



## Introduction to the Old Testament

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### Supplemental Reading:

“God’s Big Picture”

By: Vaughan Roberts

### Memory Verses:

Gen 1:26-27, Gen 12:2-3, Exodus 19:4-6,  
Deut 6:4-5, Josh 1:8, 1 Sam 16:7, 2 Sam  
7:12-13, Isa 2:2-3, Jer 31:33, Mal 1:11

# Introduction to the Old Testament

## Disciple-makers,

The Gospel Journey is about studying the Word of God, led by the Spirit of God, in a discipleship relationship, to grow in the grace of the Gospel. The Field Guide is NOT to be taught as a Bible Study or even as the primary curriculum for the Gospel Journey. The curriculum is the Word of God, and we want there to be great freedom for those in a group to discuss what the Holy Spirit has been revealing to them in their study that week. We do not want the discussion to be limited to the content covered in the Field Guide.

With that being said, the Field Guide is an effort to prepare you for significant theological terms, concepts, and themes that will likely arise in the course of discussion in a given week of reading. Thus, we encourage you to read over the content we have chosen to include in the Field Guide a couple times before your weekly discussion, so that you are able to explain these terms, concepts, and themes faithfully and clearly as they come up. If they do not come up naturally, we'd encourage you to bring them up at some point in the discussion, as we believe they are things that a mature and equipped disciple of Christ needs to understand.

Again, our hope is that far more than what is covered in the Field Guide be brought up in discussion each week, and that this tool might prepare you to explain foundational Gospel terms, concepts, and themes found in each week's reading. Ultimately, the Gospel Journey is about studying the Word of God, led by the Spirit of God, in a discipleship relationship, in order to grow in the grace of the Gospel. May your journey be blessed!

## The Harvest Team

# Introduction

We are about to embark on a remarkable journey through the entire storyline of the Old Testament in just ten short weeks. While we will not read every word, we will cover the major stages of the story. To understand the Old Testament rightly, we need to see clearly its place in the whole Bible. Though the Bible is about many things, its major thrust could be summarized by one theme: God's kingdom. God is resolved to rule and reign over his people in his place; a theme that spans all of scripture from the Garden of Eden to the new heavens and new earth of Revelation.

Furthermore, because of our rebellion against God, God's rule is specifically redemptive. He initiates and acts to save criminals and turn them into citizens of his kingdom, and he does this through the perfect life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection and ascension of their king, Jesus Christ. After God creates and mankind rebels, Genesis to Revelation unfolds God's work of redemption and re-creation. So, all the books of the Bible tell one story about one subject by one Author. The Bible is the perfect account of God and his plan to restore his kingdom on earth as he removes the curse, redeems his people, and reigns over them forever.

What moves the story of God's kingdom along is a series of covenants. A covenant defines a relationship between two parties, including

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promises and obligations. If the obligations are not met, punishment is required for the party who breaks the agreement. While there are many covenants throughout the Old Testament, God reveals his promise of salvation in the covenants he makes with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David. Finally, in the New Covenant, God's promise of salvation finds fulfillment because of its faithful mediator, Jesus Christ.

Now, let's begin our Gospel Journey through the Old Testament!

## God the Creator (Gen 1:1, 27)

When compared with other creation narratives, the Bible presents us with something totally unique. In the first chapter, we find a God who is totally distinct from his creation. This “Creator-creature” distinction is foundational for any theology that would claim to be Christian. Not only that, but in creation we find that God made all things. And he made all things good. Creation did not come about by random chaos, but by a loving act of a good God.

Remarkably, the creation story in Scripture is told twice from different vantage points. Genesis 1 gives us the broad stroke of how everything was made good and by God. Genesis 2 zooms in on the crown jewel of all creation. Only one created thing is made in God’s image - mankind. As image bearers of God, both male and female are equal in worth and dignity. Thus, all humans are to be treated with utmost love, care, and respect.

Another aspect of being created in God’s image is the divine task of representing God. To be created in the image of God means humans are “like God” as his sons and daughters, representing his character and mediating his rule over the world. Adam and Eve are called to “fill and subdue” the whole earth, even to “have dominion” over it all. In this sense, Adam and Eve were the first king and queen. Not only that,

they were priests, tasked with representing God himself. The fullest expression of the image of God is lived out in the life of Jesus Christ, who taught that the greatest commandment was to love God with everything and love your neighbor as yourself.

## The Fall (Gen 3:1-24)

In the Garden, Adam and Eve were given an explicit command: “Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Yet they disobeyed, which was direct rebellion against their Creator and Heavenly Father. Adam and Eve rejected God’s definition and rule of the world, claiming to be wise and pretending to be gods for themselves. God had put everything under Adam and Eve’s feet – everything, but himself, that is – yet, it wasn’t enough. They wanted more. And we begin to see the effects of this tragic event in the next chapter as one of their sons murders the other.

In response, God curses the serpent, the woman, and the man. Here we see that disobedience before a holy God demands justice. God casts both the man and woman out of the Garden. He exiles the humans who were created to experience life and relationship with him. Sinful rebels can no longer dwell in the place of God, experiencing the presence of God.

Yet, there is great hope. In the midst of God's curse, we find a promise of grace. Look again at Genesis 3:15. "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Speaking to the serpent, who has deceived his image bearers, God promises judgment for his enemies and victory for his people. There will be "enmity between" the two seeds. The people of the woman will go to war with the people of the serpent. Yet in this battle, a descendent of Eve will crush the head of the enemy of God's people. God will send one from the line of the woman to absorb the effects of this divine curse on the world and set humanity and creation free from its bondage to sin.

## The Flood (Gen 6:5-7)

After God curses and promises, the story of Scripture progresses quickly. But the prospects of humankind do not appear bright. In Genesis 6:5, we are told that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." God responds with judgment. Just as God judged Adam and removed him from the garden, so too shall God remove his image bearers from the earth. Since humanity is not imaging God as they were supposed to, they must be dispelled.



## God's Covenant with Noah (Gen 9:1-17)

Yet again, there is great hope. God preserves one family on earth. Noah, though not righteous in himself, finds favor in God's sight. This is the Old Testament way of saying Noah received God's grace. As such, Noah was tasked with a specific and unique mission: he must build a large vessel to preserve two of every kind of creature.

After this, God establishes a covenant with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature, that he will never again destroy the earth. And, importantly, the original calling which God gave to Adam and Eve is reiterated here. This is a kind of restart for humanity. The call to "fill and subdue" and "have dominion" is re-given to God's image bearers. Yet, in short time, humanity will experience a "second fall" at the tower of Babel. At Babel, man once again refuses to submit to God's rule. Thus, once again, God responds in judgment. Clearly, something more is needed for God's people to keep God's commands and represent him as God's image.

## God's Covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3; 15:8; 17:4-8)

Out of all the people in all the nations of the world at the time, God chose one man, Abram, upon whom to set his divine love. Abram, who would later be renamed Abraham, is promised land, offspring, and blessing. Not only that, but through Abraham and his family, God will bless all the families and nations of the earth. Part of the covenant between God and Abraham is the physical sign of circumcision, which will now mark God's people off from the rest of the world. In these ways, Abraham and his descendants will be the vehicle through which God will reverse the curse from Gen. 3 and bring blessing to the world.

## The God of Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob (Gen 26:3-5; 35:9-12)

Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob have often been referred to as the patriarchs. This is because God's promise to Abraham moved through the line of Abraham's sons. There's a strong note of continuity here. Notice how the promise of numerous offspring (Gen 26:4) and the calling to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 35:11) are passed on. Yet, there is progress from one individual to another. Here again

we see a recapitulation of what God was doing with Adam in the Garden of Eden. On the basis of God's covenant with Abraham, God makes promises to Isaac. Because of God's favor upon Abraham, God calls Jacob. And thus, the line of the patriarchs progresses. God is planning to use one family to bless the whole world.

## God's People Increase (Ex 1:7)

When God makes promises, he keeps them. We see this in the opening of Exodus when what began as Joseph and his family has multiplied to millions of people. The people of God have been fruitful and multiplied; however, this great nation of a couple million people does not yet have the land which God promised. They are still dwelling in exile, away from God's place and presence under the rule of foreign kings and gods. Now, in the book of Exodus, we will see God deliver his people in order to give them a land of their own - the land that God promised to Abraham.

## God's People Persecuted (Ex 2:23-25)

Back in Genesis 3:15, God promised to send a seed of the woman to crush the seed of the serpent. In that same verse, he put “enmity” between the two seeds. This was an act of God’s grace. Adam and Eve chose friendship with Satan and enmity towards God, but God is going to, by divine grace, reconcile sinners unto himself and refocus their enmity towards Satan and his “seed.” The book of Exodus presents us with this very battle between the two seeds. Pharaoh and the Egyptians represent the seed of the serpent. God’s people, Israel, represents the seed of the woman. If the serpent, through his seed, could squelch the seed of the woman by destroying God’s people, then the Messiah would never come into the world to bring about God’s promises.

## “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex 3:14)

In this passage, we are told something incredible about God - his name. He is called “Yahweh,” which is roughly translated as “I AM WHO I AM” or “I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE.” Certainly this name tells us a lot about God, but one thing we cannot fail to see is called aseity, which means that God is self-existent and self-sufficient. He is uncaused and independent, in and of himself. Often in Scripture, false gods are referred to as not actually existing. Idols are mute. They are lame. They can do nothing because they have no power or existence in and of themselves. Only the one true and living God can truly and rightly be called Yahweh – “I AM WHO I AM” – because only He has life in himself. God needs nothing outside or apart from Himself to be who he is.

## God & His People (Ex 4:22-23, 5:2)

One of the major recurring themes in Scripture is the idea of sonship. This calling is bound up in the original creation of humanity in God's image. Adam was God's "son" (Luke 3:38). And Noah was portrayed as God's son and Abraham was shown to be God's son. Now, the nation of Israel corporately is called God's "son" (Ex 4:22). As such, they must show the world what God is like (Ex 19:4-6). So, God is bringing his son out of Egypt by killing the firstborn son of his enemies. And he does all of this to show the world what he is like (Ex 5:2). "Who is the Lord?" God himself answers by his mighty acts to deliver his people from bondage so that they can worship him as sons.

## The Passover (Ex 12:11-13)

Every family in Egypt mourned because death came to every household – either a dead son or a dead lamb. There is no essential difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians, both are corrupted by and guilty of sin. Yet, God put his love upon Israel, providing a substitute for them through the Passover lamb. The only hope for the Israelites to be spared was if a lamb was offered in their place. The bloody lamb served as a substitute and sacrifice for the people. Essentially, the Bible is preaching the gospel to

us in a picture-story. The sacrificial system is a type, meaning God is establishing a pattern that will be fulfilled later to a greater degree. Jesus, our Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7), became our substitute and sacrifice that he might bring us to God (1 Pet 3:18).

## Salvation through Judgment (Ex 15:12-13, 17)

God's glory in salvation through judgment is one of the major themes of the Old Testament. Just as God saves his people, he judges his enemies. In fact, this often occurs in the exact same historical events. God's saving mercy comes in the midst of severe judgment. Thus, deliverance from Egypt comes at great cost. As God judges his enemies (Ex 15:1), he saves his people (Ex 15:2). After all, "the LORD is a man of war," just as Moses and the people of Israel sang in celebration (Ex 15:3). Notice also that part and parcel of God's salvation is his plan to bring about a restored Eden. God wants to bring his people to his mountain, into his sanctuary, which his hands alone have made (Ex 15:17). Though sinful humanity has been cast out of God's presence, God is working to bring his people back from spiritual exile into relationship with Himself.

## God's Covenant with Israel (Ex 19:4-6; 24)

Recall that Israel is called to be God's son (Ex 4:22). Now pay careful attention to the substance of that divine calling in Exodus 19:4-6. First, God recounts how he delivered them by his grace alone. Then, God gives them the law as a means of rightly relating to and representing him. God's people have access to God's presence (Ex 19:17) because they are the ones sprinkled by "the blood of the covenant" (Ex 24:8).

Yet, there is great tension here. Obedience is required to rightly relate to God – and not just any obedience. This must be perfect obedience. As James says, one who breaks any part of the law is guilty just as if he'd broken the whole thing (James 2:10). The testimony of all of Scripture teaches that Old Testament Israel failed to live up to this calling. The nation was continually characterized by idolatry and injustice. However, perfect obedience is still required if anyone will be able to meet with God. Not only that, but a sacrifice must also be made for the disobedience of God's people. Thus, there is a serious tension in the Bible's storyline. How will God resolve this?



## The Law is Good (Ex 20; Psalm 19)

The Ten Commandments, a summary of the whole Law, function as a constitution for Israel. We could speak of the giving of the Law as their official charter. And yet, Israel will go on to break the same Law that formally brings them into existence. Does this mean there is a problem with the Law itself? No. Over and over again in Scripture, we see that the Law is perfect. It is an expression of God's character. It reveals God's righteous standard. Furthermore, the Law communicates what it means to truly be human, as God intended. It describes how we are to relate to God and one another. Thus, God's commands in Scripture are profoundly good. Obedience to God is not legalistic but loving. Because God loves his creatures, he has told them how to live according to his design and intention. The problem is not with divine law but with human sin (Rom 7:7-12).

## The Problem of Sin (Ex 32, 40)

The tragic incident with the golden calf illustrates much about Israel. No doubt, they have been delivered from their oppressor, Pharaoh. And yet, there is a much worse oppressor from which they still need salvation. Though they are unaware, Israel actually has more in common with their Egyptian oppressors than they realize. Both share the sinful human condition. As such, Israel is prone to idolatry. Their tendency is to worship false gods. This poses a serious problem for God and his people. How can a righteous God dwell with sinful people without righteously obliterating them? The divine answer is the tabernacle and the holiness regulations of the Law. God must regulate his relationship with sinners as he works to reconcile them to himself. God himself must make a way to deal with sin.

## The Solution of Sacrifice (Lev 1, 16)

The human problem can only be resolved by divine solution. The solution is sacrifice. In order to take away the just punishment God renders for sin, both propitiation and expiation must be made. To understand these two important theological terms, just think about the annual Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16.

First, the high priest must sacrifice a goat before the Lord. This is propitiation. The sins of the people deserve God's holy wrath and just judgment. But, because of the sacrifice, God's wrath can be satisfied through substitution. Second, the high priest must confess the sins of the people over the head of another goat, which he sends outside of the camp and into the wilderness. This is expiation. The sins of the people are taken away from them.

It is vitally important to note here that these sacrifices do nothing in and of themselves. Rather, the people of Israel were forgiven as they offered sacrifices in faith and repentance, trusting God's method of salvation – that he would forgive their sins because justice had been met in the punishment of another. It was not in the blood of these Old Testament sacrifices that they found forgiveness (Heb 10:4). They pointed forward – beyond themselves – to the one, true Sacrifice. Jesus offered his own perfect life once to save all of his people from their sins (Heb 10:10). Thus, it is as if the Israelites, who possessed faith, looked through the sacrifices to the Sacrifice and found forgiveness in his blood. Their hope was in God and his bloodied Redeemer, not the blood of bulls and goats. It is not the lambs of Leviticus, but the Lamb of God “who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

## God's Choice of Israel (Deut 7, 9)

Israel was not chosen because they were more righteous. They were not chosen because they were more numerous. Rather, God chose Israel because he has a plan to bless the world through Abraham's offspring. What we find as the story of the Bible progresses is that Israel has the same heart problem as all of sinful humanity. This passage essentially interprets what we read in Numbers 13 and 14. Israel is a "stiff-necked" obstinate group of complainers. But God preserves them in the Old Testament because of his covenant faithfulness and love. From Israel, God will bring the Messiah to the earth.

## The Circumcision of the Heart (Deut 10)

So far in the Scriptures, we've seen that Israel, like all of humanity, has a heart problem. We could say that God has gotten them out of Egypt, but he hasn't yet gotten Egypt out of them. They don't just do sin, but they are sinners. Israel is characterized by a consistent spiritual inability. In fact, God gave Abraham the ordinance of fleshly circumcision to point forward to the need for spiritual circumcision (Col 2:11-12) – a change of heart in the inner person which enables obedience. The problem, of course, is the Israelites lack the ability to give themselves exactly what they need – what God has commanded – a new heart.

## Blessings &amp; Curses (Deut 28)

In the Garden of Eden, we saw the blessing of experiencing God's presence by obeying God's Word. Yet, we also saw that disobedience is met with exile from fellowship with God. Later, Moses and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai continue this same pattern. There are clear covenant obligations, which if met, result in blessings, but, if unmet, result in curses. In Deuteronomy, we see even more clearly that the Old Covenant between God and Israel includes both blessings and curses. If the people of God are not obedient to the covenant, then God will call down curses on them. If they hear God's Word and obey his voice, they will be blessed. This is not salvation by works. The people are saved by God's grace. As Creator, Redeemer, and covenant Lord, God has the right to stipulate how recipients of his grace are to respond. Blessings for obedience. Curses for disobedience. Yet, in the New Covenant, we see that God, in the person of Christ, takes the curses of the Old Covenant upon himself so that his people might receive blessing for his obedience. And, importantly, Jesus' finished work enables us to obey with the power of his Spirit (Rom 8:4).

## God Will Circumcise and Bring Back (Deut 30)

Tragically, Israel will continue to be disobedient to their covenantal relationship with God. Yet, here God promises to do what they cannot do. God will circumcise the hearts of his people. Notice the connection in verse 3 where “the LORD your God ... will gather you again.” The circumcision of the hearts of the people of God is connected here with the return from exile and the restoration of their relationship with Him.

## Conquering the Land (Josh 6-7)

Just as God promised a people and a blessing to Abraham, he also promised to give his offspring a land in which to dwell. Having succeeded Moses as leader of Israel, Joshua now leads the people of Israel into the land of Canaan to conquer it as their own. We must recognize, however, that Israel’s battle strategies are seemingly ridiculous. Who ever heard of an army marching around the city in order to capture it? But this is intentional on God’s part. He wants his people to know that they are not their own savior. God alone is the warrior for his people. God gives Israel the land by defeating their enemies.

## Cycle of Sin &amp; Deliverance (Jdg 2-3)

After Israel moves into the land, we quickly see that they have again been disobedient. They did not drive out all the inhabitants of Canaan as they were commanded to do (Num 33:52). Just as God promised, the remaining people of the land will become increasingly troublesome for Israel (Num 33:55, Jdg 2:3). Here we see the curse exemplified. Just as Adam failed to drive the serpent out of the Garden, so Israel failed to drive the people out of Canaan. And this brings us to the cycle of Judges. Israel sins. God brings judgment via oppression. God brings salvation through a human deliverer in the form of various judges. Finally, there is peace in the land. But the cycle repeats and increases in severity.





## The Epitome of Evil (Jdg 19)

This scene in the book of Judges is the epitome of the book's theme: "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." It's the epitome of evil. Israel, situated between world powers, was to demonstrate to the world what it was like to be genuinely human. They were to show what it was like to be God's people. They were to have a righteous influence on the nations. Instead, they became like the nations. Because there is no king in the land, everyone did what they pleased. They were their truest selves. Thus, there is great need for a king to lead the people in following God's law.

## Hannah's Prayer (1 Sam 1-2)

Hannah's story of infertility sets the stage for a remarkable prayer. This prayer encapsulates, in seed form, the main points of the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. Originally just one book in the Hebrew Bible, the books of Samuel constitute a reversal of fortune. The high are brought low. The lowly are exalted. Humility is rewarded. Pride is punished.

## A King Like the Nations (1 Sam 8-9)

Israel wants a king. Their desire for a king is not problematic in and of itself. In fact, the monarchy is predicted and regulated in

Deuteronomy 17. However, their desire is for a king like the nations, but Israel was to be distinct from the nations as a witness to God's gracious rule of them. In desiring a king like the nations, Israel is rejecting their true King – Yahweh. So, in judgment, God gives them what they desire. The first king of Israel, Saul, epitomizes the ways of the world. He is a worldly king, with external strength, handsome appearance, and his own rejection of Yahweh's rule. But, in God's kindness, the worldly king paves the way for a godly king by emphasizing the anticipation for a good king among God's people.

## The LORD Sees Not As Man Sees (1 Sam 16:7)

This verse captures briefly the main point of 1 and 2 Samuel: God judges justly. He does not see as men and women see. He does not look merely on the external. The LORD sees Saul for who he is and will bring him down. But he also sees David for who he is and will “lift up the horn of his anointed” (1 Sam 2:10). In keeping with Hannah's prayer, God rules in an unexpected way, humbling the proud and exalting the lowly. God will take a lowly shepherd boy and make him king over God's house that he might govern God's people in God's way.

## God's Covenant with David (2 Sam 7)

David was a great man. Yet, he was not the one who would fulfill God's promises and bring his kingdom and blessing to the world. David needed a Savior. And here, God promises exactly that. There will be a future son of David who will have God's favor without measure and without limit. God's love will not depart from him. In addition, this son of David will obey God's Word perfectly. He will finally be the human who keeps God's commands in their entirety. The covenant God makes here with David is the means by which He will fulfill his promise to Abraham.

## God's King Reigns (Ps 2 & 110)

The first verse of Psalm 110 is one of the most important verses in all of the Bible. In fact, it is the most-quoted Bible verse in the New Testament. The apostles understood that this psalm was about Jesus. After he had died and rose, he ascended to sit on the eternal throne of David, where he now rules as God subdues his enemies (See 1 Cor 15:25). This is the great messianic hope of the Old Testament – God's King, the son of David, ruling over the whole world. It is especially important to notice that the King is not only ruling over his people, but all people. His people receive his reign joyfully, and His enemies are defeated by him. For more

meditations on God's covenant with David – in particular God's King, the nations, and justice – read Psalms 72 and 89.

## God's King Falls (2 Sam 11-12; Ps 51)

David's sin with Bathsheba is one of the most tragic scenes in all of Scripture, yet it is a good reminder that there is no position or privilege that makes us immune from sin. David was where he should not have been (this was the time when King's went to war), and his flesh was urging him to take what was not his (Uriah's wife). Sin will always over-promise and underdeliver, and though David will be restored and forgiven for his sin, the consequences that result from his sin will be devastating for himself and his family.

## God's Wisdom (1 Kgs 3-4; Prov 1-3)

Biblically considered, wisdom is applying God's law to life. The first son of David to receive major coverage in the Bible is imbued with wisdom because of God's favor upon him. Wisdom is how Solomon is able to rule Israel well. And the wise king recorded much of his wisdom for us in Proverbs. The book begins with a theology of wisdom and concludes with several practical proverbial sayings. As you read more of Proverbs, keep in mind that proverbs are not promises, but general sayings about life.

## David's Son Builds God's House (1 Kgs 8-9)

Solomon's building of the temple and bringing the ark into that temple is a picture of God's favor upon the nation of Israel. In so doing, God reestablishes his promises to Solomon (1 Kgs 9:4-5). Yet, the covenant is conditioned upon the king's faithful obedience. Thus, the tension of the Old Testament is clear once again. This is, in one sense, David's son building God's house. But in another important sense, this is not David's son building God's house. The promised Son will be a faithful King. He will keep all of God's commands obediently. It will be this King who fully fulfills the divine promise to David.

## A Remnant in Israel (1 Kgs 17-19)

This section of Scripture covers a high point in the life of one of the premier prophets of the Old Testament. After confronting the prophets of the false god Baal, Elijah thinks he is the only faithful person left. Yet, God declares that he still has many faithful ones serving him (1 Kgs 19:18). Though Elijah cannot presently see it, God is busy at work among his people. The essential tension is this: not everyone who is a Jew outwardly is one inwardly (Rom 2:28) in the same way that not everyone who professes Christ is truly saved.

## God's Conversion of Israel (Amos 3 and Isaiah 1-2)

Fundamentally, the testimony of Israel's dealings with God is one of outward actions only. They do not concern themselves with the inside, with the heart, as they should. Because of this, God says he is not pleased by their sacrifices (Isa 1:11). Yet, remarkably, in the midst of judgment there is great hope. God promises to wipe away the sins of his people (Isa 1:18). Not only that, but the people of God are expanded to include even those from the idolatrous nations. The unfaithful ones have become a faithful, righteous city (Isa 2:2-3). God will bless the nations by converting them to be his people.

## The Fall of Israel and Judah (2 Kings 17; 2 Chr 36)

Through God's provision, Israel had inherited the land and become a great nation and kingdom. But they are still characterized by idolatry and injustice. The nation does not serve God alone, and they perpetuate terrible harm to their neighbors. Israel was to lead the nations to know the Lord by showing them what He is like through obedience to his Word. They failed to fulfill their calling before God. After much patience and long suffering, God brings judgment. Using Assyria and Babylon as instruments, God sends the nation of Israel into exile for their disobedience. The covenant curses are carried out. The people are disciplined, exiled from the land just as Adam was cursed and exiled from the garden.

## A Stump and a Shoot (Isaiah 11:1)

In chapters 10 and 11 of Isaiah, Israel is pictured as a tree. Because of their disobedience to the covenant, God will judge them. Specifically, he will use the wicked nation of Assyria as his axe – and he'll chop the tree down into a stump. Yet, the promise comes quickly after. A shoot will come up from the dying stump. A righteous branch will come forth from Israel. The promised shoot is the Messiah-King in the line of David. He will rule and reign in perfect fear and delight in the Lord (11:2-3). While Israel is the stump, Christ is the shoot. He is the means by which all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:3). The New Testament tells us that by having faith in Christ we're made sons and daughters of Abraham (Gal 3:15, 26-29).

## The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52-54)

Later in Isaiah, more color is filled into the growing picture of the coming Messiah. More detail is given. Unexpectedly, the King in the line of David will be a servant. He will be successful in his divine calling, but paradoxically, he will triumph through suffering. The Servant is not only King, but Priest and Sacrifice (Heb 9:14). This is how the promises made to Abraham will be fulfilled. Though the Servant will be “crushed” (53:5), he will “see his offspring” and “prolong his days” (53:10). This is a clear and dramatic



foretelling of Christ's death and resurrection. Not only that, but the theological significance of the life of Christ is given here also. The iniquity of the people will be upon him (53:6). This is a substitutionary sacrifice. Christ takes the place of judgment before God on behalf of his people.

## The New Covenant (Jer 31; Ezek 36:16-37)

As we've seen from Moses and the people of Israel, the Old Covenant promised life and blessing for obedience. Yet, there was a flaw built into the system. Because of sin, the people could not hear and obey God's Word. They did not live in the fear of the Lord but rebelled with idolatry and injustice. And the blood of bulls and goats could not take away the sin of the people (Heb 10:4). In God's abundant kindness, he promises a new covenant through his prophets. It will not be like the covenants before it (Heb 8:9; Eph 2:12-16). Under the New Covenant, what was once external becomes internal. The law is not written on tablets of stone but on new hearts. The Spirit of God dwells not in a temple made with hands but in God's people. Circumcision is no longer fleshly, but spiritual and supernatural. Unlike Israel, the New Covenant community – the true Church – is comprised only of those who know and love the Lord. He will be their God, and they will be his people.

## The New Temple (Ezek 1, 10, 43)

What makes Israel unique among all the nations is not their physical plot of land; it is the presence of their God. Remarkably, the God of the universe chose not only to rule over his people but to dwell among them. Yet, Ezekiel is given a dramatic vision of the glory of God leaving the temple. This is the judgment of God in its most severe form. The core of Israel's unique identity is stripped away. And God's plan to dwell with his people, which began in the garden and picked up again with Israel, seems to have ended in failure. The sin of man, however, will not thwart the plans and promise of God. Ezekiel is given a vision of a new temple. This new temple is the reality to which the first two temples pointed. Whereas they were local to Jerusalem and limited to partial glory, the unfettered glory of God fills the new temple and overflows until the whole world is made holy by the direct presence of God. Read Revelation 21 and 22 and consider how John's vision parallels and progresses what Ezekiel saw.



## The Return From Exile (Ezra, Haggai, Nehemiah)

These books detail the return of Israel from exile. Nehemiah leads the people to rebuild the wall. Ezra recounts the rebuilding of the temple. Remarkably, this return from exile appears incomplete. The people have physically returned, but it is clear that their hearts have not. They have been brought back from Babylon, but they still act like Babylonians. They do not have eyes to see as God sees, nor hearts to love and obey the Lord. The people are still characterized by self-interest and ignorance to the things of God (Haggai 1:6-11). Though the temple is eventually completed, it hardly compares to the glory of the first. More importantly, this rebuilt temple is not like the new temple in Ezekiel's vision! The people await the real return from exile along with a new covenant, including a new king, new hearts, and a new temple.

## A History of Sin (Nehemiah 9)

Nehemiah and Ezra lead those who returned from exile to renew their covenant with God. They do this by reading the law, singing, confessing their sin, observing the feast of booths or tabernacles (Lev 23:33-43), and pledging to keep the covenant. In chapter 9, the people recount their nation's history, which is

underscored by the twin truths of their terrible sin and God's unending faithfulness. Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah's work seems complete, but the people have not maintained their covenant obligations: the Levites fail to maintain purity laws, the Israelites fail to honor the Sabbath, and they continue to intermarry with the nations. The people can leave Babylon, but God must remove Babylon from the hearts of the people.

## The Messenger of the Lord (Malachi)

All of God's promises will find their yes and amen in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). But first, the Lord will send his messenger (Mal 3:1). He will come in connection with the Day of the Lord – the day God comes to judge his enemies and save his people (Mal 4:1). In Malachi, the Old Testament ends with the command to look for Elijah (Mal 4:5). He will prepare the way and announce the arrival of the Lord (cf Isaiah 40:3). And so, the Old Testament ends with a call for anticipation – a call for hope in God and his promises.

As Christians today, we have not only the Old Testament, but also the totality of God's revelation in the New Testament. By God's grace, we can see how these promises made were promises kept. The New Testament declares that, in Jesus, God has come to rescue his people fully and forever. He is both the sacrificial lamb that takes away the sins of the

world and the priest that intercedes on our behalf. He is David's greater son, the king of the New Covenant. He is the true prophet of God, not only speaking revelation but being the very Divine Word himself. In Christ, we are returned from exile. Our sins are forgiven. We are given new hearts. We join ourselves to the new temple. The Old Covenant has passed away, and we relate to God in accordance with the New Covenant, guaranteed by Christ. The new creation has dawned in the resurrection of Jesus, and we join it as new creations ourselves. God is indeed faithful. The New Testament tells us of his faithfulness, explaining how the Old has been fulfilled in Christ and setting our hopes upon his return, where we will enjoy the promises in full:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."  
(Rev 21:3-4).

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!



