2:11). In his first sign, Jesus wanted his followers to recognize his character on the basis of his messianic work.

### **Sign #2: Jesus clears the temple area (2:13-22)**

Significance: to point to Jesus' identity as the Son of God who has authority over the temple

Comment: This event was not miraculous per se, though it certainly demonstrated significant courage and physical exertion. But in the purging the temple of unclean business, Jesus displayed not only his authority over the religious center, but also his concern for the things of God. By calling the temple his "Father's house," he desired that he would be recognized as the Son of God. That this event is considered a sign in the Gospel is demonstrated in Jesus' response to the Jewish leaders and in John's summary (2:18-23).

### **Sign #3: Jesus heals the official's son (4:43-54)**

Significance: to point to Jesus' ability to give life

Comment: By speaking the word, Jesus reverses a sick boy's condition, thereby imparting life. In response to this sign, the official and his family recognize Jesus' ability to give life and they believe in him.

## **SIGNS #4-6: JESUS WAS SENT BY THE FATHER AND DOES THE WORKS OF THE FATHER (5:1-10:42)**

### **Sign #4: Jesus heals a lame man (5:1-47)**

Significance: to point to Jesus' unity with the Father

Comment: This miracle is not about compassion (many were not healed) or about faith (the lame man didn't even know who Jesus was). Jesus' miracle was a display of the Father's work. Just as the Father restores the legs of the lame, so does Jesus (cf. Ps 146:8). Just as the Father works on the Sabbath, so does Jesus (5:17). Jesus' work, like that of the Father, overthrows the effects of the power of sin in the world.

### **Sign #5: Jesus feeds the five thousand (6:1-71)**

Significance: to point to Jesus' identity as the bread of life sent by the Father

Comment: Jesus' feeding of the masses recalls Moses' provision of manna for the Israelites in the wilderness. On the next day the crowd finds Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum and they press him to provide manna yet again. But the sign of physical bread was intended to point to something greater, more lasting, and more satisfying. This Jesus explains in his declaration that he is the bread of life. He is like Moses in performing this miracle, but he is greater than Moses because he can provide bread that will satisfy eternally. Jesus is also greater than Moses because he is the bread. Those who feed on Jesus are eating the bread that God gives and they receive life with God.

**Sign #6: Jesus restores sight to the blind (9:1–10:21)**

Significance: to point to Jesus' identity as the Son of Man who does the works of the Father

Comment: The one who is light now offers sight to those who recognize their blindness and act in faith. After the blind man receives physical sight, he gradually receives spiritual sight as he recognizes that Jesus is a prophet who does the works of God and is in fact from God. By contrast, the Pharisees are blind to the power of God in their midst. Thus the one who was blind can see and those who think they can see are in fact blind (9:35-41; cf. Isa 29:13-24).

**SIGN #7: JESUS IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE THROUGH WHOM ALL MAY LIVE  
(11:1-12:11)**

Significance: to point to Jesus' identity as the resurrection and the life through whom all may live

Comment: Jesus' ultimate miracle, and the seventh sign in John's Gospel, is his bringing the dead back to life. The raising of Lazarus was to demonstrate in a bold and unmistakable way Jesus' claim to be the God who gives life. He is the one who could give spiritual life to the spiritually dead. The seventh sign is an appropriate final climactic sign in its foreshadowing of Jesus' raising of himself from the dead.

**PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Acts 1-3. Pay attention to verses about the kingdom, the church, and Jesus. How are the kingdom and church related? What is Jesus doing now?

## STUDY #30: THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH (ACTS 1-3)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Acts 1-3. Pay attention to verses about the kingdom, the church, and Jesus. How are the kingdom and church related? What is Jesus doing now?

### JESUS ALIVE; NOW WHAT?

The consistent hope of the Old Testament was the redemption of the world through the coming of the Messiah to establish God's kingdom on earth. Jesus' announcement that the kingdom was near and his demonstration of his messianic identity suggested that the time had come. But Jesus was rejected and crucified by his own people. Yet this too was a fulfillment of what God had intended, for the righteous king had to die for the sin of the people. But Jesus has been raised and vindicated. Now what? Try to put yourself in the disciples' shoes in the days following the resurrection. What expectations would you have? What questions would you ask?

### KINGDOM NOW? (ACTS 1)

The last question that the disciples asked Jesus before he ascended into heaven concerned when Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). They had not been disabused of the OT teaching that God would fulfill his promises to Israel through the establishment of a righteous kingdom on earth. More importantly, Jesus did not rebuke them for having a wrong expectation. He could have denied their expectation and reprimanded them for anticipating a literal fulfillment of the prophecies. Instead he told them that they could not know the *timing*, and that the Spirit would come on them so they would be Jesus' witnesses to the world (Acts 1:7-8). Some suppose that the coming of the Spirit was identical with the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, but in this case, nearly all of the content of the OT promises must be denied. A better view is that the Spirit would empower the disciples to witness to Jesus' coming kingdom so that the nations might repent before that day arrived.

### THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT (ACTS 2:1-21)

On the day of Pentecost, God sent his Holy Spirit to fill the believers and enable them to witness of Jesus to people from all nations. That this was their mission was clear from the initial sign of the Spirit's coming: the disciples could speak in foreign languages. Peter explained this miraculous event by quoting from the book of Joel, showing how God's Spirit being poured out was anticipated in advance of the coming of God's kingdom (= the Day of the Lord). The urgent need was for repentance, for judgment would precede salvation, but everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Acts 2:14-21). Repentance was particularly necessary because the people had crucified God's Messiah.

### PETER'S MESSAGE (ACTS 2:22-36)

Peter's sermon was really just a lengthy explanation to their question: why are you speaking in tongues? Peter answered that the speaking in tongues was the result of the pouring out of the Spirit which was a work of Jesus who is now at God's right hand. Jesus is at the Father's side because

God exalted Jesus after his resurrection. This resurrection was predicted in advance by David, indicating that God was accomplishing his purposes even though evil men were acting according to their desires by crucifying Jesus. Thus in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus fulfilled the plan of God. And it is this same Jesus who was the one who caused the disciples to speak in foreign languages by pouring out his Spirit.

### **IS JESUS THE KING NOW?**

Because too many people find in Acts 2 ideas that are not there, it is worth noting what the passage does not say: it does not say that the kingdom is now established, it does not say that Jesus is now ruling as king, it does not say that any or all of the OT promises have been fulfilled in the church. Peter quotes Scripture (1) to establish that the coming of the Spirit is a work of God that calls for repentance, (2) to prove that Jesus must rise from the dead; (3) to explain that Jesus is now at God's right hand waiting for the establishment of the kingdom. When Jesus ascended to heaven, his status as king remained the same as when he was on earth: he was still the "king of the Jews," the rightful heir to the throne of David, but he did not exercise that rule before his crucifixion or after his resurrection. Jesus' status is similar to that of David during the years that Saul was king: he has been anointed, but he awaits his coronation. He has the right to rule, but has not yet been given the authority. Just as the wicked Saul prevented David from becoming king, so the enemies of God now rule until God removes them and places Jesus on the throne.

### **THE CHURCH**

Since Jesus is not now establishing his kingdom, what is he doing? He is pouring out his Spirit on his followers so that they will be his witnesses to the nations so that all people will repent before judgment comes and it is too late to be admitted into his kingdom. The people who repent and are forgiven form a new body known as the church. They are to be baptized and they receive the gift of the Spirit. Their community is characterized by apostolic teaching, fellowship, eating together, prayer, and sharing resources (Acts 2:38-47). All who repent of their sins and follow Jesus become part of this community and there is no other group to join or avenue to follow that is pleasing to God (cf. Acts 4:12).

### **REPENTANCE BEFORE KINGDOM (ACTS 3)**

The raising of the lame man gave Peter an opportunity to explain that this miracle was the work of Jesus. How could this be since Jesus had been crucified by the people of Jerusalem? It is so because God raised Jesus from the dead. This living Jesus is responsible for this man's healing (Acts 3:11-16). What this means is that the people must repent of their sins so that (1) they would be forgiven; (2) God would send times of refreshing; (3) God would send Jesus the Messiah to restore everything (Acts 3:19-21). Jesus is the one about whom Moses, Samuel, and all the prophets spoke; he is the one who would bless all peoples on earth, beginning with the Jews (Acts 3:22-26).

In this explanation, Peter continues to clarify the current situation following Jesus' ascension. He does not say that the church is the kingdom, but he says that Jesus must remain in heaven until it is time for the kingdom. He does not say that the disciples are establishing Jesus' kingdom on earth, but he says that God will establish the kingdom in the future when he sends Jesus. He is emphatic



that Jesus is now working on earth, but he never suggests that he is now reigning on earth. As Jesus had intended, his disciples are now continuing Jesus' work on earth by being his witnesses to all peoples. In this way Jesus is blessing all peoples on earth.

### **THE MESSAGE OF JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES (ACTS 4-28)**

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus called on the nation of Israel to submit to him as their Messiah. He verified his identity by doing miracles that only God could do (John 3:2). The nation rejected him and though that meant Jesus' departure to heaven, the message did not change. Still Jesus' disciples called on the nation of Israel to recognize Jesus as their Messiah and submit to him (cf. Acts 5:42). Their testimony was verified by the miracles that Jesus did through them (by the Spirit he sent). They also taught something Jesus did not teach to the nation: his crucifixion and resurrection. Because the Messiah's death could be a stumbling block to faith, it was important for the disciples to emphasize that Jesus rose from the dead in fulfillment of the OT Scriptures (Acts 4:33).

Throughout the book of Acts, the disciples would continue to bring the message of the crucified and risen Messiah to Israel and the nations in advance of Jesus' return, judgment, and establishment of the kingdom. The gathering of people from Israel and the nations to a body of believers did not constitute the fulfillment of God's kingdom promises but was the way God was working until Jesus' return. The disciples took the message of the Messiah to Israel first because he was Israel's Messiah, but Israel's refusal to listen would not keep the good news from going to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-48; 28:23-31). Thus Israel not only missed out on the blessings in accepting their Messiah but also in sharing those blessings with the nations.

### **GOING FURTHER**

How does the book of Acts show, on the one hand, fulfillment of the OT in the person of Jesus and, on the other hand, lack of fulfillment of other promises of the OT? What does this mean?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Romans 9-11. Trace Paul's argument concerning whether God's promises can be trusted or not. What does this mean for the future of Israel?

## **STUDY #31: THE FAILURE OF GOD'S PROMISES TO ISRAEL (ROMANS 9-11)**

### **PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY**

Read Romans 9–11. Trace Paul's argument concerning whether God's promises can be trusted or not. What does this mean for the future of Israel?

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Romans 9-11 Paul explains God's purposes in the world since his people Israel have rejected Jesus and the church is largely made up of Gentiles.

### **THE GREATER CONTEXT**

The letter to the Romans is a bold statement of the gospel. Paul begins by showing the sinfulness of man, proving that both Gentiles and Jews are guilty and under the condemnation of sin. Thus both Jew and Gentile need salvation and this cannot be earned by obedience to the Law. Salvation comes to all in the same way: God gives his righteousness to all who trust Christ. God's free gift to those who were his enemies means still more: those who have been justified will most certainly be glorified, for God has already done the hard part in sacrificing Jesus and the rest is comparably easy. The believer can therefore have a strong assurance that he is eternally at peace with God, free from the possibility of condemnation. But these very strong promises guaranteeing salvation raise a question: God made promises to Israel that appear to have failed. If they failed in the case of Israel, might they fail in our case as well?

### **THE OBJECTION (9:1-6A)**

Paul does not sidestep the objection, but he meets it head on, insisting that "It is not as though God's word had failed" (9:6). It's true that it appears that God's word has failed, for though God gave Israel the covenants, the law, the temple, and the promises, Israel is now cut off from God (9:1-5). If God's promises to Israel failed, why should the church be confident that God's promises to them will fare any better?

### **GOD'S SOVEREIGN CHOICE IN THE PAST (9:6B-21)**

Paul first observes that God's promises can be fulfilled even if every person does not receive them. Abraham himself had two sons, but the promise was given to Isaac and not Ishmael. Isaac had two sons, but the promise was given to Jacob and not Esau. So one cannot say that the promises failed if God sovereignly chooses to give those promises to some descendants but not all.

### **GOD'S SOVEREIGN CHOICE IN THE FUTURE (9:22-29)**

Paul then observes that God predicted through the prophets that some of Israel would be saved and some would not. This was part of God's sovereign purpose and it does not constitute a change of plan or a failure of his promises. It was never God's intention to save every person in Israel.

### **MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY: WHY ISRAEL FAILED (9:30-10:4)**

To anyone familiar with the Old Testament, the events of the two decades before Paul wrote this letter (AD 33–56) must have been shocking. Israel’s Messiah was rejected by Israel but Gentiles all over the Roman world were forsaking idols and worshiping a crucified Jewish man. While acknowledging God’s sovereignty in the process, one must also wonder what human explanation there is. Paul explains that Gentiles received the righteousness of God because they believed. The Jews, however, did not receive this righteousness because they tried to earn it. They rejected the righteousness that God offered in Jesus and sought to establish their own righteousness through the law. But since they missed the whole point of the law (Jesus), they failed to obtain God’s righteousness.

### SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT (10:5-21)

Paul does not want anyone misled into thinking that his explanation is a new teaching. Thus he quotes a dozen verses to show that he is only following the Old Testament. The OT had already revealed that salvation is by faith and that there was no salvation apart from God’s appointed means. Israel’s refusal to accept God’s message was a reality in the past and in the present. But God had already revealed that he would reveal himself to those outside Israel in order to make Israel jealous. This sets Paul up for the final portion of his argument.

### ISRAEL REJECTED? THE REMNANT (11:1-10)

The question remains: Did God reject Israel? Certainly not! Paul himself is an Israelite, so God’s word has not failed with Paul. Besides that, there are other Jews who believe. Just as God preserved a remnant of believers in Elijah’s time, so now he is preserving a remnant of Jewish believers.

### ISRAEL REJECTED? SALVATION FOR GENTILES (11:11-24)

Because Israel rejected its Messiah, salvation came to the Gentiles. But this was not God’s last word. God has planned something greater to come out of it. Not only will the Gentiles receive salvation, but the Jews will too. Two times Paul makes a logical argument that if Israel’s *failure* led to great blessing, then Israel’s *acceptance* would result in even greater glory.

There is a real hidden danger for the Gentiles in light of the present circumstances. They might suppose that they are better than the Jews because they have received God’s favor. This could lead to an arrogant attitude resulting in judgment from God. Instead the Gentiles should rejoice in God’s mercy and recognize that God can more easily restore Israel (the natural branches) than he brought salvation to the Gentiles (the wild branches).

### THE FUTURE: ISRAEL’S SALVATION (11:25-32)

Paul counters the potential arrogance of the Gentiles by letting them in on a little secret: after the full number of God’s elect Gentiles are saved, he will save all Israel. The mystery is not that Israel will be saved, for that is abundantly clear throughout the Old Testament. The mystery is the way in which God accomplishes his salvation, *first* by saving the Gentiles through the rejection of the Jews, and *then* by saving the Jews when they appear to have been rejected. How can this be? “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.” All of God’s glorious promises to Abraham and David will be fulfilled, even though Israel’s present rejection has pushed the fulfillment off into the future.

## **PAUL'S RESPONSE TO GOD'S PLAN (11:33-36)**

In a way, this plan is kind of crazy. Why would God ever do things this way, such that Israel rejects and the Gentiles accept, leading Israel ultimately to accept? There must be an easier way. Paul admits it: this plan is not something that humans would have come up with. It could only come from the "depth of the riches of the wisdom of God." And if that's the case, then only God can receive the glory for it. And he will.

## **CONNECTING TO THE BIGGER PICTURE**

These chapters resolve a potential problem in the promises God made to Abraham and David when Israel rejected the very Messiah who was to fulfill those promises. Without Paul's explanation here, some would have been tempted to think that God was finished with Israel and that the nation's rejection of the Messiah ended God's patience with his people. Some might have thought that God would transfer his promises from the people of Israel to the Gentiles. The sad fact is that many Christians today still believe these things, even though Paul was so careful to refute them. God is not finished with Israel because he has not done all of the good things that he has promised. And God never fails in his promises. That also means that we Gentiles can have complete confidence that our salvation in Christ is absolutely secure.

## **GOING FURTHER**

Explore the very practical result of this teaching in Paul's discussion of the stronger and weaker brother in Romans 14-15.

## **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Come up with your own answer to the question, What is the church? Think about God's purpose for the church in the world today. Passages you might read include Eph 2-4, 1 Tim 3-4, 1 Peter.

## STUDY #32: GOD'S PURPOSE FOR THE CHURCH IN HISTORY

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Come up with your own answer to the question, What is the church? Think about God's purpose for the church in the world today. Passages you might read include Eph 2-4, 1 Tim 3-4, 1 Peter.

### THE FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

The focus of this study is on the church corporately, not believers individually. We're interested in these questions:

- Why did God establish the church?
- How does the church fit into God's overall plan of restoring creation?
- How does the church relate to Israel in God's plan in history?

Our interest is in the church's *external* relations. This study is not about how believers should love one another, how believers will receive a crown of glory, or how believers will be raised from the dead. Rather we're pursuing an understanding of how the church relates to God, history, the covenants, the future, Israel, the government, and the world.

### PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH

To proclaim the excellencies of God (1 Pet 2:9).

“Seeking our own eternal well being—right though that is—could never provide a truly satisfying goal for life. The answer to our search for ultimate meaning lies in ‘declaring the excellencies’ of God, for he alone is infinitely worthy of glory. Redemption is ultimately not man-centred but God-centred” (Grudem, *1 Peter*, 119).

To demonstrate the unity of Jew and Gentile in one body (Eph 2:14-22).

“Christ's bringing together Jew and Gentile in himself as the ‘one new person’ is a highly significant step towards the fulfilment of God's eternal plan, that is, the consummation of the mystery (1:9-10). God's ultimate purpose is to bring together everything in Christ as the focal point” (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 200-201).

To serve as God's witness to the world (in light of Israel's failure) (Acts 1:8; Eph 6:19; Col 4:3-5).

“Today, believers continue to have the responsibility for being Christ's witnesses throughout this world. The sphere for witnessing is as extensive as the kingdom—all the world. That was and is the mission for the church until Jesus comes” (MacArthur, *Acts*, 21).

To make Israel jealous (Rom 11:11, 14).

“Paul apparently thinks that the Jews, as they see the Gentiles enjoying the messianic blessings promised first of all to them, will want those blessings for themselves” (Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 688).

To hasten the coming of the day of the Lord (2 Pet 3:12).

“We may think that the idea of Christians hastening the coming of Christ takes away from the sovereignty of God, for doesn’t the Bible make clear that God determines the time of the end? We have here another instance of the biblical interplay between human actions and God’s sovereignty: Human acts are significant and meaningful, but God is nevertheless fully sovereign. As Bauckham argues, what Peter is suggesting is that God graciously factors his peoples’ actions into his determination of the time of the end” (Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 198).

To be the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim 3:15).

“Here then is the double responsibility of the church *vis-à-vis* the truth. First, as its foundation it is to hold it firm, so that it does not collapse under the weight of false teaching. Secondly, as its pillar it is to hold it high, so that it is not hidden from the world. To hold the truth firm is the defence and confirmation of the gospel; to hold it high is the proclamation of the gospel” (Stott, *Guard the Truth*, 105).

To be the beginning of God’s plan to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, Christ (Eph 1:9-10).

“The church thus appears to be God’s pilot scheme for the reconciled universe of the future, the mystery of God’s will ‘to be administered in the fullness of the times,’ when ‘the things in heaven and the things on earth’ are to be brought together in Christ” (Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 321-22).

To reveal God’s manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (Eph 3:10).

“The very existence of this new multiracial community in which Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in unity in the one body is the manifestation of God’s richly diverse wisdom” (O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 246).

To wait for Jesus to return (1 Thess 1:10).

The master is honored by the servant who waits patiently for him.

“Had the early followers of Jesus not believed that he would soon return from heaven as the messianic Lord, Christianity would almost certainly not have come into existence. Belief in the parousia of Christ is what gave the resurrection its real significance by promising the realization of Christ’s messianic rule on the plane of human history” (Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 87).

To reign with Christ (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26-27).

“The thought of sharing Christ’s role as king and judge with a share in the accompanying glory is widespread in the NT. Its basis is Mt 19:28” (Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 740).

To judge the world and angels (1 Cor 6:2-3).

“Drawing on Daniel 7:22, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they will help Jesus exercise judgment over the non-Christian world (both people and angels)” (Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 117).

### QUESTIONS

What is the church’s relationship to the government? Is the church to be ruling the world? (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17)

What is the church’s relationship to Israel in the kingdom?

### GOING FURTHER

How do your prayers reflect God’s purposes for the church? How do your actions? Should you do anything differently? Should our church?

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Think about the subject of salvation. What is salvation? Who is saved? What leads to salvation? How has our study of the Old Testament affected your view of salvation?

## **STUDY #33: THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL SALVATION**

### **PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY**

What is salvation? Who is saved? What leads to salvation? How has our study of the Old Testament affected your view of salvation?

### **PREFACE**

This is a difficult issue, especially because of its application to family and friends. Our thinking may be guided by what we want to believe rather than what God's Word teaches. It is of utmost importance to not be deceived but to understand the full teaching of Scripture.

### **A NARROW VIEW OF SALVATION**

One concern is that we may define salvation too narrowly. We say that we are "saved" if we say a prayer, believe certain facts, participate in certain activities, and anticipate going to heaven after death. We think of salvation as deliverance from the penalty of sin but not the presence of sin. The goal is to escape hell, not to escape sin. Our focus is on ourselves, not on God. Our desire is for blissful living, not giving God the glory he is due.

### **SALVATION: MAKING THINGS RIGHT WITH GOD**

Some Christians define "being saved" as "going to heaven." Besides the fact that we were not created for heaven and will not spend much time there, this view gives too little significance to the seriousness of sin and the program of God. The priority in salvation is not making sure we have reservations for some sort of a (really long) future vacation, but making things right with God. It is recognizing a lifelong enmity with your Creator and being traumatized by how you have abused, ignored, and defamed him. It is crying out for mercy, asking God to forgive, and submitting all of yourself to him without restriction. It is a desire for order to be restored, for God to be put in his right place, and for things to be as the Creator intended. This is radically different than a rushed prayer of magical words that eternally secure a place on a list in heaven.

### **GOD-CENTERED VS. MAN-CENTERED VIEWS**

A God-centered view of salvation is radically different than a man-centered view of salvation. The first recognizes the eternal glory of God that deserves the worship of every creature. Thus it views sin as grievous treatment of a most worthy God and rightly deserving of eternal separation from his presence. A man-centered view of salvation focuses on future joy or pain without reference to God. God is more of a means to an end; we'll take him as long as we get the good stuff. A God-centered view of salvation crushes man's pride; a man-centered view of salvation is unconcerned with it. A God-centered view of salvation gives all credit to God; a man-centered view sees a helpless God as exuberant when an individual sovereignly chooses to follow God. Read Ephesians 1 in this light.

### **IS IT HARD TO BE SAVED?**

Should we ever discourage others from becoming a Christian? The very thought is anathema to many. But the tendency to rush people down the aisle to somehow "lock in" their salvation runs



counter to Jesus' method. Jesus turned away those who were not fully committed to him (Luke 9:57-62). He told the crowds that they could not be his disciple if they did not hate their father, mother, wife, children, and own life (Luke 14:26-27). He gave parables on the need to count the cost and give up everything (Luke 14:28-33). One wonders if some modern evangelists would rebuke Jesus for making it so hard to be saved.

### IMPLICATION: CHILDREN AND SALVATION

The rush to assure young children of salvation may be related to a sub-biblical view of salvation. When salvation is turned into a prayer with heaven in the balance, it naturally follows that parents want their children to be saved as soon as they can articulate the desire. But if the child does not truly understand his sin and offense against a holy God, what is he seeking salvation from? If the child is not mature enough to be given responsibilities, is he mature enough to make a decision affecting his entire earthly existence? If a child does not have an independent sense of judgment apart from his parents, can he be held accountable for his decision? How much do false childhood professions account for our confusion at teenagers and young adults abandoning the faith? What value is there in giving a young child assurance of salvation? Does it outweigh the risk of providing assurance to a nonbeliever?

### ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED?

Some biblical truths about salvation may seem contradictory. Jesus clearly taught that no one could lose their salvation (John 10:29), but he also said that the one who endures to the end will be saved (Matt 10:22; 24:13). Paul assured the Philippians that God would finish the work he began in them (Phil 1:6), but he also feared that the Thessalonians might have been tempted to reject the faith (1 Thess 3:5). The writer of Hebrews warned his readers against abandoning the faith and facing eternal punishment (Heb 6:1-12; 10:26-34). He wrote, "We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved" (Heb 10:39).

How can the truth of eternal security be reconciled with the strenuous exhortations for perseverance? The answer is that the commands to persevere is one *means* by which salvation is secured. God saves his people not apart from their personal perseverance in faith but *through* their perseverance in faith. This does not suggest that the individual saves himself through works done after initial salvation, for God is at work throughout the individual's life. One is saved by grace and one *stays saved* by grace. "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil 2:13). Yet this truth does not negate human responsibility, for in the previous verse Paul commanded the church, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). As you "work out your salvation" by living in obedience to God, you realize that it is only by God's gracious work in your life that you can do what he has commanded. Again, God secures the salvation of the individual *through* the person's persevering faith. As Peter wrote, one purpose of trials is to demonstrate the genuineness of faith (1 Pet 1:6-7). Without those trials, one would not have the same assurance that one's faith is true and enduring.

### ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

Assurance of one's salvation should not come from reflecting back on a past event (a "moment of salvation"). While every person is surely saved in a moment—at the instant when faith is exercised and rebirth is granted—the basis for assurance comes from one's present relationship with God. The one who is living in sin (rebellion against God) cannot be assured of his salvation on the basis of some perceived prior exercise of faith because that faith may not have been genuine. The test of genuine faith is how one lives, for Paul wrote that there are two kinds of people: those whose lives are controlled by the flesh and those whose lives are controlled by the Spirit (Rom 8:5-11). The former live to please the flesh and are under condemnation resulting in death. Those controlled by the Spirit live by the Spirit and fight against sin, with the result that they are sons of God who will inherit God's promises (Rom 8:12-17).

To put it bluntly, those who are living in sin (rebellion against God) can have no assurance of salvation. They may be saved, but they can have no confidence that they are saved while separated from God. They should not be assured that they are saved on the basis of some perceived past event. Sometimes these matters can be very difficult to decide; we may have known the person for years when they appeared to be walking with the Lord. Now we hope that their apostasy is temporary and they will soon return to the faith. We want to believe that "once saved, always saved," and therefore take comfort that they are saved despite present appearances. What we should do in this situation is not to attempt to determine whether they are saved but to call them to seek God in repentance. This call is the same regardless of the spiritual status of the person; whether saved and sinning or unsaved and sinning, the person is commanded to repent and turn to God. When one does repent, that is a work of the Spirit by which one can have assurance of salvation. The one who does not repent but persists in rebellion has no reason to believe that God is at work in his heart.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

In preparation for our study of the believer and the law, think about whether Christians are under the law (and if so, what law). Important passages include Matt 5:17-20, Rom 6-8, 9:30-10:4; Gal 2:15-21; 3:10-29; James 2:8.

## **STUDY #34: BELIEVERS AND THE LAW**

### **PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY**

Think about whether Christians are under the law (and if so, what law). Important passages include Matt 5:17-20, Rom 6-8, 9:30-10:4; Gal 2:15-21; 3:10-29; James 2:8.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Are believers under the law today? This is a tricky question because there are multiple uses of the word law and there are differing Christian views. Some verses say that Christians are not under the law, but others suggest that they are. This study is an attempt to come to clear conclusions on how the believer is and is not under the law.

### **THE USE OF THE WORD "LAW" IN THE BIBLE**

Some confusion results from the various ways in which the word "law" is used in the Bible. Often it is used as a synonym for the legal requirements set forth in the Mosaic Covenant (Exod 19–Deut 34; Rom 9:4). But it can also be used as a synonym for the Pentateuch as a whole (Matt 5:18; Luke 24:44) or even all of the Old Testament (1 Cor 14:21). The word is sometimes used to refer to a general command of God outside the Pentateuch (Rom 8:7; Gal 6:2). A fourth use of the word is as a synonym for "principle" (Rom 3:27; 8:2).

### **ETERNAL LAW CONTRASTED WITH PARTICULAR LAW**

By virtue of God's existence, there is a divine will. When God created man, he began to express that will through commands which might be termed "law." Sometimes the commands were binding upon all creation throughout time and sometimes they were specifically limited to a particular person, people, or situation. God commanded Noah not to murder because man is created in the image of God (Gen 9:5-6). The basis for the command makes it clear that this is a timeless decree (since all people are made in God's image). But when God told Abram to leave his country, this was a particular expression of God's will not intended for all people. There may well be truth about God's character and purposes from his command ("law") to Abram, but the command itself is not binding upon those to whom it was not given.

### **AN EXAMPLE OF PARTICULAR LAW: THE MOSAIC COVENANT**

Similarly, when God made a covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, he revealed his will in an extensive body of literature that contains many laws. These laws were not given to other nations and other nations were not accountable to keep them. Today we live outside the Mosaic Covenant (see below for reasons why). Thus these laws are not binding upon us. Yet we can learn about God's character, purposes, and will through the Mosaic Law.

### **ARE BELIEVERS UNDER THE MOSAIC LAW?**

The issue may be crystallized this way: Are believers to keep the Ten Commandments? The answer is both yes and no. No, by virtue of the fact that the Ten Commandments are in an obsolete covenant made with another people. But yes (mostly), by virtue of the fact that nine of the

commandments are stated to be in effect in the New Testament (outside the bounds of the Mosaic Covenant context). The sole omission, the Sabbath law, thus serves as a good test case for one's view of the Law. Those who believe that the Mosaic Law is binding on the church (either out of ignorance or the mistaken notion that Israel=the church) insist on Sabbath observance. Those who reckon the Sabbath command as integral to the Mosaic Covenant do not consider it obligatory because of the obsolescence of that covenant. This, of course, was the view of Paul, who wrote, "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5). If a person has the freedom to not keep the Sabbath, then Sabbath observance is not binding.

In short, the Mosaic Covenant was a particular expression of God's will to a certain people at a certain time. It was not a timeless covenant but one that was temporary, intended to accomplish certain purposes. Its temporary nature was recognized by Moses within the covenant itself: Moses predicted that Israel would abandon the covenant and be scattered among the nations (Deut 29). But the hope of a new covenant is also given, for Moses predicted that God would bring the people back and circumcise their hearts (Deut 30). Jeremiah develops this idea, noting that the new covenant will not be like the old (Mosaic) covenant which they broke but will be an eternal one (Jer 31:31-34). Thus it is already clear in the Old Testament that the Mosaic Covenant was limited in duration and served a greater purpose.

### **HOW IS THE MOSAIC LAW RELEVANT TODAY?**

While the Mosaic Law expresses some of the timeless moral will of God, it also includes specific commands not binding outside of that covenant. To determine a command's relevance for today we must consider (1) the basis for the law (e.g., the Sabbath was a sign of the Mosaic Covenant; Exod 31:17), (2) other biblical revelation (e.g., murder was forbidden to Noah outside the Mosaic Covenant; Gen 9:5-6), and (3) later revelation which clarified its applicability (e.g., Jesus declared all foods clean; Mark 7:19). Though sacrifice for sin was found outside the Mosaic Covenant (earlier than Moses in the time of the patriarchs), the need for it has ceased because of Jesus' all-sufficient death (as explained in Hebrews 9-10).

### **DOES "NOT UNDER LAW" = LAWLESS?**

The believer today is not "under law" in several senses. First, he is not party to the Mosaic Covenant. Second, he is not under law in the sense of condemnation for his sin. The believer has died to the law and thus is no longer subject to it (Rom 7:1-6; Gal 2:19). Whereas the purpose of the law was to reveal sin and lead to Christ (Gal 3:24; 1 Tim 1:9), the believer has no need of the law because the purpose has been accomplished. Third, the believer is not under law in the sense that he must keep the law in order to earn salvation. By virtue of being a believer, he understands that he has been declared righteous on the basis of another person's legal obedience and not his own (Rom 3:20-22; Gal 3:10-13; Phil 3:9).

Yet those who charge us as "antinomian" (apart from law) are wrong in that we insist on submission to God and his revealed will. That means that in practice there are "laws" (commands) that guide our practice and if we disregard them, we are outside of God's will and committing sin (John 15:10). God has commanded us to love our neighbors and if we don't, we have sinned. In order

to avoid confusion, it is best to not classify this as “under the law” (cf. 1 Cor 9:20-21) but rather speak of living “according to the Spirit” who has revealed his will through the Scriptures he inspired (Rom 8:5; Gal 5:18).

### **SIMILAR CONCLUSIONS, DIFFERENT MEANS**

“I am not, then, suggesting that the essential ‘moral’ *content* of the Mosaic law is not applicable to believers. On the ‘bottom line’ question of what Christians are actually to *do*, I could well find myself in complete agreement with, say, a colleague who takes a traditional Reformed approach to the Mosaic law. The difference would lie not in what Christians are to do but in how it is to be discovered. While my Reformed colleague might argue that we are bound to whatever in the Mosaic law has not been clearly overturned by New Testament teaching, I argue that we are bound only to that which is clearly repeated within New Testament teaching” (Douglas Moo, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 376).

In my opinion, right means are more important than right conclusions. (Interpretation is like math in this way.)

### **GOING FURTHER**

Study and explain three crucial passages: Matthew 5:17-20, Romans 9:30–10:4, and 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

What is the “law of Christ” (see Galatians 6:2; James 1:25-2:12)?

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, and Hebrews 8–10. Try to determine what the New Covenant is and then identify if it is in operation today. If you think it is, explain how it is. If not, explain how/when it will be fulfilled and how it relates to the church.

## STUDY #35: THE LAW IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

### ROMANS 1-3

All people are guilty before God. The Jews are guilty because they do not obey the commands of the Mosaic Law (Rom 2:17-24). The Gentiles are guilty because they do not obey God's law that is written on their hearts (Rom 2:12-15).

Rom 3:19-20: Because man is sinful, he cannot keep the Mosaic Law to be declared righteous. What the Mosaic Law does is reveal the sinfulness of man. By revealing man's need for another righteousness, the Law leads people to Christ. The only way to be declared righteous is by receiving Christ's atoning sacrifice by faith.

### ROMANS 5-6

Rom 5:12-21: Sin existed before the Mosaic Law was given and before Moses everyone who sinned died. The Law was given so that sin would increase, thereby pointing man to their need for a Savior.

Rom 6:1-14: Believers have died to sin and now live for God. This entails a death to the Mosaic Law, for the Mosaic Law was an administration to reveal sin. To live under the Mosaic Law is to deny one's new life in Christ and to revert to a pre-conversion existence.

Rom 6:15-23: Believers now live not under the Mosaic Law but under an administration of grace. Those who live under the Mosaic Law are slaves to sin; those who have been justified by faith in Christ are slaves to righteousness. The believer has exchanged masters: he has traded Mosaic Law (which produces sin) for God (who gives life).

### ROMANS 7-8

Rom 7:1-4: The Mosaic Law does not have authority over believers because believers have died to it. Just as marriage is binding only until death, so the Mosaic Law is no longer binding after a person has died to the flesh.

Rom 7:5: The Mosaic Law arouses sinful passions.

Rom 7:7: The Mosaic Law is holy, righteous, and good. The problem is that man's flesh is sinful and therefore Mosaic Law + flesh=sin. When the holy Mosaic Law confronts sinful flesh, man's desires for sin increase. Thus the Mosaic Law exposes man's sin and its consequent death.

Rom 7:23; 8:2: The word "law" here means "principle."

Rom 8:3: This verse summarizes the point of chapter 7: The Mosaic Law is powerless because it is weakened by the flesh. Thus the Mosaic Law could not provide life, so Jesus died as an offering for sin so that the demands of the Law would be fulfilled in us. Since those demands of righteousness were satisfied by Jesus, we are no longer subject to the requirements of the Mosaic Law.

Rom 8:7: God's law here speaks of God's will and is not restricted to the Mosaic Law. The point is that the sinful mind cannot do what God desires.

## ROMANS 9-11

Rom 9:4: “The receiving of the law”: this is clearly the Mosaic Law.

Rom 9:31: Deciding the meaning of law in this verse is debated. It may refer to the Mosaic Law which promised righteousness or the emphasis may be upon righteousness itself, making “law” here a synonym for principle. In either case, righteousness comes only through faith in Jesus; for that reason the Gentiles obtained it but the Jews did not.

Rom 10:4: This is a summary verse for the previous paragraph. That “Christ is the end of the law” means that Christ is the purpose of the law: the law leads to Christ and those who follow the Mosaic Law (which reveals man’s guilt and need of a savior) will come to Christ who provides that righteousness. Righteousness cannot be achieved through the law alone because the flesh is incapable of obeying it. But righteousness can be obtained through Christ who fulfilled the Mosaic Law.

Christ is also the end of the law in that there is no purpose of the Mosaic Law beyond Christ. Since Christ fulfills it and provides all that it ever could (and more), there is no abiding function of the Mosaic Law. Christ completes it. All should now come to Christ instead of the Mosaic Law. By being in Christ, with a new life in Christ, one fulfills God’s moral demands (law). Our status is now “in Christ” (or with the Spirit of Christ in us; 8:9-10) and not “under the law.”

This does not mean we can live free from God’s moral character (law), for by virtue of being “in Christ” we are living in conformity with God’s will (law). If we disobey God, we are not abiding in Christ. If by saying we are not under the law we mean that we are our own law, we are gravely mistaken. Instead we are in Christ, subject to God, and slaves to righteousness. By virtue of being in Christ, saved by his blood, given a new heart, it is only natural (it is our nature) to walk in conformity with God’s character (law). The claim that since that we are freed from the Mosaic Law we can now sin it up is a complete misunderstanding of our salvation. That claim comes from an outsider who doesn’t know grace, who doesn’t appreciate the cost of salvation, who doesn’t have union with Christ. The one who has humbled himself before God (a necessary component of salvation) cannot arrogantly claim to have no allegiance to God (for sinning is rebellion).

## ROMANS 12-16

Rom 13:10: Love is the fulfillment of the law. In the context here, Paul is quoting from the 10 Commandments which are summed up in the command to “love your neighbor.” So loving one’s neighbor fulfills some of the Mosaic Law. But this part of the Mosaic Law is part of God’s timeless moral law, and it can be easily summarized in this one commandment.

Rom 14:5-6: Paul’s instruction here clearly shows that the Mosaic Law is not binding on believers, for if it was, Sabbath observance would not be optional. Paul also uses the example of the food that one eats; this was tightly governed by the Mosaic Law but it no longer applies to those not under the Mosaic Law. In the cases of laws outside of the eternal moral law of God, the believer has freedom and is judged on the basis of conscience. One might sin by not keeping the Sabbath *if* his conscience condemns him. Thus the believer must live according to his conscience in a way that glorifies God and reflects the fact that we belong to him.

Rom 14:14: Paul is convinced that no food is unclean. This clearly indicates that the Mosaic Law is outside the eternal moral will of God. Some may think that they need to eat a certain way and they will be judged if they do not act in the way they believe is required. Later they may mature and recognize that they are not under such restriction. (This was particularly an issue for Jews who grew up in obedience to the Mosaic Covenant and had great difficulty in separating God's eternal will from the Mosaic Law.) Furthermore, if another might be harmed by what I do (or eat), then for the love of my brother, I am bound to act accordingly. I am restricted in what I can do by virtue of love for another. The point is not that as one not under the law I can act however I please without regard for others, but that I have a new master and I act according to his desires.

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

While we are not under law (the Mosaic Law), we certainly are under teaching. Scripture (the NT) clearly commands us to do certain things and we cannot claim to be free from those instructions. But we are not under them in the sense that we must do them in order to gain righteousness. We do them because we have already been made righteous and thus are walking in conformity with the righteousness secured for us.



## STUDY #36: THE NEW COVENANT AND THE CHURCH

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, and Hebrews 8–10. Try to determine what the New Covenant is and then identify if it is in operation today. If you think it is, explain how it is. If not, explain how/when it will be fulfilled and how it relates to the church.

### THE PROBLEM

Many people assume that Jesus made the New Covenant *with the church* on the basis of a superficial reading of New Testament passages. They read that Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20). They know that Hebrews emphatically declares that the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant (Heb 8-10). They recall that Paul claimed to be a minister of a New Covenant (2 Cor 3:6).

The problem with the simple conclusion that the church is now enjoying the New Covenant is that it doesn't fit with what the OT predicts about the New Covenant. For a full treatment, see the previous handout, The New Covenant in the OT; in brief, Jeremiah predicts that God would make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and Judah in which he would write his law on their hearts and they would all know God (Jer 31:31-37). It includes a restoration of Israel to the promised land, an eternal preservation of the Jewish people, and the establishment of David's son ruling in Jerusalem.

### SOME SOLUTIONS

Careful readers have a few options. (1) Some believe that Israel forfeited its role in the plan of God, and the (mostly Gentile) church receives the blessings in Israel's place. But this requires a redefinition of God's promises, which some would consider an act of unfaithfulness on God's part. The point of the New Covenant promise was that wicked Israel would be made righteous. Yet this view has God eternally rejecting Israel because of its wickedness and choosing a new Israel.

(2) Some believe that the church is a *partial* recipient of the promises of the New Covenant and that Israel will be restored in the future at which time the rest of the New Covenant will be fulfilled. The problem with this view is that there is no indication that a covenant can be split up into parts, some of which are fulfilled with one party (a Gentile church) and others with another party (Israel). This seems to be a pragmatic solution that requires a *loose* interpretation of the Old Testament passages.

(3) Some dispensationalists in the last century argued that there were *two* New Covenants—one promised to Israel in the OT that would be fulfilled in the future and *another* that Jesus made with the church. The strength of this view is that it attempts to honor all biblical passages without resorting to redefinition. Its weakness is that there is no indication in the Bible that there are two distinct New Covenants. No one holds this view today.

### KINGDOM NOW, NOT YET, OR BOTH?

It is helpful to take a step back and consider the views on how the church is experiencing the promises of the last days (eschaton). On one end of the spectrum, some believe in *realized eschatology*. This view sees most of the future kingdom blessings as in force today. Believers are right now experiencing God's kingdom on earth and the fulfillment of the New Covenant. (An extreme version known as preterism also believes that Jesus has already returned and the resurrection has already occurred.) This requires *spiritualizing* most of the promises of the Old Testament, such that promises of an abundant grain harvest (to give one example) is fulfilled now in something much greater: a harvest of righteousness and joy. On the other end of the spectrum, I believe that the kingdom is *entirely* future and the New Covenant is not yet in force. A popular position takes the middle ground of *inaugurated eschatology*, which sees certain parts of the kingdom and New Covenant as presently being fulfilled with a full fulfillment in the future. This view is sometimes referred to as the "already/not yet" view.

### THE LEGITIMACY OF THE ALREADY/NOT YET VIEW

What everyone is wrestling with is how to understand what the church is experiencing today. Because there are some *similarities* with OT promises, the "already/not yet" view believes that there is some partial fulfillment. In my estimation, however, the *differences* are so great that our present situation does not constitute fulfillment. Furthermore, I have a *philosophical* problem with views that pull apart promises. I don't think it's legitimate to take a package of promises (e.g., the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31) and say that some are for now and some are for later. I don't think it's legitimate to see *fulfillment* of promises to a party other than the one to whom they were promised. I'm not denying the *blessings* that the church is experiencing (which are real and wonderful!), but I don't think that we have a *textual* basis for claiming that *part* of the New Covenant is now operative and *part* is not.

Of course, my "problem" is that the New Testament (the term of which by itself helps to create confusion, since "testament" is synonymous with "covenant") speaks about the New Covenant *in relation to the church*. This is why many conclude that the New Covenant is now operative, and that leads them to believe that the apostles saw God *changing* his promises. This then serves as grounds for seeing large-scale revision of the OT; the OT is read in light of the NT instead of the other way around. Spiritualization of OT promises is viewed as legitimate and what the NT doesn't repeat from the OT is usually denied (e.g., Israel's restoration to its land).

### MY VIEW: RATIFIED BUT NOT INAUGURATED

Is there another way that does not require a major reconfiguration of God's promises in the OT? I believe there is, but I think it is worth observing at this point that my view does not need to *solve every problem* in order to be accepted. It simply must be *more convincing* on the whole than the other view. I think that the other views start off with a major deficit by believing that the prophets who wrote the OT promises and the people who heard these same promises *could never have understood* what they actually meant. For example, if you told Jeremiah and his audience that the New Covenant would actually be fulfilled with Gentiles without any regard for Israel's post-exilic restoration, they would have considered you delusional since Jeremiah said the opposite.

My view is that Jesus *ratified* the New Covenant with his death on the cross and he will *inaugurate* it at his Second Coming when he establishes his kingdom on earth. By dying, Jesus paid all that was necessary for the forgiveness of sins, the granting of new hearts, and the restoration of Israel. But though the blood was shed for the New Covenant, it does not require that the covenant came into force. By way of analogy, the selection of a US president is *ratified* by the people on a Tuesday in November, but he is not *inaugurated* until January 20. Though Jesus *ratified* the New Covenant with his death, he did not *inaugurate* it because Israel did not accept him. After the resurrection, Peter appealed to Israel to repent of their rejection of Jesus so that “times of refreshing” would come and Jesus would restore everything “as he promised long ago through his holy prophets” (Acts 3:19-21). Because Israel rejected Jesus as their sacrifice and king, he did not fulfill his promises. (If you think of this in an OT context, this makes perfect sense: God sent many prophets to tell Israel to repent; when they did not turn to him, he did not bless them.) When Israel does repent, their sin will be forgiven and God’s promised blessings will be fulfilled.

### ISN’T THE CHURCH IN THE NEW COVENANT?

So what is going on with the church today? How are we to understand the passages in the NT that speak of the New Covenant? I think that these are to be understood in a way similar to some passages that speak of the kingdom. In Acts 28, Paul “preached the kingdom of God.” He wasn’t preaching that the church is the kingdom, but he was speaking of what Jew and Gentile must do in order to enter that (future) kingdom. In the book of Hebrews, the author warns his readers against returning to the Old (Mosaic) Covenant with its temple sacrifices for sin. If they do, they are turning their backs on Jesus whose perfect sacrifice truly atoned for sins. It is *not* necessary to conclude that the New Covenant is now in operation just because the Old Covenant is obsolete. There can be a window of time between ratification and inauguration during which time it is damning to reject the new administration in favor of the old. The old system could save *as long as* it was a shadow of the new and the individual’s faith was in God’s *future* provision of a sufficient sacrifice. But *once the sufficient sacrifice has been made*, to return to the old system constitutes *rejection* of God’s provision. But the offer of the sufficient sacrifice does not necessarily entail the inauguration of the covenant. Of course, it could have, but I think that it was *so obvious* to the early church that they weren’t experiencing the New Covenant (or the kingdom) that the apostles did not feel the need to make the point explicitly.

### WHAT IS THE CHURCH EXPERIENCING IF NOT THE NEW COVENANT?

Yet I still haven’t answered the question: if the New Covenant has not been inaugurated, what is the church experiencing today with the forgiveness of sins and regeneration of hearts? I think that God has graciously given to the church New Covenant-like blessings *in order to make Israel jealous*. As Paul explains in Romans 11, one of God’s purposes in establishing the (largely Gentile) church was to provoke Israel to jealousy so that they would return to God. Thus it makes good sense that God would give to the church gifts that the Jewish people would recognize as the work of God promised to them. In seeing God’s absence from their midst and yet his fingerprints on the church, they would seek God with the expectation that he would do as he promised and establish the New Covenant with them.

Someone has proposed an analogy that compares God's promises to Israel to a great banquet. Right now the church is "setting the table" for that banquet and in the process is benefiting from those blessings (such as in enjoying the delicious smells, sampling some of the dishes, etc.). While imperfect, this analogy provides one way to understand how the church can enjoy blessings related to the New Covenant without denying the full, future fulfillment of that New Covenant.

It is important to understand that it is only because Jesus *died on the cross* that the church can now enjoy forgiveness of sins and new birth. In what way are we now "ministers of a New Covenant"? We live in light of the New Covenant and all that God has promised in it. The ratification of the New Covenant decidedly makes the Old Covenant *old* and we implore people (particularly Jewish people, and recall that Paul declared that the gospel was salvation *first* for the Jew, then for the Gentile) to reject the Old Covenant in favor of what God has promised in the New Covenant through the death and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Think about how your view of the future, including the promised kingdom, affects your view of history, the church's mission, and our involvement in governmental affairs.

## STUDY #37: MILLENNIAL VIEWS

Some have joked that with so much confusion concerning premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism, they prefer panmillennialism, trusting that it will all “pan out” in the end. The truth in this humor is that none of us can control the future, but the corollary that what we believe doesn’t matter is wrong. Though one’s millennial position is technically an “eschatological” (end times) view, it has a major impact on how we read the Bible and how we live today.

### BRIEF DEFINITIONS OF MILLENNIAL VIEWS

The names for the views come from the timing of Jesus’ return in relation to the millennium, but this is much more than a chronology debate.

**Premillennialism:** Jesus will return *before* (pre) the millennium. He will rule over the present earth for 1,000 years in order to fulfill all of God’s unfulfilled promises.

**Postmillennialism:** Jesus will return *after* (post) the millennium. The present age is the “millennium” (though it is not 1,000 years long) during which “God’s kingdom” is expanding in the world through the mission of the church. When Jesus comes, history (time) will come to an end and the eternal state will begin in a new heavens and new earth.

**Amillennialism:** There is *no* (a) millennium. Adherents reject this designation because they believe that there *is* a millennium and we are living in it now (though it is not 1,000 years long). Jesus is building his kingdom today through the church (the present spiritual kingdom) and at the end of the age, he will return, destroy the earth, and establish the new heavens and new earth.

### SIMILARITIES AND DISTINCTIONS

Post- and a- agree that the thousand years is not to be taken as signifying 1,000 years of 365 days. Like most of the numbers in Revelation, the millennium is not taken as a literal number but as a symbol.

Post- and a- agree that Revelation is not to be read as a chronological account of future events.

Post- and a- agree that Jesus’ rule is spiritual not earthly and that the promises made for Israel are fulfilled in the church.

Post- and a- generally agree that the millennium began in the first century and we are living in it today. Some post- believe that the millennium will only begin in the future when the world is Christian.

Post- and a- agree that there will be no future seven-year tribulation. Tribulation occurs whenever the church is persecuted.

Post- and a- agree that the rapture occurs at the same time as Jesus’ return to earth.

Post- and a- agree that Satan is currently bound and Christians are currently reigning over the earth with Christ.

Post- and a- agree that Jesus is now reigning, but a- believes that Jesus is reigning in heaven while post- believes that Jesus is reigning on earth through the gospel.

Pre- and post- agree that the millennium is a time of great earthly blessing.

Pre- and (some) post- agree that the millennium is a time of glory after the tribulation and not mixed with tribulations.

Pre-, post-, and a- agree that trials are occurring on the earth today, but they differ on whether these are what are predicted as the tribulation.

### POPULARITY OF THE VIEWS

**Premillennialism** was the predominant view of the early church. **Amillennialism** became the majority view following the merging of the church and state at the time of Constantine. The Reformers (Luther, Calvin, and others) rejected much of the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church but continued to hold to amillennialism. **Postmillennialism** grew popular at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century as the world seemed to becoming more like God's kingdom, but it was nearly wiped out with the evil atrocities of World War I. **Dispensational premillennialism** has been on the rise since the late 1800s and is the majority view of evangelical churches in the US today. **Historic premillennialism** may be on the rise today, in part due to some poor presentation and misconceptions about dispensationalism.

### FAMOUS ADHERENTS

**Dispensational Premillennialism:** C. I. Scofield, Dallas Seminary, Hal Lindsey, John MacArthur, J. M. Boice, Tim LaHaye

**Historic Premillennialism:** George Ladd, John Piper, Wayne Grudem

**Postmillennialism:** B. B. Warfield, Charles Hodge, R. C. Sproul

**Amillennialism:** Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, J. I. Packer

### PREMILLENNIALISM: TWO VERSIONS

Historic premillennialism sits on the eschatological spectrum between amillennialism and dispensational premillennialism. It shares with dispensationalism the belief that Jesus will return *before* the millennium to establish his kingdom on earth. It shares with amillennialism the belief that Israel's future is solely as part of the church.

Dispensationalism makes the divide between church and Israel sharper by (1) emphasizing the literal fulfillment of OT promises to ethnic, national Israel; (2) seeing Daniel's 70th week as part of God's purpose for Israel and thus (3) placing the rapture of the church before the 70th week (the 7-year tribulation).

Historic premillennialism agrees with amillennialism in uniting the rapture with Jesus' return: the church is called up to heaven in order to greet King Jesus and usher him back to the earth to rule. Dispensationalism separates the rapture from Jesus' descent because of (1) the belief that the

church will not face God's wrath on earth; (2) the belief that during the tribulation God will work directly with Israel without the intermediate agency of the church; (3) the belief that a rapture only in order to return immediately to earth is unnecessary.

Historic premillennialism is so called because this view was held in the early church. Dispensational premillennialism is alleged to have only begun in the early 1800s. It is poorly named because (1) every view acknowledges dispensations in history; (2) the presence and character of dispensations is *not* a central feature of the view. Dispensational premillennialism has one major tenet that distinguishes them from all other views: Scripture is to be interpreted literally according to the author's intention in a consistent fashion. This accepts the presence of figurative language and symbols, but it requires textual evidence for such.

They argue that just because a number may have symbolic value (e.g., 7 and 12 have significance throughout history), this does not necessarily mean that the number is not also literal. (For example, the 7 churches of Revelation may represent the church as a whole, but they also refer to 7 specific congregations.) 1,000 years may refer to a complete period of time, but there is no *textual* evidence that it is not actually 1,000 years long. Dispensationalists fault the other views for being *inconsistent* in their interpretation of Scripture and allowing logic and theology to *change* the meaning of texts.

## THE EFFECTS OF ESCHATOLOGY

One's view of the millennium affects more than the way one would draw an end-time chart. As you can see from the views above, some see "end times" events as occurring right now whereas others believe they are yet future. This has a significant impact on what one believes about God's work in the world today and the role of the church in society.

**Amillennialism:** If you believe that we are living in the millennial kingdom today, you see the spread of the gospel as bringing God's kingdom to more people. The church is now fulfilling God's promises to bless the world. Your future hope is in heaven in eternity, not in the fulfillment of God's purposes on this earth.

**Postmillennialism:** If you believe that society will ultimately become entirely Christian, you view the church's mission as one of permeating society in order to bring it in submission to God. The return of Jesus is dependent upon the transformation of this world into what God originally intended in the Garden of Eden.

**Dispensational Premillennialism:** If you believe that society will ultimately unite against God and the people of Israel, you will focus on personal evangelism so that individuals are saved before God's wrath falls upon this earth. Because you believe in a pretribulational rapture, you do not fear the awful days predicted in Revelation. Israel is usually treated with kid gloves because God's promises to bless his people will be fulfilled in the future.

**Historic Premillennialism:** If you believe that only Jesus can establish a righteous kingdom on earth, you will not put great efforts in transforming society through politics. Though you do not believe that the rapture will occur before the tribulation, you trust that God will keep his believers from

apostatizing during the outpouring of his wrath. Israel has no future as an entity but individual Jews who trust Jesus will be saved in the church.

### SOME COMMON MISREPRESENTATIONS OF DISPENSATIONALISM

Perhaps without exception, dispensationalism is not accurately understood or described by those who do not accept it. One common failure is to emphasize features that were articulated by one person 100 years ago but which are not widely held today. Opponents often stress aspects that dispensationalists do not believe. This includes:

**1. The significance of dispensations.** Dispensationalism no more needs dispensations than any other view. (All believe that God's ways of working have changed with time; for instance, no one believes sacrifices are required today.) Proposals about "tests" and "failures," as well as the number (4, 5, 6, 7, 8), are at best peripheral to the view.

**2. A distinction in salvation.** Dispensationalists do *not* believe that Israel and the church are saved in different ways. They insist that all people in all times are saved through faith in God's provision of the death of Jesus on the cross.

**3. A contrast between earthly people and spiritual people.** Israel is just as earthly as the church and just as spiritual. Both Israel and the church live on the earth and will live on the earth in the future kingdom. Both Israel and the church are spiritual to the degree that they are submitted to God's will and living by his Spirit.

**4. A claim that the church is outside of God's original plan.** God always planned to bless the nations (Gentiles) through Israel. But God did not reveal *prior to Israel's rejection of their Messiah* that he would establish a single body of Jews and Gentiles in order to provoke Israel to jealousy. This lack of revelation in the OT is why Paul called the church a *mystery* (Eph 3). It's not surprising that God would not reveal this reality given the sincere desire that Israel would embrace its Messiah.

**5. The escape from all trials.** Dispensationalists do not believe that Christians will not face tribulations and even suffer martyrdom. They do believe that the Church will not be on earth when God pours out his just wrath on an unbelieving world during a seven-year Tribulation prior to Jesus' return to establish his kingdom.

**6. A wooden literalism in the interpretation of Scriptures.** Dispensationalists accept figures of speech and symbols according to the *author's intention*. They deny that what all would have understood as literal in the OT *became symbolic* because of NT revelation. They believe that NT revelation is consistent with the OT and no *change* is necessary or permissible. (For example, Ezekiel's temple should be understood as a physical building in Jerusalem and not as some spiritual symbol of the church or New Jerusalem.)

**7. An inherent preoccupation with timelines and date-setting.** Because the dispensational view takes Scripture literally there are lots of *details* which they believe God has revealed. (By spiritualizing these details, the other views know very little about the future.) This provokes greater study in an effort to understand God's plan correctly. Some untrained or unbalanced individuals have made sensational claims but these are not intrinsic to dispensationalism.



**8. The newness of the system.** Opponents frequently try to bias others against the view by claiming that dispensationalism was only first begun in the early 1800s. But it is very similar to the writings of the early church. And a similar charge could have been made by the Catholics against the Reformers in the 16th century. The real issue is whether it is correct to interpret the Bible according to the author's intention or whether some passages must be re-interpreted (changed) in light of later revelation.

#### RECOMMENDED ARTICLE

<http://bibchr.blogspot.com/2006/11/twenty-five-stupid-reasons-for-dissing.html>

## STUDY #38: REVELATION: THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISES

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read the book of Revelation, considering how God fulfills all of his promises. Think about how Revelation brings a glorious climax to everything we've read in the Bible.

### OUR HOPE: A PHYSICAL BODY

Because of some misunderstandings, some Christians do not have a high view of the physical body. This may be in part to a wrong idea of what the "flesh" is that Paul describes ("flesh" is not our physical body but "the human person in contrast to God" [Moo]). It may also be related to some anti-materialistic views that exalt the spirit but denigrate the body. In addition, because we look forward to being in heaven with Jesus, some incorrectly assume that a physical body is unnecessary or undesirable.

Paul addresses this issue directly in his letters to the Corinthians. In 2 Cor 5, he describes three states: his greatest desire is to be clothed with his heavenly body; the worst situation is to be in the present "earthly tent" that is mortal. Between those two states is a third: being "unclothed" (a spirit without a body) but in the Lord's presence. At death our body goes into the ground and our spirit goes to be with the Lord. At the first resurrection (the rapture), our body is raised from the dead and united with our soul (1 Thess 4:16; Rev 20:4-6). God designed man as a united body and soul. Only death (not part of God's design) separates body and soul. Our future hope is body and soul without the possibility of separation.

### OUR HOPE: AN EARTHLY HOME

Along with the previous misunderstanding, some also conceive of their future as in a spiritual (non-physical) heaven that is radically different from our present existence on earth. Some of this error stems from a misunderstanding of what the "kingdom of heaven" is (it is God's kingdom come down to earth *from* heaven). Some of it comes from misunderstanding passages such as "this earth is not our home" (Heb 13:14, NLT) and "we are strangers on the earth" (Heb 11:13).

But God created this earth and he called it "good." Though corrupted and cursed in the Fall, God intends to redeem the earth and accomplish his original purpose of his image-bearers ruling over it for his glory (cf. Rom 8:21). We were not created for heaven and our destiny is not heaven, though we will spend some time there while waiting for the redemption of all things. Passages that speak of believers being strangers on this earth are addressing the evil world system that is now under the control of Satan. "Our citizenship is in heaven" because we serve a Lord who is now in heaven but who will return to earth to "bring everything under his control" (Phil 3:20-21).

There are two future destructions of the earth. The first is graphically described in Isaiah 24 and Revelation 6-18 and may be characterized as God's judgment of evil on this earth. After the "winter" of this destruction, the earth is revitalized with new life, a new King, and the removal of (most of) the curse throughout the millennial kingdom. At the end of the thousand years, God creates a new earth with a new Jerusalem (Rev 21). It seems appropriate to see some measure of

*continuity* of the old earth with the new earth, just as there is with our mortal body and our eternal body (“to each kind of seed [God] gives its own [new] body”; 1 Cor 15:38).

## THE ARGUMENT OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation is appropriately named because what John sees is the “revealing” of Jesus as Lord over the earth. The book was written to churches (congregations of believers) who were enduring persecution and needed the hope of Jesus’ return to help them to persevere. The **first chapter** introduces Jesus as the eternal God with authority over death and Hades. He is the primary character throughout the book. In **chapters 2 and 3**, Jesus addresses believers in their present-day situations, warning them of dangers and encouraging them to overcome.

In **chapter 4** readers are taken to the heavenly courtroom where John sees future events. A scroll sealed seven times must be opened, but when no one in all of creation is found worthy to open it, John is emotionally devastated. But then Jesus rises to take the scroll and he is found worthy to open it because he was slain and with his blood he purchased people for God from every tribe and tongue (**Rev 5**). Most of the rest of the book (chapters 6–19) is concerned with the opening of this scroll, so it is clearly of supreme importance.

What is written on the scroll? It is not the judgments, for those occur *prior* to the scroll being opened (all seven seals must be broken in order for the scroll to be read). The scroll must then be related to what occurs after the judgments. Some believe that the scroll is Christ’s “title-deed” to the world, and this makes sense given that he has the right to it by virtue of his lineage (“the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David”) and his sacrificial death. Similarly, the scroll may contain God’s good plan for the world which is fulfilled in Jesus’ earthly reign over it.

That judgments precede the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth is expected, for the earth has been under the control of the evil one since Genesis 3. The process of opening the scroll by Jesus’ breaking of seven seals unleashes death, famine, and destruction upon the earth yet the hardness of men’s hearts precludes their repentance (**Rev 6**). There is some debate over how to understand the relationship of the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. Some believe they are describing the same seven judgments in three ways (“recapitulation”). A preferable view is that they are “telescopic”: the seventh seal consists of seven trumpets; the seventh trumpet consists of seven bowls. All are an expression of God’s long-delayed wrath against his image-bearers who despise and defy him.

Though the book proceeds in a generally chronological order, there are several interludes that provide the reader with background information. Thus after the six seals, we learn about the 144,000 Jews whom God has protected and the great multitude of believers who have been martyred (**Rev 7**). After the six trumpets (**Rev 8-9**), we are told of the two witnesses who prophesied for God for the first 3.5 years of the tribulation before they were killed and resurrected (**Rev 11**). We also learn about the evil trinity and their efforts to destroy Israel and other believers (**Rev 12**). The evil trinity consists of the dragon/Satan (an angelic being), the beast who is the Antichrist (a human king who imitates Jesus), and the second beast/false prophet (who supports the Antichrist in a manner similar to the way the Holy Spirit serves Jesus; **Rev 13**).

In **chapter 14**, three angels announce what is coming in chapters 15-19. The first angel commands all men to worship God because “the hour of his judgment has come”—this judgment is fulfilled in the seven bowls of **chapters 15–16**. The second angel declares that Babylon has fallen, an explanation of which is given in **chapters 17–18**. The third angel describes the eternal wrath of God which is fulfilled when Jesus returns and casts the enemies into the lake of fire in **chapter 19**.

Three evil spirits come from the evil trinity to gather to Armageddon the kings of the earth for “the battle on the great day of God Almighty” (Rev 16:14). This attack is what is described in Zechariah 14 where the armies of the world attempt to destroy Jerusalem. At this time the Lord Jesus descends to the Mount of Olives, defeats his enemies, and becomes king over the whole earth. The Antichrist and False Prophet are thrown into the lake of fire, but Satan is bound for a thousand years during which time Jesus rules with his saints over the earth. Upon Satan’s release, his short-lived rebellion leads to the final judgment of the wicked (**Rev 20**). Then God creates a new universe in which he lives with those he has made righteous for all of eternity (**Rev 21–22**).

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Revelation in light of the OT (especially Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zephaniah, Zechariah). What can you understand in Revelation from the OT that would otherwise be veiled?

## STUDY #39: REVELATION IN LIGHT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Revelation in light of the OT (especially Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zephaniah, Zechariah). What can you understand in Revelation from the OT that would otherwise be veiled?

### INTRODUCTION

Like many books of the Bible, Revelation is often studied today as an independent book. This can lead to many significant errors in interpretation because Revelation was God's capstone to his written Word. Just as a reader would be confused by reading only the last chapter of a book, so he will struggle to understand Revelation apart from God's previous revelation. The vision that God gave John is difficult to understand, but the difficulty is exacerbated by failing to read Revelation as the conclusion to a grand and glorious story written by a single Author. This study is an attempt to help the reader to see *a few* of the connections with the OT and earlier parts of the NT so that the reader will better understand Revelation and be provoked to dig deeper into God's Word.

### THE DESCRIPTION OF JESUS (REV 1)

Since the book identifies itself as "the revelation of Jesus Christ," it is not surprising that there are numerous ways in which Jesus is described. Many of these echo the Old Testament, not only identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophetic hopes, but also providing a richness of meaning for those familiar with those passages. As Psalm 89:27 expected of God's future Messiah, Jesus is the firstborn and ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev 1:5). Jesus is not only the powerful Messiah who comes on the clouds (Dan 7:13), he is the one who is pierced (Zech 12:10; Rev 1:7). In claiming that he is ("I am") the Alpha and the Omega (Rev 1:8, 17; 22:13), Jesus identifies himself with Yahweh who is the first and the last (Isa 48:12). When the reader is introduced to one "like a son of man" (Rev 1:13), this immediately brings to me the one in Dan 7:13 given authority over all nations and peoples. He is the divine figure described in Dan 10:5-6 whose eyes are flaming torches, arms and legs are burnished bronze, and who wears a golden belt (Rev 1:13-15). He is similar to the Ancient of Days whose hair is white like wool (Dan 7:9; Rev 1:14) and his voice is like God's in that it sounds like the roar of rushing waters (Ezek 43:2; Rev 1:15). He is the Servant of Isaiah whose mouth was like a sharpened sword (Isa 49:2; Rev 1:16). Many more echoes may be found in Revelation 2 and following. If you do not understand the terms and identities as developed in the OT, you will miss most of the meaning.

### THE BEAST AND BABYLON (REV 12-19)

Daniel's fourth beast is the final kingdom of rebellious man. This beast has 10 horns, as does the beast in Revelation. The last horn is himself also known as the beast and he rules a nation that is given authority over the entire world (Rev 13). Daniel 10 reveals that the conflict between earthly kingdoms is energized by a spiritual battle. In Revelation we see the dragon (the angelic being Satan) empowering a human figure known as the beast.

This beast is the final Babylon, in direct continuity with the original Babylon (Babel in Genesis 11 is the same word in Hebrew as Babylon) and the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar who exalts himself

against God and persecutes the saints who do not bow down to the golden anti-God image (Dan 3–6). As prophesied in Isaiah, Babylon falls and the Israelites are delivered (Isa 13–14, 21, 48; Rev 17–18). The defeat of Babylon is the defeat of all of rebellious humanity’s efforts against their Creator. The judgment at the tower of Babel (Gen 11) and the conquest of Babylon by Persia (Dan 5) only foreshadow the great and final destruction of the seed of the serpent in Rev 17–19.

### **THE JUDGMENTS OF THE BOWLS (REV 16)**

The final outpouring of God’s wrath in the seven bowls is intended to recall God’s judgment upon Egypt in order to deliver his people from oppression. In both cases, the plagues serve to reveal and harden the hearts of God’s enemies in order to prepare them for the final judgment. The first bowl causes sores to break out on those with the mark of the beast, just as the Egyptians (but not the Israelites) were afflicted with festering boils (Exod 9:10; Rev 16:2). The second and third bowls turn the sea and rivers into blood killing every living thing just as the Nile turned to blood and killed the fish (Exod 7:20–21; Rev 16:3–7). In the fourth bowl the chief deity that the Egyptians worshiped, the sun, sears the people with scorching heat (Rev 16:8). The fifth bowl recalls the ninth plague when the land of Egypt was plunged into darkness (Exod 10:21–23; Rev 16:10). The sixth bowl dries up the Euphrates River, a miracle reminiscent of the parting of the Red Sea (Exod 14; Rev 16:12). The seventh bowl causes lightning, thunder, and a severe earthquake, the same phenomena that preceded God’s appearance to Israel on Mount Sinai. Altogether the progression in Revelation parallels that of the exodus beginning with the plagues and culminating with the divine presence on earth.

### **THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH (REV 21–22)**

The vision of the new heaven and new earth in chapters 21–22 is intended to stimulate comparison with God’s creation of the present heaven and earth in Genesis 1–3. Just as the Garden of Eden was the place where God walked among his people, so God will live in the midst of his people in the new creation. Yet God’s presence and glory is so much greater in the new Jerusalem that the city will not even need a sun or a moon. The old creation was marred by sin which led to pain, mourning, and death, but the new creation will not be tainted by sin or any of its effects. Evil-doers will be excluded from the new Jerusalem not by the first death but by the second. (All die once, but it is those who die twice who are eternally separated from God.) The tree of life from which mankind was banned is now readily accessible and abundantly productive. The ones who were made in the image of God now have God’s name written on their foreheads. Intended to rule over God’s creation, man finally fulfills his divine purpose without a curse on the land to frustrate his efforts. This rule goes on for ever and ever, without the possibility of sin or evil ending the glorious harmony of man with his Creator and the new creation.

### **EVOKING TRUTH AND EMOTION**

Never in Revelation does the author indicate that he is quoting the Old Testament. Instead the vision that he records is full of Old Testament realities expressed in Old Testament language. These allusions bring to the reader’s mind the truth content of the OT passage as well as the emotional impact of the previous revelation. For instance, when Jesus is described as the Root of David (Rev 5:5), the reader is taken back to Isaiah 11 where the glorious future king is described. He not only

recalls the character of the Messiah but also of his longing for this righteous age in the midst of corrupt kings. Similarly, when Jesus is introduced as a Lamb, the reader thinks of John's "Behold the Lamb" (John 1:29) which in turn goes back to the one "led like a lamb to the slaughter" with all of the raw emotional impact of a righteous servant who was crushed for our iniquities (Isa 53:7)

By speaking in the language of the Old Testament, the author is multiplying the cognitive and emotional power of his words. The effect is to fill the reader with great joy and hope as he awaits the fulfillment of all of God's promises in Jesus' judgment and return to the earth. The one who is ignorant of the Old Testament misses out.

### **GOING FURTHER**

A quick entry into this type of study can be gained from looking at cross-references and notes in a study Bible. But each allusion must be understood in its full context and that requires a commitment to learn the OT. The investment is worth it in a thousand ways.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

How would you answer the question, What is the Bible all about? Think through the unfolding of God's plan in Scripture and identify his primary purposes, turning points, and fulfillments. How would you summarize the Bible if you had one hour?

## STUDY #40: GOD'S PURPOSE IN CREATION: A SUMMARY

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

How would you answer the question, What is the Bible all about? Think through the unfolding of God's plan in Scripture and identify his primary purposes, turning points, and fulfillments. How would you summarize the Bible if you had one hour?

### GOD'S PURPOSE IN CREATION

In the beginning, God created the universe to display his glory to the ones he made in his image. Man and woman were given the earth to rule and to fill with their offspring, with all enjoying the presence of God in their midst. But the decision to seek satisfaction outside of God led to separation from God, a curse on the earth (to rule) and childbearing (to fill), and physical death. Yet even as he was speaking judgment, God promised redemption by declaring that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent. Even so the sin of man would pervade Adam's descendants so that only a righteous remnant would submit to God. Mankind's war against God would not be stopped though God destroyed the earth with a flood and scattered mankind with confusion of languages. So God chose a family to bring blessing to the earth.

Abraham and his barren wife were promised innumerable seed and a strategic piece of real estate by which God would reach the nations of the world. But the patient process by which God worked through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants would demonstrate God's glory through weak and sinful creatures. Through Abraham God revealed the need for faith in order to be justified. Through Isaac God revealed his sovereign choice of the seed (Jacob, not Esau). Through Jacob God showed his pleasure in redeeming even a deceitful usurper. Through Judah God identified his choice of a king as one who would lay down his life for his brothers.

The family of Abraham became the nation of Israel outside of the land God had promised to them. Through the oppression of the Egyptians Jacob's numerous descendants learned to cry out to God for salvation and God delivered Israel by humbling the mightiest nation on earth. Israel was led out of Egypt and to a new relationship with God. At Mount Sinai the nation of Israel was bound to God in a suzerain-vassal covenant whereby the people would be blessed if they obeyed the laws of their King. The intention of the Mosaic Covenant was to accomplish the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant: Israel was to bless all the nations of the world by being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. God came down to live in the midst of the twelve tribes when the tabernacle was constructed and laws concerning his holiness were implemented. The world was to marvel at a wise and understanding nation whose God was near them.

But the Mosaic Covenant did not of itself provide regenerated hearts, and the laws that would sanctify the individual submitted to God would only increase the sinfulness of those who worshiped other gods. The sinful condition of the majority of the nation led first to the judgment in the wilderness and later to the divine prediction that Israel would be exiled from the land God was about to give them.



The book of Joshua shows the possibilities when the nation is faithful, for God fights for Israel and gives the people rest in the land. The book of Judges shows what happens when the nation ignores the covenant and pursues other gods. The nation clearly needs a righteous king, but it is not clear where one could come from in this wicked nation. Yet the book of Ruth shows a righteous family who will produce a godly king.

The first king Saul reveals the type of ruler that sinful Israel desires and the result is disaster. God's choice of David provides a submissive but imperfect king who is the prototype of an heir who would accomplish all that God had promised. Through the Davidic Covenant, the Lord promised to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant by establishing David's descendant on the throne of Israel forever. David writes many psalms for his righteous heir who will meditate on God's word day and night, perfectly fulfill God's commands, but also suffer for the sins of others before being raised to life again. His successor Solomon demonstrates much that God desires in a wise king ruling over his creation but his ultimate quest to find satisfaction in the creation apart from the Creator dooms his kingdom.

The history of the nations of Israel and Judah consistently show man's unfaithfulness and God's faithfulness. Wicked kings are punished, but God preserves the line of David and raises up prophets to call the nation to repent and to elaborate on his promises for those who do. Against the backdrop of idolatrous rulers, the promise of a godly king who will fulfill the Davidic covenant becomes increasingly more prominent. Isaiah predicts a virgin-born child whose righteous reign will never end. He will lead Israel out of exile by atoning for their sins by his innocent death. Jeremiah describes the New Covenant that God will make with Israel, granting them new hearts to obey him fully. Ezekiel promises that despite exile Israel will live again, the temple will be rebuilt, and God will live with his people.

The hope that this will occur when Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was destroyed (in 539 BC) is clarified by later prophets. Daniel revealed that Babylon was but the first of four world empires who would subjugate Israel before God would establish his kingdom on earth. At that time one like a Son of Man would receive the kingdom and bring in everlasting righteousness. Haggai explained that the lack of blessing was owing to disobedience, but God would surely fulfill his promises for a glorious temple, a righteous people, and a Davidic king. Zechariah called the people to obey with visions of God living among his people in a restored Jerusalem after Israel repented for piercing the shepherd-king. Esther shows how God is at work protecting his people through natural (providential, but not miraculous) means. This was the state of affairs for 400 years until God sent his Son.

The years of waiting for God to fulfill his promises weighed heavily on the righteous remnant who longed to be free from the oppression of sin and Gentile rule. Jesus came to fulfill every promise God had made. As a son of Abraham, he would bless all the nations who blessed him. As the son of David, he would be the righteous ruler who would bring an end to sin.

In preaching the good news of the kingdom, Jesus was declaring that God's promises were true and fulfillment was near. But God did not intend to give his kingdom to his enemies; the seed of the serpent would be crushed and not blessed. The command to repent was a call to join God's side. When the nation collectively refused to repent and submit to God's demands, Jesus prepared for a

new community that would be his faithful witness in the world. When Israel crucified its Messiah in rejection of his message, Jesus established a blood-bought body of Jews and Gentiles to bring the good news of God's plan to the whole world. Neither the execution of the Messiah nor the establishment of the church precluded God's intention to redeem this earth, and after a time during which God patiently waits for men to be saved (while the wheat and tares grow to maturity), Jesus will return to earth to destroy those who scorned his sacrifice and establish his glorious rule for the faithful. The church today bears witness to the world of God's desire that all be saved, and it provokes a God-forsaken Israel to jealousy and repentance.

When Jesus returns, he will fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant by blessing all nations, the Davidic Covenant by establishing an eternal rule of righteousness, and the New Covenant by giving Israel submissive hearts. Jesus will accomplish God's original purpose in creation by ruling over this earth, together with his vice-regents, in harmony with God's will. Thus the curse will be lifted and the groaning of creation will cease. Jesus will rule perfectly for 1,000 years subduing all of God's enemies and casting the serpent into eternal exile before handing over the kingdom to the Father. This will usher in the eternal rule of God in which there is no sin or death but only glorious joy in the presence of God as his faithful ones rule over the new creation for ever and ever.

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