



# KING, KINGDOM, AND KINGDOM PEOPLE

A BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND WORLDVIEW  
APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE

BY KYLE D. RAPINCHUK

WITH DUSTY DEEVERS



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King, Kingdom, and Kingdom People: A Biblical, Theological, and Worldview Approach to Scripture

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# Introduction

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# Introduction to Worldview

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What is a worldview? The obvious answer would be one's view of the world, and that would not be far off. A worldview is a comprehensive set of beliefs that shape one's view of the world and how it came to be. Everyone has a worldview—*everyone*. Unfortunately, too many conversations and debates get off track because individuals are unaware of or refuse to acknowledge their worldview and its underlying presuppositions. A worldview is essentially a lens through which we see the world, and this lens can either enhance or distort the image. As an example, people with vision problems will use glasses to help their eyes see things as they truly are. These lenses enhance their ability to see. For those without vision problems, putting on glasses would distort their vision, making what was once clear now foggy and blurry. The goal is to find the right lens through which one is supposed to view the world. Worldview 4 will focus on a more detailed study of worldview as a discipline and will present competing worldviews vying for acceptance. For purposes of Worldview 1, we will presuppose the existence of God, the belief that God communicates through His written word, and therefore proceed from the conviction that the proper lens with which to view the world is the one presented in the Bible.

Worldview deals with three fundamental questions. First, *from where did we come?* One of the more basic reasons that we will argue that everyone has a worldview is that everyone must have an answer to this question. Whether we are the product of divine design or naturalistic causes, our view of the world is shaped significantly by our answer to this question. Consequently, we will spend significant time addressing the nature of creation in the biblical account. Second, *how do we know?* Anyone can tell a story of origins, but how do we know that our story is correct? What evidence do we have in favor of our view? Is our conclusion the best based on the evidence we have? What evidence do we weigh most heavily? These questions are already in many ways determined by our answer to the first question. If we conclude that we came about by naturalistic causes, the answer how do we know is not coming from Scripture but from science and/or philosophy. If, however, we conclude that we came about by divine design, then our answer to the question of how we know may be determined by any number of religious documents, experiences, or philosophies. Thus, we must come to a firm understanding not only of where we came from but how we can know. Finally, *what do we do about it?* Determining one's origin of life and source of knowledge are important initial steps, but a failure to act upon these truths constitutes a contradiction in our existence. We must know what we are expected to do, and we once again must have a foundation for this knowledge. These three

questions, then, form the framework through which we can assess any worldview. The more evidence a worldview can procure in favor of its answer to these three questions, the more viable the worldview proves itself to be. Once again, one of the main tasks of Worldview 4 will be to assess a variety of competing worldviews according to these guidelines. For purposes of Worldview 1, we will explore the answers Christianity gives to these three questions.

## **From Where Did We Come?**

Christianity claims that we came from a God who is eternal. This eternal God is eternally Trinitarian—that is, while He is one God, He has eternally existed in three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> As we will discuss in Worldview 2, this understanding is important because it protects us from some potentially dangerous views, namely a view that God needs us. Since God is eternally Trinitarian, He is also eternally in community, and thus creating man is not out of necessity for relationship, but out of gracious love to share that relationship with His creation and reflect His glory.

Christianity also asserts a distinction between mankind and the rest of God’s creation. Mankind alone is made in God’s image. While many debate the details of what “image” means in this passage, most agree at least on the idea that humans, unlike the rest of creation, are meant to represent God. One way humans may fulfill this role is clarified by God’s blessing that they are to have dominion over the earth and the animals that fill it. Mankind alone is given dominion; essentially they serve on earth as a reflection of the divine dominion of God. Another way we are to represent God is by reflecting His glory. Anything beyond these broad conclusions may be making too specific an application of “image” in this passage.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, although Christians often disagree on the exact way in which God created, Christians agree on our origin from an eternal, Trinitarian God who made us in His image.

## **How Do We Know?**

The second question, how do we know, is simple to explain, but perhaps more complex to defend. For example, Christians claim that we know where we came from on account of the Bible. But what evidence exists that we are correct in our source of knowledge? As we will

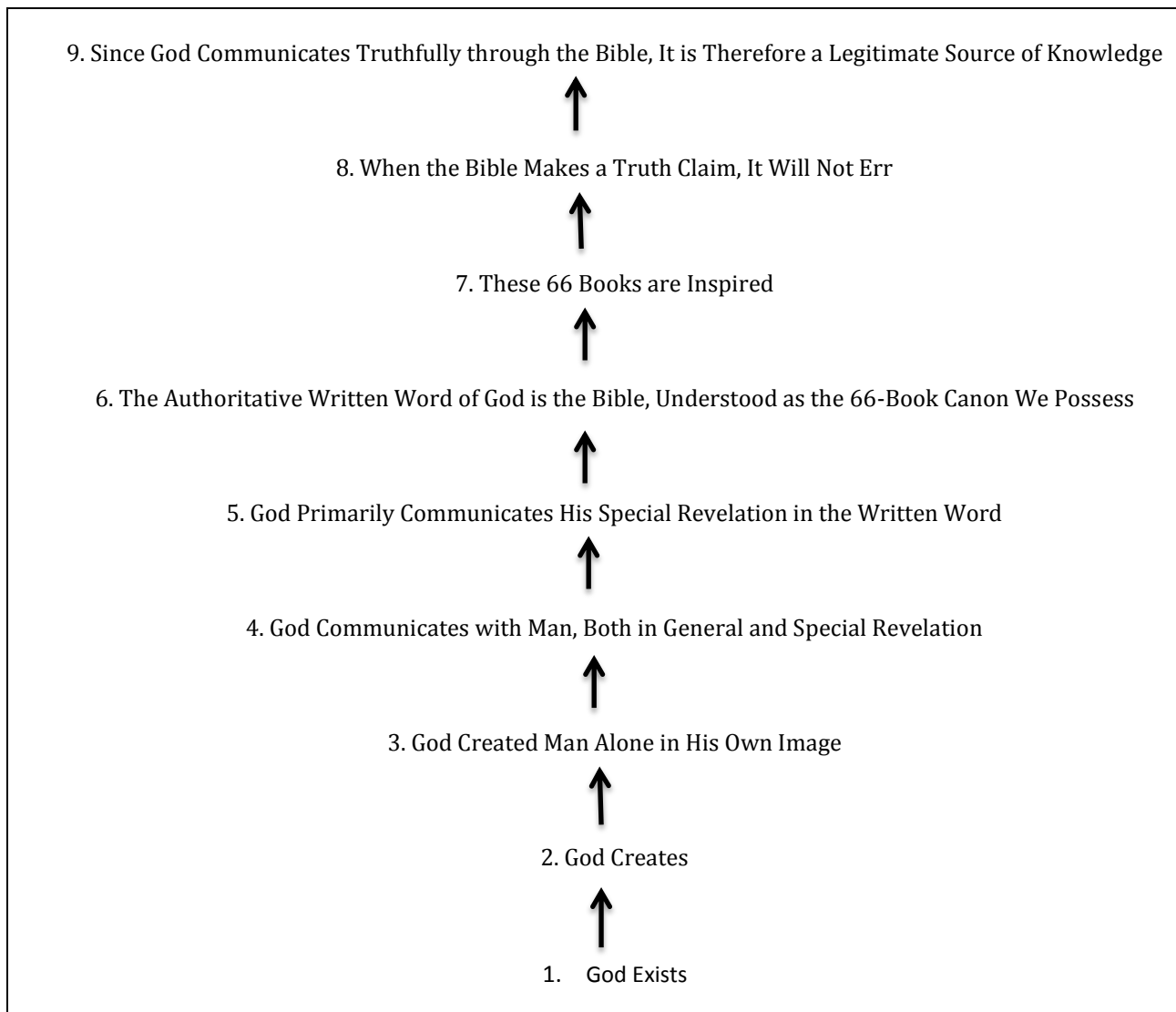
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<sup>1</sup>A detailed discussion of the Trinity (revelation in Scripture, formulation of the doctrine in church history, and its implications for the Christian life and worldview) will be discussed in Worldview 2.

<sup>2</sup>For further discussion, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 442-444.

explore in more detail later on, there is a significant amount of evidence to support this view. While a full discussion in defense of the Bible is not the purpose of this course,<sup>3</sup> one way for Christians to begin to understand the manner in which the Bible is a legitimate source of knowledge is through philosophical presuppositions.

In more understandable terms, philosophical presuppositions are those beliefs that Christians *pre-suppose*, or assume beforehand, when approaching the biblical text. Each of these presuppositions can be adequately defended, thus making a strong case for the Bible as a (or, *the*) reliable foundation for knowledge. See Figure 1 below for one example.



**Figure 1: Philosophical Presuppositions 1-9**

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<sup>3</sup>We will defend the authority and reliability of the Bible in Worldview 4. A good accessible resource on the topic is Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible's Origin, Reliability, and Meaning* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012). A more detailed analysis is Neil R. Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

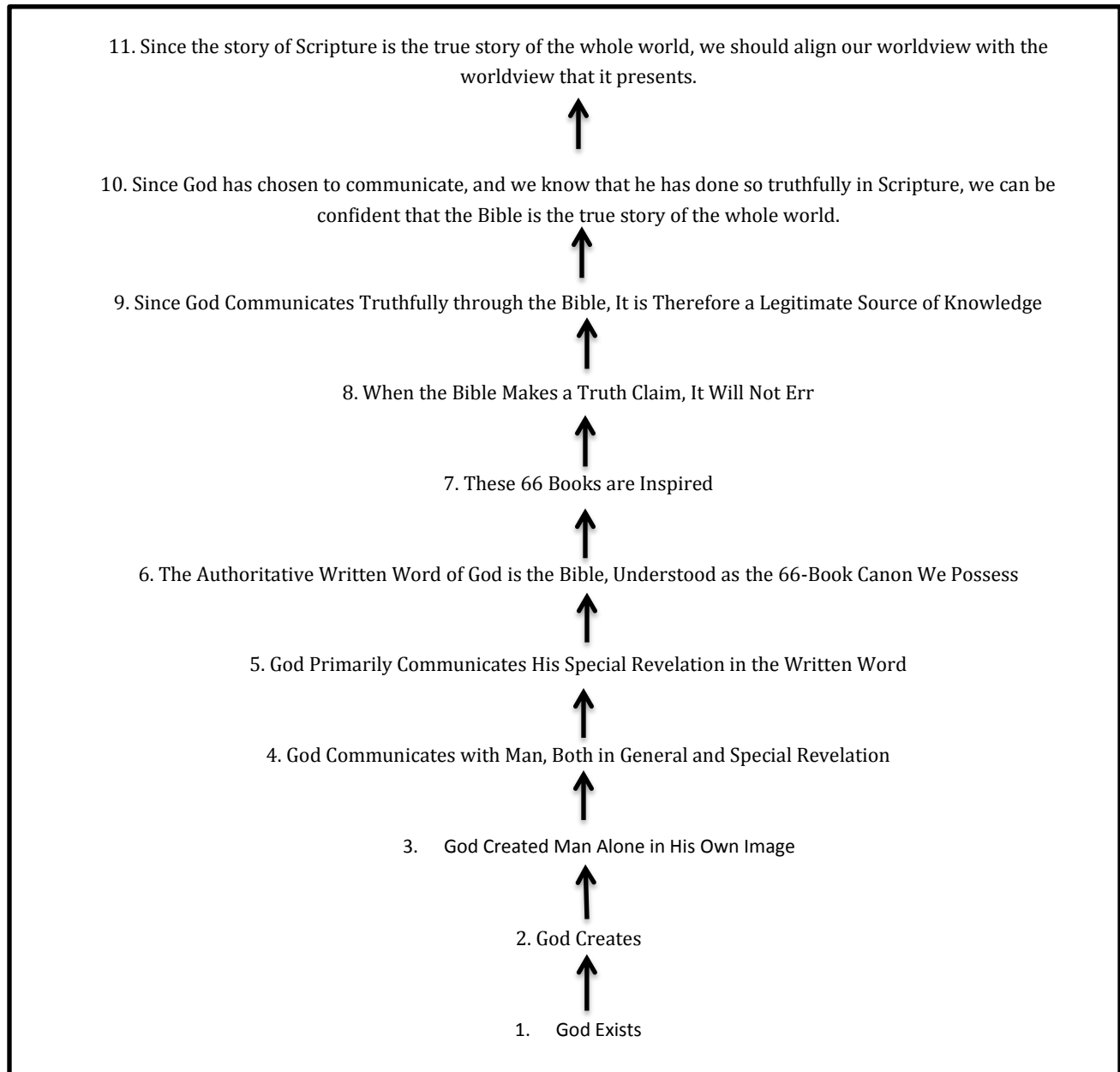
Each of these nine presuppositions builds off the conclusion of the previous one, and each of the nine can be defended with evidence outside of the Bible itself. That means that while the Bible bears witness to its own authority, we can establish the authority of the Bible by other means and thus avoid the charge of circular reasoning (e.g. the Bible is true because the Bible says it is true). Worldview 4 will provide a defense for several of these points. For now, the idea is simply to recognize how they fit together. First, if we can establish by means of evidence that God exists, then we can establish the first point. If God exists, then He is the source of creation. We can see in creation that human beings are different from animals, so the best explanation is that God made mankind distinct from the rest of creation. One aspect of creating mankind in His image, as we saw above, is that we are to reflect God's image as we live in relationship with Him. A relationship with God assumes the ability to converse with God, and we can see how God communicates in the natural world and through special revelation. Though we can know things about God through nature, our fullest revelation would come through a spoken or written word, and since a written word allows for a consistent witness to all generations, we are not surprised that God communicates through a written word. We have good reason for the reliability and authority of the 66 book Bible we possess. Moreover, we expect that a God who intends to communicate through a written word would need to be involved in the writing process, thus we have an initial understanding of inspiration. Furthermore, a God who intends to communicate through a written word and is involved by inspiration in the writing process would ensure that it is accurate. Since, then, we have truthful communication from the God who created us, we can trust this communication (the Bible) as a legitimate source of knowledge. Although necessarily brief here, the hope is that the reader has a general understanding of the fact that a written word is both a legitimate and expected source of true knowledge about the world.

### **What Do We Do About It?**

By now the reader has probably inferred (rightly) that what we are to do about this knowledge of where we came from is precisely what is outlined in the rest of Scripture. To the previous presuppositions, one could add the following two:

10. Since God has chosen to communicate, and we know that he has done so truthfully in Scripture, we can be confident that the Bible is the true story of the whole world.
11. Since the story of Scripture is the true story of the whole world, we should align our worldview with the worldview that it presents.





**Figure 2: Eleven Philosophical Presuppositions**

These eleven presuppositions help set the stage for understanding Scripture and the biblical worldview. Before moving on to the biblical text, however, it would be helpful to explain what we mean by the story of Scripture, since it serves as an organizing framework for this book, the Bible, and all of history.



## Prologue: The Story of Scripture

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The Bible presents a rich tapestry of truth in a variety of genres, cultures, and historical time periods through many different authors. The Bible has two testaments, three different languages, and 66 different books. It would be easy and understandable to view Scripture as a random collection of individual books—but it would be an inadequate way of ascertaining all that Scripture aims to teach us. We have suggested in the introduction that the Bible presents the true story of the whole world. This section intends to explain how the Bible can be, and we argue should be, understood as a single story.

Although the Bible has many different genres, the majority of the Bible is narrative. There are plenty of good reasons for this fact, but we will only consider a few. First, stories capture our attention and keep our interest. If someone were to ask us about our day, and we chose to respond with a bullet point list of things we did, the response would be informative, and boring, and the listener will likely suffer it for only a short time before changing the subject. They will also likely remember precious little of the response. Responding with a story, however, not only captures and keeps the listener's attention, but it also helps the attentive listener remember far more of what is said. Stories are simply easier to recall than a list of facts. Stories have natural transitions, discernible structures, and memorable hooks to keep information in order.

I am reminded of my daughter Ana. At the dinner table, I will ask my children how their day was at school and what they learned. Ana, in preschool, rarely communicated more than a few bullet points about coloring pictures, learning a letter, and playing outside, even though she is an excellent talker. One day, though, her teacher had told her a story. I sat mesmerized as my five year old daughter told me a five minute story with barely a pause to remember what came next. More recently, my oldest daughter Karis, who mysteriously has the same “I learned nothing at school” response syndrome, was sitting in a group of college students who were discussing the gospel. I asked the students to communicate the story of the gospel in 2-3 minutes. Two students came up to me afterwards and told me that while they all sat around thinking, Karis, a six-year old first grader, had communicated the whole gospel from creation to resurrection. After my immediate reaction of pride in my daughter, I began to wonder whether this incident did not prove my point all along. I had been trying to stress that the gospel is not a list of propositions about God and Jesus, but a story, *the* story of Jesus as the resolution of the story of the whole world.<sup>4</sup> A six year old knew the

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<sup>4</sup>Based on Scot McKnight's definition in *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 12.

story, but eight college students struggled to articulate a response—we have taught them to forget about stories as they grow up, and we are missing out on so much as a result.

It makes sense, then, that if authors wanted to communicate information of the greatest significance that they would do so in a story. Going beyond genre, however, the Bible as a whole has a story-like quality to it. Consider how it begins and ends in the garden with the river and the tree of life (Gen 1-2//Rev 21-22). This is a classic bookending technique of stories. This is but one of dozens of examples of the Bible's story-like quality. The question, then, is not so much if the Bible has a story to tell, but what that story is. Many excellent books have been written on this topic (several are recommended at the end of this section), but two stand out as particularly helpful to our task.

## **The Mission of God**

The first is from a book called *The Mission of God* by Christopher Wright.<sup>5</sup> In this book Wright argues that we ought to approach the Bible as the revelation of God's mission and the participation in it of God's people, which serves then as a framework for understanding the whole of Scripture. It is both theological (telling us about God) and hermeneutical (an approach that teaches us how to read Scripture properly). Wright explains the mission in the following paragraph:

The Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation. The Bible is the drama of this God of purpose engaged in the mission of achieving that purpose universally, embracing past, present and future, Israel and the nations, 'life, the universe and everything,' and with its center, focus, climax, and completion in Jesus Christ. Mission is not just one of a long list of things that the Bible happens to talk about, only a bit more urgently than some. Mission is, in that much-abused phrase, 'what it's all about.'<sup>6</sup>

Wright goes on to argue that our engagement with God's world "means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation."<sup>7</sup> Understood in this manner, the Old Testament becomes a story of Israel's role of being a light to the nations, the means of bringing redemptive blessing of God to all the nations of the world, as

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<sup>5</sup>Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 22-23.

originally promised in the covenant with Abraham.<sup>8</sup> In the New Testament, Jesus identifies himself not only as the Old Testament Messiah, but also as the object of the meaning of the entire Old Testament Scripture. The entire meaning of the Old Testament finds its focus and fulfillment in both his death and resurrection and in the mission to all nations, which flows out of that event.<sup>9</sup>

## **Drama of Scripture**

The second helpful source is *The Drama of Scripture* by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen.<sup>10</sup> Their work builds well upon this mission of God storyline. They begin by highlighting two important truths. First, the Bible must be understood in the context of the one storyline of Scripture. Every event, book, character, command, prophecy, and poem of Scripture must be understood in light of this one storyline. They argue that the Bible is “a unified and progressively unfolding drama of God’s action in history for the salvation of the whole world.”<sup>11</sup> Second, they emphasize that the story of the Bible alone tells the true story of the world. It is not merely a set of beliefs, but it is “public truth”—it is the way the world actually is and came to be. Consequently, “faith in Jesus should be the means through which a Christian seeks to understand all of life and the whole of history.”<sup>12</sup>

In addition to this concept of mission, they seek to address the comprehensive scope of God’s redemptive work in creation and emphasize the believer’s own place within the biblical story. In order to bring together these three main emphases, they orient the whole of Scripture around the ideas of covenant and kingdom of God, which roughly represent the Old Testament and New Testament respectively. However, they explain the relationship as follows: “When God’s people enter into a covenant relationship with him, they are obligated to be his subject people and to live under his reign. As we soon see, covenant also insists that we take seriously God’s purposes with the whole of creation. Thus, covenant and kingdom are like two sides of the same coin, evoking the same reality in slightly different ways.”<sup>13</sup>

Finally, by using the kingdom of God as the overarching theme of Scripture, they come up with a six-act structure of the Bible (See Figure 3 below).

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<sup>8</sup>Wright, *Mission of God*, 31.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>10</sup>Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

<b>Act 1</b>	God establishes His kingdom: Creation
<b>Act 2</b>	Rebellion in the kingdom: Fall
<b>Act 3</b>	The King chooses Israel: Redemption Initiated
	<b>Scene 1:</b> A People for the king
	<b>Scene 2:</b> A Land for His people
<b>Interlude</b>	A Kingdom story waiting for an ending: the inter-testamental period
<b>Act 4</b>	The Coming of the King: Redemption Accomplished
<b>Act 5</b>	Spreading the news of the King: The mission of the Church
	<b>Scene 1:</b> From Jerusalem to Rome
	<b>Scene 2:</b> And into all the World
<b>Act 6</b>	The Return of the King: Redemption Completed

**Figure 3. Six Act Drama of Scripture<sup>14</sup>**

What is particularly helpful about this six act drama is the metaphor of a drama itself and what it entails. A drama is a production. It has script-writers, actors, and an audience. Taking an illustration from N.T. Wright, Bartholomew and Goheen tell the story of a lost Shakespeare play. A group of professional Shakespearean actors seek to perform the play, but they find that the fifth and final act is missing. However, based on their understanding of Shakespeare and the first four acts of the play, they are able to improvise the fifth act in a manner that reflects Shakespeare quite well.<sup>15</sup> Now consider the biblical story in light of this analogy. We as Christians begin the drama in the audience. We are watching God create. We watch Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon serve the Lord. We watch Jesus come as a baby, teach, die, and rise again. And then all of the sudden, in the middle of the fifth act, we are transported from the audience to the stage. We are now actors in God's drama, but we do not have a script. Nevertheless, we know a great deal about God, the author of Scripture; we ought to know a great deal of the script that has come before; in fact, unlike the Shakespeare play, we also know the ending. We are now expected to complete our scene in the drama in a manner worthy of the God who has written the script.

It is precisely in this moment that biblical survey and Christian worldview become intertwined. In order to live out the drama that we find ourselves in, we must know the script that has come before and the God who has had a hand in writing it. Without a firm foundation in the teaching of Scripture, we have no basis for thinking that we can live as

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 197; N.T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7-32.

God intends for us to live. As we explore the story of Scripture as revealed in the Old and New Testaments, we need to keep in mind that it is shaping our understanding not only of God's redemption of creation but also what we are called to do in the world in which we live. Consequently, though most of this book will deal with a survey of the Old and New Testaments, its primary aim is not to fill the student with knowledge of the Bible for academic purposes, but rather that having a grasp of the whole of Scripture the student can better understand how to respond rightly to the God who created us in His image and taught us how to live.

### **Suggested Resources for the Story of the Bible**

Bartholomew, Craig G., and Michael W. Goheen. *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The True Story of the Whole World: Finding Your Place in the Biblical Drama*. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2009.

Roberts, Vaughan. *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2002.

Wright, Christopher J.H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.





# **Part 1: The Story of the Old Testament— The Gospel of the Coming King**

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# Chapter 1: The Old Testament as Christian Scripture

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The study of the Old Testament remains vital for establishing a Christian worldview. Far from discarding the Old Testament message, Jesus and the New Testament authors embraced the Old Testament as the foundation of their preaching and teaching. Before any of the New Testament texts were written, Jesus and the apostles were teaching people from the Scriptures. We must be careful, then, not to gloss over the Old Testament as if it were outdated. In the same way, though much less common, we must be careful not to treat the New Testament as if it is an optional appendix. The two parts together make up the Christian Scripture.

## **The Old Testament *Is* Christian Scripture**

In the gospel of Luke, Luke records an encounter between a pair of Jesus' followers and Jesus himself after his resurrection. As he walks with them on the road to Emmaus, he is astonished at their lack of understanding. Luke records the following:

25 And Jesus said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself . . . 44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:25-27, 44-48 ESV).

Much can be said here about how we are to read the Old Testament as Christian Scripture. Our hope is that this course will be a practical application of these principles, as well as taking time to establish a formal practice of exegesis. Let us briefly say here that in calling the Old Testament "Christian Scripture" we are making a statement about the theological content of the Hebrew Bible. The Scriptures written by Israelites for Israelites were taken by early Christians and read as their own Holy Text that made sense of the incarnation, death, resurrection and certain future coming of Christ. They did this because Jesus rebuked them for not doing so before.

We trust Jesus and the first Christians (who were Jews!) in their theological interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures primarily because of the One to whom and about whom they were proclaiming in their interpretation. Jesus is the One we follow when we interpret the Old Testament as a message concerned fundamentally about him. What is more, the driving force for the first Christians was their experience of and relationship with the crucified and risen Son of God.

As witnesses to the supernatural events of Jesus' life, the apostles and early Christians diligently searched their Scriptures, the Hebrew Bible, in order to understand how the Christ event could be understood in their light. From them we have been handed a New Testament that is anchored in their confidence that Jesus is the beginning and end of their story.

Christian interpretation of the Bible should be trusted because Jesus rose from the dead. The resurrection validates that the claims of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the hope for the present and the future are true. As such, Jesus has demonstrated that the Old Testament spoke of him as the Coming King (Messiah). The Old Testament itself anticipates the gospel of redemption through God's promised King. For this reason we have sub-titled Part One "The Gospel of the Coming One."

## Chapter 2: The Pentateuch

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As the beginning of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch (the first five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) sets the interpretive stage for the whole of Scripture. The importance of the message of the Pentateuch, which should be read as one book, is prominent throughout Scripture. At the end of the Pentateuch Moses tells the priests to put the “Book of the Law” (the Torah or Pentateuch) in the ark of the covenant as an abiding witness (Deut 31:26) and tells them, “For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess” (Deut 32:47).

The Historical Books begin with the LORD telling Joshua, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it (Josh 1:8). In so doing, Joshua will have success. The prophets follow suit by commenting on their current context by interpreting their situation in light of God’s words in the Pentateuch. At the end of the Prophets the LORD tells the people to “Remember the law of my servant Moses” (Mal 4:4) and thereby continues the message of the heightened place of the Law (Pentateuch) in pointing people to the “day of the LORD” when the Elijah-like prophet will deliver His people and destroy His enemies.

Psalms 1 also affirms the centrality of the Law for a prosperous life of worship to the LORD.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psa 1:1-2, see also Psa 19 and 119).

Consequently, due to the pervasive reliance of the whole of the Old Testament on the Pentateuch and the New Testament writers’ interpretation of the Old Testament (founded on that of Christ’s, Luke 24:25-48), the importance of the Pentateuch on the whole of Scripture must be a driving force in any biblical interpretive effort. The eschatological anticipation of the Pentateuch is present and active throughout Christian Scripture to Revelation and even now as Christ’s Body joyfully anticipates His coming.

We will come to see throughout this section that the message of the Pentateuch is one of hopeful, forward-focus that rests upon the faithfulness of God to fulfill His covenant promises to the Coming One and all those who faithfully obey Him.

# Genesis

## Creation Account

The Creation account is a controversial topic for many. A person's credentials as a conservative or liberal often hang upon his or her view of the Creation narrative. Later in the course, we will look in detail at four views on the creation account.<sup>16</sup> For our purposes here, however, we will focus on those areas that impact the whole of the Pentateuch and consequently explain the fundamental relationship between God and man. Three points emerge with this focus in mind.

*First*, the author carefully and purposefully wrote in such a way as to highlight three particular subjects: God, human beings, and the land. God is the Creator of the universe (Gen 1:1) who creates by means of His Spirit. He is the Preparer of the land (1:2-2:4a). He gives the land to the people He created for the land (1:26-30; 2:4-24).

*Second*, the author emphasizes God's purpose in Creation. When He placed Adam and Eve in the garden He prepared for them, He established a covenant with them in order to bless them (1:27-30; Isa 45:18). The blessing was for a *posterity*—"fruitful and multiply" (1:28) and *rest* in the *land*. God is the owner of the land He prepared for humans; as such, it is solely His right to give it to whomever He desires. The Creator-God of the universe and Preparer of a special land for His people has a plan for a relationship of ongoing blessing in safety and rest for and with His people.

*Third*, the author demonstrates how continued blessing or swift judgment is contingent upon man's obedience to God's will (2:15-17). God alone knows what is "good" (beneficial) and not good for the man and woman He created and thus should be trusted. If Adam and Eve "worship" and "obey" God, they will have rest in God's presence.<sup>17</sup> However, should they not trust God by disobeying Him, they will surely die. Life, rest, and posterity are bound with trusting and obeying God. The same is true of the inverse—destruction and torment for faithless disobedience.

## Fall and Exile

There is no place in Scripture where the problem of evil and nature of temptation and sin is more carefully detailed than in the Fall narrative. Scripture's commentary on the Fall is set at the beginning of the biblical story for several very important reasons.

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<sup>16</sup>Theistic Evolution, Day Age Theory, Literal 6-Day Creationism, and Historical Creationism.

<sup>17</sup>The Hebrew words could also be translated as "worship and obey," instead of "work it and keep it." For a defense of this translation, see John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995). See also Deut 30:15-18.

*First*, the narrative anticipates the Fall from the beginning in the Creation account. The author's focus on the condition of the land before the creation of man pertains to those parts that will be directly affected by the Fall. (1) The "bush of the field" and "small plant of the field" (2:5) anticipate the "thorns and thistles" and "plants of the field" that follow the curse (3:18). (2) "The LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land" (2:5) anticipates the narrative of the Flood (7:4). (3) The fact that there was "no man to work the ground" anticipates the bitter toil under the curse of the Fall (3:23). (4) The Man's being created from the "dust of the ground" (2:7) looks to his mortality, rather than immortality, in returning to the "dust" (3:19).

*Second*, to speak to the nature of man's sin from the very start; at the core man is on an idolatrous search for wisdom. The Fall narrative begins with the depiction of the "crafty" (*arum*, which is also the Hebrew word used throughout Proverbs meaning "wise") snake as the antithesis of Godly wisdom. Only two statements from the "wise" serpent were needed to nullify Adam and Eve's trust and obedience to their Creator. The story is concerned with the knowledge or wisdom of that which is good and evil; that which is best for man. The serpent called them to question their Creator's wisdom to provide all the "good" they needed even though the Creation narrative shows that God is using His knowledge for the benefit of the man and woman. Eve found the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (knowing what is beneficial for man and what is not, which is the definition of wisdom) to be good for food and good to look at (like the other trees of the garden) but adds that it was "desired to make one wise" (3:6) so she ate. The author portrays the Fall as an idolatrous search for wisdom. The man and woman embark on their own path to determine what is most beneficial to them. In doing so, they directly reject God, not trusting that He is wise enough to provide what is best for them. They endeavor to attain the blessing of God by means of their own wisdom, apart from the wisdom of God. Adam and Eve pursued wisdom apart from God, but rather than blessing and rest they found shame, toil, and vanity. The book of Ecclesiastes is a reflection and explication of Genesis 1-4.

*Third*, the narrative accentuates the consequences of the Fall that arise from not pursuing the blessing of God by way of the wisdom of God. The Fall narrative is sandwiched between two statements about the nakedness of Adam and Eve. Prior to the Fall they were "naked and unashamed" (2:25). However, following the Fall, the author tells us that in fear of God, due to their nakedness, they hid themselves from Him (3:7-8). In Hebrew there is a play on the words *arom* (naked) and *arum* (crafty or wise). This word play serves as a transition between man's innocence in their relationship with God before the Fall, and the loss of innocence in the Fall through their foolishness for following the one who set himself

up as wise. The term for nakedness in 3:7 is the same used in the portrayal of the exiled Israelites who failed to joyfully trust and obey God.

Because you did not serve the LORD your God with *joyfulness and gladness of heart*, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in *nakedness*, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you” (Deut 28:47-48)

The fate for Adam and Eve in their idolatry is the same as the Israelites at the end of the Pentateuch—curse and exile. What’s more, their fall is paradigmatic for each mans’ sin—an idolatrous pursuit of wisdom.

*Fourth*, the narrative locates the plan of deliverance or damnation in the coming Seed of the woman as the ever present hope or warning of Scripture. After the snake is cursed and upon Adam and Eve’s exile from the garden, God mercifully reiterates His promise of the original blessing for the first couple—posterity through the Seed of the woman.

I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel (3:15).

The question of the identity of the offspring is not answered here, it is simply raised. Throughout our study of the rest of the Pentateuch and the Old Testament we will see the prominence and centrality of the hope in the Seed and the redemption from the curse and exile that is found in Him alone. However, as we will find in the covenants and the rest of the Bible, the blessings of posterity and rest in the land have their sole fulfillment in the Coming One as the distributor of all the blessings to those who are united to Him by joyful obedience, which is faith (2 Cor 1:20). In other words, due to the curse and exile, all the blessings of creation are no longer directly to humanity (rather to Christ), but are mediated or delivered, by Christ to His faithful elect (Rev 1:17b-18; 20:1).

One final note, Paul sees Jesus as the incarnate wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24). True Wisdom will crush the head of false wisdom and any who set themselves up to know “good” (what is beneficial for man) apart from Him. The only way to know what is most beneficial for man (to have wisdom) is to have it by way of Christ, the Wisdom of God.

From the very opening passages of Scripture we can see that God had a plan for salvation and damnation—a plan to bless His people, who worship and obey Him, with rest



in fellowship with Him in His place. The redemption of man was not an afterthought but in the merciful mind of God from the start.

## **An Introduction to the Rest of the Pentateuch**

In addition to the issues already discussed, we wish to focus on three major aspects of the Pentateuchal narrative—the covenants, the poetic seams, and the legal material. In keeping with our story approach, we will address them as they present themselves in the narrative of the Pentateuch, rather than giving three separate, systematic discussions. Although a systematic presentation is in many ways helpful, we believe that recognizing these issues within the flow of the narrative, as the authors of Scripture have placed and commented on them, will be helpful in giving the context for each occurrence.

The narrative account of the creation and the fall introduces the first of six biblical covenants found in the Old Testament, five of which are found in the Pentateuch. As we move through the Pentateuch we will expound upon the nature of each of these covenants in relationship to their blessings, stipulations, and significance. In brief, the biblical covenants serve as a hermeneutical/interpretive tool to the message of the Scriptures. As one moves through the biblical canon, these covenants are not replaced but rather refocused.

For example, as we will see in the Adamic Covenant, the blessings and stipulations are not unique to Adam, but find a role in other covenants and serve as a paradigm for a relationship with God as He intended in creation. As we progress through the Pentateuch we will also note the poetic seams found in Genesis 49, Numbers 23-24 and Deuteronomy 32-33 as they are important to the message and context of the Pentateuch. Finally, we will look at the way Moses portrays Abraham as a man of faith, while painting himself as the man under the law. Likewise, we will look at the use of the legal material and come to a conclusion as to its purpose and the reason for its inclusion in the narrative. As we will see, this is directly related to the Abraham/Moses dichotomy.

### **Genesis 2-3: Adamic Covenant**

The stage has now been set for the rest of the Pentateuch. God has created everything, prepared a land for his greatest creation, human beings, and yet they sought wisdom that they thought existed apart from God. At the occasion of the fall, Adam and Eve have introduced what will become the paradigm for all future sinning: rebellion, idolatry, and selfish desire.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden, He established a covenant with them. It should be noted that God's promises to Adam and Eve are never called a covenant. Nevertheless, the language and concepts used to describe this interaction between God and Adam is similar to that of later biblical covenants, so it proves helpful to consider it as a covenant.

God's covenant with Adam promises at least four blessings if he keeps the two stipulations. God promises that Adam (1) will be fruitful and multiply; (2) he will have dominion over creation; (3) he will have peace with God; and, (4) he will trust God for good. All Adam is required to do is to worship and obey. He also must not break the single prohibition of eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. If he succeeds in keeping these stipulations his blessings will be abundant. However, according to the pattern of later covenants that are more explicitly stated, disobeying leads to curses.

The curses for Adam and Eve are actually a direct reversal of the blessings of the covenant. For example, whereas they were to be fruitful and multiply, the woman would now have "pain" in childbearing. While the pain associated with childbearing may very well be in view here, there also seems to be the idea of "difficulty" in childbearing. Such a reading is supported by the ensuing narratives of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, all who are at one time barren and have difficulty conceiving. If this reading is kept in view, then difficulty conceiving would be a direct reversal of the blessing that they would be fruitful and multiply.

Second, whereas they were supposed to have dominion over the creation, after the fall Adam is forced to work the ground that will not cooperate with him and will make his work difficult (3:17-19). Finally, it is clear that because of their sin they no longer have peace with God nor did they trust Him for their good, for everything that God gave He called good, but they sought their own desires.

### Genesis 6-9: Noahic Covenant

After the narrative of the fall, the story of Cain and Abel shows how humanity very quickly chose the path of Adam's sin rather than reconciliation with God. When God looks upon the land in Genesis 6, He sees that it is so wicked that He must destroy it. However, the text notes that Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD (6:8). Consequently, God chooses Noah to build an ark in order to save a small group of people and animals from the coming destruction through a flood.

When Noah and his family and all of the animals are safe from the effects of the flood, God establishes a covenant with Noah (8:20-9:17). The blessings of this covenant are

almost identical with that of the Adamic covenant: be fruitful and multiply, have dominion over animals, and have peace with God. This covenant also has the additional blessing that God will not bring judgment such as this for a time, so as to give people an opportunity to repent and worship Him. Also similar to the Adamic covenant is the stipulation to worship God alone. While in somewhat different language, the concept remains the same.

Ultimately, when Adam and Eve choose their own will above God's command they have set themselves up as gods in their own eyes, and have committed idolatry. Noah is also commanded to worship the LORD alone. Additionally, he is given the prohibition not to eat meat with the blood still in it. Finally, the sign of this covenant will be the bow in the sky. When God sets the bow in the sky, He and the people will be reminded of His covenant with Noah that he has withheld judgment for a time that people will repent and worship.

### Genesis 12-17: Abrahamic Covenant

Though there is a measure of hope in the Noahic covenant, the narrative quickly returns to the wickedness of man. Noah's son Ham makes light of his father's nakedness and the people wish to make a name for themselves with the tower of Babel. Once again, however, God shows himself at work for His own glory.

Through the line of Shem comes Abram, whom God calls out of Ur of the Chaldeans for the expressed purpose of making a covenant with him that will make him the father of God's chosen people. The blessings of the Abrahamic covenant are for a great land, a great people, a great name, and that Abraham will be a blessing to the nations. There are several important points about this covenant.

*First*, the blessings of the covenant will be primarily realized, not by Abraham, but by his seed. Though the phrase "Be fruitful and multiply" is not used in this covenant as it is in the first two, the notion that Abraham will be the father of a nation that numbers more than the stars of the heavens (15:5) suggests the same type of blessing. However, as Paul reveals in Galatians 3:16, it is not many offspring to whom the promise is made, but to one, who is Jesus Christ.

*Second*, Abraham receives this covenant by faith. As Paul reflects upon in Romans 4 and Galatians 3, it is significant that Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness (Gen 15:16). Abraham's faith is highlighted in the Pentateuch as a model for covenant faithfulness. Implied in these statements is the stipulation to the covenant: faith. Abraham was to believe that God would do what he said that he would do.

*Third*, the covenant is not only for the propagation of what will become God's chosen people, Israel, but for all nations. It is through Abraham that all the nations of the earth will

be blessed. This is important for understanding Israel's missiological goal in the Pentateuch. They are not only God's chosen people for their own blessing, but for the purpose of making God known throughout the nations.

Furthermore, Abraham is given one additional blessing: kings will come from him (17:6, 16). Though the monarchy is not established until the time of Samuel, there are echoes of kingship throughout the Pentateuch. This reference in the Abrahamic covenant is the first such foreshadowing for the reader of what is to come. As we progress through the Old Testament Scriptures, we will see that the significance in such a statement is not that kings will come from him, but the one king, the long-awaited Messiah.

### The Patriarchs

The narratives of the patriarchs are quite similar and address many of the same theological concerns as we have already addressed. Just as the LORD opened Sarah's womb to give her the son and heir he had promised, so also is the LORD the central figure in the continuation of the seed through Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah. Such a common emphasis on the seed clearly makes this theme central to the Pentateuchal narrative as a whole. Moreover, not only does the LORD bring about this seed through His opening of the womb, but the seed is also propagated by the LORD's choice, not by man. In the case of Abraham, he and Sarah sought to fulfill God's promise on their own, thus bringing about Ishmael by Sarah's servant, Hagar. The LORD, however, chose Isaac. Likewise, though Esau was the firstborn, the LORD had chosen Jacob. Similarly, the narrative focus of Genesis 37-50, with few exceptions, is on one of the younger sons, Joseph, not the eldest son, Reuben. In the midst of the Joseph narratives; however, there is a curious insertion of a story about Judah, his sons, and his daughter-in-law Tamar.

The story is seemingly out of place in the midst of the Joseph story, but it serves an important purpose. The story serves to show how Judah and his sons have no concern for the propagation of their seed. Rather, it is Tamar who takes the initiative. Though her actions are less than admirable on the surface, Judah recognizes that her concern for the continuation of the seed is a proper concern.

The reader is thus reminded of the promise to Abraham that the LORD will bless his seed. Moreover, the blessing of the sons of Jacob (Israel) in Genesis 49 makes clear that it is to Judah that all the sons of Israel will bow. Read in light of the promise to Abraham that kings will come from him, the reader can reasonably expect that it is through the line of Judah that the LORD will fulfill this promise.

## Poetic Seam #1: Genesis 49

The structure of the Pentateuch is driven by a pattern of narrative, poetry and epilogue. That is, although most of the Pentateuch is written in narrative form, it has sections of poetry that act as a theological and interpretive lens on the previous narrative. This poetic section is then followed by a brief narrative epilogue before the next larger narrative begins. This is seen both on a macro and micro level in the text. For example, on a micro level we have already explored the early chapters in Genesis. In those chapters we see a narrative of creation, followed by a poetic response from God about making man in his image, and a brief epilogue. Similarly, we see in chapter two a more focused view of the garden in narrative, followed by Adam's poetic statement that Eve is "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh", which is again followed by a brief narrative epilogue.

Though important on a micro level, our concern here is for the first of three macro-poetic seams in the Pentateuch. Just as was the case with the micro level, the pattern remains narrative, poetry, and epilogue. The narrative section, however, is quite lengthy, and is matched by a proportionally long poetic section, then a brief epilogue. The other two major poetic seams occur in Numbers 23-24 and Deuteronomy 32-33. In Genesis 49, the narrative prose is interrupted by a lengthy section of poetry, the content of which concerns the blessing of the sons of Israel by their father. There is much to be examined in such a rich passage, but only two aspects are of chief concern to our overview.

### **The Lion of the Tribe of Judah Will Rule. . .**

The *first* aspect was alluded to above, namely that Judah would be the ruling tribe. In verse 10, the text says that the scepter will not depart from Judah until tribute comes to him. Most translations will either note or use the term in the Hebrew text to say "until Shiloh comes." The ESV translation captures much of the essence of the meaning here. Primarily, the phrase suggests that the scepter will not depart from Judah until the one comes to whom it belongs. Taken with the ESV translation, there is a hint here that the ruling tribe will come from Judah and that this line will continue upon the throne until the one to whom the ultimate kingship belongs comes. As we will see in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17, which speak of establishing the throne of the king forever, there is both a common aspect (all kings will be from this line) as well as a hint at the culmination in a single individual.

### **. . .In Days to Come**

The *second* main emphasis of this poetic seam that we wish to address is an aspect of the text that recurs in the latter two poetic seams. The phrase translated here "in days to come" is rendered differently in Numbers 24:14 in the ESV, but has the same Hebrew phrase. The occurrence of this phrase in each of the poetic seams primarily serves to place the context

and realization of the promises of the Pentateuch in the distant future, not in the generation that is preparing to take the land. This phrase has the added purpose in this text of pointing the reader to a fulfillment of this kingship in more distant future.

## Exodus

Exodus is a book packed with some of the most interesting narrative in the entire Bible. The story of the Israelites in slavery, their miraculous exodus, the parting of the Red Sea and the giving of the 10 Commandments has the makings of classic epic literature. One can almost see a bookshelf lined with Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, alongside Moses' Exodus. What makes this book so rich, however, is that it is not some fanciful tale conjured up for the entertainment of the people, but that it is historically accurate and true (not to mention inspired by the Holy Spirit)!

Moreover, though it possesses all the makings of great literature, such as characters, plot, and style, it is first and foremost a work of theology. As we approach the book of Exodus, then, we must be careful not to limit the content of the book merely to the stories and history it contains. We must be careful to consider what theology the author is trying to present to his reader. It is again impossible even to begin to address all the theological concerns of this book. For our purposes we must again limit our scope to three main concerns.

### The LORD's Special Concern for Israel

The *first* of these concerns has to do with the LORD's special concern for Israel. Among the many considerations of this topic, we will mention only one. We should recall that in Genesis 12 the LORD tells Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth will be blessed. The manner in which this begins to be revealed is primarily through God's special relationship with Israel and his liberating them from their slavery in Egypt.

When we consider the narratives of the plagues that the LORD sends upon Egypt, there is one common reason that the LORD gives as to why Pharaoh continues to harden his heart. The whole purpose of these signs and wonders and miraculous works is to be a witness to the greatness and glory of God. In four ways the text suggests such a reason for the miracles: (1) so that the Egyptians might know that He is the LORD (7:5); (2) so that Pharaoh may know that there is none like the LORD (8:10, 22; 9:14); (3) so that the name of the LORD will be proclaimed in all the earth (9:16); and, (4) so that the LORD will get glory over Pharaoh (14:17). Likewise, when the LORD becomes angry with the people of Israel because of their sin and threatens to destroy them, Moses appeals to how such an act

would be a poor witness to the surrounding nations of the faithfulness of the LORD (32:9-14).

### The LORD Reveals Himself to His People

The *second* concern is very much related to the first as it has to do with God's revelation of Himself to the Israelites. As part of His special relationship with them, the LORD reveals Himself to them in two primary ways. The first is the revelation of His covenant/personal name, Yahweh (YHWH), translated the LORD [notice all caps to differentiate from the word *adonai*, which means Lord]. This name is derived from His proclamation to Moses in 3:14 that "I AM who I AM." This is as much a statement of His character as it is of His personal name. Similarly, the LORD reveals Himself by revealing his character to Moses in chapter 34:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation (v. 6-7).

Thus, Exodus is extremely important for a proper understanding of the Old Testament witness to both the character of the LORD and to the nature of His relationship with Israel.

### Mosaic Covenant: Exodus 19-20

The *third* aspect of Exodus that we will discuss is also the fourth biblical covenant. The Mosaic covenant is established at Sinai and has two stipulations and three blessings. Moses and the people are required to obey the LORD and keep His covenant, namely the Ten Commandments. The blessings of the covenant include Israel being God's chosen people, being a kingdom of priests (God's representative among the nations), and being reserved for God's purposes.

We should notice that the blessings of this covenant closely correspond to the promises God made to Abraham. If the people of Israel keep the commands of the LORD, they will be a holy people, a great nation, a witness and representative to other nations, and they will inherit the land toward which the LORD is leading them. However, even as Moses stands in the presence of the LORD receiving this covenant, the Israelites are breaking multiple commandments in their worship of the golden calf (Exodus 32). As Moses descends the mountain to see what Israel has done, he throws down the tablets of stone and breaks them, a visible sign that the Israelites have broken the covenant established by the LORD

who brought them out of slavery. The fulfillment of these promises is thus delayed through the rebellion of Israel.

## **Leviticus**

### **Covenant, Stipulation, and Failure**

What ensues in the biblical narrative is a lengthy collection of legal material. After the sin of the golden calf, in which Aaron the priest is held accountable due to his poor leadership of the people, the LORD renews His covenant with Moses and Israel (Ex. 33-34) and institutes what is known as the Priestly Code (Ex. 35-Lev. 16). As the narrative progresses, it appears as though the priests are doing their job, because when the people return to their idolatry, they do not practice it in the sight of the priests, but are forced to go to the fields to sacrifice to goat idols (Lev. 17:1-9). Because this sin is chiefly the result of the people's sinfulness, the LORD institutes stipulation directed at the people, a collection of laws known as the Holiness Code (Lev. 17:10-Lev. 25).

Following this delineation of laws is another covenant renewal (Lev. 26). The legal material that is presented in Exodus and Leviticus, then, is not separated from the narratives in which they are imbedded. Rather, the narratives which are interspersed set the framework for understanding the legal material as part of the larger structure of covenant, stipulation, and failure.

The text suggests two main purposes for the laws: they show the faithfulness of God to His covenant and restrain the people from further or more grievous sin. However, the question we want to consider is not primarily what the laws did for Israel, but what the purpose is for including the legal material in the Pentateuch. When we consider the structure in which these laws are presented and look at the narrative framework, we find an interesting thread woven throughout the Pentateuch.

### **Purpose of the Legal Material**

First of all, the emphasis on the failure of Israel to keep the covenant over and over again shows that the laws do not provide righteousness, but accentuate the need for faith. Moreover, what the people need is not a collection of new laws, but a new heart (Deut 10:16; 30:6). Finally, we should notice a textual connection between Abraham's faith and the Mosaic covenant. It is easy to put the Mosaic covenant into a category of strict legalism, but this would be incorrect.



In Genesis 26:4b-5, the LORD promises Abraham that “in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.” Notice the direct correlation between what Abraham is said to have done, obey His voice and keep His commands, and the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant. Likewise, Deuteronomy 11:1 uses nearly identical terms as Genesis 26 when it speaks of the Mosaic covenant. The correlation is not accidental. Throughout the Pentateuch, the suggestion is that one keeps the Mosaic covenant by having faith.

## **Numbers**

Much of the narrative of the Pentateuch takes place while the Israelites are in the wilderness. They are wandering in the wilderness because they did not believe the LORD and did not trust in his ability to defeat the enemies of the land (Num 13). The narrative of the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness is full of grumbling and disobedience.

Among the problems that are included in the text are the opposition of Miriam and Aaron to Moses (Num 12—this actually precedes the account of the spies in the land and may help the reader understand why the people could so easily forget in the LORD’s power to save), the rebellion of Korah (Num 16), the grumbling for water at Meribah (Num 20), and the death of Aaron (Num 20). However, in the midst of all this difficulty, the LORD shows his power to save in the Israelite defeat of Sihon, King of Heshbon, and Og, King of Bashan (Num 21). After Israel defeats these kings, Balak of Moab is concerned and hires Balaam to curse Israel. However, three times Balaam blesses Israel rather than curses them. When asked why he does so, Balaam answers similarly each time: “Did I not tell you, ‘All that the LORD says, that I must do?’” (Num 23:26).

### **Poetic Seam #2: Numbers 23-24**

Beginning with Balaam’s second oracle and through his third, there is a large poetic section that is broken up by short narrative commentary. Numbers 23-24 serve as the second of the three major poetic seams in the Pentateuch. Just as the Patriarchal narratives culminated in Jacob’s blessing in Genesis 49, so now the exodus and wilderness narratives culminate in Balaam’s oracle. Also like Genesis 49, in this passage Balaam calls an audience together and proclaims what will happen in the latter days (Num 24:14). There are numerous textual connections in this text, as well as countless theological considerations. However, we will focus on only five.

(1) The first significant point we need to address is the movement from corporate to individual. In Num 23:22, Balaam says that God brings *them* (Israel) out of Egypt, clearly

referring to the exodus. However, in a nearly identical manner in 24:8, Balaam says that God brings *him* (the king of 24:7) out of Egypt. This is significant because it changes the subject of the third oracle to an individual, rather than Israel as a whole. Balaam continues and gives more information about this individual.

(2) In verse 9, he is said *to crouch lie down like a lion, and who will rouse him*. This is nearly identical to the phrase used in Gen 49:9 to speak of Judah, from whom will come one who will rule and receive tribute.

(3) Next, Balaam says, “Blessed are those who bless you” (24:9). This reference is back to the Abrahamic covenant in Gen 12:3. When we recall that Abraham was promised that kings would come from him, we can see how this passage begins to bring together the seed of Abraham and the seed of Judah into a single individual who will be a blessing to the nations and yet a ruler.

(4) In verse 17, the connection to Judah is strengthened even more. Balaam says, “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.” This short statement brings to a head the connection between the individual that Balaam speaks of with the coming king in the line of Judah (Gen 49:10). Moreover, the parallel refrain that begins the verse puts the realization of this individual in the distant future.

(5) Finally, the one with the scepter will crush the forehead of Moab, dispossess Edom and exercise dominion (Num 24:17-19). Moab and Edom appear here to be representative of all enemies of Israel. Thus, this coming king will exercise judgment and defeat his enemies.

## Deuteronomy

The book of Deuteronomy is influential in establishing the theology of the rest of the Hebrew Bible. One finds it quoted or alluded to in nearly every book and the theology it promotes is at the heart of the message of the Hebrew Bible. There are perhaps four issues addressed in Deuteronomy that best explain this concept.

The *first* is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and is known as the Shema, which is the Hebrew word translated to hear, listen, or obey. When Jesus is challenged with the question, “Which is the greatest commandment?” (Matt 22:37-40), he answers by using this passage and adding to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Lev 19:18). Jesus is clearly using this passage for the first part of His answer, but some may be surprised that His addition is not foreign to the message of Deuteronomy. Rather, though this text does not explicitly

mention it, the book of Deuteronomy is significantly concerned with the treatment of the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner, as well as proper respect among Israelites and families. Thus, Jesus has taken the message of Deuteronomy and used it as an answer to the question of the greatest commandment, even going so far as to say that all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

*Second*, the book of Deuteronomy sets the groundwork for later prophetic reflection and anticipation of the New Covenant (c.f. Jer. 31 and Ez. 36). “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6). Deuteronomy 10:16-17 speak to the concept of circumcising one’s heart and loving God with all one’s heart and soul again hearkens back to Deut. 6:4-9. As Jeremiah and Ezekiel will write hundreds of years later, the LORD will establish a New Covenant with His people in which He will write the law on their hearts, they will be His people whom He will prosper, He will provide forgiveness of sins, and He will give them a new heart.

*Third*, the book of Deuteronomy anticipates a prophet who will come like Moses (Deut 18:18). Moses spoke with the LORD face to face, the LORD put his words in his mouth, and Moses was humble before the LORD. One will arise from among the people of Israel who will be like Moses in these respects. This is a significant concept throughout the Hebrew Bible. The end of the Pentateuch suggests that one has not arisen since like Moses and the end of the prophets awaits the coming of Elijah or one like him. With no fulfillment of this prophet in the Hebrew Bible, we can expect that the New Testament will tell us who he is.

### Poetic Seam #3: Deuteronomy 32-33

*Finally*, the book of Deuteronomy ends with a poetic seam and short epilogue that wrap up the sermon of Moses. Once again, there are clear similarities with the two previous poetic seams. Moses gathers the people together, proclaims to them what will happen in the latter days (31:29), and pronounces a blessing on the Israelites. Among the many theological issues addressed in this passage, perhaps the most important is the function it is given in 31:21.

Along with the Book of the Law (31:26) and heaven and earth (31:28), this song was to be a witness against the people when they fell into idolatry after living in the land. Even on the edge of the land as they prepare to go in and inhabit it, there is a prophetic note to Moses’ final words: when you live long in the land, you will turn to other gods and forsake the LORD (31:20).

Not coincidentally, the only other occurrence of the phrase “in the latter days” in the Pentateuch is found in Deuteronomy 4:30, a passage which speaks of how Israel will turn to idolatry after living long in the land. However, there is more of a hint of hope in that passage than in chapters 31-33. Even though they remain unfaithful, the LORD will remain faithful, and when they return to him with all their heart He will restore them.

One of the more surprising statements in this section is also one of the more debated. Verse 43 is rendered in the ESV as, “Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries.” This translation comes about from an alternate textual tradition in the Septuagint.<sup>18</sup> The Hebrew, however, reads more directly as “Rejoice with him, O nations, his people...” The implication in this section is that because the Israelites will be unfaithful, the Lord will make the nations His people. This passage seems to anticipate the very thing Paul will argue in Romans 9-11, that the hardening of the hearts of the Jews will lead to the inclusion of the Gentiles into God’s people. Already in the final poetic seam of the Pentateuch, Moses is anticipating God’s plan of bringing about salvation to the Gentiles despite the failure of the Israelites to fulfill their role as a kingdom of priests.

## Conclusion

In concluding such a cursory glance at the Pentateuch, there are a few points we want to reiterate as we prepare to move forwards into the Hebrew Bible. *First*, the Pentateuch makes clear that the God of Israel is the God of the entire universe. For that reason, there is something unique in the way the LORD relates to Israel as opposed to other nations, but He is also singularly sovereign over all. Thus, as the Pentateuch ends with Israel on the edge of the land, preparing to conquer and inhabit it, the biblical author has already established that God, as Creator of all things, has ownership of all things and can give the land to whomever He wills, and He can use the people of Israel as an instrument of judgment on the wicked nations in the land.

*Second*, the Pentateuch sets forth the foundational problem for Israel: they are to worship and obey by acting in faith, but like Adam and Eve, they will be hindered by sin and will continue to rebel against the LORD and His gracious covenant. The narrative of the fall and Adam and Eve’s improper pursuit of wisdom is paradigmatic of the plight of all

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<sup>18</sup>The Septuagint (LXX) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

humanity, not the least of which is seen in Israel's consistent rebellion in spite of the LORD's special revelation to them.

*Finally*, the Pentateuch looks forward to the coming of the king to whom tribute is due, who will crush the head of his enemies and will also be a blessing to the nations. We also look forward to the prophet who will arise like Moses. What is not yet clear in the Pentateuch, however, that will become clear later, is that the king and the prophet are the same individual.



## Chapter 3: The Historical Books

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As has previously been mentioned, the Pentateuch ends and the Historical Books begin with an emphasis on the importance of the Book of the Law in the faith and practice of Israel. The same prominence on the message of the Book of the Law is found at the end of the Prophets as well with the theme of Deuteronomy 18:18, that of a coming prophet. Malachi 4:4 looks to the return of Elijah, the greatest prophet of the Prophets.

### Deuteronomistic History

In brief, the idea is that the authors' purpose in writing Joshua through Kings was, in one continuous narrative thread, to commend and teach the theological message—blessing and curse, rest in the land, posterity—of the book of Deuteronomy. We will here explain two dominant purpose of Deuteronomistic History.

(1) *To explain why the people went into Babylonian Exile.* Each successive book sets up the next. The Israelites agreed to the covenant with God. The punishments in Deuteronomy 28, in forms of curses for disobedience, were for exile from the land that God had given. The Historical Books stress the fact that the covenant cuts both ways. God was faithful to do what He promised. Israel broke covenant with the LORD, thus the reason for the Exile.

(2) *To explain what must be done to return from Exile and receive the blessings of the covenant.* The concern of the books is not primarily historical, rather it universalizes the history so that it becomes a paradigm for everyone, everywhere on how to live in proper fellowship, or covenant with God—trust and obey Him. Again, Deut 28 is the background for the hope of reconciliation. “And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God” (Deut 28:2).

The authors teach this message by selecting certain history—people and events—from the life of Israel and comparing and contrasting them in relation to their success in or failure to trust and obey what God had told them in the Book of the Law, and, more narrowly, the message of Deuteronomy.

### Joshua

The book of Joshua has a discernible *structure* that serves to support and accentuate its message. Chapters 1-12 speak of the conquest of the Promised Land. The Israelites, under

the leadership of Joshua, “take” the land. In chapters 13-22 the people “divide”<sup>19</sup> the land. Chapters 23-24 are the farewell.

The author(s) has also provided certain *compositional features* that act as landmarks for the reader in order to link the theological message of Joshua to other parts of Scripture. In so doing, he assumes that the reader is attentive to and knowledgeable of the rest of Scripture.

Joshua begins with a link to Deuteronomy 34 by the death of Moses and the phrase “Be strong and courageous.” The book ends with the same exhortation from the LORD. This technique is called an *inclusio*, whereby the author(s) inserts interpretative bookends that serve to inform the reader as to the dominant theme inside each end. There is also a link to Psalm 1 encouraging meditation on Scripture. The Pentateuch, or “Book of the Law,” is specifically referenced in 1:8; 8:31, 34; 23:6; 24:26, thus showing the continual necessity of living the Abraham-like faith of the Pentateuch. Finally, throughout the book Joshua is portrayed as another Moses.

### Message of Joshua

There are two prominent themes that run throughout the book of Joshua. As has been noted, both themes have their foundations in the covenant relationship that the LORD has with Israel beginning in creation and operating throughout the Pentateuch. (1) Joshua is concerned with God’s faithfulness to fulfill His promises. The author, through his tools of selectivity and commentary, shows that the LORD is at work fulfilling His promises to Abraham (Gen 13:15) and Moses (Exod 3:8). The God of creation is also the God of the covenant. The miraculous events of the book show that the LORD is the owner of the land and can and will give it to whomever He chooses. It is not on the basis of Israel’s power that the people take possession of the land that the LORD swore to them and are delivered from their enemies, rather, the power of God did it (“commander of the army of the LORD” 5:13-15; 23:3; 24:12-14). By the end of the book there is a sense of anticipation that the final fulfillment of all the promises of the Book of the Law is coming true.

Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one

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<sup>19</sup>The Hebrew word for “take” has the consonants *lamed, qoph, chet*. The word for “divide” is the reverse of those same Hebrew consonants: *chet, qoph, lamed*. The author uses this word play in shaping the overall structure of the book.



word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass (21:43-45).

(2) The second theme, which rests in the background for the majority of the book, is Israel's failure to trust and obey God. The attentive reader who is closely familiar with the Book of the Law recognizes that while God is at work fulfilling His promises, there are signs of trouble for the people for their failure. Because their prophet did not "ask counsel from the LORD" they made a treaty with the Gibeonites (9:14). In 11:22 the "Anakim" are said to remain no longer in the land of the Israelites even though there are some in the land of Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod. The author is quick to remind the reader that even in Joshua's old age much of the land was still yet to be possessed (13:1-2).

The Philistines, who turn out to be perpetual enemies of Israel, still had their primary strongholds in the land and these included Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod (13:3). The Israelites were also unable to drive out the Jebusites who remain in Jerusalem "to this day" (15:63). In 18:2-3, just after the people came to Shiloh and made a meeting place for the LORD, the reader is told that seven tribes do not have their inheritance because of their slackness. God's promises are not being realized in full because of the failure of the people. Finally, in 22:10-34, the people are near a civil war.

These two themes are especially prevalent in the final speeches of Joshua. There is a sense of anticipation that the promises of land and deliverance from enemies are on the verge of fulfillment. The compositional/poetic seams (Gen 49, Num 23-24; Deut 32-33) in the Pentateuch, which speak of "the end of days," are seemingly near their fulfillment of God's final kingdom. Starting with Genesis, the promises of God in the seed who is going to come and crush the head of the enemy and deliver the people *from* the curse and *to* the land seem very near.

They observe the Passover and cross the Red Sea, obey the law, and do everything the Lord commanded them. In 21:43-35 and 23:14 everything the Lord promised, He brought about. He gave them rest and delivered them from their enemies. However, the judgment side of the covenant sets an ominous tone for what will happen after Joshua.

But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the LORD your God has given you, if you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you (23:15-16).

There is here a warning to the people foreshadowing what will come. They are going to lust after other gods. The exile cannot be explained in terms of the LORD, but the people because of their sin.

Consider how this relates to Hebrews 4 and the promised rest we are still awaiting. The people did not enter the LORD's rest because of disbelief. In the wilderness wandering they were supposed to enter His rest but did not. Those to whom it was first preached did not enter so some are yet to enter. If Joshua had given them rest, then he would not afterward have spoken of another day (4:8). With Joshua, there is partial fulfillment; he gives them land and rest from their enemies. However, partial fulfillment is in all actuality no fulfillment.<sup>20</sup>

## Judges

The book of Judges starts with very little anticipation and deteriorates quickly. This is a pattern that recurs throughout the Old Testament historical books. The book takes its name from 2:16, "Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them." Judges, however, is not the beginning of the office of judge in the Bible.

### Office of Judge

We find references to the office of judge in several places in the Pentateuch.<sup>21</sup> They are associated with the leaders of Israel. Moses, upon the advice of his father-in-law Jethro, sets them in place in the legislation of the Israelites after the exodus from Egypt (Exod 18). Later we find that there are judges in each of the cities, but also in the tabernacle where

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<sup>20</sup>The whole Bible speaks to partial fulfillment to stress that the fulfillment is not yet. The Old Testament and New Testament are designed to give Christian hope and anticipation for the coming day of the Lord. Even in the New Testament, in speaking of Jesus Christ, it is not His second coming, but his coming. The New Testament doesn't speak of the second coming of Christ. The word is Parousia. Jesus is coming. He is still waiting.

The message of the prophets is still for Him. He is waiting for the day when the righteous will not be oppressed by the wicked. He is waiting for the end of sin and the forgiveness of iniquity when everything will be purified. The promises in Genesis and the Pentateuch are associated with so much more than the Jews in Israel. It is the "end of days" that these promises point to in their Fulfillment. That is when it is all over. It is getting back to the tree of life just as in Revelation 22:2.

Consequently, we are still waiting as well. Their story is our story. The waiting of those in Scripture is our waiting. The hope of Scripture is our hope. He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus (Rev 22:20)!

<sup>21</sup>Exod 2:14; 18; Num 25:5; Deut 16:18; 17:9.

they have responsibility along with the priests to exercise judgment to keep the camp clean and ensure that Israel is not polluted or corrupted (Deut 16:18; 17:9).

The judges have two primary responsibilities, one legal (the administration of justice) and the other spiritual (see to the people's obedience to the covenant made with the LORD). We find both of these responsibilities active in Judges. Additionally, these are the same responsibilities the kings who came after them were to possess (Deut 17). In this regard, the book of Judges can be seen as a manual for kingship that anticipates their coming later in the biblical narrative.

### Shape of the Book

Judges starts with a double introduction that makes up the *prologue* (1:1-3:6). Two times the reader is told what took place after the death of Joshua (1:1-2:5 and 2:6-3:6). Both introductions tell of the LORD's faithfulness to uphold His name and keep His promises. Both also speak of Israel's disobedience to the LORD in committing idolatry in worshipping at the altars of the inhabitants of the land. Out of His mercy and for His own name's sake,

The LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so (2:16-17). The double introduction also answers the question as to why the Canaanites and others are in the land. The immediate reason is that Israel failed to drive them out, but we also see that God left them to test Israel to see whether they will follow Him or not (2:1-3, 4-23) and so those who have not known war can learn how to fight (3:1).

### Judges Cycle

The *body* of the book extends from 3:7-16:31. The important feature of this section is the cycle of judges. This cycle is very important. Each one of the cycles of the installation of a new judge does not follow this cycle perfectly or have all the elements, but most do. (1) Death and falling away of the previous judge (Joshua dies and all the elders with him); (2) Israel does evil; (3) the LORD sends oppressors; (4) Israel cries for help; (5) God raises up a judge and delivers the people; and, (6) Israel has peace.

The tone throughout Judges is continually more serious and negative. The people are rebellious, and thus, are getting what they agreed to in Joshua 24. The covenant cuts both ways. If they trust and obey the LORD, the blessings are incredibly great. But, if they commit idolatry and disobey, the curses will be equally bad.

If Joshua is a message that God is faithful, then Judges is a message that the people are faithless. They were supposed to have rest from all their enemies, but their oppressors are on every side. The people should have known that they would not have been able to keep the covenant and should have trusted in the Lord. Joshua told them this very thing. “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God” (Josh 24:19).

Consequently, the *epilogue* (chs. 17-21) speaks of idolatry (17:1-18:31) and civil war (19:1-21:25). Deut 17:14-20 set out the way in which a king should lead God’s people. By the end of the book it is clear that unless the people have this type of leadership, there is little confidence that they will ever trust and obey the LORD.

### Message of Judges

Very briefly we will cover a few of the important themes of Judges. From the beginning (1:17) to the end (20:18), the tribe of Judah plays a significant role. Judges also stresses the importance of God’s promises to Judah in the Pentateuch, primarily focusing on Judah as the ruling tribe from which the true king would come.

It is very telling that the Book of the Law is not mentioned in Judges. In the introduction, the author notes the fact that the generations of the Judges rose up and “did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel” (2:10). This is a statement about the people’s ignorance to the Book of the Law, despite Joshua’s instruction.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Josh 1:8).

The role of judgment is found in God’s faithfulness to His covenant; to curse those who do not obey the Law. The people “forgot,” “did not know,” and “turned away from” the LORD and “whored after,” “went after,” and “bowed down to” the gods of the inhabitants of the land. For their faithlessness, God would keep His covenant and judge them. However, because of God’s faithfulness to His covenant and steadfast love, He had mercy on those who call upon Him in faith. Mercy is also a prevalent theme throughout Judges. Twelve times God raises up a judge and therein acts mercifully to turn the people’s hearts back to Him.

Peace also plays a role in the message of the book. There is a connection to the end of Joshua and being at peace with their enemies on all sides. Each time we see the role of a judge and God’s raising him up, we see that God is after rest and peace and the fulfillment of His promises. The hoped-for rest and peace are not realized, however, because the

people are disobedient. As they return to idol worship, God raises up an enemy against Israel.

### **Snapshot: Five Judges**

Though Judges spans the leadership of twelve judges, we will here cover only five: Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, and Samson. Certainly, much more could be said on each. In not mentioning them here, we are by no means devaluing the others and the role they play in the overall purpose of Scripture.

(1) Othniel (3:7-11). Things are as they should be. He is both a deliverer and a judge. The people follow the LORD under his leadership. Othniel does all that the Lord commands, but from there it deteriorates throughout the book, so much so that a civil war breaks out by the end.

(2) Ehud (3:12-30). Though he is a deliverer, he passes by “stones” that are likely used for idol worship (3:26). The presence of these stones suggests that the people are not wholly following the LORD. Ehud is left-handed from the tribe whose name means “son of my right hand” (Benjamin). The author is showing that God uses His leaders’ talents and created make-up to do His work.

(3) Deborah (4:1-5:31). She is a prophetess who judges the people. Her counterpart is Barak. Her song is incredibly important. Songs in the Old Testament put the narratives in the proper theological context. They are Old Testament theology *par excellence* and are almost always messianic. Moses’ song in Exodus 15, Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2, and David’s song in 2 Samuel 22 are other examples of songs in the Old Testament. Deborah’s song is a reflection on the head of the enemy being crushed with the tent peg. Deborah is picking up on the theme of deliverance from the beginning of Genesis 3:15 and through Balaam’s oracles (Num 24) concerning the deliverance and judgment that will come through the promised seed.

(4) Gideon (6:11-8:35). He is an unlikely, mighty warrior. There are some similarities between Abraham in Genesis 14 and Gideon in Judges 7. A very few, good men destroy an entire army. The stress of the narrative is that God alone is the victor and deliverer, not the might of the people. Gideon’s creation of the gold ephod shows that things are getting worse and the people are sinning. Gideon leads them in idolatry. The ephod became an idol for worship. The narrative is not clear if Gideon is to blame for it, but the people certainly are. It closely resembles Aaron and the golden calf.

(5) Samson (13:1-16:31). Overall, he is portrayed negatively as a man who cared more about women and alcohol than the LORD. Not much of what Samson does is reflective of

godly leadership. However, he does have zeal to destroy God's enemies and when he calls upon the LORD in the end, the LORD responds.

Judges ends without a king in the land and the lack of the hoped-for godly leadership. "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Before moving on to the institution of the king in Samuel, however, the Old Testament includes Ruth, a book that narrates events that happen during the reign of the judges.

## **Ruth**

The book of Ruth begins with the phrase, "In the days when the judges ruled." The situation at the end of Judges—killing of many Benjamites (Jud 20:1-48) and the attempt to acquire wives for them—are similar to the opening events in Ruth.

The book is named after its principle character, though by the end the narrative sets up David as the central figure. The significance of the entire Ruth and Boaz story is that through their son, Obed, comes Jesse, who fathers David who is the father of the messianic lineage.

The date of composition and author are unknown, but we do know that there is enough distance between the events and authorship to allow the author to talk about earlier time periods (e.g. a time after the Judges and when David is significant).

Several themes emerge from study of the book of Ruth: the faithfulness of the LORD, the woman of excellence, and God's plan for the nations through the Coming King.

### **The LORD is Faithful**

The role of God's will is similar in Ruth to the book of Esther. God's will *seems* to come about by chance. The author of Ruth does not come out and say, "The LORD led Ruth into Boaz's field," rather, it says, "She happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz" (2:3). The author is showing that God's concern for Israel and the nations (see below) is in harmony with God's concern for this one family.

### **The Woman of Excellence**

The author sets up Ruth as an example of the "virtuous woman" or "woman of excellence" in the final poem in Proverbs (Proverbs 31). The poem begins with the question of finding an "excellent" or "noble woman" (Prov 31:10) and ends with the line, "let her works praise her in the gates" (31:31). The book of Ruth is the only other book that uses this phrase,

specifically in Boaz's reference to Ruth as "a noble woman" (Ruth 3:11). In the same verse, Boaz informs her that this is the consensus of, "all my fellow townsman." The phrase in Hebrew literally means, "those at the city gate." It is a reference to the men in 4:1-2. Thus, Boaz says of Ruth what the writer of Proverbs says of the "excellent wife."<sup>22</sup>

### Let the Nations Come to Him

Finally, the book of Ruth aids us in balancing the scale of God's plan for the nations. Ruth is a Moabite woman. In Numbers 24:17 we learn that the messianic seed of Genesis 3:15 and 49:8-12 will strike the head of Moab, an enemy of Israel. However, in Ruth God is continuing the messianic line through the offspring of a Moabite. Moab was one of Lot's daughter's sons (Gen 19:37). This is important because the LORD covenanted with Abraham, not his brother's son Lot (Gen 12-22). The point is that God brings about his purposes through foreigners as well as Israelites. As we have already seen in the Pentateuch, God's plan of blessing the nations was ultimately through his promised King. In Ruth, the role that the nations play in the lineage of the King makes the same point.

For example, Matthew begins his Gospel with the genealogy of "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). The only women mentioned by name in the line of Jesus are Tamar (Gen 38), Rahab (Josh 2) and Ruth. All three are non-Israelites! It is no small matter that the LORD, in the line of the Son of God and King of the universe, included the non-Israelites nations in His plan to glorify Himself through the incarnation, death, resurrection, and coming of His Son. That the nations are included in His plan to glorify Himself is the consistent testimony of Scripture. In this sense, the mention of Tamar at the end of the book of Ruth and on the lips of the city elders (4:12) is significant. Tamar is not mentioned often in the Old Testament. The author has in view the same questions that arise in the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38), that being the continuation of and concern for the promised seed. In Ruth, that seed is clearly leading to David. Additionally, the mention of Rachel and Leah as women who "together built up the house of Israel" (4:12) further substantiate the emphasis of the continuation and fulfillment of the LORD's promises to them through their forefathers (Gen 3:15; 49:8-12; Num 24:7, 17).

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<sup>22</sup>One of the more prominent differences in the order of the English Old Testament and the Hebrew Bible is the location of Ruth. The English Bible, which manifests a concern for chronology (when the events happened) and classification (type of literature; i.e. narrative, poetry, prophecy), places Ruth after Judges because it happens during the time of the judges. In the Hebrew Bible, however, Ruth follows Proverbs, making this observation easier when reading the Hebrew order.

## Samuel

In the Hebrew Bible, Samuel follows the book of Judges, which makes for a more seamless transition into the institution of the king. Rather than the story of Ruth and the genealogy of David, whom we have not yet met in the biblical narrative, the book follows Judges with its concluding refrain: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Jud 21:25). As we enter into the narrative of Samuel, then, we can expect two things: the arrival of a king and the continued disobedience of the people.

### Messianic Framework

In the Hebrew Bible, the books of 1 and 2 Samuel are considered a single book (as are Kings and Chronicles). Knowing this fact makes it easier to recognize the framework of the book. The book is framed on either end by Hannah's prayer/song in 1 Samuel 2 and David's song in 2 Samuel 22-23. Both poetic interludes focus on two key themes: the exaltation of the low and weak and the LORD's anointed. We see these features in Hannah's prayer most clearly in verses 4-10. In verses 4-8, Hannah proclaims ways in which the LORD exalts the poor, the weak, the hungry, and the barren. In verse 9, she professes that this is so because the LORD guards those who are faithful to him, while the wicked shall be cut off. In verse 10, Hannah speaks of the LORD's anointed, anticipating the one who will be the subject of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7.

In 2 Samuel 22-23, the themes are again brought together in poetic form, this time by King David. David is the LORD's anointed; however, he is not the Anointed, the Messiah. In 23:2-4, David reflects upon the reign of the Messiah, who will rule justly over men by ruling in the fear of the LORD. Read in light of Hannah's prayer and anticipation and the narrative of Samuel, the reader is given a clue to the theological message of the book: the earthly kingdom, even the relatively ideal kingdom under David, is meant not to fulfill the covenants God made with Moses and Abraham, but rather to point towards the eternal kingdom that God has promised to David through his Son, the Messiah.

### Samuel: A Prophet like Moses?

As we might expect from the title of the book, the book of Samuel (at least 1 Samuel) is greatly concerned with the prophet, Samuel. In the course of the events that lead to Israel instituting a monarchy, Samuel is shown to be like Moses. When the people want a king, they come to Samuel for advice (1 Sam 8). Like Moses, Samuel inquires of the LORD, who tells him to submit to the request of the people but to warn them of what will come to pass if they act in the manner that they desire. Samuel does so, but the people refuse to obey his



voice (v. 19). The people's refusal to heed the word of the prophet not only hearkens back to the Israelites in the wilderness and their refusal to listen to Moses, but also points forward to the same disobedience that will lead to exile.

Additionally, Samuel's prophecies throughout the book come true, which is one measure of a true prophet as introduced in Deuteronomy. However, though Samuel is shown to be like Moses in some ways, he is not ultimately the one Moses anticipates in Deuteronomy 18.

### The King

It should not be entirely surprising to the reader that the Israelites come to Samuel asking for a king. In Deuteronomy 17, the LORD establishes some of the qualifications necessary for the king. There are three *affirmations* of what he must be or do and three *prohibitions* against what he must not do. He must be an Israelite, he is to write a copy of the Book of the Law and he will be chosen by the LORD. He must not acquire many horses from Egypt, multiply wives, or acquire much gold for himself. What stands out in these qualifications is that there is no mention of military prowess or strength. Rather, the only requirements are national (he must be an Israelite) and spiritual (he must write a copy of the Law and be chosen by God). The picture, then, is of a king who is first and foremost a spiritual leader.

The people's request for a king, while not in itself prohibited, is portrayed as poor judgment by the author of Samuel. This is because they wish to have a king like the other nations who will "judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam 8:20). Moreover, the one who is set as king over them is a Benjaminite. If we recall our discussion of Genesis 49, we would expect one from the tribe of Judah to reign over the people of Israel. This problem will quickly be resolved in the narrative.

As Saul's reign begins, it is inaugurated with success in battle as he defeats the Ammonites. However, when he marches to fight the Philistines in the very next chapter, he finds strong opposition, and the Israelites are forced to scatter and hide in caves. In response, Saul performs an unlawful sacrifice, the first of three grievous sins addressed in the narrative (1 Sam 13). The second sin is likewise a result of not listening to the prophet. Saul is told in 1 Samuel 15:3 to devote all of Amalek to destruction because of what they did to Israel when they left Egypt. Saul, however, keeps the best of the livestock for an offering to the LORD. When Samuel discovers Saul's sin, he again rebukes Saul and tells him that the LORD has rejected him from being king.

Additionally, there is a hint in the poetic interlude of Saul's third and final sin. In 15:22-23, Samuel speaks to Saul, and it is recorded in the narrative as poetry. One line says that

“rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.” We find in 1 Samuel 28 that Saul, in distress over what to do, consults a medium. When Samuel appears he again rebukes Saul and tells him that because of his sin the Philistines will defeat Israel. This does come to pass, and in the grief of defeat, Saul kills himself.

### Davidic Covenant

Near the end of Saul’s reign, David is introduced in the narrative as the one whom God has chosen to succeed Saul as the king. Though Saul tries to kill David, David does not do likewise even though he has the opportunity to do so. Rather, David recognizes Saul as the LORD’s anointed and will not take it upon himself to remove Saul as king by killing him. This is one attitude that shows that David’s heart is more in line with what the LORD requires, and suggests that he will be a strong leader of Israel.

As we discussed in the previous lesson on the Pentateuch, the LORD established covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses, each of which correlates to the others and builds upon some of the same promises. At the beginning of David’s rule, many of the promises are still unfulfilled. With the establishment of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 (again later in 1 Chron 17), the reader should begin to see how the fulfillment of each of these covenants must be interrelated.

In the Davidic covenant, the LORD promises David that he will make him a great name. This promise echoes the same promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12. God also promises David he will have rest from all his enemies. This seems intertwined with the concept of rest in the land introduced in Joshua. Another commonality between the Davidic covenant and the previous ones is the role of the seed. Adam and Noah are to be fruitful and multiply, and although Abraham’s seed will be abundant, it is through an individual seed the promises will be fulfilled. Likewise, from David’s seed, God will establish an everlasting kingdom, and the seed will be to God a son, and the LORD will be to him a Father. Finally, David will not build a house for the LORD, but the LORD will build a house(hold) for David. However, his “son” will build a house for the LORD.

With so many promises of the covenants seemingly coming together in the Davidic covenant, the fulfillment of these seems as imminent as ever. While we know that it is not David but one of his sons who will fulfill this covenant, we still anticipate that his rule will exemplify the everlasting kingdom to come. While there are stumbles, namely adultery with Bathsheba, murder of Uriah, and the taking of the census, the rest of David’s rule is presented positively. He has recaptured and extended the boundaries of the land and brought the ark into Jerusalem. Moreover, he is a spiritual leader for the people. However,

even though there is a positive emphasis throughout the book, it ends with the census and the resulting plague that kills thousands. Thus, there is a distinctly negative tone at the end of the book that may hint towards problems to come.

## **Kings**

Despite the negative end to Samuel and the first chapter of Kings where Adonijah tries to set himself up as David's successor, the book of Kings has a hopeful beginning. As David hands the kingdom over to Solomon and he prepares to build a temple for the LORD, both men sense the covenant's fulfillment on the horizon. Solomon believes that he is the fulfillment to the covenant, and announces himself as such in 1 Kings 8:22-26 at the dedication of the temple. He begins well enough as the author highlights his proper pursuit of wisdom. Whereas we have looked at how Adam and Eve sought wisdom apart from the LORD and thus fell, Solomon seeks wisdom from the LORD above all else, and he is blessed accordingly.

However, though he starts well, the author makes clear that Solomon is not the fulfillment of the promise to David as Solomon had supposed. Solomon begins to multiply horses from Egypt, wives, and personal wealth, the very things prohibited in Deuteronomy 17. Consequently, the LORD was angry with Solomon for turning from Him and tells Solomon that He will tear his kingdom from him and give it to his servant. However, for the sake of David, He will not do this in Solomon's day, but in his son's day.

## **Divided Kingdom**

After Solomon dies, his son Rehoboam begins to rule and is harsh to the people. As a result, the peace that Israel received from their enemies under David and Solomon is shattered from among their own people as the kingdom is split. The southern kingdom, Judah, continues to be under the leadership of Rehoboam and his successive sons in the line of Judah. Only Judah and Benjamin remain in the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom, Israel, is ruled by Jeroboam and his sons who are not of the line of Judah. The northern kingdom consisted of the other ten tribes.

The narrative throughout the rest of Kings moves back and forth between kingdoms as new kings are set up. Every king who rules in Israel is evil in the sight of the LORD. Moreover, they are said to walk in the sins of Jeroboam that made Israel to stumble. In the southern kingdom of Judah, there are many wicked kings as well, but there are a few who are said to do what was right in the eyes of the LORD. However, even some of these kings are said to do well, but not as David had done, because the high places are not removed.

Only a handful are said to do what was right in the eyes of the LORD as their father David had done. Chief among these are Hezekiah and Josiah.

### The Role of the Prophets in Kings

Another important emphasis in the book of Kings is the role of the prophet. This is established in two main ways: the ministry of Elijah and Elisha and the emphasis on the fulfillment of prophecy. Of great significance is the way that the author textually links Elijah with Moses. There are several ways in which the two are compared. First, both go before the king to pronounce judgment. Second, both stretch out their hands to part waters. Third, the LORD provides for Elijah east of the Jordan just as he did for Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. Fourth, both experience the fire of the LORD (altar and bush). Fifth, both hide in the cleft of the rock (Mount Sinai in both cases) as the LORD passes by and speaks.

With so many textual links between the two, the reader should wonder if he is the prophet like Moses who is to come (Deut 18). Though Elijah is like the prophet to come, he is not the ultimate fulfillment for one simple reason: Elisha is greater than Elijah because he receives a double-portion of Elijah's spirit, evidenced by his performing twice the miracles of Elijah. Though the author shows in this way that Elijah is not the fulfillment of the promise of Deuteronomy 18, by linking him textually to Moses he gives his ministry added authority, making the sin of the people in not listening to him all more egregious.

Second, there is a strong emphasis in the book of Kings on the fulfillment of the prophecies that come from the prophets of the LORD. One example that is readily apparent is the prophecy that Ahijah makes to Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11:29-39. He prophesies that the LORD will tear the kingdom from Solomon's son and give him ten tribes, which comes to pass in 1 Kings 12. Another example is 1 Kings 16:34, in which Hiel rebuilds Jericho and loses his firstborn as a result. The author reminds the reader of the prophecy of Joshua 6:26 that whoever rebuilds the city of Jericho will do so at the cost of his firstborn.

There are several more examples which suggest that Kings is careful to point out that that which is prophesied by the prophets will come about. The focus of these prophecies throughout is on the sin of the people, their need for repentance, and the judgment that will come upon them if they do not return to the LORD.

### Exile

The narrative continues expounding upon the wickedness of the people and their kings and their unwillingness to listen to the words of the prophets. Israel is the first of the kingdoms to fall, being captured by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17). Verses 7-18 of that chapter are the

most extended dialogue of the reason for the exile of the northern kingdom. Some of the reasons listed are how they feared other gods (v.7), walked in the customs of the people of the land whom the LORD had driven out (v.8), built high places (v. 9), did not listen to the prophets (v.14), despised his statutes and covenant (v. 15), abandoned the commandments of the LORD (v. 16), and sacrificed their children (v. 17). As verse 18 concludes: “Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight.”

Judah, however, is not far behind. In verse 19, there is already an indication of their impending fall. The author notes, “Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced.” The final chapter of Kings recounts the fall of Judah to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and the exile of the people. Thus, the narrative of Kings has reversed the blessing of the land that was secured in Joshua.

The expectations that were so high during the reigns of David and Solomon are likewise erased. It may seem as though there is no hope in Israel (Israel/Judah), that God’s promises have failed and that the line of David will cease. However, the author leaves the reader with a subtle note of hope. In 2 Kings 25:27-30, Jehoiachin, King of Judah, is released from prison and is given a regular allowance according to his daily need for as long as he lived. As long as the line of David remains, there is hope for Israel (Israel/Judah).

## **Chronicles**

The book of Chronicles, though broken into two books like Samuel and Kings, should be understood as a single book with unified authorship, an author commonly referred to as the Chronicler. It is important to keep this in mind so as to recognize how the genealogies and narratives of 1 Chronicles inform the message and purpose of the narratives of 2 Chronicles. Like Samuel and Kings, it is an historical narrative which encompasses the reigns of the kings of both books. However, unlike Samuel and Kings, Chronicles is only concerned with the kings of Judah. Following on the heels of Samuel and Kings, much can be lost in this placement. It is often overlooked as one reads through Scripture as merely a rerun, and readers often ignore its theological implications and nuances. Such a reading would be akin to reading through Matthew, and then, when coming to Mark and finding parallel accounts, simply passing by it and failing to deal with the unique way in which Mark describes and uses the account.

We must be careful, then, to allow the Chronicler to shape the same events in new ways in order to promote his own theological message. In order to achieve this goal, we will look at the genealogies, the Chronicler’s portrayal of the Davidic Covenant, his unique portrayal of the kings, and the account of the Edict of Cyrus. After addressing these issues, we will

show how they promote a unified theme of Messianic expectation that will culminate in the arrival of the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

### Genealogies

The book of Chronicles begins with nine chapters of genealogy. Though we will not take time here to discuss all the details of those genealogies, they do serve to highlight certain themes that will be important in Chronicles:

(1) Beginning with Adam serves to show Israel's place among the nations and how God has already partially fulfilled His promise to Abraham to bless all the nations.

(2) The Chronicler seems intentionally to select and construct his genealogy in such a way that the seventy person genealogy following the flood corresponds to the seventy persons from Abraham at the end of Genesis. This places the emphasis again on the notion that God called Abraham out of all the nations to be blessed, and through him all the nations will be blessed.

(3) The Chronicler's genealogy highlights the name change of Abraham, which points the reader back to this narrative in Genesis 17. This passage also happens to be the place where God promises Abraham that kings will come from him, thus linking the importance of the genealogy with the narratives to follow.

(4) The Chronicler begins his genealogy with Judah (who is not the oldest son), which reminds the reader of the blessing that Jacob gives to his sons in Genesis 49 in which Judah is said to be the ruling tribe. The preeminence of Judah in the genealogy highlights the role Judah will play in the ensuing narratives.

Albeit brief, these four points help set the stage for the main narratives of Chronicles and its focus on the Davidic king from the line of Judah.

### Davidic Covenant

After the genealogies conclude, the Chronicler gives Saul very little attention before moving on to David. Such a treatment is not surprising given the Chronicler's interest in the tribe of Judah. Unlike in Kings, the Chronicler focuses almost exclusively on the southern kingdom of Judah. Thus, Saul, a Benjaminite, cannot be the one to fulfill or picture the rule of the One who is coming in the line of Judah (Gen 49; 2 Sam 7) to set up an everlasting kingdom, namely the Messiah. After moving on to David, the Chronicler records the Davidic Covenant in 1 Chronicles 17. As we read the Chronicler's account, we see nearly identical language to that of Samuel, but there is one peculiar absence.

<p>Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. 9 And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. <b><i>When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men,</i></b> 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever (2 Sam 7:8-16).</p>	<p>Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be prince over my people Israel, 8 and I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 9 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall waste them no more, as formerly, 10 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will subdue all your enemies. Moreover, I declare to you that the LORD will build you a house. 11 When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. 12 He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. 13 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, 14 but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever (1 Chron 17:7-14).</p>
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**Figure 4: Comparison of 2 Sam 7 and 1 Chron 17**

One of the more debated questions among Christians regarding the Davidic Covenant is how to handle the highlighted passage in the Samuel account. If this passage is to be fulfilled by Christ, how can we understand this claim? There are several responses given, but regardless of the conclusion, we find that the Chronicler has interpreted the passage for us. By removing the highlighted passage from 2 Samuel 7:14 above, the Chronicler has interpreted the meaning of the covenant to refer to One who is yet to rule. None of the kings that the Chronicler will go on to describe are the Coming One that he anticipates.

### Kings of Judah

One of the most noticeable differences between Chronicles and Samuel-Kings is the way that the Chronicler tends to highlight the positive aspects of the rule of some of the “good” kings and leave out their transgressions. He essentially idealizes the kings. The reason for such an approach seems to be directly in line with the purpose of his genealogy and

portrayal of the Davidic Covenant: he is anticipating the Messiah. Consequently, the Chronicler gives the longest look to David, and his focus on David is for eschatological reasons. Moreover, the text looks forward to a coming king who will rule forever and David is the king who best epitomizes the coming Messiah. In order to show that the Chronicler does in fact have this messianic picture in mind, we will look at the portrayal of David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah.

## **David**

Though David is pictured as a man of God in the book of Kings, the author recounts his three most grievous sins: adultery, murder, and the taking of the census. In Chronicles, the picture of David is much different. The narratives of David's adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband Uriah are absent. The author does retain the narrative of the census, but like the author of Samuel, shows that after the sin he follows it with wisdom: he asks to fall into the hands of the LORD, he intercedes for the people and he obeys the LORD by offering sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Likewise, David does not follow the Torah instructions for carrying the ark when he first tries to move it to Jerusalem, and it costs Uzzah his life. However, after David realizes his mistake, he corrects it and successfully brings the ark to rest in Jerusalem.

The rest of the narrative of David depicts him as a great king and leader who has concern for the ways of the LORD and leads the people in wisdom and truth. Additionally, David plays a greater part in the preparation of the building of the temple than in Samuel. Though he will not be the one to build it because he shed much blood through the taking of the census, he gathers all of the materials and tells Solomon his son what to do.

Moreover, though David passes away in the narrative, the Chronicler continues to idealize his reign throughout by comparing subsequent kings to David. Many are wicked because they do not do what David did, and any who are good have done, at least to some measure, the good that David did. Thus, David is set up as the archetype of the king who rules according to the law and wisdom of the LORD, and yet the Davidic Covenant is to be fulfilled by one of his sons. The Chronicler has thus set up a picture of what the Messiah will be like: He will bring peace, He will rule justly, and He will be greater even than David.

## **Solomon**

The argument for a messianic theme does not only hinge upon an idealistic portrait of David, however. Solomon is idealized in the text as a picture of what the coming king will be like: he will be a man of peace, he will receive gifts from foreign royalty, and he will be a man of wisdom. Unlike in the book of Kings, Solomon's many failures as it relates to acquiring many wives, horses from Egypt, and gold for himself are not recounted. Solomon is not pictured as



one who is led astray, but one who rules wisely. Solomon's care for the building and dedication of the temple exceeds any such notion in the Kings account. Nonetheless, though David and Solomon believe the covenant will be fulfilled in Solomon, the Chronicler makes clear through the ensuing narrative that it is not fulfilled. As the narrative progresses, several interesting points arise which lend support to this argument.

### **Structure of the Book Regarding Ensuing Kings**

After Solomon exits the scene, the structure of the book shifts. Whereas David and Solomon received lengthy portraits, 2 Chronicles 10-36 typically contain one small unit per king. However, the four longest units in this section are in regards to Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah. What is intriguing about this break in structure is that each of these four kings is given lengthier portions because they are kings who, for some time at least, were faithful to the LORD. What arises in the narrative, then, is a sort of audition for the one who will keep the commands of the LORD and thus fulfill the role of the king whom God promised David. For the king who is wicked, he is named as such and passes quickly in the narrative. For the king who begins faithfully, he is given an extended look. Let us look, then, at two of these kings who are given an extended look.

### **Hezekiah**

One of the first things the reader is told about Hezekiah, after the age and length of his rule and the name of his mother, is that "he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done" (2 Chron 29:2). In what follows, the reader is told that in the first month of the first year of his reign he opened the doors of the temple, repaired them, reinstituted the priests and proclaimed to the people: "Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, in order that His fierce anger may turn away from us (2 Chron 29:10). Thus, from the very beginning of Hezekiah's reign he had a concern for the LORD that manifested itself in his care for the temple, an important theme in Chronicles as we have noticed already in David and Solomon's rules. He attempts to reunify the tribes of Israel and reinstitutes the Passover.

Again, it is said of Hezekiah:

Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered (2 Chron 31:20-21).

However, Hezekiah, after the LORD helps him defeat Sennacherib of Assyria, becomes ill. The LORD restores him to health when Hezekiah prays, but the Chronicler recounts that Hezekiah "did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was

proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem” (2 Chron 32:25). Unlike other kings, however, Hezekiah humbles himself after this sin that the wrath of God does not come upon the people during his reign (v. 26).

## **Josiah**

Josiah is likewise portrayed by the Chronicler as one who purges evil from the land early in his reign. The picture the Chronicler paints of this action is powerful:

And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images. And they chopped down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and he cut down the incense altars that stood above them. And he broke in pieces the Asherim and the carved and the metal images, and he made dust of them and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins all around, he broke down the altars and beat the Asherim and the images into powder and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem. (2 Chron 34:2-7)

During Josiah’s reign, while the priests are purifying the temple, they find a book of the law, presumably Deuteronomy, and make it known to Josiah. When Josiah hears the law and how they have not been obeying it, he tears his clothes and institutes immediately the demands of the Law. The Chronicler tells the reader that during the reign of Josiah the people followed the LORD and he instituted the Passover (2 Chron 34:33-35:1).

Nevertheless, though Josiah is pictured as greater than any king since David, he neglects to hear the word of the LORD and goes in disguise to war against Neco of Egypt and is killed (2 Chron 35:20-24). After Josiah, it takes only three months for his son Jehoiakim to be defeated by the Egyptians, and Jehoiachin his son is taken captive along with Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, as the people enter exile, the anticipated king and fulfillment of the covenant with David has not come.

## **Summary of the Portrayal of the Kings**

Though David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others are given an extended look and are presented as pictures of what the rule of the Messiah will be like, nevertheless, in the end he can only fail like past kings. Like Jaques in Shakespeare’s comedy, *As You Like It*, who says that “All the world’s a stage,” one could view the book of Chronicles as a stage in which

the kings “have their exits and entrances” and yet all end the same, in “mere oblivion.”<sup>23</sup> None succeed, and as each king fails to fulfill the conditions of the covenant, it serves to show that the One who will fulfill the conditions is still yet to come.

### The Edict of Cyrus and the Conclusion of Chronicles

The final matter to consider in the book of Chronicles is the concluding passage of the book. In 2 Chronicles 36:22-23, the Chronicler recounts the edict of Cyrus:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, “The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.”

As we come to the end, then, the Chronicler has spent his account portraying the kings of Judah in light of this Messiah. What he finds as he returns from exile is that this One has not come. And yet, though Jerusalem lies in ruins and the king is not on the throne, the line of David has been preserved through exile and the LORD has used a Gentile king to bring about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. And as the Chronicler concludes, he anticipates one final time the One who will come to rebuild the house of the LORD.

Recalling the Davidic covenant once more, 1 Chronicles 17:12 says, “He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever.” Thus, the One who will “go up” and build the house of the LORD is the One who will establish His throne forever. Chronicles thus ends with a messianic expectation on which the New Testament writers pick up.<sup>24</sup>

### Ezra-Nehemiah

In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are one book. The superscription of Nehemiah 1:1, “The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah,” identified the beginning of a new section, rather than the heading of another book.

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<sup>23</sup>William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 415-416.

<sup>24</sup>This connection with the New Testament is even more pronounced in the Hebrew order where Chronicles is the last word of the Old Testament. Thus, Matthew’s word in 1:1 of the genealogy of Jesus Christ is supremely appropriate. The long expected One is introduced immediately in the New Testament by means of a genealogy, the same method employed by the Chronicler to anticipate his coming.

## Message and Structure

Although each has its unique aspects, it is important to read Ezra and Nehemiah together as one book in order to see the scope and continuity of the theological message of the book. Ezra should be understood as the first part and Nehemiah the second that together make the whole of the one narrative. When reading the work as two books, clarity of message and purpose are potentially lost. We will look at prominent themes and the role that Ezra-Nehemiah plays in the fulfillment of God's promises.

### Structure

The author, in compiling Ezra-Nehemiah, leaves historical gaps (Ezra 7:1; Neh 1:2; 2:2) and spends an extensive amount of detail on rather short time periods. Certainly, theological concerns, as found in the presentation of themes along the course of the whole narrative, are behind the compilation and arrangement of the book. The book can be briefly outlined as such: (1) Ezra 1-6: the community rebuilds the temple amidst opposition. (2) Ezra 7-10: defining of restored community by the "law of your God and the law of the king" (7:26). (3) Nehemiah 1-7: completion of walls amidst opposition. (4) Nehemiah 8-12: fulfillment and unfulfillment. (5) Nehemiah 13: final reforms according to Torah and only one holy.

### Prominent Themes

We see in Ezra-Nehemiah that God is faithful to keep His promises. From the perspective of the historian, the restoration of Israel appears to be inconsistent with regard to difficulties, repeals, and floundering for lack of a coherent strategy. However, Ezra-Nehemiah tells the story of the faithfulness and providence of the LORD as He is the One who directs the affairs of kings hearts to rebuild His temple and to release His people to worship therein (Ezra 1:1; 7:27). "They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by the decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia" (6:14).

In conjunction with the faithfulness of God, one scholar recommends three major themes for the book. "The time period of Ezra-Nehemiah witnessed a transformation from a time of elite leaders, narrow holiness, and oral authority to a time of community, spreading holiness, and the authority of written documents."<sup>25</sup>

(1) *From leaders to community.* Ezra and Nehemiah are similar to the charismatic leaders that are so pronounced in the Old Testament, however, they are absorbed into the community as the community rebuilds the temple and wall and turn to the LORD. Yet, what the scholar does not mention, is that the book ends with corruption in the land and

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<sup>25</sup>T.C. Eskenazi, "The Chronicler and the Composition of 1 Esdras," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 39-61. And her *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988).

Nehemiah focusing solely upon himself and pleading with the LORD, “Remember me, O my God, for good.”

(2) *Holiness extended to whole city.* Holiness is no longer restricted to certain special places marked off for the worship of Israel. The whole city is seen as a “holy city” marked by the completion of the temple, walls, and the rest of Jerusalem (Neh 3:1; 11:1). Even here, the scholar’s assessment is lacking the author’s notation of the failures and the need for Nehemiah’s further reforms (Neh 13).

(3) *Shift from oral communication to written communication of God*—from the Prophets to written Scripture. We also see this shift in Chronicles. The emphasis moves from the spoken word to the Law and what it teaches. The climax of the narrative is when everyone stands up and the Law is read and the priests are standing in front of the people explaining the Law as it is read the entire day. The people rededicated themselves to this divinely given book at a great covenant renewal ceremony (Neh 8-10) The Torah of the LORD is the most important word and document. Again, however, the message at the end of the books is, no matter how important the Law became for the people, the Levites, the priests who were to “teach the law” (Lev 10:10), are not doing it.

By the end of the book, these themes reflect that there are aspects of fulfillment and non-fulfillment. What the reader expects to happen in the return from exile and to the promised land in the “holy city,” Jerusalem, never perfectly actualizes and the book ends with a focus on one leader’s holiness and care for the Law rather than the corporate testimony to hearts which trust and obey the Law of God.

### **What role does Ezra-Nehemiah play in the fulfillment of God’s promises?**

#### **Fulfillment**

The themes of fulfillment and non-fulfillment are important in Ezra-Nehemiah as they reflect the similar situation of the OT’s story of the Israelite people. At certain places the reader sees the fulfillment of God’s promises: (1) the people return from exile (promised in Jer 25:8-13); (2) they build during time of Cyrus (promised in Isa 44:28); (3) they bring in material from Tyre (Ezra 3:7; Neh 13:16) just as Solomon acquired materials from Hiram of Tyre (1 Kings 5-10); (4) they acquired the wealth of nations (Ezra 6:1-12; compare Hag 2:7); and, (5) there is a separation and fulfillment of Law (Neh 9).

#### **Non-Fulfillment—Hints that this Is Not the End**

However, fulfillment is not the final word in Ezra-Nehemiah, nor the rest of the Old Testament. Regarding non-fulfillment we see that: (1) the post-exilic temple is not as great as Solomon’s (Ezra 3:12); (2) there is talk of foreign wives showing the people’s continued

idolatry (Ezra 9-10; Neh 13); and, (3) the priests are still in sin in the failure in the temple (Tobiah and the chamber in Neh 13:4-9). The final word is the same word as that before the Exile; the LORD is faithful to do what He said He will do, but the people are faithless and turn away.

Before the Exile, the common sin is idolatry. After the Exile, the people marry foreign wives which will lead them to idolatry. Israel is still the same kind of people; they fail to keep the covenant.

Jerusalem has a new wall, the population has grown, various religious and ethnic reforms have been ordered, and the temple has been rebuilt; however, the characteristics of pre-Babylonian Exile life still continue after their return. The people are still slaves in the promised land of their forefathers.

Behold, we are slaves his day; in the land that gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins (Neh 9:36-37; cf. Ezra 9:8-9).

They are still in exile even though they are in the Promised Land.

## **Esther**

Esther concludes the historical books in the English Bible. More than many other books, the structure of the book plays an essential role in revealing its theological message.

### **The Book's Structure as a Means for Understanding the Book's Meaning**

Throughout the book of Esther the author uses irony as a literary device to show that there is an unnamed author who is providentially writing the script and working all things according to His plan. While the LORD is never mentioned, the irony of the events shows that God is at work caring for His people even when they are in Exile at the hand of their enemies for their rejection of the LORD. The text explicitly mentions this "reverse" of what the reader thinks is going to happen.

Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, *the reverse occurred*: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them (Est 9:1).

The book of Esther is structured as a chiasm. A chiasm is a literary device in which a story is told in such a way that earlier and later parts of the story parallel one another so as to highlight not only the contrast between the two parallels but also emphasize what

happens in the middle. In the case of Esther, there are four parallels that serve to highlight the central point (see Figure 5 below). The chiastic structure of Esther thus serves as a vehicle for the author to highlight this irony or “reversal.”

**A** The greatness of Ahasuerus and his banquet for officials from 127 provinces—Ch. 1

**B** Banquet celebrating coronation of Esther over her rivals—Ch. 2

**C** Decree to exterminate Jews and their mourning—Chs. 3-4

**D** 1st banquet of Esther; Haman plans death of Mordecai—Ch. 5

**E** The king cannot sleep, the chronicles read, Mordecai honored, Haman shamed—Ch. 6

**D'** 2nd banquet of Esther; Haman dies instead of Mordecai—Ch. 7

**C'** Decree of Jewish defense and their joy—Ch. 8

**B'** Banquet celebrates victory of Jews over their rivals—Ch. 9

**A'** The greatness of Ahasuerus and his prime minister Mordecai; letters to the Jews in 127 provinces and banquet of Purim—Chs. 9-10

**Figure 5. Chiastic Structure of Esther.**

The chiastic structure of the book centers on the honoring of Mordecai and the shaming of wicked Haman. Mordecai is noted as a model wise man like other wise men and deliverers in Israel’s story. Like Saul, who was from the tribe of Benjamin and defeats Agag/Amalekites, so Mordecai, from the tribe of Benjamin, defeats Haman, an Amalekite. Mordecai is also like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah). Just as they do not bow and do not burn, so also Mordecai will not bow to Haman, and he is likewise delivered.

The point is that God is in control of all that happens because it happens according to His plan. Though the brutality of the exile weighs heavily on the Jews and the apparent loss of all the divine promises seems the reality, the LORD is on His throne. He “removes kings and sets up kings” (Dan 2:21) and “the king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He will” (Prov 21:1; cf. Ezra 6:22).

Just as He had done at other times (Joseph, Moses, Daniel) God brought Esther, a gifted Israelite, into the court of a foreign king “for such a time as this” (4:14) to preserve the life of His people. “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today (Gen 50:20-21). The

deliverance of the Jews from their enemies was so great that they set apart two days every year as a commemoration that is kept to this day.

### **Concluding the Historical Books**

The goal of this cursory glance at the historical books is to bring together the major themes that run throughout, namely Israel's disobedience, God's faithfulness to His promises, and the expectation of the Coming King and prophet. The message contained within is that faithfulness to God's covenant is directly related to possession of the land, as is mentioned as early as Deuteronomy 4. And yet, God, though punishing the people for their idolatry and wickedness, will stay faithful to His covenant.

The best way to recognize that truth, however, is not to conclude that God has to keep fixing His covenants as the people sin, but rather that each of the covenants is interrelated and will find fulfillment in the promised seed. The message of the prophets later in the Old Testament have this same type of expectant hope that God has a plan to fulfill his covenants at a future time. This will be seen most evidently in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36, which speak explicitly of the New Covenant, but we will attempt to show how the whole message of the prophets is anticipating that time. The wisdom books that follow Esther will likewise find hope in God's faithfulness and the coming King.



## Chapter 4: Wisdom & Poetic Books

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The wisdom and poetic books in the Old Testament include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. One other poetic book, Lamentations, is placed after Jeremiah because of his supposed authorship of the book. It is helpful to recognize similarities in genre and theme between Lamentations and the other wisdom and poetic books. For continuity, however, we will discuss Lamentations in its placement after the book of Jeremiah.

### Job

The story of Job's suffering is one of the more recognizable stories in all of Scripture. Job, a righteous man who was blessed with family and property, loses his children, his animals, and is himself afflicted with sores on his body. In the discourses that follow, Job calls out to God for answers as to the reason for his suffering, continuing to profess his innocence though his friends continually accuse him of sin. When God finally speaks, Job begins to understand that the sovereignty of God extends far beyond what he ever understood. In the conclusion, the LORD restores blessings to Job, and Job intercedes for his friends. Although the plot of the story may be quickly outlined in this manner, the message of the book is not quite so simple. What is one to make of nature and purpose of Job's suffering? What does the book tell us about the sovereignty of God and the nature of suffering? What does Job add to the message of the Old Testament? These and other questions may arise as we look at the message of the book, but the text does provide us with some answers.

Job's placement at the head of the wisdom and poetic books makes sense in keeping with the Old Testament's concern for chronology. The events of Job likely happened during the time of the patriarchs (Abraham through Jacob), but it was not written until much later. It also fits well in this location because it is a blend of narrative and poetry. Although it is almost entirely poetic, and thus fits well in this section of Scripture, it is bracketed by narrative material that helps transition from the narratives of the historical books that precede it. On the other hand, though the narrative prologue and epilogue set the context and conclusion of the matter, Job is unique among Old Testament books in the way in which the poetry carries on the narrative story. In approaching this unique book, we will look at features of its structure, its relation to other Old Testament texts, its theological message, and its Christian implications.

## Structure of Job

As mentioned above, the majority of the book is in poetic form. The poetic section consists of a number of different discourses from Job, his three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar), Elihu, and the LORD. Throughout much of the discourse, Job is lamenting his suffering. Though his friends tell him that suffering is the result of sin, Job continues to argue for his innocence. If one were to have access only to the poetic material in Job, it would be quite easy to side with Job's friends. Many of their points are drawn directly from Scriptural principles, most notably their insistence on the doctrine of retribution. While we will discuss this concept more in the theological message section, it should be noted here that the doctrine of retribution suggests that suffering and judgment are consequences of sin. However, in the canonical text we have an aid to interpretation, namely the narrative prologue and epilogue that bracket the text.

Much like we discussed in Samuel, where the poetic interludes in 1 Samuel 2 and 2 Samuel 22-23 provide a Messianic framework, in Job it is the narrative framework tells the reader two very important keys to interpretation. First, Job's suffering is not the result of sin, for he is said to be righteous; rather the suffering comes as a test of faith. Second, Job has spoken what is right of the LORD. In reading the poetic discourses, then, we should keep in mind the nature and purpose of Job's suffering and the fact that his lamenting is recognized by the LORD as a legitimate response.

As a quick reference, it may be helpful to see a basic outline of the book in order to have a foundation for some of the references to follow.

1. Prologue—1-2
2. Job's lament—3
3. Dialogue cycles—4-27
  - a. Eliphaz → Bildad → Zophar
  - b. Job responds to each
  - c. 3 cycles, though Zophar has no 3rd speech
4. Wisdom—28
5. Job's monologue—29-31
6. Elihu—32-37
7. LORD's speeches—38-42:8
8. Epilogue—42:9-End

**Figure 6. Outline of Job.**

## Relation to Other Old Testament Texts

### **Proverbs, Psalms and Other Wisdom Literature**

The book of Proverbs, many of the Psalms and other wisdom texts often address the doctrine of retribution as mentioned above. This is even seen played out in some of the narratives of Kings/Chronicles for example, where the sins of a king lead to severe consequences, including defeat at the hands of their enemies, physical ailments, and death. The speeches of Job's friends are closely related to some of these passages as they attempt to show Job that his suffering must be the result of sin. However, as we will see, though they are drawing from principles found in wisdom literature, they misapply it. Just because suffering and judgment are consequences of sin, does not require that ALL suffering is the result of sin. Another connection between Job and Proverbs is the refrain that wisdom is to fear God and turn away from evil (Job 1:1 & 28:28//Prov 3:7). Additionally, Job has dozens of connections with the Psalms.

### **Isaiah**

There are at least six thematic and lexical connections with Isaiah which show how the book of Job is consistent with the message and theology of the book of Isaiah, and by association the other prophets as well.

#### 1. Eliphaz on the wicked—Job 15:35//Isaiah 59:4

\*They conceive trouble and give birth to evil, and their womb prepares deceit (Job 15:35).

\*No one enters suit justly; no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies, they conceive mischief and give birth to iniquity (Isa 59:4).

#### 2. God's power—Job 9:8//Isaiah 44:24

\*Who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea (Job 9:8).

\*Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself (Isa 44:24).

#### 3. The LORD did this—Job 12:9//Isaiah 41:20

\*Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this (Job 12:9)?

\*That they may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it (Isa 41:20).

4. Kings go astray—Job 12:24-25//Isaiah 19:14

\*He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth and makes them wander in a pathless waste. 25 They grope in the dark without light, and he makes them stagger like a drunken man (Job 12:24).

\*The LORD has mingled within her a spirit of confusion, and they will make Egypt stagger in all its deeds, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit (Isa 19:14).

5. Drying up the sea—Job 14:11//Isaiah 19:5

\*As waters fail from a lake and a river wastes away and dries up (Job 14:11).

\*And the waters of the sea will be dried up, and the river will be dry and parched (Isa 19:5).

6. The LORD Controls the sea—Job 26:12//Isaiah 51:15

\*By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he shattered Rahab (Job 26:12).

\*I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar-- the LORD of hosts is his name (Isa 51:15).

## **Genesis**

The links between Job and the early chapters of Genesis are numerous and important for an understanding of Job as wisdom literature and for the background of the LORD as the Sovereign Creator. Among the most evident connections are the number of verbal and thematic concerns shared by the prologue to Job and the narrative of Genesis 1-3. In Job 1, Job is said to be blameless and blessed by God, similar to the state of Adam prior to the fall. Job's family has multiplied and filled the land, and his seven sons hosted a feast each on his day (v. 4). These facts echo God's command to Adam to be fruitful and multiply and to the seven day account in Genesis 1-2.

In Job 1:21, Job says that he was naked when he entered the world and will be naked when he departs. This word for naked is used seldom in the Old Testament, but one of its other uses is in Genesis 2:25 to refer to Adam and Eve being naked and unashamed. In Job, Satan attempts to use suffering to tempt Job to sin; in Genesis, it is the serpent who devises a plan to cause Adam and Eve to sin. In Genesis, they fall, but in Job, he does not fall. Likewise, while Eve gives the fruit to Adam and he sins, Job's wife tells Job to curse God and die, but he does not listen.

Finally, the Genesis narrative shows God walking through the garden, and the narrative prologue to Job shows Satan going back and forth throughout the earth (2:2). These

parallels serve an important role in setting the context of what is to follow. In the Genesis narrative, there is a blameless man in the garden which God has provided, God is walking in their midst, there is no sin present, and yet they fall into temptation because they seek wisdom apart from God. In Job, however, he is in a world filled with sin, where Satan travels throughout the earth, and though he is tempted to curse God because of his misfortune, he does not fall as Adam did. Rather, through fearing God and turning from evil, he is shown to be wise, precisely because he seeks out the LORD, even in lament.

### Theological Message of Job

The message of Job cannot be limited to any single statement in the text. Rather, the message is progressively revealed through the discourse of Job. In the prologue, the reader is introduced to the context and the setting of the plot. The reader is also made aware that Job is righteous and that it is at the prompting of Satan that Job is tested. Satan does not reappear in the rest of the book, and his role is seen thus merely as the means of implementing this testing.

After Job experiences his misfortune, the text transitions into poetic dialogue. Throughout the dialogue, Job calls out to God, who is seemingly absent, to appear and explain to him why he is suffering. As Job continues to cry out in lament, the question arises as to whether or not Job's response to God is appropriate.

Job's friends clearly do not find this appropriate as they call on him to repent, for his sin must be the reason for his misfortune. Job, however, maintains that he is innocent, and continues to question God's reason for his suffering. As discussed briefly above, Job's friends misapply the doctrine of retribution, assuming that all suffering is the result of sin. However, knowing from the prologue that Job is blameless and that his suffering is a test of his faith, the reader has knowledge that Job's friends do not: though sin does lead to suffering and judgment, it is not the only reason for suffering.

While this should give us as the readers enough evidence to reject the claims of the friends, we may still wonder with Job the ultimate purpose of his suffering. Though the book of Job does not address the question of why there is suffering in general, or even why there is innocent suffering, it does address in Job's specific situation how a person can respond in the midst of suffering.

Ultimately, however, Job's suffering is explained in terms of Satan's question to the LORD: "Does Job fear God for no reason?" (1:9). The question that the reader should be asking, then, is whether Job will remain faithful to the LORD throughout his trials, or whether Satan is right that Job fears God merely because he has been blessed.

Thus far, the reader has seen him cry out to the LORD to appear and speak with him (31:35) and lamented that he suffers though he is righteous. After Elihu comes and speaks, the LORD responds to Job and visits him in a whirlwind. Of main concern in these speeches is that the LORD is sovereign over all things because He created them, and His plans are beyond the realm of human understanding. What may seem disordered is in fact perfectly ordered in God's plan, and as the Sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, His purposes cannot be thwarted.

The effect of these speeches of the LORD is to convince Job that he has spoken of things that he did not understand (42:3). However, though Job did not understand, he did not sin in his lamentation. The LORD rather convicts the friends of speaking what was false and Job of speaking what was right, and moreover calls upon Job to offer prayer and sacrifice on behalf of his friends (42:7-8).

Thus, the answer to Satan's question in 1:9, "Does Job fear God for no reason?," is answered. Job does in fact fear God without respect to his situation. Consequently, the message of the book of Job is one of a sovereign God who rules justly, but in a manner that exceeds human understanding. Though things may seem disordered, though we may wonder like Habakkuk why the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, though we may lament with Job over our sufferings, we can know that God is in control and nothing can happen outside of His sovereign, perfect plan.

### Christian Response to Job

We can see then how the textual links with other Old Testament texts and the book's position in the wisdom writings present a consistent and complementary message with the rest of the Old Testament. The God who created all things remains in control of all things. The God who chose Israel as His people remains God of all the nations. The God who is to be worshiped and sought after for wisdom is and remains sovereign and just in both the blessing and the suffering of His people. However, though the message may fit well within the Old Testament, how is a Christian to approach it in a way that is distinctly Christian?

First, we see in Job a response to God of lament. Though Job does not fully understand the ways of the LORD, nevertheless he does not sin in his lament. The legitimacy of Job's lament is accentuated by the words of Christ on the cross. In quoting the lament of Psalm 22, Christ confirms such an attitude towards God is appropriate. The reason it is appropriate is that the cry of the lament is to God, because the lamenter realizes that it is God alone who can act upon the lament to rectify the situation. Thus, through Christ's

example we can approach Job with the knowledge that Job's lament, while lacking understanding of the ways of the LORD, is a legitimate response to God.

Additionally, the message of Job that God's rule over creation extends beyond merely distributing justice is accentuated in the New Testament. God's rule and purposes must be more than merely dispensing justice or else the loving, merciful sacrifice of Christ for undeserving sinners would make no sense. In relation to this idea is one connection with Job and Isaiah that we have reserved until this point. In Isaiah 53:9, a suffering servant passage that is frequently associated with Christ as it relates to the crucifixion, the prophet writes, "And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth." In the book of Job, we see that Job suffers even though he is said to be blameless and to have spoken what is right of the LORD. In some sense, Job's suffering for reasons other than his own sin prefigures the sacrifice of Christ.

We are not suggesting that Job is suffering for the sake of others, or that he is perfect. Rather, we are merely suggesting that the suffering of Christ for sins not his own would be largely foreign to the concept of suffering in Scripture apart from Job (see also Isa 53:5).

We also recognize from the New Testament that Jesus Christ is the means by which all things were created and hold together (Col 1:15-17). In light of this New Testament witness, when the LORD speaks of his sovereignty and lordship over all creation in Job 38-41, Christ can claim that authority as well.

Finally, the supremacy of Christ that is revealed in the New Testament is shown for the purpose of leading to persevering faith (Col 1:15-23). Like Job, we are called to persevere in our faith, regardless of our circumstances, which springs from our knowledge that, whatever the situation, God is in control and works all things together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28).<sup>26</sup>

## **Psalms**

The book of Psalms is one of the more popular Old Testament book for many reasons, but likely the most common reason is the way in which we as Christians can easily relate to the emotions in the book, whether it is thanksgiving, praise, or lament. Nevertheless, despite its popularity many miss the rich depth of the Psalms. In our study of the Psalms we will look at how to read the Psalms and overview the theological message of the book of Psalms.

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<sup>26</sup>Lindsay Wilson, "Book of Job," in Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible. Ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. 384-388.

## Psalms is a Book

The book of Psalms is a composition rather than an anthology and should be read as an arranged book with a theological message. It is not just a random shuffling and collection of hymns. Psalms is divided into five books, usually understood to have an introduction and conclusion.

<b>Book</b>	<b>Psalms</b>
Introduction	Psalms 1-2 (could be considered part of Book 1)
Book 1	Psalms 3-41
Book 2	Psalms 42-72
Book 3	Psalms 73-89
Book 4	Psalms 90-106
Book 5	Psalms 107-145
Conclusion	Psalms 146-150 (could be considered part of Book 5)

**Figure 7. Five Books of Psalms**

Each book ends with a doxology. From book to book there are devices that are used the same way to tie the units together among the books; for instance, superscriptions, named authors, and acrostics on the Hebrew alphabet.



## **Superscriptions**

What do they do and say?

The superscriptions are at the beginning of many chapters. They provide information regarding authorship. They also make several connections outside the book of Psalms or provide stitching, especially to Chronicles. They provide the tune of music and give some indication of the performers. They also ease the transition of authorships within the five books, but also within the individual psalms themselves. In these ways they tell the reader how the Psalms should be related to each other. They trace certain themes and content across the books. Finally, they show that there is a shape to the Psalter and a theological intentionality behind its arrangement.

Are they inspired?

The superscriptions are the work of an editor or compiler who, then, is an author. The editors are inspired and just like other biblical authors they are composing the Psalter together under the inspiration of God.

The author-editor collected and arranged the psalms he had at his disposal. In so doing, under the inspiration of God, he created a new setting in the canon by taking the psalms out of the setting from which they came and placing them into a literary setting within the Psalter. This process was part of the role of composition and canonization.

How do we interpret the Psalms?

### **As a random collection of hymns?**

Many approach Psalms as a random collection of hymns which immediately speak to their situation. The psalmist is describing his hurts, fears, joy, or triumphs, and the application of the particular verses or larger portion is directly applicable to the reader's hurts, fears, joys, or triumphs. In this sense any human, believer or non-believer, can derive the same value from the content due to its direct application to life.

There are two major problems with this use of the Psalms. (1) Psalms is in the Christian Bible and is only rightly understood and applied by those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Non-believers cannot rightly apply or live out the content in the Bible because they have no allegiance to the God of the Scriptures. If believers and non-believers alike can read the Psalms and make the same interpretation and life-application, then we are denying the exclusivity of Christ's righteousness as the only way to relate to God.

(2) On a related note, this direct application does not make sense of the Psalms as a "Christian" text. If Psalms (and any other book) is in the Christian canon, it must in some

manner speak about Christ. Otherwise, there is no place for it in the Christian Bible which tells about the glory of God in the face of Christ. Direct application of the Psalms does not first make sense of how all of Scripture is a message about how God is glorifying Himself by reconciling fallen man to Himself through Christ. Rather, this single-step application seeks, as its first aim, to answer the life-questions of the reader. This type of reading, void of seeing and submitting to God in Christ, seems to be the very thing Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and disciples for doing:

And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, *he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that *everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.*" Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47)

There is a better way to understand the message of Psalms; a way that Scripture itself provides.

### **As messianic prophecy.**

What evidence do we have that the Psalms are intended to be messianic? There is textual warrant for interpreting the Psalms messianically.

### **In light of the broader OT**

(1) The psalm writers were writing prophecy.

Now these are the last words of David:  
The *oracle* of David, the son of Jesse,  
the *oracle* of the man who was raised on high,  
the anointed of the God of Jacob,  
the sweet *psalmist* of Israel (2 Sam 23:1).

David and the chiefs of the service also set apart for the service the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who *prophesied* with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals. The list of those who did the work and of their duties was: Of the sons of

Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Ashareliah, sons of Asaph, under the direction of Asaph, who *prophesied* under the direction of the king. Of Jeduthun, the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the direction of their father Jeduthun, who *prophesied* with the lyre in thanksgiving and praise to the LORD (1 Chron 25:1-3).

All these were the sons of Heman the king's *seer*, according to the promise of God to exalt him, for God had given Heman fourteen sons and three daughters (1 Chron 25:5). And Hezekiah the king and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the *seer*. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshiped (2 Chron 29:30).

(2) In Nathan's oracle to David in 2 Samuel 7:9-17 the LORD promises David that the Messiah is a royal descendant with an eternal kingship. Throughout Psalms this prophecy (along with Dan 7:10-14 and 1 Chron 17:14) is the dominant message (see especially Psalm 2, 72, 110).

And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David (2 Sam 7:9-17).

### **In light of Psalms**

Psalm 1 serves as an introduction to establish the central theme of the book—meditation on the Law is the way of the righteous and where blessing is found. No human, other than the God-man, Jesus Christ, can say they are blessed in the sense of Psalm 1. Only Jesus has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, or stood in the way of sinners, or sat in the seat of

scoffers. He alone has meditated on the law day and night. He is the One who is planted by streams of water who yields much fruit in His season. His leaf does not wither. “In all that He does, He prospers” (v. 3). The wicked will not be able to stand before the Son of Man in the judgment (v. 5//Luke 21:36).

Psalms 1, 19 and 119 all focus on living a righteous life before God. Each of these psalms is followed by a unit that focuses on the coming Messiah—Psalms 2, 20 and 120-134 (Songs of Ascents). The point of this arrangement is to tell the reader, “If you search the Scriptures, you will find the Messiah.”

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Further, when read in light of this arrangement, the rest of the Psalms inform the reader of different aspects of the Davidic/Messianic King’s role, life, relationship with the Father, prayers to the Father, suffering, death, anguish in the grave, resurrection, rulership and authority as refuge for those who trust in Him and destroyer of those who reject Him and seek their own way to wisdom (what is best for man).

The most significant evidence for Psalms as a book with a messianic message is the organization of the book as a whole. The book of Psalms is organized into five “books.” Immediately this organization suggests to the reader an intentionality in arrangement and a purpose on the part of the author to make one “Book” out of 150 individual psalms. The organization is further highlighted by the doxology at the end of each book (41:14; 72:18-20; 89:53; 106:48; 145:21). As one reads through the book of Psalms, one recognizes a story that plays out that is in direct correspondence with the opening two psalms. Moreover, it is a story both of the coming Messiah and a retelling of Israel’s story.

Book 1 (Psalms 3-41) contains 39 psalms that regularly reflect on the themes established in Psalm 2. Most notable is how many of the psalms focus on the danger or distress that the psalmist is in, and how he trusts in the LORD to redeem and care for him and not let his enemies triumph over him. It is interesting that all of the psalms in this unit (3-41) are attributed to David, except 10 and 33, and good arguments can be made for why 10 should be read as one psalm with Psalm 9 and 33 begins with the same refrain that ends 32. Thus, Book 1 is an entire collection of Davidic psalms, and read as part of a completed book with Psalms 1-2 as introduction, we can see how these psalms are not only about

David, but representative of the war against the Davidic king who is to come. The significance of this section lies in the fact that although the kings of the earth have set themselves against the Lord's anointed (Psa 2:1-3), Psalm 41:11 declares that the Lord has sustained and delivered him because He delights in him.

Book 2 (42-72) then tells the story of the successful transfer of the Davidic kingdom from David to Solomon, culminated in the prayer of Psalm 72. Book 2 sees this transfer as a potential fulfillment not only of the Davidic covenant, but the Abrahamic covenant as well, since this coming king will be a blessing to the nations (72:17).

Book 3 (73-89), however, traces Israel's story after Solomon, and its picture is bleak. In fact, the only lament psalm that does not end with praise occurs in this section—Psalm 88. Psalm 89 is likewise without hope except for the doxology at the end. We would argue that the doxology is the work of the final "author" or editor of the psalms, suggesting that this psalm originally ended without praise as well. These two psalms, 88 and 89, thus give a realistic picture of the overwhelming lament of a people who thought God had abandoned His covenant with David. Psalm 89:38-39 express this emotion well. "But now you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed. You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust." Although the psalmist expresses the heart of the people and their belief that God has abandoned His covenant, the doxology provides hope that this is not the end of the story.

Book 4 (90-106) then answers the cry of Psalms 88-89 with three points. First, Psalm 90 is a song of Moses. This would seem to be out of place, but its location here at the transition from Book 3 to 4 is a reminder that the hope of salvation and relationship with God is through meditation on the law. Moses, the lawgiver, is an appropriate speaker here for he ushers the people back to Psalm 1 and the need to meditate on the law day and night. God has not abandoned His covenant, however much it may look like it, but the people have certainly abandoned God and they need to recover relationship with and obedience to Him through meditation on His word. Second, Book 4 reminds the people that the LORD reigns (Psa 93-100). Despite the failure of the Davidic kings to rule with justice and righteousness, the LORD has done and will continue to do so without fail. Since the LORD is still reigning, there is hope that his anointed one is still to come. Third, Book 4 ends with three psalms (104-106) that recount God's faithfulness to Israel in the past. Despite Israel's unfaithfulness, which is quite explicit in Psalm 106, the LORD "remembers His covenant forever" (Psa 105:8).

Finally, Book 5 (107-145) shows the life of praise that springs forth out of the reminder that the LORD has been faithful to His promises and will bring His anointed one to the

throne to reign in an everlasting kingdom. The book of Psalms, then, retells the story of Israel (David→Solomon→failure→hope) in order to provide a messianic hope, a prophetic expectation, that the anointed one of Psalm 2 is still to come, and the LORD does not forget His promises.

### **In light of the New Testament**

The New Testament writers speak of the Messiah in the Psalms quite frequently, but they have often been accused of poor exegesis when suggesting that these messianic psalms were prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. However, in light of the evidence in Psalms itself discussed above, it is more likely that the New Testament writers were not importing Jesus into the psalm book of Israel, but were rather following the textual clues that are there and understanding it correctly. We see this truth in at least six ways.

(1) Jesus tells them to do so.

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. . . <sup>32</sup>They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” . . . <sup>44</sup>Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that *everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.*” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:27, 32, 44-47)

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and *it is they that bear witness about me*, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. (John 5:39-40)

(2) When Peter preached at Pentecost he cited Psalm 16:8-11 telling the people that David was a prophet who foresaw and spoke of Christ’s death and resurrection. David knew he was speaking about Christ because God had sworn to him (2 Sam 7 & Psalm 132:11) that his seed would be a royal king with an eternal kingship who would be a sin-bearer for His people who would die but be raised to life by God (2 Sam 7:14-15).

For David says concerning him (Jesus),

“I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;

therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
my flesh also will dwell in hope.

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One see corruption.

You have made known to me the paths of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

"Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. (Acts 2:25-31)

(3) God spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David about Christ's predestined rejection by the Jews and Gentiles, suffering and being the Anointed King. David could know these things because he spoke by the Holy Spirit.

Who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

"Why did the Gentiles rage,  
and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers were gathered together,  
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. (Acts 4:25-28//Psalm 2:1-2; 16:10-11)

(4) Paul, along with Jesus in Luke 24, declares all the Scriptures to have Christ as their main concern.

For he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, *showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus*. (Acts 18:28)

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the Scriptures*, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day *in accordance with the Scriptures*. (1 Cor 15:3-4)

(5) The New Testament writers, in light of Christ's resurrection (Luke 24:27, 32, 44-47), all interpret the Psalms messianically, as prophecy referring to Jesus Christ. We could call this a Resurrection-Hermeneutic approach to the Psalms (and the rest of Scripture for that matter). When analyzing the citations or references given by Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the author of Hebrews (not to mention, all the others NT writers) we arrive at a group of themes which form somewhat of an Apostles' Creed-like statement. Jesus Christ is the Anointed Son of God, King, High Priest, and Authoritative Teacher who suffers and dies, is raised from the dead, is exalted to the right hand of God, and will one day return as Judge and King.

(6) Jesus and John recognize (a) the Psalms as "Scripture" and (b) the Psalms as prophecy that He is fulfilling.

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

this was the Lord's doing,

and it is marvelous in our eyes"? (Matt 21:42//Mark 12:10, quoting Psa 118:22-23)

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I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' (John 13:18, quoting Psa 41:9)

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So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

"They divided my garments among them,

and for my clothing they cast lots."

So the soldiers did these things. (John 19:24, quoting Psa 22:18)



For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” (John 19:36, quoting Psa 34:20)

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For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. (John 20:9, alluding to Psa 16:10—“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”).

## Summary

In light of the Old Testament, Psalms itself, the New Testament writers, and Jesus, it should be clear that the Psalms are prophecy and, more specifically, prophecy directly concerned with the person and work of Christ; his life, death, resurrection, enthronement, and place as deliverer of those who trust in Him and judge over all His enemies.

Bruce Waltke suggests a “Canonical Process Approach” to reading the Psalms.<sup>27</sup> (1) Each psalm had an original setting in the life of Israel. (2) The job of the interpreter is to take the Psalm into the original setting (e.g. the temple). This information can be found within the psalm itself or the superscription. (3) Then also look at the psalm within the setting of the Psalter and interpret it within its new canonical setting (i.e. book of the Psalter). After the exile, sometime after 520 BC, the Psalter was compiled and edited for this new context as a book with a high messianic hope. (4) The original setting may be about David, but in the canonical view within the Psalms it is not just about David but finally and primarily about the Christ as it is in the context of the Psalter. That they are messianic prophecies was the unanimous view until rabbinic Judaism and later 18th century higher criticism. He concludes with this:

The Psalms are ultimately the prayers of Jesus Christ, Son of God. He alone is worthy to pray the ideal vision of a king suffering for righteousness and emerging victorious over the hosts of evil. As the corporate head of the church, he represents the believers in these prayers. Moreover, Christians, as sons of God and as royal priests can rightly pray these prayers along with their representative Head.<sup>28</sup>

## Tips for Reading the Psalms

Let us suggest a few ways to help understand the Psalms, as what they are, prophecy about the person and work of the coming Messiah and the LORD’s dealings with Him.

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<sup>27</sup>Bruce Waltke. “Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms,” in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg* (Moody Press, Chicago: 1981).

<sup>28</sup>Waltke, “Canonical Process Approach,” 16.

*First*, consider the speaker in the text who is speaking about the Christ. Is the speaker: (a) the faithful follower or congregation? (b) the enemies of the LORD and the Messiah? (c) the LORD? or, (d) the Messiah speaking about Himself?

*Second*, consider what the speaker is saying about God, the person and work of the coming Messiah who is Jesus Christ, how the faithful should respond to Him, and what He will do to His enemies.

*Third*, trust in and give praise to God through Jesus Christ for who Jesus is and what he has done to reconcile sinners to God.

*Fourth*, trust in and give praise to God for His faithfulness.

*Fifth*, take comfort and persevere in whatever God has providentially designed for your life—sufferings, sorrows, sickness, joys—because Christ has endured and overcome these things (Heb 4:14-16)

## **Proverbs**

As we have seen with Job and Psalms (and will see with Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs) Proverbs is not a random collection of sayings but a book. As a book, it has a compositional strategy embedded by the author for the purpose of expressing meaning.

Proverbs has seven superscriptions, and they are the best indicators of the design and divisions in the book. We will look at each of these seven superscriptions and some of the notable aspects within each division.

(1) *Proverbs of Solomon* (1:1). Proverbs 1:1-7 serves as the introduction to the entire book that sets the stage for the interpretation of the book. Chapters 1-9 serve as the introduction to the entire book setting the stage for the introduction of the isolated sayings that will follow in chapters 10 and beyond. Chapters 1-9 set out all the reasons that one should acquire wisdom telling the reader to “bind them around you.”

Two women are highlighted/contrasted. The adulteress woman stands in the town square and seduces young men to follow her leading them to destruction. She represents folly and wickedness. Lady Wisdom, on the other hand, takes a stand on top of hill as well. She represents wisdom and righteousness. These two are personified. The wise person is righteous, whereas the fool is wicked.

Chapter 8 looks back to and reflects on Creation. The perspective from which wisdom speaks is of a time before creation. Wisdom was at creation. “The LORD fathered me at the

beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old" (v. 22). "I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man" (vv. 30-31).

(2) *Proverbs of Solomon* (10:1). Chapter ten begins the transition to pithy sayings that should be recognized as human wisdom and common sense statements.

(3) *Words of wise* (22:17). This section continues the previous type of wisdom as a cultural phenomenon.

(4) *More sayings of the wise* (24:23). Again, a continuation of the previous human wisdom.

(5) *Proverbs of Solomon through men of Hezekiah* (25:1). This section begins with a somewhat cryptic statement in a book claiming to reveal the secrets of wisdom. "It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out" (v. 2). In light of the next section, this statement takes on a larger meaning. Wisdom is not found in the ways of man.

(6) *Words of Agur* (30:1). Chapter 30 is cast in the mouth of a prophet. Agur's prophecy, or oracle, is a reflection on the entire book. What proverbs are supposed to do is exactly what they do not accomplish.

The man declares, I am weary, O God;  
I am weary, O God, and worn out.  
Surely I am too stupid to be a man.  
I have not the understanding of a man.  
I have not learned wisdom,  
nor have I knowledge of the Holy One. (Prov 30:1-3)

Agur's problem is that he has no understanding, wisdom, or knowledge. The reader reaches the end of the book only to find that one of the book's own authors is exhausted from trying to find wisdom, but he is still "too stupid to be a man." The outlook from the vantage point of the end of the wisdom book is dismal. However, there is hope.

Who has ascended to heaven and come down?  
Who has gathered the wind in his fists?  
Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment?  
Who has established all the ends of the earth?  
What is his name, and what is his son's name?  
Surely you know. (Prov 30:4)

At the end of the book he is saying, “I’ve read it all and I’ve gained nothing, until I answer the most basic question, ‘who is God and who is His Son?’” Without this the book is worthless. The reflection and prophecy of Agur is that the only way to know wisdom is to know God and His Son. You can know all of the proverbs and try to do them, but you can still end up a fool because you did not know God and His Son.<sup>29</sup> Wisdom is now replaced by the Son of God. The New Testament writers are not reflecting on the sayings of Proverbs, but the book of Proverbs, its collective message, when they see Jesus as the Wisdom of God.

In the broader Old Testament, the phrase “ends of the earth” (v. 4) is almost exclusively used as a reference to the judgment or salvation that the Anointed One of the LORD brings.<sup>30</sup> Agur’s use here in relation to gaining true biblical wisdom by knowing God and His Son is not by accident, it is by design.

The proverbs are not just human wisdom with little theology. There is eschatology in the design of the book. It is rich with theology rather than being devoid of it.

Like the prophets who learn to wait patiently when they see the righteous oppressed and the wicked prosper (Hab 2:4), the message of hope in Proverbs is not that the righteous prosper in the present, but that one day everything will be set right. This is the best way to look at Proverbs and its principles.

(7) *Words of Lemuel 31:1*. Chapter 31 serves to bring the book to a close. There is imposed on everything between chapter 1 and 31 an inclusio from words in both chapters. An inclusio is a bookend that calls for everything in between both ends, in this case chapters 1 and 31, to be read in light of what is being said in each of those chapters. Most of the book is a father talking to a son, now the last part is a mother talking to her son. The book starts with a father’s instruction about Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly, then moves to a woman’s instruction and the woman of excellence.

The beginning of chapter 31 is a reflection on a king like a future king. Notice similarities between the advice Lemuel’s mother gives and prophecies about Christ in other books.<sup>31</sup>

Open your mouth for the mute,  
for the rights of all who are destitute.

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<sup>29</sup>In the immediate context, the son suggests the son who is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (anointed one). In the New Testament, we learn that the Davidic son is truly God’s Son.

<sup>30</sup>Psalms 2:8; 22:27; 65:5; 72:8; 98:3; Isaiah 24:16; 40:28; 41; 45:22; 52:10; Daniel 4:22; Micah 5:4; Zechariah 9:10.

<sup>31</sup>Psalms 72:2; 146:7-8; Isaiah 1:17; 11:4; 25:4; 61:1-3; Jeremiah 5:28; 22:16; Luke 4:18.

Open your mouth, judge righteously,  
defend the rights of the poor and needy (vv. 8-9).

At the end of Proverbs, King Lemuel is told to stand up for the poor, open his mouth for the speechless, judge righteously, plead the cause of the poor, helpless, and needy, and administer justice correctly. This is the very thing that Christ does.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

Proverbs closes with sayings about a virtuous woman. They are not twelve things that make a successful woman. What things are most important? Look to Ruth. Verses 10 (Ruth 3:11) and 23 (Ruth 4:1-2) are applied directly to Ruth. She is the "excellent wife." She disavows her Moabite heritage and works hard to care for the preservation of the seed which is very important within theology of the Old Testament.

Proverbs gives commentary on itself. The book of Proverbs is intending to teach knowledge, understanding, and wisdom from the very beginning; however, at the very end Agur's commentary on the human wisdom notion is bleak. After having read the entire book, the realization is that wisdom only comes from God, not man. Proverbs does not begin with pithy statements. It starts with a craftsman who is with God in the beginning of creation and ends with a King who will bring justice.

## **Ecclesiastes**

The book of Ecclesiastes is a difficult book for many reasons, evidenced by its wide range of interpretations over the course of history. Among the problems that have arisen are questions of authorship, date, purpose and message. We could write (and many have) extensively on any of these issues, but for our purposes we will focus on the message of the book and how we can approach it in such a way as to ground our conclusions in the text of Scripture, rather than in tradition. In order to do so, we will look at the structure of the book, some of the literary and linguistic questions that are raised and how the conclusion sets the framework for understanding the message of the book. After looking at these

issues, we will provide a few steps that will help us in understanding how we should read this book as Evangelical Christians.

The book of Ecclesiastes is situated within the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and is an important addition to that genre. As we will see, Ecclesiastes has several links with Job and Proverbs, as well as sharing Job's interest in the opening chapters of Genesis. The book of Ecclesiastes allots most of its space to the words of Qohelet (the Preacher), a section consisting of musings on life and wisdom, death, and vanity. At the end of the book, another voice breaks in to set the context for the words of Qohelet. In the following look at the book, we will spend much of our time addressing the relationship between the messages of these two speakers.

### Structure of the Book

The structure of Ecclesiastes is integral to our view of the message of the book. Critical scholarship, much like in the book of Job, has attempted to erase the epilogue from the book and get back to the historical preaching of Qohelet. One major problem with this approach is that it is at best speculative and at worst fabricated. Beyond our inability to access the historical preaching of this individual (probably Solomon), our convictions for a canonical, text-oriented approach make such an endeavor unnecessary anyway.

If we truly believe that the canonical Scriptures are breathed out by God and inspired by the Holy Spirit, then we should care every bit as much about what the voice of the epilogue has to say as to what Qohelet has to say. Moreover, once we accept the importance of hearing the voice of the epilogue, we see that it serves as a means of contextualizing the message of Qohelet. The structure of the book helps make this claim legitimate.

If we look at 1:2 and 12:8, we will see that the author of the book has used a literary device known as *inclusio*. This literary device involves using a phrase, then later repeating that same phrase as a means of bracketing the material within. We can see this in many of the Psalms (i.e. Psalm 8—O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth in 8:1 & 8:9).

In Ecclesiastes, the *inclusio* phrase gives the reader a basic summary of the message of Qohelet: "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (1:2) and "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity" (12:8). Thus, the author of the book has framed the message of Qohelet so as to emphasize this point that is made throughout. However, unlike our example of Psalm 8, which ends with the *inclusio*, the book of Ecclesiastes continues beyond the close of the *inclusio*. In doing so, the author is able to set the words of Qohelet in context. He essentially uses the *inclusio* as a parenthesis; he is

telling the reader that all that has come before should be understood in light of what he is going to say. As he continues, the author explains:

Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. (12:9-14)

Thus, the words of Qohelet are proverbs and words of truth, yet the end of the matter is found in the command to fear God and keep his commandments for that is the duty of man. The author concludes by giving reason for his exhortation: fear God and keep his commandments because he will come in judgment.

### Linguistic and Literary Concerns

There are three main linguistic and literary concerns that arise in the book of Ecclesiastes that should be addressed as we try to determine how best to read the book. These concerns are the meaning of the Hebrew word *hebel* (most often translated as vanity in Ecclesiastes), the meaning of the phrase “under the sun,” and juxtaposition of the *hebel* vs. joy passages. The word *hebel* has a wide semantic range; that is, its definition can be understood in a variety of ways based on the context. The two most common ways that *hebel* is rendered in English translations are in a qualitative sense, vain/empty/nothing, and a temporal sense, vapor/breath. In rendering the word *hebel* as vanity, the English translators have shown their preference to understand the word in its qualitative sense.

However, some have suggested that the temporal sense should be favored due to the emphasis throughout the book on the fleeting nature of human life. William Dumbrell extends this discussion by arguing that 1:3, which immediately follows the opening refrain in which *hebel* is used five times, is better understood with a temporal concept.

ESV: “What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” (Eccl 1:3)

Dumbrell: “What continues to endure from the labor at which one toils during life?”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Summary of the Old Testament*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 286.

The purpose of discussing this issue is not to decide once and for all which reading is preferable. Rather, the point is to show how there is textual evidence for both positions. Moreover, though it does not change the overall message of Qohelet, it will influence how one views the emphasis of his musings. Is he lamenting that all work is vain and meaningless, or that the effects of his work will not last?

Second, we should consider the use of the phrase “under the sun.” The phrase is most often understood to be a reference to all of the life of the living. It is a way of conveying the totality of God’s creation and man’s place in it. Consequently, what is suggested by the phrase is that one’s life will be affected by the vanity that is under the sun because one lives in that world.

However, we must allow even with this understanding some level of distinction, for if everything under the sun is vanity as Qohelet suggests, then the author’s exhortation to fear God and keep his commandments is meaningless unless one can escape from under the sun in this life. Thus, what we are left with is an understanding that life under the sun is a pursuit for meaning in this life apart from the LORD. Such a conclusion seems to fit well with the overall message of the book. Nevertheless, some still suggest that “under the sun” is a phrase that refers to life after the curse.

Prior to the fall of Adam and Eve, man’s toil was not meaningless or empty, nor could one say that life was fleeting. One of the consequences of the fall was the curse that fell upon creation until the time when it will be restored (Romans 8). As we will see later in this lesson, the book of Ecclesiastes alludes in several ways to the opening four chapters of Genesis. Thus, given that the author intended for the reader to have this passage in mind elsewhere in his book, it is possible that his use of the phrase “under the sun” could have reference back to the curse.

Once again, as with the possible understandings of *hebel*, one’s understanding of the phrase “under the sun” can emphasize a particular aspect or application of the text, but will not likely alter one’s interpretation of the meaning of the text. Therefore, one could accept either conclusion and have textual evidence to do so.

Third, Qohelet moves between statements of the vanity of certain pursuits and exhortations to have joy in them. For example, in 2:23, Qohelet calls work a vexation, but in 3:22 he says that man should rejoice in his work. Thus, the same pursuit is both *hebel* and joyful. Such a contrast seemingly requires something that will bridge the gap. How is it that both can be the case?



Craig Bartholomew suggests that the *hebel* conclusions are derived from empiricism and applied to life while the joy passages are the result of his Jewish upbringing.<sup>33</sup> The bridge between these two positions comes in the exhortation of 12:1 to remember your creator. This is not a simple glance at one's memory, but a life-altering change affected by one living from the premise of the fear of the LORD. As Bartholomew defines it, this change "means developing a perspective integrally shaped by a view of this world as being the Lord's."<sup>34</sup>

In summary of this section, the purpose is to show how there are varied understandings of some of the issues in the book that are perhaps equally valid and textually warranted. Though we may not all agree with some of the nuances of the text, as long as they are defended by the text they may provide helpful insight into the overall message.

### Links to Genesis and Job

As briefly outlined above, the author of Ecclesiastes shapes his book in such a way as to point the reader back to Genesis 1-4. One way that he does so is by using textual markers. One example of this is the decision to use the word *hebel*. As we know from the previous discussion, this word is somewhat ambiguous. However, it seems to be a better choice than other words because it serves the author's purpose of pointing back to Genesis. In Hebrew, the word *hebel* and the proper name Abel are the same: הֶבֶל.

Second, the emphasis on creation in 12:1 sets the reader's attention back to the creation narrative in Genesis 1-2. Third, Bartholomew points out that the author's understanding of work as toil and life as *hebel* have strong links to the fall narrative. Finally, the end of the matter is to remember the Creator, fear the LORD and obey His commandments. If the stipulations of the covenant to Adam and Eve are understood as we suggested in a previous lesson, "to worship and obey," then the author's emphasis on creation, fear of the LORD, and obedience is another link with Genesis 1-4.

The message of Ecclesiastes finds similarities in the book of Job. Though the author does not make direct reference to the book, as readers of the canonical text we can recognize the similarities and confirm our understanding of some of the issues in Job through the similarities with Ecclesiastes and vice versa. As both are part of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, such similarities should not be surprising. However, these two books appear to share more in common than some of the other wisdom books. One such similarity is the concern noted above to link the message of the book with Genesis 1-4.

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<sup>33</sup>Craig G. Bartholomew, "Book of Ecclesiastes," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 184.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

Second, though Qohelet's struggle is more intellectual than Job's, he likewise asks a question that seeks answering throughout. In Job, we looked at how the book sought to answer the question of whether or not Job feared God for nothing. In Ecclesiastes 1:3, the question seeking answering is, "What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?" We will address the answer the author gives to this question in the next section.

Third, similar to how Job could not see order to the universe, Dumbrell argues that "Qohelet sees no discernible moral order and [...], like Job, is merely taking the wisdom movement of his own day to task for its overemphasis on a cause-and-effect nexus between act and consequence."<sup>35</sup> Thus, the reader again sees how the way in which the sovereign LORD governs His creation is beyond human understanding.

Fourth, Ecclesiastes has an absence and aloofness of God akin to Job until the time that the LORD is revealed as the sovereign Creator who is in control of all things. In Ecclesiastes, then, we find a confirmation in many ways of the conclusion of Job: though God at times appears distant and the world seems out of order, He is nevertheless the sovereign Creator, in control of all things, whose ways are too high that we cannot attain them (Psalm 139:6).

### Theological Message

Much of the message has already been laid out in the previous sections. Thus, with the foundation in place, we will merely highlight some of the key points that arise in the text. The message of Qohelet is generally seen as negative as it is filled with pursuits that are said to be vain and striving after wind. Nevertheless, the author contextualizes these statements, giving them truth in the proper framework. It is true that for those who seek purpose in life apart from God, their lives will be a striving after wind. However, as John Sailhamer suggests, "life is meaningless only to those who do not do the will of God. To the man who pleases God there is 'wisdom, knowledge and happiness' [from 2:26]."<sup>36</sup>

In contextualizing the message of Qohelet, then, the author has shown how pursuit of these tasks apart from God is futile; yet if one acts upon the exhortation to fear the LORD and obey His commands, then the book of Ecclesiastes shows how this disposition has value in everyday life. Finally, the emphasis throughout the book on God as Creator (c.f. 3:11, 14, 20; 7:14; 8:17; 11:5; 12:1) culminates in the final statements of the book.

The reason that the author calls people to fear the LORD and obey His commandments is that a judgment is coming. Thus, the God who is both Creator and Sustainer of all things is also judge of all things, and the author is calling people to repent. Dumbrell captures this

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<sup>35</sup>Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 293.

<sup>36</sup>Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*, 357.

concept and applies it aptly to the message of the book as a whole when he writes: “Life is swiftly ebbing away. Everyone must turn to God while there is still time.”<sup>37</sup>

### Keys to Interpretation

In addition to the material presented above, Craig Bartholomew has presented four hermeneutical points of emphasis that are helpful reminders when reading Ecclesiastes.<sup>38</sup>

- (1) It is important to read Ecclesiastes and not just “Qohelet.” By this he is referring to the critical practice that we mentioned in which the attempt is to find the historical Qohelet at the expense of the canonical text.
- (2) Reading the text as a literary whole must involve taking the epilogue seriously as part of that whole. Similarly, this point reminds us to see the author as contextualizing the message of the Qohelet to convey his message.
- (3) The book must be read in the context of the canon of Scripture and especially of the Old Testament Wisdom literature. This point informed our discussion of the relation of Ecclesiastes to Job and Genesis 1-4.
- (4) Attention needs to be given to the poetics of Ecclesiastes, particularly its repetition and juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory concepts (e.g. *hebel* vs. joy/*carpe diem* passages).

As Christians approaching this text, we should be both convicted and encouraged. We should be convicted in that manner that we often, like Qohelet, pursue after things of the world through the ways of the world without concern for the things of the LORD. However, we should be likewise encouraged that though we may face trials and sometimes fail to see purpose in our lives, we know that for those who fear the LORD, He has directed their steps and works all things together for good (Rom 8:28).

### Song of Songs

The beginning of the Song of Songs in the English Standard Version is translated “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s” (1:1). It could be taken to mean that Solomon wrote the song or someone else wrote the song about Solomon. Considering the fact that Solomon is mentioned in the book (i.e. 3:7, 9, 11), it is likely that this is a song about Solomon and one of his 700 wives or 300 concubines (1 Kings 7:11), although this conclusion does not prohibit the possibility that he also is the author.

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<sup>37</sup>Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 293.

<sup>38</sup>Bartholomew, “Book of Ecclesiastes,” 184.

## Interpretative Theories

Song of Songs is an interesting book with a history of many interesting interpretations. Due to the content, from very early on, interpreters have sought to make sense of the love affair and its inclusion in the Hebrew Bible and then in Christian Canon. We will briefly survey some of the interpretations of the book, concluding with the interpretation we commend and providing warrant for that interpretation.

### **Allegorical Interpretation**

An allegorical interpretation of the love story is the predominant approach, whether Jewish or Christian. This approach sees a meaning that goes beyond a literal reading of the contents. The book is not so much about Solomon and a Shuamite woman, but the relationship between God and his people. For Jewish interpreters the book is about God and Israel. For Christian interpreters Song of Songs is a story of Christ's relationship to His church. This was the primary reading until the rise of modernity. The early church fathers thought that if the book is simply describing a physical relationship between a man and a woman it would not be appropriate in Scripture; it was beneath the subject of Scripture.

### **Dramatic Theory**

The Dramatic Theory views the Song of Songs as a play, or drama, between two or three characters. The two-character view has Solomon as the good guy pursuing with undying devotion a Shuamite woman. The three-character play has Solomon as the bad guy, a shepherd boy is the good guy and the Shuamite woman is the innocent one caught in the middle.

### **Literal Interpretation**

Many modern interpreters have understood the book as a literal love story or anthology of love songs to human love. No one takes the Song of Songs exactly literally. There is not a woman alive whose hair is literally "a flock of goats" (4:1) or teeth are cleanly shaven ewe lambs (4:2). All interpreters who come from a literal point of view see these statements as metaphors and the book as a whole about a man and a woman in a garden-like environment, establishing what an ideal marriage should be. By their estimation the book contains all the principles for a strong marriage or courtship to the glory of God—just do not "awaken love until it pleases" (2:7b).

## Compositional Interpretation<sup>39</sup>

In accordance with the interpretative approach we have consistently employed, we are proposing a different reading of the book. An important question to ask is, “How was the book intended to be read by its original audience?” Although the book is a romantic drama of a lover’s desire for his beloved and her willing compliance, it is poetic language and imagery. However, there is not a free-for-all with allegorical interpretations. The book itself, taking from the author’s clues as interpretative keys, must provide the framework for interpretation.

- (1) The first clue is in the superscription. The notice in the superscription is that this song is the song of all songs, the model or best song. It is the high point of all the songs ever written.
- (2) The second clue is the genre of the Song. It is poetry. It uses figurative language to represent ideas. The images are not to be read literally. The images are intended to depict themes or ideas beyond the range of the poetic images. The purpose of the poem lies in what the poetry portrays.
- (3) The third, fourth and fifth clues are found in the structure of the book. As we read the book we find that the lovers’ intensity starts high and never wanes. From the opening verse “your love is better than wine (1:2), to the end of the poem, “[Wine] goes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding over lips and teeth” (7:9b), the passion never stumbles or fades. They long to join each other in intimate union. This being the case, the Song is not a typical love story where people meet, develop affections, fall in love, and have a fairy tale ending.
- (4) The fourth clue is that the two lovers never actually come together. The book ends with the beloved wooing her lover to come to her, “Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices” (8:14). That for which they so long is beyond their grasp; it is still out in the future. Though the prize of coming together gets very close at times, it never happens within the confines of the Song.
- (5) The fifth clue is found in the phrase, “Do not arouse or awaken love until she so desires” (2:7b; 3:5b; 8:4b). This phrase is operative in the Song is at least a couple of ways. It keeps the story line moving forward till the end 8:4b. Additionally, the author connects the refrain (8:4b) to the final statements by the beloved in 8:5b, “Under the apple tree I awakened you. There your mother was in labor with you.”

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<sup>39</sup>A restatement of John Sailhamer’s view in his *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*.

The connection of the refrain to the statement about labor under the apple tree is ripe with inter-textual connections especially in the prologue of Proverbs and Genesis 3 and the account of the Fall. When the woman desired, or went on a pursuit for wisdom and took the fruit she thought would bring it (Gen 3:6) she did so apart from God's way of getting God's blessing.

David's son, Solomon, has a quest for wisdom which characterizes the central theme of Proverbs. In the prologue he speaks of binding wisdom to himself and on his heart (Prov 3:3; 7:1-3). Similarly, in the Song of Songs the beloved says, "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm" (8:6). Solomon says, "Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister'" (Prov 7:4), just as here the beloved says, "If only you were to me like a brother" (Songs 8:1).

If these inter-textual connections are correct, it suggests that "the beloved" in the Song should be understood as a personification of "wisdom" and "the lover," Solomon, is a picture of the "promised seed" of Genesis 3:15 who is the Messiah. These similarities, and many others, suggest that they are not simple coincidence; rather, they are part of the author's compositional strategy in connecting and alluding between the texts. They show off a greater purpose in the love song—a growing eschatological, messianic hope in this portion of the Old Testament. The obtainment of wisdom will only come when one like Solomon comes to claim His beloved.

This reading brings to light an early understanding of the "seed" of Genesis 3:15 and the reference to Eve as "the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20) as messianic references. This linkage would put the interpretation of the Song of Songs on an interpretive level away from a human love story and closer to traditional attempts at reading poetic imagery as alluding to more than a straight forward reading.

What is more, it would provide necessary insight into the underlying justification for the book's inclusion into the Old Testament. It is generally recognized today that the formation of the Old Testament canon coincided with a significant surge in the hope of the imminent return of the messianic King. Song of Songs' inclusion kept with these purposes to show a picture of the Messiah.

## Chapter 5: The Prophets

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### Introduction to the Prophets

The Prophets are not innovators, but revivalists calling people back to the faith of the Patriarchs, especially Abraham. They are commentators on the Pentateuch in light of their current context. The central theological message of the prophetic literature has to do with imminent divine judgment and divine blessing and salvation.

#### Imminent Divine Judgment

The people had rejected the Lord and did not realize they were living apart from God. They had a false hope. They thought that since God's presence was with them in the temple (the blessing of the covenant) that they were being obedient (keeping the requirements of the covenant); therefore, they would not face disaster or destruction (Mic 3:11; Jer 7:1-7). However, the people had rebelled against God in their idolatry. They focused on the externals of religion, rather than the internals of broken and contrite hearts. Into this contrived confidence, the prophets spoke to the reality of the situation alerting the people that God was opposed to them and that divine judgment was immanent (Isa 3:1-8).<sup>40</sup>

#### Divine Blessing and Salvation

Though God would exact judgment against the people for faithlessness, He is also faithful to His promise to their fathers that through their offspring blessing would come to all mankind. Divine judgment was imminent, but there was still hope in the future.<sup>41</sup>

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (1 Pet 1:10-12).

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<sup>40</sup>Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*, 362.

<sup>41</sup>Isa 4:2-6; 9:2-7; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:22-28; Hos 1:8-2:2; Mic 7:18-20.

## The Major Prophets

The Major Prophets, as they are typically named, in the Hebrew Bible include Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In the English Bible Daniel is included in this list.

### Isaiah<sup>42</sup>

Isaiah is written within the context of the threat of Israel's impending captivity (Babylonian) which was God's judgment upon them for their faithlessness in forsaking the covenant He made with them (Isa 1:2-6:13; esp. 3:1-8). The tone of the prophets is ominous. However, intermingled with the themes of divine judgment are themes of divine blessing and deliverance.

### Message

#### Isaiah 1:2-12:6

Isaiah first addresses God's people with a message of both judgment and deliverance. The salvation of Jerusalem is in the hands of the coming Son of David, the "shoot of Jesse" who is filled with God's Spirit (11:1-2). He will judge the nations (vv. 3-5), bring peace to the world (vv. 6-9), gather the remnant of His people from the nations (vv. 10-13), and "reclaim the Promised Land to its original boundaries from Assyria to Egypt (vv. 14-16; cf. Gen 15:18)."<sup>43</sup>

#### Isaiah 13:1-23:18

Next, Isaiah likewise confronts the nations for their oppression of God's people. The result of God's punishment of the nations is an eschatological peace for Israel (18:7; 19:21-25). However, judgment is not the only word for the nations. In His steadfast love God will save the man in the nations who will "look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel. He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands, and he will not look on what his own fingers have made" (17:7-8; cf. 16:5; 19:18-25).

#### Isaiah 24:1-35:10

The focus then shifts to Isaiah's apocalyptic vision of the time when God will utterly judge and destroy all the inhabitants of the earth (24:1-22) and establish His kingdom rule "on Mount Zion in Jerusalem" (v. 23). Isaiah responds in praise to God's establishment of His kingdom (25:1-12). In that time He will prepare a feast for all peoples (v. 6) and "swallow up death

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<sup>42</sup>The majority of the overviews of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are from Sailhamer's *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*.

<sup>43</sup>Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*, 364.



forever; and the Sovereign LORD will wipe away tears from all faces” (v. 8). In the day of the LORD it will be said, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. . . let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (v. 9). Before the kingdom is established, Isaiah prophesies the destruction of both the northern kingdom and Jerusalem. However, on the basis of His promises to David (29:1), Judah and Jerusalem (Ariel) would be rescued (vv. 5-8).

In the midst of His rescue, the eyes of Jerusalem would be blinded due to God’s pouring out upon them “a spirit of deep sleep” (vv. 9-10). There would be no one found who could read or understand the word of the LORD. Their spiritual stupor is due to the fact that “this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” (v. 13) even though the traditions of old were still taught by the elders. In order to open their eyes and ears (v. 18) God would again do “wonderful things with this people. . . and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish” (v. 14). In that day, God would bring salvation to the house of Jacob (vv. 19-24). A King will “reign in righteousness” (32:1) and the people of God would pay attention to Him and understand with their ears and see the LORD (v. 3).

After destruction and devastation, God would pour out His Spirit and peace would reign due to righteousness (vv. 15-20). The desert wilderness would be fruitful and God’s people would dwell in restful abundance. Zion will be restored and the Destroyer of God’s people would be destroyed by God (33:1-12). Those saved by the King would stream to Zion on a highway “called the Way of Holiness” (35:8).

### **Isaiah 36:1-39:8**

The question of the time of fulfillment of all of Isaiah’s prophecies is addressed. Were the prophecies in close proximity or far in the future and eschatological? The narrative section situates the prophecies of judgment and deliverance (or, destruction and peace) in the future coming of the promised, messianic King that would be after the Babylonian captivity. This is the same time Daniel has in mind (7:9-14). Peter also confirms this eschatological reading (1 Pet 1:10-12).

### **Isaiah 40:1-55:13**

The rest of Isaiah is a prophetic message of comfort pertaining to the coming redemption of Israel. Isaiah’s message is inherently good. The LORD would return to His people and be enthroned in a restored Jerusalem. Isaiah’s comfort climaxes in a messenger announcing to Jerusalem the good news (40:9-11) of her redemption and rebuilding (44:26; 45:13; 54:11-12). The nations will be judged and Israel will return to the land (41:1-3).

The messenger is a deliverer (41:2-3, 5-7, 11-13, 25) and chosen servant (vv. 8-10, 14-20; 42:1-4; cf. Mark 1:11//Isa 42:1) with God’s Spirit upon him (42:1) whom God would

raise up (vv. 4, 21-29) to “bring justice to the nations” (v. 42:1b). He would be “as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (42:6b-7). The LORD’s servant would open the blind eyes of His people to see the glory of the LORD with spiritual eyes.

At this time, God would “pour out [his] Spirit” on Israel and bless her offspring (44:3). God would send His Servant, the Redeemer, to Israel, but they would reject Him (50:4-11). However, there would be those who listen to Him and “pursue righteousness” and “seek the LORD” (51:1). God’s mighty acts of redemption would be like those in the exodus (51:9-10). The redeemed shall return to “Zion with singing; everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (51:11//Rev 21:4).

God’s Servant would accomplish this work of deliverance (52:13-53:12). “He would accomplish his goal and be highly exalted (52:13), but in the process the Servant would be marred and so disfigured that many would be as appalled at him as they were of Israel in their captivity (vs. 14).”<sup>44</sup> God’s Suffering Servant would yield up His own life as an atoning sacrifice for the sin of Israel and the nations. He and His message would be rejected, ignored and despised (53:1-3). Even still, He would bare the sin of His people and thereby redeem them (53:4-12).

Based upon the everlasting “covenant of peace” (54:10) that God made with the messianic Seed of David and the eternal kingdom promised Him, the LORD will redeem all those who turn to His Servant (55:1-13).

### **Isaiah 56:1-66:24**

Before the Babylonian captivity, most of the people had turned from the LORD in idolatry (57:3-11). The people could not save themselves so God would act in faithfulness to His covenant. The new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 and Ezekiel 36:26, though more detailed in those accounts, finds a parallel in Isaiah 59:21. The LORD would send His Spirit upon the people and the nations would come to the light (59:21-60:4). Israel would be rebuilt (60:15-18) and God’s dwelling with His people would take the place of the light of the sun and moon (vv. 19-20//Rev 21:3, 22, 23). In that city mourning will not be heard and all the people will be righteous (v. 21//Rev 21:4).

The Anointed One of God would restore and rename Jerusalem, His bride, “My Delight Is in Her” (62:1-5//Rev 21:1-2). In His delight, the LORD would create “new heavens and a new earth” (65:17//Rev 21:1-2) and no crying or weeping would be heard (65:19//Rev

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<sup>44</sup>Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*, 372.

21:4). Death shall be no more (65:20//Rev 21:4). An environment much like Eden and the original creation would exist, only better. Pain in child bearing would cease (65:23). God would answer before they call (65:24). All creation, man and beast, would exist in perfect harmony (65:25).

The final message of Isaiah is that the LORD will save the one “who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles” at His word” (66:2). However, the rebels will surely perish (v. 24), not partaking of the peace of Jerusalem (v. 12) or God’s presence (v. 23).

## **Jeremiah**

Jeremiah’s message should be read within the context of Babylonian Exile (Jer 1:2-3). This is important in setting the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecies. Will the judgments and anticipated blessings be fulfilled in Jeremiah’s time or in the future? From Jeremiah’s own statements, which are confirmed by the writers of the New Testament, the prophecies look toward the coming of Jesus Christ.

The message of the book is found in his call (1:4-19). Before Jeremiah’s birth the LORD chose and set Jeremiah apart for the purpose of announcing the LORD’s looming judgment against Judah and Jerusalem. In judging the people, the LORD would send a kingdom from the north to defeat them (v. 14). The book sees judgment not only in the destruction brought on by the hands of the Babylonians, but also in the end of days just as prophesied in Daniel 9:27.

From Jeremiah’s call forward there is a discernible flow to the message that is very similar to the structure of Isaiah and Ezekiel. There are prophecies of destruction against Judah, Jerusalem and the nations (1:1-25:38). There are prophecies of hope and deliverance for Israel and Judah (26:1-35:19). Finally, there are also prophecies of destruction specifically against the nations (46:1-51:64).

Jeremiah 31 addresses the New Covenant that the LORD will make with His people. “New Covenant” is used only in here in Jeremiah 31; however, the same stipulations and covenant language are present in Deuteronomy 30 and Ezekiel 36. The New Covenant is a significant development from that of the other covenants in that the heart is dealt with in a way that will bring faith and obedience, where it formerly did not exist except in Abraham who trusted God before the giving of the Law. Under the Mosaic Covenant the people failed to trust and obey because of their hard-heartedness. The hope of the New Covenant is in the circumcision of the heart. In Jeremiah 31 God will write the law on their heart, whereas in Ezekiel the emphasis will be on a new heart and a new Spirit.

The covenant blessings include an internal law, being God's people, God's glory being known universally, forgiveness, and a rebuilt Promised Land. The Old Covenant (i.e., the Mosaic Covenant) is rendered obsolete by this New Covenant. The one who made redemption is now the mediator of the New Covenant. Hebrews 8-10 tells about the mediator of the New Covenant. The New Covenant is the means of bringing the Abrahamic Covenant and the Davidic Covenant into actuality.

The final chapter serves as a conclusion that is made up of two narratives from the book of Kings. The first narrative retells the fall of Jerusalem (52:1-30//2 Kings 24:18-25:21) in order to set Jeremiah's judgment prophecies against Babylon (50:1-51:58) in proper context. God used Babylon as an instrument of judgment against His people (51:7), but the Babylonians destroyed His temple in the process (v. 11) and thus God will send the Medes to punish them (50:41-44; 51:11).

The book closes with the second narrative from 2 Kings which is a word-for-word retelling of the restoration of the royal entitlements of Evil-Marodach, the Babylonian king (2 Kings 25:27-30). The message in the second narrative is of hope and expectancy. God's purposes for Israel and His promises to David from 2 Samuel 7 will not be frustrated. Though Jerusalem lies in ruin, its king sit in captivity, and its Redeemer is yet to come, God is still sovereign and working for the good of His people. He is making all things new.

## **Lamentations**

Lamentations is somewhat out of place next to Jeremiah, even though he has historically been understood as the author of the book. The primary issue is that Lamentations is poetic rather than prophetic, thus its location here both separates it from other poetic and wisdom books as well as failing to fit with the prophetic message. Nevertheless, it does serve as a poetic interlude about the horrors of the exile that come about because the people do not listen to the prophets (such as Jeremiah).

Despite the fact that the both Jewish and Christian believers have traditionally understood Jeremiah as the author, the book is anonymous. Even if Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, its anonymity is perhaps a positive and intended feature because it universalizes the lament. Not only could the author voice this lament, but all of Israel could as well. Moreover, though the nature of the lament may change, Christians can likewise lament before the LORD.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the authorship of the book is not any significant concern of ours, though the study and search may be interesting.

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<sup>45</sup>See our discussion on Job for why this is appropriate.

To return to the main point, however, this speculative suggestion of the author has led Lamentations to be read and interpreted within in the prophetic corpus. After reading the book of Jeremiah, Lamentations serves as an expression of the despair that has fallen upon the rebellious as a result of their exile and the judgment of the LORD.

## Structure

Lamentations has the most easily discernible structure of any book in the Old Testament. It is a five chapter poem that follows a clear pattern. The first four chapters are an alphabetic acrostic. That means that the first word of each stanza begins with the next letter of the alphabet. In English, then, the first line would be A, then B, etc. In Hebrew, there are twenty-two letters and thus twenty-two verses. Though chapter 5 is not an acrostic, it does retain that structure as it has twenty-two verses. Figure 8 below shows the design of the book.

Chapter	Description	Example
1	Acrostic every third line *22 vv, 66 lines	A X X B etc.
2	Acrostic every third line *22 vv, 66 lines * same as chapter 1 except <i>pe</i> and <i>ayin</i> , the 16th and 17th letters, are reversed	A X X B etc.
3	Acrostic with each letter 3 consecutive lines *66 verses, 66 lines	A A A B B B, etc.
4	Acrostic every other line *22 verses, 44 lines	A X B X, etc.
5	No acrostic *22 verses, 22 lines	Z C R, etc. (no discernible pattern)

**Figure 8. Structure of Lamentations**

There are perhaps two main reasons for the author's use of the acrostic. The most common suggestion is that it is an aid to memory. By beginning each line with each successive letter, it was easier to memorize and recite. This is almost certainly true in this

case. However, it is also likely that describing the desolation from *aleph* to *taw*, or “A” to “Z” in English, expresses a certain totality and completeness to the destruction. Thus the structure of the book serves a two-fold purpose.

### Message of the Book

In discussing the message of the book, we will take a quick overview of the main theme of each chapter and then give some concluding points about the overall message.

#### Chapter 1

In chapter one, the author acknowledges that the LORD has brought grief to Jerusalem because of her many sins (v. 8). In making this assertion, the author has echoed the same message of the Deuteronomistic writer(s) [Joshua-Kings]: they have been judged and exiled because they did not obey the LORD. Another feature of chapter one is the repetition of the phrase that there is no one to comfort her (v. 2, 9, 16, 17, 21).

#### Chapter 2

Chapter two shifts the focus to the LORD as divine warrior. He has now become the enemy to Israel. This shift has come about as an outworking of the covenant curses which He promised in the Pentateuch (ex. Deut. 4, 27-28). The author makes this clear in verse 17 when he writes, “The LORD has done what he purposed; he has carried out his word, which he commanded long ago...” (ESV).

#### Chapter 3

Chapter three is another turn, this time to some measure of hope. Though the people have sinned, God’s loyal love, covenant faithfulness, and compassions never cease, so all hope is not lost. Additionally, with this hope there is a call to life and faith in the LORD through repentance and confession of guilt (3:39-42). Moreover, in the exact middle of the book (i.e. the center of ch. 3, v. 21-42), Dumbrell suggests that the author “gives the theological solution to the riddle of the disaster.”<sup>46</sup> Namely, that the mercies of the LORD produce hope, and one begins to believe that this punishment is not the end, but rather that it points towards rehabilitation.

#### Chapter 4

In chapter four, the author speaks of the enemies of the LORD as typified by Edom. Though they triumph for a moment, their judgment is coming. As the chapter concludes, the author anticipates a return from exile (v.22a).

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<sup>46</sup>Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 297.

## Chapter 5

Chapter five continues along the lines of chapter four by calling on the LORD to judge the enemies of Israel. He also asks the LORD to renew His people while affirming God's eternal kingship.

### Tying it together

In looking back on the message as a whole, the theme of restoration begins to build and becomes the book's conclusion (4:22 & 5:22). What began as utter desolation "How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave" (1:1), has progressed to an expectation of restoration. The author admits the guilt of the people, but also asks for the LORD to judge the enemies of Israel.

Additionally, the reader can see how Lamentations has links to some of the wisdom literature. One clear example is Job. While Job's suffering is on an individual level, the book of Lamentations addresses national suffering. Also, the author utters a similar refrain to that of Job which sets it in the context of the wisdom writings.

Lamentations 3:38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?

Job 2:10 Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?

Finally, the book finds its application for the Christian in a similar manner to what we discussed in the book of Job. Lamenting before the LORD is an appropriate response to Him because it recognizes Him as the only one who can rectify the situation. Thus, if we are in the midst of trials and suffering, we can follow the model of the author of Lamentations:

- (1) Begin with a recognition of your sins. None of us comes before the LORD blameless.
- (2) Know that while we were in sin, we were at enmity with God. As James writes, whoever is a friend to the world is an enemy to God (James 4:4). As the author of Lamentations shows, echoed by the author of Hebrews, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31).
- (3) Rejoice in the faithfulness and compassion of the LORD, repenting of sin and trusting in His restoration.
- (4) Anticipate that the LORD is using this trial as a means of rehabilitation—His testing is meant to strengthen our faith by forcing us to depend on him for salvation.
- (5) Pray for restoration while recognizing that the LORD is the eternal, sovereign King and nothing is outside of His control.

## Ezekiel

Ezekiel carried out most of his prophetic ministry as a member of the exiles in Babylon (1:1). The message of the book consists primarily in two aspects.

- (1) While in the exile, he warned the people against following the false prophets who told them that peace and blessing were coming their way (13:1-23).
- (2) He also prophesied that peace and blessing would come to Israel, but at a future time after their judgment and destruction. Prophecies of hope are found in chapters 34-35 with the restoration of the house of David, 36-39 with the restoration of God's people, and 40-48 with the restoration of God's temple.

Rooted in the LORD's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:16, Ezekiel prophesied of a future for Israel in which the Davidic king would be a shepherd (34:23) and prince (v. 24) to the regathered exiles who finally come to the land promised them (vv. 13-22, 25-31). The prophecies against Edom directly connect this Davidic king to the one anticipated in Numbers 24:18, which places the fulfillment of the promises of land, a New Temple, a New Covenant, a new heart, and a new Spirit still in the future.

In reading the following verses side-by-side we can see the connections of the New Temple and the New Covenant. Ezekiel is not here speaking of David, but the future king from the line of David. Deuteronomy 29:1 is the backdrop of the covenant discussion that Jeremiah and Ezekiel recollect. We see here that in the end of days, the very promises of the whole of Scripture will come about as deliverance and judgment are meted out by Jesus Christ, the King of the New Covenant.

**Ezekiel 37:26-28**—"I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore."

**Jer 31:31-34**—"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And



no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

**Rev 21:1-5,22-27**—"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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."

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life"

Ezekiel's New Temple is much like the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. The Lamb is present with the people in the whole city rather than just in the temple. John borrows Old Testament language from Zechariah 14:20-21. Both the New Temple and the New Jerusalem picture the same reality—humanity's enjoyment of God's presence and fellowship. It is pictured as a return to God's original intent in the Garden of Eden (Gen 1-2).

## **Daniel**

The book of Daniel is most notable for its popular stories of the fiery furnace and lion's den and also its apocalyptic final chapters. Though the stories and content are well-known by many, there is little consensus among believers as to its message. With so many various interpretations of the book, how is a Christian to determine which ones are valid and which ones are unwarranted from the text? Ultimately, our conclusions should be drawn from the text. Consequently, though we will present some basic conclusions about the book, the

majority of our time will be spent discussing the structure of the text, its relationship to other books, and other issues that determine the manner in which we read the book. By establishing some guidelines for interpreting the book, though we may come to somewhat different conclusions on some issues, they will more likely be valid conclusions drawn from the text than they would be if we had no hermeneutical foundation for the book.

What we will find as we enter into an analysis of Daniel is a book that continues the Old Testament narrative of the exile, a book with a discernible structure that aids in interpretation, and a book of prophetic and apocalyptic visions. Our goal in this endeavor is to understand the role Daniel plays within the Old Testament narrative, as well as how a Christian can approach it with application to our lives while maintaining a consistent, valid hermeneutic.

### Structure of the Book

The structure of the book of Daniel plays a significant role in its interpretation. The most basic structure of the book is easily discernible in the English text. Chapters 1-6, or the first half of the book, are a narrative which takes place in or related to the court of the king. Chapters 7-12, or the second half of the book, are apocalyptic. One of the more important interpretive points that we will make is based on this simple recognition. We suggest that the meaning of the apocalyptic visions is only properly understood in light of the context set by the narrative.

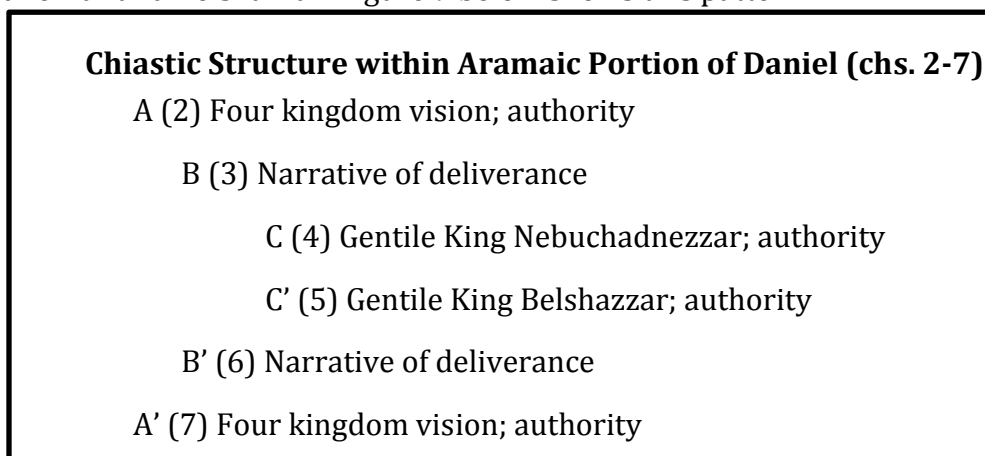
A second structure, less obvious in our English text (though most should footnote it), comes from 2:4 through chapter 7. In 2:4, the text reads: "Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic[...]" The quotation is in Aramaic, as indicated by the information given by the narrator, but once the quotation concludes, the Aramaic does not. In fact, all of the rest of chapter 2 through chapter 7 are entirely in Aramaic. The reader should be alerted by this that something else is at work than a simple language switch. Though the switch to Aramaic may indicate a note of universality as some commentators suggest, it appears as though the more significant feature of the Aramaic is to set off these chapters within the structure of the book.

This again is done in two ways. *First*, chapter 1 (in Hebrew) serves as an introduction to the book, giving background on the setting and characters that will be important in the coming narrative, while chapters 8-12 (switches back to Hebrew) are dependent upon the vision of chapter 7 and provide implications of that vision for Israel.<sup>47</sup> The *second* way in which the Aramaic section gives structure to the book is its internal structure. The Aramaic

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<sup>47</sup>Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 303-304.

section follows a chiastic pattern which finds its focus on the humbling of the Gentile kings Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Figure 9 below shows this pattern.



**Figure 9. Chiastic Structure of Daniel.**

As suggested above, the focus of this chiastic pattern is in the central narratives on the humbling of the Gentile kings. This suggests that one of the primary points that the author is addressing is how the LORD alone is the One who removes kings and sets up kings (Daniel 2:21); as the Sovereign over all creation, including the kingdoms of the earth, the LORD alone has authority to set up kings for His own purposes and to remove them as an act of judgment. In the narratives of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar in chapters 4-5, the LORD exercises this right and shows Himself to be in control, even over these kings who are keeping the LORD's chosen people in captivity. Such an emphasis shows the author's confidence that the LORD is able to overthrow the strongest kings, and thus highlights his confidence in the probability of deliverance for the people of Israel.

Now that we have highlighted the structure of the book, we will walk through the flow of the book and focus our attention on the dream and interpretation recorded in chapter 2 and how it informs our understanding of the rest of the book.

### How are we to understand the book of Daniel?

As noted above, the first chapter of Daniel is significant in that it introduces the characters and setting of the ensuing narratives. The first chapter contains a wealth of information that informs our understanding of the narratives to follow. For example, the reader is told that the setting for these narratives is in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, who brought Judah out of the land and into captivity.

The first chapter also introduces the reader to the main characters: Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel, and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (more commonly referred to by the names they are given in Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego). The first

chapter also expresses the faithfulness of the four young Hebrew men to the Law. Though they are offered the finest food and drink in the land, they will not defile themselves by eating the food, but rather request a diet that will allow them to observe the Law. The first chapter also clarifies that the origin of their great wisdom, as well as their favor in the eyes of their enemies, was given to them by God.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the mention of Shinar in Daniel 1:2. In this passage, Nebuchadnezzar brings the vessels of the house of the LORD to the land of Shinar. Shinar is found only a few times in the Old Testament, and most prominently in Genesis 11:2. In that passage, the geographic marker of Shinar introduces the narrative of the Tower of Babel (Babylon).

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth. (Gen11:1-4)

Returning to the narrative of Daniel, we see Nebuchadnezzar gathering young men and training them in his court. As Dumbrell points out, the education of these young men serves to unify their language, social policy, and bond of education, much like the collaboration in the Babel narrative.<sup>48</sup>

## **Chapter 2**

Chapter 2 recounts Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue and Daniel's interpretation of it.

You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:31-35)

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<sup>48</sup>Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 304-305.

Daniel goes on to interpret the dream, telling Nebuchadnezzar that he is the head of gold, the others are kingdoms that will arise after his and be inferior to his, and the stone that struck and destroyed the image will be an everlasting kingdom that the LORD shall set up in the days of those kings. This, then, is the dream and its interpretation, but what should we make of it?

One of the first things we should notice as we begin to look at this text is the way that the author of Daniel composes it with Genesis 1-11 in mind. In Daniel 2:37-38, Nebuchadnezzar is said to have been given authority over the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens (sky). This language for dominion echoes that of Genesis 1:26, 28 where God creates man and gives him dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens and every beast of the field. We have already discussed how the mention of Shinar in 1:2 helps link the narrative with the Babel narrative of Genesis 11.

Taken together, the reader can see how the author of Daniel is setting this dream up in relation to the movement of the narratives of Genesis 1-11. For example, the movement of Genesis 1-11 can be summarized as follows: Gift of God's dominion (Gen 1-2) → Deterioration (Gen 3-10) → Attempt to secure God's blessing without God (Gen 11). If we recognize that Nebuchadnezzar's reign, due to the parallels with Genesis 1, has been set up in Daniel's interpretation as a reflection of the dominion that God had given humankind over creation, then we can also see that the reason that the other kingdoms in the dream fail is because they attempt to secure God's blessing apart from God.

The links with Genesis 1-11, then, form a parallel between the attempt to build the tower so as to secure God's blessing on their own and the kingdoms represented by the statue. Consequently, rather than seeing these nations as historical referents, the link with Genesis 1-11 suggests that the whole image is representative of biblical Babylon. The positive aspects of Nebuchadnezzar's reign are thus reflecting God's intention of giving dominion to humankind, while the negative aspects reflect the division and confusion found in the Babel narrative.<sup>49</sup>

In summarizing the vision of the statue in chapter 2, then, we can draw out six conclusions. (1) The whole image is biblical Babylon. (2) The head of gold is God's authority granted to mankind. (3) Human efforts become less valuable and more limited. (4) Human efforts result in a divided kingdom. (5) The kingdoms do not have a specific historical referent. Rather, the last kingdom will be any kingdom who tries to secure God's blessing of

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<sup>49</sup>Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*, 398, 400.

dominion apart from Him. (6) God's rock striking the image is God's victory over all and any attempts of this sort.<sup>50</sup>

Beyond the scope of what we should make of this particular passage, we suggest, along with Sailhamer, that "this dream and its interpretation provide the conceptual framework for most of the other events and visions that follow."<sup>51</sup> By this we mean that, though some of the images later appear to be more specific to historical referents, still they should be read in light of the message of chapter 2: God's original intent for human dominion is spiraling further from realization and more and more into confusion as it becomes less powerful due to human attempts to secure dominion apart from God. Moreover, we see in the visions to come what will happen to the earthly kingdoms in the times until the everlasting kingdom comes and destroys all opposition.

### **Chapters 3-6**

In the remaining narrative chapters, the author continues to make connections both with other biblical books and with the vision of chapter 2. For example, Nebuchadnezzar creates an image of gold with the purpose of making a name for himself, just as the people in the Babel narrative did (Dan 3). The exchange between Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 finds parallels with Joseph and Pharaoh in Genesis 37-42. In chapter 5, Belshazzar's kingdom is divided, reminding the reader of the divided kingdom of 2:41, and suggesting that things are quickly moving away from the original goal. In chapter 6, Darius proclaims God as the living God (6:26), using similar language to that found in Daniel's interpretation of the vision in chapter 2. As this proclamation by Darius comes in the last three verses of the narrative section of Daniel, the reader can see how the focus of the series of narratives is on the eternal kingdom of God, just as Daniel's interpretation in chapter 2 is. The narratives thus reinforce the interpretation of chapter 2, so that the reader can agree with Daniel in his statement that "The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure (v. 45)."

### **Chapter 7**

Just as chapter 2 is foundational for the rest of the book, so also chapter 7 sets the stage for the final five chapters. The imagery and ideas in this chapter are drawn from various passages in the Pentateuch and the historical books, but the clearest similarity is to 2 Samuel 7 and the promise of the eternal kingship to One who will be to God a Son. In Daniel 7, we see this Son as the Son of Man, riding on the clouds into the presence of the Ancient of Days to receive the kingdom. This section comes in nearly the exact middle of the vision and is followed by a description of the kingdom being given to the saints. Thus, the location

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 400.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 397.

of the Son of Man section seems central in the vision so as to emphasize that the kingdom is first given to the Son, who in turn gives it to the saints. In view here seems to be a picture of the everlasting kingdom that has been promised in 2 Samuel 7 and reoccurred in the vision of the statue in Daniel 2. This everlasting kingdom will be given to the divine figure of the Son of Man who will be the recipient of the worship of the peoples of every nation and language.

## **Chapters 8-12**

As mentioned in the introduction to this lesson, chapters 8-12 return to the Hebrew language and are dependent upon the visions of chapter 7. Chapter 8 deals with the vision of the ram and the goat, which Gabriel says is for many days from then. In chapter 9, Gabriel again comes to give understanding. In this case, however, Daniel has moved beyond visions to interpretation of the authoritative word.

Whereas he struggled with a vision in chapter 8, his concern in chapter 9 is on Jeremiah's words as to when God's people would be restored. Gabriel tells Daniel that it is not seventy years, but seventy weeks of years. Although the fulfillment of the seventieth week is perhaps the most debated issue in the interpretation of Daniel, of primary concern is the manner in which the Anointed One is mentioned.

There are two features of chapter 9 that are somewhat different from the rest of the book. First, throughout the book Israel is seen as relatively faithful to the LORD, but chapter 9 makes a lengthy case for their disobedience and deserving punishment. Also, God's kingdom has encountered no problems throughout the book. Though human kingdoms stand in opposition, the kingdom of the LORD will crush them. However, in chapter 9, almost as soon as the Anointed One is mentioned, He is cut off. Such an abrupt change to the normal manner of things should catch the reader's attention and point to the significance of such an event. This surprise becomes even more pronounced because it involves the Anointed One, the Messiah.

Chapters 10-12 then serve as visions of the subsequent history of God's people until the time of the Messiah.<sup>52</sup> However, in Daniel 10:14 we are given a clue as to the time of the realization of these things. The messenger comes to Daniel so that he may "understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days." This phrase, "in the latter days," is the same phrase used in the poetic seams of the Pentateuch.

If we recall from the Pentateuch, we were anticipating the Lion of Judah who would come take the throne that belongs to him (Gen 49); we were anticipating this same One

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<sup>52</sup>Sailhamer, 410-411.

who would be the seed of Abraham and would come in judgment against Moab and Ammon and Edom and all the enemies of Israel (Num 24; c.f. Gen 3:15); and we were anticipating the prophet who would come like Moses (Deut 18).

As we discussed, the use of this phrase “in the latter days” in the poetic seams suggested that the fulfillment of these things would be in the distant future. In Daniel’s use of the phrase in 10:14, we are directed then both to look back at how the fulfillment of his vision will be intertwined with the promises of the Pentateuch, and also directed to look forward to the time of its fulfillment, which will be in the latter or end of days.<sup>53</sup>

### Movement and Message of Daniel

With such a well-established structure, the reader may expect that there is a clear movement and message throughout the book. Though shrouded at times in apocalyptic language, there does appear to be a clear message. In regards to the movement of the book, Dumbrell makes three points. *First*, whereas the saints, the people of God, begin the book in chains, they end the book as the saints triumphant. *Second*, there is a theme that is woven throughout the book of the survival and vindication of God’s people, though they are facing increasing opposition from the kingdoms of the world. *Third*, no matter the extent to which the kingdoms of the earth seem to prosper, the kingdom of God will prevail.<sup>54</sup>

Dumbrell lays out the message of Daniel with the analyses outlined below.

- (1) The LORD is the Creator of all things, and established in creation that man should have dominion over the fish, the birds and the beasts.
- (2) Through a pursuit of this blessing apart from God, there arose confusion and division and an ever-growing weakness in the rule that man possesses.
- (3) In the midst of this downward spiral, the LORD will establish an everlasting kingdom that will reestablish the intended order of creation. He will do so by first giving the kingdom to the Son, who will in turn give it to the saints.
- (4) This everlasting kingdom will come in the end of days, after the Anointed One has been cut off.

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<sup>53</sup>Interestingly, a phrase nearly identical in Hebrew and rendered the same in English is used in Daniel 2:28 by Daniel to specify to Nebuchadnezzar when the vision that the LORD revealed to him will occur.

<sup>54</sup>Dumbrell, 310.



## New Testament Witness

There is a much broader New Testament witness to the book of Daniel than we have space to discuss here. However, a few points should be mentioned as a general summary. *First*, just as Jesus is identified as the stone of stumbling and rock of offense of Isaiah 8, one should also see Him as the One who crushes the statue of Daniel 2. *Second*, the gospel narratives give witness to Jesus' preference to refer to Himself as the Son of Man. This title has its background in Daniel 7 as the divine figure who will inherit the kingdom. Jesus uses this phrase in part to show that He is that divine figure as well as the One who comes in judgment. *Third*, among the many echoes of Daniel in the book of Revelation, one image that stands out is the refrain "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" (Rev 18:2). As we see the judgment in Revelation falling upon the kings of the earth, we are reminded of the destruction of the statue in Daniel 2 and the fall of the kingdoms of the earth that have set themselves against the LORD and against his Anointed (Psa 2).

## Christian Response

The book of Daniel is, for Jews and Christians alike, a book of hope. The narratives of deliverance, as well as the promises of better days in the apocalyptic section, give the believer confidence that the LORD is working all things together for His purposes. One major area of divergence from the Jewish perspective, however, is the anticipation of the Messiah. For the Jews, the coming of the Messiah is yet future, likely in the time of the end. For Christians, however, we recognize that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the God-Man, is the long-anticipated fulfillment of the Coming One (Messiah) of the Old Testament texts.

In reading Daniel, then, we do so in light of the belief that the Anointed One has come and has been cut off. However, through the resurrection, this is not the final word. He will return, and His coming will mark the time of the end, a time that Scripture tells us will be a day of judgment on the wicked and a day of salvation for the elect. His coming will mark the prophetic realization of the Day of the LORD, and the kingdom that has been given to Him will be shared with the saints.

As a Christian approaching the book of Daniel, then, we find several applications. *First*, as the people of God, we are called, like the Jews, to endure the deficiencies and trials accompanied by human kingdoms as we await the realization of the kingdom of God. *Second*, we are called to remain faithful in the midst of persecution, captivity, or other trials, just as Daniel and his friends maintained their faithfulness to the Law and would not bow before any but the LORD. *Third*, we should follow Daniel's example of searching the

Scriptures for truth and praying to the LORD for understanding. *Fourth*, we should affirm the sovereignty of the LORD in all things. *Fifth*, we should take seriously the consequences of becoming proud and seeking to make a name for ourselves or to secure blessings apart from the LORD.

These are but a few possible applications of the text to the Christian. Ultimately, any application of the book of Daniel should follow the same process as other books: applications should be based upon the meaning of the biblical text and be understood and acted upon in light of the death, resurrection, and future coming of Jesus Christ.

## **The Minor Prophets: The Book of Twelve**

The twelve prophetic books from Hosea to Malachi are most commonly referred to as the Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets range from pre-exilic prophets who ministered during the time of Isaiah to post-exilic prophets who experienced the return from Exile. Though the books are ordered the same in the Hebrew Bible order as they are in the English Bible, there is early evidence that these prophetic books were grouped together as a single book: the Book of Twelve. It seems that the primary reason for this grouping was to give the Twelve a weightiness that matched the longer books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

It would be difficult for one reading the book of Obadiah for instance to attach the same importance to its message as that of Isaiah. However, as part of the Twelve, Obadiah is understood within the larger message of the collected book, making it easier for one to attach equal importance to the message of the Twelve as that of the longer prophetic books. This practice is quite helpful in understanding the Twelve, but it is only successful because the books individually address several common themes. When grouped together, then, it is not a random collection of writings, but a Book with a coherent and unified message. In the following discussion, we will look at several of the features of the Book of Twelve and address the common themes that are emphasized by reading the Twelve as a single work.

### **Connecting the Twelve**

It may be sufficient to appeal to Hebrew practice for our decision to read the Twelve as one, but it may be more helpful to show how they fit so well together. There are a number of categories by which we can compare the Twelve and find similarities. We will look at only a few, particularly the use of superscriptions, common words, and common motifs.

Perhaps the most pervasive similarity is the key phrase “word of the LORD” in the superscription. The superscription in this case is the opening to the book that introduces the prophet and the nature of his book. This phrase is found in the superscription of the

first two books (Hosea and Joel), two in the middle (Jonah and Micah), and the final four books (Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). By occurring at the beginning and end, the phrase serves to bracket the whole of the Twelve and give the reader the correct impression that all of what is found in the middle is likewise the “word of the LORD.”

Another phrase found in multiple books is “burden/oracle,” which is used in the superscription to Nahum, Habakkuk and Malachi. A third unifying feature of the superscriptions is the list of kings mentioned. Amos says his vision concerns Uzziah and Jeroboam. Micah says that the word of the LORD came to him during the time of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Hosea, the first of the Twelve, mentions five kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Jeroboam. Such unity in content and time of ministry serves to unify the messages of the books as well.

In addition to the superscriptions, there are several words and phrases that help unify the message of the Twelve. Some type of word for vision or seeing is used in Hosea, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum and Habakkuk. Likewise, Hosea 12:11, Haggai 1:3 and Malachi 1:1 speak of the message “by the hand of the prophets.”

Another unifying feature is the common use of the Pentateuch through verbal links. The phrase “grain, new wine, and oil” is used in Deuteronomy 7:13, 11:14, 12:17 and 28:51. This phrase is used in Hosea 2:8 and 2:22; Joel 1:10, 2:19, and 2:24; and Haggai 1:11. Additionally, Joel, Jonah, Micah, and Nahum have textual links to the LORD’s revelation of Himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7.

Finally, there are two motifs that link the message of the Twelve together. First, the gentile nations mentioned in the Twelve correlate well. Consider the following chart:

<b>Book</b>	<b>Gentile Nation</b>
Hosea	Assyria
Joel	Edom/Tyre
Amos	Edom/Tyre
Obadiah	Edom
Jonah	Assyria
Micah	Assyria
Nahum	Assyria
Habakkuk	(Babylon)
Zephaniah	Assyria
Haggai	Persia
Zechariah	Persia
Malachi	Persia

**Figure 10. Gentile Nations in the Twelve.**

Second, some propose a three-part movement focused on the message of the sin of Israel and the nations, the punishment for sin, and the restoration of both from that sin.

Message	Book
Sin	Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah
Punishment	Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah
Restoration	Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

**Figure 11. Three Part Movement of the Twelve.**

Though each book should not be thought to address only one of these particular issues, the movement as a whole is relatively convincing and helps unify the message of the Twelve.

### The Message of the Twelve

In addressing the unified message of the Twelve, one of the more helpful discussions is found in Willem A. VanGemenen's book, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*. VanGemenen nicely outlines some of the themes of the Twelve in a helpful acronym, TRUMPET.<sup>55</sup> In his TRUMPET acronym, he gives the following seven themes of the Twelve:

- T** Transformation of all things
- R** Rule of God: the great King
- U** Unbroken covenants: creation and redemption
- M** Messianic kingdom: Messiah
- P** Purification and glorification of the remnant
- E** Enemy avenged: judgment, vindication and vengeance
- T** Torah of God internalized: Spirit of restoration

While we will only focus on the few themes that we see as most prominent, VanGemenen's portrayal is a helpful place to start in getting our thinking directed at a common message of the Twelve.

### Sins Against the LORD

The first point of emphasis is the nature of the sin of the all the peoples, whether, Judah, Israel, Edom, or the nations. Throughout the Twelve, the issues of idolatry resurface again and again. Like the prophetic ministries of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the Twelve speak to the same rebellious people about issues of unfaithfulness to the LORD. Additionally, the Twelve pick up the message of the Major Prophets in their practical negligence of caring for the poor. As we discussed in our earlier lesson on the Pentateuch, the book of Deuteronomy is clearly concerned for the proper treatment of the widow, the orphan, the sojourner, and

<sup>55</sup>Willem A. VanGemenen, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

the poor. As the Major Prophets make clear, one of the reasons Judah and Israel are sent into exile are because they fail to do this very thing.

The Twelve pick up the same prophetic message, and it is most clearly seen in three passages: Amos 5:11-12, Amos 8:4, and Zechariah 7:9-14. Amos 5:11-12 says that because the people trample the poor and exact taxes of grain from him, they will be driven from the land so as not to dwell in the houses they have built nor drink of the wine from the vineyards they have planted. Again in chapter 8, when Amos addresses the people to proclaim the coming day of judgment, he addresses them as those who trample the needy and bring the poor to an end. Finally, in Zechariah 7, the LORD proclaims through Zechariah that the people are not to oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor.

However, verses 11-14 assert that they refused to pay attention, provoking the LORD to anger and He scattered them among the nations they had not known. Thus, not only did Judah and Israel participate in the sins of idolatry like the surrounding nations, but they also broke the spirit of the Law of Moses by oppressing the poor.

### **Repentance and the Day of the LORD**

The most common issue of the Twelve, which not surprisingly has the most vivid expression, is the coming Day of the LORD. The Day of the LORD is described as a great and awesome day, but also a day of darkness and judgment against the wicked. However, the message of the Twelve is not devoid of hope. Rather, the Day of the LORD will also be a day of salvation for those who repent of their wickedness and return to the LORD with their whole heart. The message of repentance in the Twelve is inextricably linked with the Day of the LORD. As the LORD tells Habakkuk, though the judgment of the wicked may seem slow, wait for it, for it is sure (Hab 2:3).

As we discussed in the Pentateuch, it was the LORD's will as expressed to Noah and continuing throughout the Old Testament narrative that he would delay judgment so as to give an opportunity for repentance. The message of the Twelve, then, is that the Day is approaching, and they must repent now lest they perish.

In the following discussion we will walk briefly through some of the issues addressed in each of the books. Such an approach will be far from exhaustive—in fact, nearly all of the discussion of the nature of the judgment will be passed over so as to focus on the way that the Twelve link repentance and right conduct with the Day of the LORD. Our goal is that addressing some of these issues in this manner will help draw out points of the individual books so as to highlight how they fit into the overall message of the Twelve.

## Hosea

The book of Hosea is one of the more unique pictures in all of Scripture. The marital unfaithfulness of Hosea's wife Gomer is meant to symbolize the covenant unfaithfulness of Israel (Judah/Israel) with the LORD. Interspersed are judgments against both Israel and Judah and a call to repentance in chapter six that is not heeded by the people.

As the book concludes and there is still no sign of turning, there is yet another lengthy plea for repentance and turning to the LORD. The concluding refrain of the book draws from the plea for a return to the LORD and calls people to be wise by following in the ways of the LORD.

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;  
whoever is discerning, let him know them;  
for the ways of the LORD are right,  
and the upright walk in them,  
but transgressors stumble in them (Hos 14:9).

In many ways this final refrain looks like a proverb that contrasts the transgressors (wicked) with the upright (righteous), demonstrating that it is walking in the way of the LORD that helps identify one's true character. Although significant to Hosea in its own right, this statement can also serve almost like a thesis statement for the Book of Twelve as a whole, as the rest of the prophets will call people to repentance, often in similar terms to walking in the way of the LORD.

## Joel

With respect to the link between repentance and the Day of the LORD, Joel provides perhaps the most complete picture of the Twelve. He does so primarily in the way that his message is structured. Joel 1:13-15 is a call to repentance. Immediately following in 2:1-11 is a description of the Day of the LORD. Then, 2:12-17 is another call for repentance. Afterwards, the message moves to the judgment of the nations and the future for Judah. By bracketing the Day of the LORD with a call to repentance, Joel highlights the consequences of not repenting while at the same time giving the means by which the people can avoid the judgment.

In 2:1-11, Joel's portrayal of the Day of the LORD is as a day of darkness and gloom in which the army of the LORD will devastate all who stand in opposition. As verse 11 asserts,

“the Day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?” The answer, of course, is that none can endure it. However, the following verses call for a return to the LORD because He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, one who relents from disaster. This phrase is taken from Exodus 34 in which the LORD reveals his character to Moses.

By alluding to this aspect of God’s character, Joel is providing hope for the people that they need not be the object of this judgment. Rather, if they will repent and return to the LORD, trusting in His grace as He revealed to them at Sinai, “Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?” (2:14). As part of this turning, the LORD will pour out His Spirit upon His people, and they shall prophesy, and all who call on the name of the LORD shall be saved (2:28-32). We see a partial fulfillment of this in Acts 2 at Pentecost. However, the final Fulfillment will be in the Day of the LORD when Christ finally comes to judge the living and the dead.

## **Amos**

Amos, like Joel, calls the people to repent before telling of the judgment that will come to those who do not. In 5:5, 6, and 14, Amos calls for the people to seek God and to seek good, rather than evil, that they may live. What follows in 5:18-27 is a warning about the Day of the LORD. Woe to those who desire that day, for it is a day of darkness and not light, a day of judgment without opportunity for escape (see Rev 6:16-17).

## **Obadiah**

Though short in length, the book of Obadiah serves to extend the message of judgment and the Day of the LORD beyond Judah and Israel, and even beyond the nations that are far off, and focus it upon Edom. Nevertheless, the message of Obadiah is that the day of the LORD is near upon all nations (v. 15). We should recall the connection of Edom to the judgment in the end of days found in Numbers 24.

## **Jonah**

Jonah is unique in the Twelve because of its narrative style. Though Jonah is called to bring a message to Nineveh, the book is not concerned so much with the details of that message, as the other prophetic books are, but with the response of the Ninevites. When Jonah finally brings the message to Nineveh, they respond rightly by abandoning their wickedness and

crying out to the LORD in repentance. Because of Jonah's animosity towards Nineveh, God's decision to relent of the disaster He was going to bring is a disappointment to Jonah. He even explains his earlier actions of going in a different direction as an attempt to avoid bringing the message to Nineveh because he knew that if they repented, God may save them, and he did not want them to be spared. Like Joel, Jonah gives the reason for his confidence in the LORD's gracious response as God's self-revelation of His character in Exodus 34. Jonah knows that the LORD is a gracious and merciful God who relents from disaster, so he is certain that if the Ninevites repent then they will be spared.

The ironic message of this book is that while the Israelites continue to ignore the words of righteous prophets, a wicked Gentile nation responds to the message of a less than righteous, and even unwilling, prophet. Moreover, though much of the Twelve is concerned with judgment on the nations, this book shows that God's plan does include all nations if they will repent and turn to the LORD.

## **Micah**

Micah, perhaps more than the other books of the Twelve, makes an intentional attempt to draw the Pentateuch into his message. In 4:1, Micah presents a message that is nearly identical to Isaiah 2 in describing how the nations will stream to the mountain of the LORD. One difference is that Isaiah exhorts the people by saying, "Let us walk in the light of the LORD," while Micah adds a small section before asserting that "We will walk in the name of the LORD." The slight difference seems to emphasize Micah's certainty that this will occur. However, Micah does not seem to think this is the case in his current situation. Rather, the surrounding text suggests that he is looking for the fulfillment of such an obedient people in the future.

What makes this particular discussion related to the Pentateuch, however, is the manner in which it is introduced: "It shall come to pass in the latter days." The phrase rendered "in the latter days" is the same Hebrew phrase used in Genesis 49, Numbers 24, Deuteronomy 4 and Deuteronomy 31. If we recall the chapter on the Pentateuch, three of these are found in the poetic seams of the Pentateuch, while the phrase is used in Deuteronomy 4 to speak of the repentance that will follow their exile. Micah's message is thus very much related to the message we discussed in the Pentateuch, and he seems to have this in mind in his use of the phrase.

That Micah had the Pentateuch in mind in this matter is strengthened by the fact that he makes other direct references to it. Interestingly, both Deuteronomy 4 and 31, mentioned above as containing the phrase "in the latter days," call heaven and earth as witness against



the people when they sin against the LORD by worshiping idols. Micah 6:1-2, while not using the same phrase, likewise calls upon heaven and earth as witness for the same purpose.

Hear what the LORD says:

Arise, plead your case before the mountains,  
and let the hills hear your voice.

Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD,  
and you enduring foundations of the earth,  
for the LORD has an indictment against his people,  
and he will contend with Israel.

What immediately follows this call for witnesses is a recounting of some of the key elements of the Pentateuch: the exodus, the leadership of Moses, and the sins of Balak and Balaam.

Immediately following the recounting of these saving acts of the LORD, Micah asks what the LORD requires of His people. It is not the commandments or the sacrifices, however, which he mentions. Rather, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8). This statement echoes Deuteronomy 10:12-13:

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

Finally, Micah seems to allude to Exodus 34 in Micah 7:18-19. He asserts that the LORD does not retain His anger forever but delights in steadfast love and has compassion. All of these allusions together show a great concern of Micah to ground his message in the Pentateuch.

## **Nahum**

The book of Nahum is a sort of reversal of Jonah. It is an oracle to Nineveh, but unlike in Jonah when they repent and are saved, in Nahum they remain unrepentant and wicked and are judged. This is expressed most clearly in the use of Exodus 34. In Jonah, the LORD is said to be gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and relenting of

disaster. In Nahum, however, He is slow to anger and great in power, and He will by no means clear the guilty.

While Jonah expresses God's desire to relent from disaster when they repent, Nahum emphasizes that the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. These two uses of Exodus 34 help express how God can be both merciful and just. The difference for Nineveh between salvation and judgment was repentance. The difference for Judah, Israel and the nations is the same. To those who repent, the LORD will relent from disaster and desire to do good for them; however, for those who do not repent but remain in wicked rebellion, He will by no means leave them unpunished.

## **Habakkuk**

Habakkuk is superbly placed after the book of Nahum because of the previous discussion on the message of Nahum. If it is true, as Nahum teaches, that the wicked will not prosper, but rather receive judgment, why does Habakkuk see the wicked prospering and the righteous suffering? The LORD answers Habakkuk, telling him that the judgment "awaits its appointed time" (2:3a). He continues: "If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay" (2:3b). The message of Habakkuk thus continues the message of Nahum. Though it seems as if the wicked are prospering and the righteous are suffering, there is an appointed time in which this will be reversed for good, and those who rebel against the LORD will receive the judgment that they deserve.

## **Zephaniah**

Zephaniah speaks of the coming judgment on Judah and the Day of the LORD. As in Jonah, Zephaniah 2 presents the nations, the enemies of Judah, with an opportunity to repent. Also as in Jonah (Joel 2 also), Zephaniah calls the nations to repent, for perhaps they will be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD. This element of indefiniteness is in all three books, but the prophets seem in other places to assert its certainty. The reason seems to be that though God is not under obligation to forgive them upon their repentance, hence the indefiniteness of the phrase, yet their knowledge of His character from Exodus 34 tells them that He will be gracious if they turn to Him. Beyond only offering salvation to the nations, Zephaniah proclaims a time when it will be a reality:

For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples  
to a pure speech,

That all of them may call upon the name of the LORD  
and serve him with one accord. (Zeph 3:9)

## **Haggai**

Haggai begins the ministry of the post-exilic prophets, coinciding with the ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah. The concern in Haggai is that though the people have returned from Exile, all is still not right. While people busy themselves with their own houses, the house of the LORD, the temple, lies in ruins. Consequently, the LORD has called for a drought upon the land in which it is expressly stated that dew is withheld from the grain, new wine, and oil.

## **Zechariah**

Zechariah is most notable for its many visions and its small snippets of prophecy that are easily applicable to the ministry of Jesus (ex. Zech 9:9, 12:10, 13:7-9). In addition to these issues, the book of Zechariah is concerned with repentance. In 1:4-6, Zechariah reminds the people how their fathers did not heed the voice of the prophets and were sent into exile as a result. They are exhorted here to act differently from their fathers and to return to the LORD.

## **Malachi**

The final book of the Twelve is Malachi. Malachi, which means “my messenger,” is in fact concerned with a messenger who will come and prepare the way of the LORD (3:1). However, Malachi affirms that the LORD will draw near to them for judgment, and it will be swift (3:5). Consequently, verses 6-7 are concerned with calling for the repentance of the people before the coming Day of the LORD (4:1-3). Finally, in anticipation of that Day, they are to remember the Law of Moses and anticipate the coming of Elijah the prophet (4:4-5).

## **Conclusion to the Twelve**

Though we have only scratched the surface of the theology of the Twelve, the purpose of the previous discussion was to give enough of an overview so as to understand the common themes and unity of the Twelve, which will hopefully aid in further reading of the minor prophets.

## Conclusion: Major Themes of the Prophets

The prophetic literature in the Old Testament not only spans a wide range of history with respect to time, but it wrestles with a broad range of themes as well. Although it is perhaps an impossible task to agree on the major themes of the prophets, we will briefly identify eight major themes that scholars often recognize as significant emphases of the prophets.

First, the prophets focus on *the heart God desires*. Passages like Hosea 6:6 are often used to show how God desires inward devotion that is expressed through love of God and others, not through empty rituals. Other passages demonstrate that God wants His people to do justice, shown kindness and mercy, and to walk with God in humility (Mic 6:8; see also, Jer 9:23-24; Hos 14:9; Amos 5:14-15).<sup>56</sup>

Second, the prophets remind the people that the *reason for exile* was primarily because of their wrong treatment of the poor and needy and because of their idolatry. Examples include Isaiah 1:22-23, Jeremiah 16:11-13, and Ezekiel 20:30-38. The most poignant statements of the people's failure to treat the poor as they ought are found in the book of Amos (see Amos 2:4; 3:7; 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11; 5:11-12; 8:4).

Third, the prophets *appeal to the LORD's character* as the one who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, but also will not leave the guilty unpunished. They not only demonstrate this in their writings, but will at times explicitly quote from this revelation of LORD's character in Exodus 34:6-7 (Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3).

Fourth, the prophets focus on the *need for repentance*, both as the proper response prior to and during the exile. The prophets, while often predicting the future, are not only, or even primarily, functioning in that role. The most common role of the prophet is to call God's people to repentance and faithfulness to Him (Isa 1:16-17; 55:7; Jer 3:13-14; 18:11; 29:12-13; 50:4-5; Hos 6:1; Joel 1:13-14; 2:12-14; Jonah 3:9).

Fifth, the prophets look forward to the *New Covenant* that God will make with His people. The emphasis in each case is that God's promises did not fail, but the blessings and promises associated with earlier covenants have been delayed because of the disobedience of the people. The LORD will bring about the fulfillment of these promises when He gives them a new heart of flesh on which He will write His law. Only then can they truly obey and experience the blessings of God's promises (Jer 31:31-34; 32:37-41; Ezek 11:19-20; 36:22-28).

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<sup>56</sup>Each of the parenthetical references in this section is merely representative, not exhaustive. One could find numerous other examples of each of these themes in the prophets.

Sixth, the prophets speak of a day to come, a *Day of the LORD*, when He will come in judgment against all those who oppose Him. For the elect, those faithful to God, it will be a day of salvation in which the wrongs of the world will be righted (Hab 2:3). For those who oppose God, however, it will be a day of judgment, of darkness, of catastrophic events leading to their end (Isa 2:6-22; 13:9-22; 61:2; Jer 25:30-38; Joel 1:15-2:11; Amos 5:18-24; 8:9-14; Oba 1:15; Nah 1:2-7; Zeph 1:7-18; Hag 2:20-23; Zech 14).

Seventh, the prophets look forward to *God's inclusion of the nations*. The rebellious nation as a whole (Israel/Judah) has no concern for the nations. In fact, the prophet Jonah serves as an example of the typical response that Israelites had to the nations surrounding them—they desired their destruction. Yet other prophets exhibit not only a concern for the nations, but also proclaim God's promise that they will come to know Him in the latter days (Isa 2:1-5//Mic 4:1-5; Zeph 3:9; Zech 2:11).

Eighth, the prophets *anticipate God's provision through the Coming One* he has promised. As expected, they are looking for a king (Isa 16:5; 32:1; Ezek 37:24; Hos 3:4-5; Mic 5:2; Zech 9:9-13; Mal 3:1-2).<sup>57</sup> Yet the prophets also look forward to the branch of David (Isa 4:1-2; 11:1-5; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-18; Zech 3:8; 6:12-14; Amos 9:11), the child (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7), the servant (Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 52:13-53:12), and the shepherd (Ezek 34:23-24; 37:15-28). Finally, most surprising of all, the prophets Isaiah and Zechariah anticipate how the servant will also suffer on behalf of the people (Isa 52:13-53:12; Zech 12:10).

Though only a brief sketch, these eight themes are woven throughout the prophetic books and help provide an interpretive framework for such a large quantity of literature.

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<sup>57</sup>Also includes references to a judge or ruler.



## **Part 2: The Story of the New Testament— The Promised King Has Come**

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## Chapter 6: Inter-testamental Period

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The inter-testamental period is a difficult, yet important aspect to discuss. The reason for its difficulty is primarily related to the writing during this time period. The period from 400 BC until the time of Jesus' ministry is often recognized as a time of silence from God. Although He is clearly at work in the events of history during this era, He does not send prophets that speak on His behalf. The lack of prophets, however, did not stop Israel from hoping in the fulfillment of His promises to them. The primary way during this period in which the people expressed continued hope in God's promises was through apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is a genre marked by heavy symbolism, cosmic themes, and cataclysmic language. For example, whereas one might describe a battle in narrative as fierce, apocalyptic literature would describe the events in terms of the sun being darkened, the moon turning to blood, and stars falling from the sky (e.g. Joel 2). The Old Testament has several examples of apocalyptic literature, most notably the last six chapters of Daniel, the book of Zechariah, and passages in Ezekiel and Joel. One of the main reasons for using apocalyptic literature is that it demonstrated a hope that God would bring about His promises by divine intervention in history, something communicated quite well through this genre. Consequently, although there was no prophetic witness for 400 years, there was plenty of written material. Yet herein lies the problem: which of these books, if any, belong in the Bible? The exact details over these decisions and the reasons behind them are beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, brief mention as to our position will be made for the sake of clarity.

One primary criterion for canonicity (inclusion in the Bible) is that the book was written by a prophet or an eyewitness, apostle, or disciple of Jesus Christ. If it is correct that the Lord did not speak through prophets for 400 years leading up to Christ's arrival, then one can argue that any work written during that period, although valuable as history and helpful for historical and literary study, is not prophetic and should not be in the canon.<sup>58</sup>

A study of the inter-testamental period provides additional help for understanding the New Testament because it helps identify the culture, setting, and major religious leaders and practices of the time of Jesus. As with the previous issue, this discussion will be brief, but we will focus on the four major religious groups at the time of Jesus, as well as discuss a few background points with respect to Judaism of the first century AD.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>This issue is important because it is one of the major differences between Catholic Christianity (which includes some of these books; called the Apocrypha) and Protestant Christianity (which excludes Apocrypha).

<sup>59</sup>Discussion of the major religious groups at the time of Jesus is drawn from the article "Jewish Groups at the Time of the New Testament" in *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

## Four Major Jewish Groups at the Time of Jesus

The first major Jewish group is the Pharisees. The Pharisees play a prominent role in the gospels as those who commonly challenge Jesus and oppose his teaching. The Pharisees were religious leaders who lived in Jerusalem and were particularly concerned with proper temple procedure. They were legalistic about the law in some respects, and seemed to twist it to fit their preferences in others, but overall they were concerned with keeping the law so as to live righteous lives. This righteous living was particularly important because they believed that the resurrection from the dead was a reward for a righteous life. Although these are common beliefs among all Pharisees, there were three different schools of Pharisees that had different opinions on certain applications of the law. These three schools were Shammai, Hillel, and Gamaliel.

The second major Jewish group is the Sadducees. The Sadducees were wealthy, priestly families from Jerusalem. They likely only accepted the Pentateuch as authoritative Scripture, and as a result they rejected teaching like the resurrection of the dead that were foundational for the Pharisees. The Jewish historian Josephus presents a view of the Sadducees as unfriendly, disliked, and cruel. Caiaphas, the high priest who sends Jesus to be crucified, is a Sadducee, and thus helps confirm some of Josephus' assessments of the group.<sup>60</sup>

The third major Jewish group was the Essenes. The Essenes were a group that focused on strict observance of the Sabbath and maintaining purity in their lives. These strong feelings and strict regulations often forced them to withdraw from everyday society, and many went to live in outlying villages that segregated the Essene community from the rest of society. Nevertheless, they did succeed in attracting many converts. In addition to their strict legalism, the Essenes were known for applying apocalyptic passages of Scripture to their present day, a practice known as *peshet* interpretation. The Dead Sea Scrolls, an important collection of texts discovered between 1946 and 1956 in Qumran, are believed to be from an Essene community.

The fourth major Jewish group was the Zealots. Although the origin of the Zealots is somewhat debated, historians describe them as a religious extremist group that sought to overthrow the Roman government's control of the Holy Land. They were the group responsible for the Great Jewish Revolt of AD 66-70 that culminated in the destruction of the temple in AD 70. One of Jesus' disciples, Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:15), had been a member of this group before following Jesus.

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<sup>60</sup>Josephus also records that James the brother of Jesus is sentenced to death by a Sadducean high priest (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 20.200, electronic version, *BibleWorks 7.0*).

Although not identified as a major Jewish group, brief mention should be made of the Scribes since they figure prominently in many of Jesus' encounters with religious leaders in the gospels. The Scribes were, as their names suggests, preservers and copiers of Scripture. They not only copied Scripture, however, but also taught at local synagogues. They were often under the influence of the local Pharisaic schools, and thus taught many of the same things as the Pharisees, though they were of a lower status.

## **Context of the Gospels**

The events of the gospels occur against the background of first century AD Judaism. This time is known as Second Temple Judaism. In the past half century especially we have learned an enormous amount of information about the religious and social context of this period. Three details stand out as particularly significant for understanding the context of the gospels.

First, Roman rule of the land left most Jews with a feeling that they were still in exile. Although they were back in the land God had promised them, they had no control and no king. Though the location had changed, the circumstances of the exile had not. They still longed for a complete return from exile in which their king would rule and they would have the peace which God had promised David.

Second, despite the despair some may have felt on account of their present circumstances, many still hoped for the imminent arrival of the promised King. This hope is evidenced by the Essenes who saw in their day the events that would lead up to the day of the Lord. We also see this in the expectation of the Scribes and Pharisees in John 1. In trying to determine John's identity, they clarify for us who they were anticipating at that time: the Messiah, Elijah, and the prophet.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, although there were vastly different applications of the law, as evidenced by the various religious groups described above, one of the common features of daily religious life was the recitation of the *Shema* (Deut 6:4-9). The heart of spiritual formation for the first century AD Jew, whether religious leader or simple servant, was the *Shema*, and this is demonstrated by the way individuals would pray the *Shema* every morning and every evening. With a basic understanding of the background of the gospels, it is possible to begin our survey of the New Testament.

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<sup>61</sup>We will discuss this passage in more detail in our discussion of the Gospel of John.



## Chapter 7: Gospels & Acts

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### Introduction to the Gospels

#### The Synoptic Problem

The New Testament begins with four accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. These four accounts are called Gospels, which simply means "good news". One of the first issues readers encounter is the striking similarity of the first three gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These three gospels are called the synoptic gospels because of these close similarities. Though often debated, the majority view is that Mark wrote his gospel first, then Matthew and Luke both used Mark in the composition of their gospel. For the material that Matthew and Luke share that is not in Mark, they propose another common source (Q) that both used. For the material unique to Matthew or unique to Luke, the explanation is that the gospel writer used a collection of other sources, eyewitness accounts, or the apostles' teaching in filling out the rest of his gospel. John, wishing to organize his gospel in a different manner, wrote independently of any of these three, and thus exhibits few similarities. One reason for the title "Synoptic Problem" is that although the three gospels have numerous similarities, they seemingly diverge on some of the details, especially at important points such as the crucifixion and resurrection. These are "problematic" for some because they imply a contradiction for those more skeptical of the text's reliability. However, there are good reasons, many of which will be discussed in the following sections, for why the gospel writers diverge in the details. They are not contradictory, but complementary, each writer including or excluding details based on his theological purpose.

#### Why Four Gospels?

This statement about the theological purpose leads into the next question: why four gospels? Is not one representation of Jesus' life sufficient for the believer to know that Jesus was born, lived, died, and rose again? Although numerous arguments can be set forth in defense of the need for four gospels, two stand as the most significant. First, there are four gospels because, even though they have differences, the overwhelming similarities between the events recorded in the four gospels by four different writers lend credibility to the witness. If only Mark had written, then one may be able to dismiss him as mistaken. But when Matthew and John, both disciples of Jesus, agree in detail with Mark's account, and Luke, a traveling companion with Paul (Acts 27-28) and one who gathered eyewitness accounts, also agrees on the details, the chances of all four being mistaken in the same

manner is far less likely. Thus, four gospels lend credibility to the witness of each, and the collection as a whole.

Second, each gospel writer uses the same events for different theological emphases. These particular emphases will be discussed as we look at each gospel in turn, but it is worth noting here with respect to the need for four gospels. Since each gospel writer focuses on a different aspect of Jesus' life and ministry, the reader receives a deeper and more complete theological portrait by having four different perspectives. For example, Matthew writes for a more Jewish audience and records more of Jesus' teaching discourses. Mark will emphasize the urgency of the message, while Luke will focus on the Gentile response to Jesus' parables and healings. Finally, John will place Jesus' divinity in eternal perspective and spend more of his gospel on the time between the final supper and the crucifixion. With four unique perspectives, we get a much deeper understanding of the significance of Jesus' life, teaching, miracles, death, and resurrection, so long as we are faithful to read them according to each individual author's purpose. And that is the task to which we now turn.

## Matthew

The Gospel according to Matthew is largely recognized as a gospel written to a primarily Jewish audience. The way Matthew uses the Old Testament and much of his language point to such a conclusion. Matthew also stands out for its rigid structure. Matthew organizes his gospel around five main discourses (Matt 5:1-7:29; 10:5-11:1; 13:1-53; 18:1-19:2; 24:1-25:46). He uses a consistent formula, found only in his gospel, to mark these five discourses, ending each discourse with the phrase "and it happened, when Jesus had finished saying these things, that..."

Matthew also provides a summary of Jesus' ministry that becomes the organizing feature of his book:

And he went throughout all Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues and **proclaiming** the gospel of the kingdom and **healing** every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. (Matt 4:23-25)

Chapters 5-7, known as the Sermon on the Mount, marks the first of Matthew's five major discourses of Jesus. After each of the first four discourses, Jesus will demonstrate the authority of his teaching with miracles. The final discourse leads directly into the crucifixion and resurrection accounts, which are the final declaration of his authority.<sup>62</sup> The structure of the book, then, matches the summary in 4:23-25—Jesus taught and proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom, then he demonstrated the authority of his teaching through his miracles.

## Message

Matthew has several major themes woven throughout, but most significantly Matthew sets forth Jesus as the promised king of the Old Testament who brings with him the inauguration of the eschatological kingdom. As the other gospels also illustrate, the redemption of God's creation cannot occur simply through a powerful king, but through a perfect sacrifice. Matthew thus sets up a powerful image of Jesus as both the conquering king and also the suffering servant.

### Who is Jesus?

Matthew begins his gospel with a focus on Jesus' identity, which he illustrates in several ways. First, Matthew uses a genealogy to show that Jesus is the son of David and the son of Abraham. As our discussions on the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants suggest, God had promised Israel redemption through a coming king who would be one of Abraham's offspring and one of David's "sons." Matthew would expect his Jewish audience to be in anticipation of God's fulfillment of these promises. By linking Jesus' birth to Abraham and David through genealogy, Matthew is making a strong statement about Jesus' identity.

Second, Matthew uses fulfillment language to show numerous ways in which Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Among these fulfillment statements are Jesus as Immanuel (Matt 1:22-23//Isa 7:14), the ruler and shepherd of Israel born in Bethlehem (Matt 2:5-6//Mic 5:2), the king of Numbers 24 (Matt 2:15//Num 24:8), the one upon whom the spirit rests (Matt 3:16//Isa 42:1), and the beloved son (Matt 3:17//Ps 2:7).

Third, Matthew will identify Jesus as the new Moses. He does so by establishing strong parallels between Jesus' early ministry and the exodus. For example, God calls Jesus "out of Egypt" in the birth narrative, the same thing Moses writes about God's action for Israel in Numbers 23-24 (cf. Hos 11:1). Just as Israel passed through the waters of the sea, so also Matthew records Jesus' baptism as a parallel. Then Israel wanders in the wilderness for

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<sup>62</sup>Notice how Jesus' teaching after the resurrection highlights this point: "All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt 28:18).

forty years, and Jesus wanders in the wilderness for forty days. The forty days are even more striking when one recognizes how Moses spent forty days on the mountain before coming down to the base of the mountain to proclaim the Lord's covenant. In the same way, Jesus, after spending forty days in the wilderness, stands on the mountain and proclaims his most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7). Matthew's point seems to be two-fold. First, Jesus relives Israel's story, but he does so faithfully and perfectly. Second, Jesus is the new Moses, the prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15-18), who stands before the people to proclaim God's covenant—the New Covenant.

### **Matthew's Five Discourses**

Matthew's first discourse is Jesus' most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon Jesus illustrates the life that he calls his followers to live. The emphasis is on developing Christ-like virtue and seeking the coming kingdom. The sermon ends with Matthew's commentary that the crowds were astonished because he taught as one who had authority. Jesus then manifests that authority by healing and performing other miracles.

The second discourse pertains to Jesus' sending out of his disciples. After giving them authority over unclean spirits, he tells them to go and proclaim the gospel. He gives his disciples instructions for how to respond to those who receive them and those who reject them, once again reminding them that persecution will come. The third discourse begins with the parable of the sower and the parable of the weeds. Jesus continues with a collection of kingdom parables in which he compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed, leaven, a hidden treasure, a pearl of great value, and a net. In the fourth discourse, Jesus identifies the life of humility required of his kingdom community. He demonstrates these qualities through the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the unforgiving servant. In Jesus' final discourse, he moves on to tell his disciples about the future destruction of the temple and some parables about coming judgment. They are to keep watch for the day of judgment may come at any moment.

### **Unique Contribution of Matthew**

#### **The Crucifixion Account**

With each presentation of the crucifixion account in the gospels, there are certain elements that are included in all gospels and others that the gospel writer emphasizes to make a theological point. In Matthew's case, the events that he records are carefully crafted to match closely with Psalm 22. This correlation is even more obvious when one notes that Matthew only puts one phrase in Jesus' mouth while on the cross, whereas the other three gospels add six more among them. Jesus' only quote from the cross in Matthew is "*Eli, eli,*



*lema sabachthani*,” which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” taken directly from Psalm 22. The reason that Matthew seems to place such emphasis on Psalm 22 is that it helps demonstrate that the Father heard this cry of Jesus on the cross. It is not the case, as hymns such as “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us” suggest, that “the Father turned His face away.” Rather, Matthew means the reader to see in Psalm 22:24 that “he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.” Matthew tells us through his allusions to Psalm 22 that the Father had his gaze directly on Jesus, heard his cry, and yet followed through with the plan to pour out His wrath against all sin upon His Son. Though we deserved the punishment, Jesus was our propitiation, that is, he received the wrath of God on our behalf. The magnitude of this truth is not lost on Matthew, who follows this reminder with the rending of the curtain of the temple, the shaking of the earth, and the rising of many saints who had died (28:51-53).

## Mark

The gospel of Mark is by far the shortest of the four gospels and is usually recognized as the first one to be written. Though the gospels were anonymous, church tradition almost unanimously recognizes its author as John Mark, mentioned in Acts 12, 13, and 15, and also in Colossians 4:10, Philemon 1:24, 2 Timothy 4:11, and 1 Peter 5:13. Though Mark himself was not himself a disciple, he worked closely with Paul and Peter (assuming he is the John Mark of the passages above). Mark himself is an interesting character in that he deserts Paul on one of his journeys (Acts 13:13), which later leads to the disagreement between, and eventual separation of, Paul and Barnabas over whether or not to bring Mark with them (Acts 15:36-41). First Peter 5:13, which refers to Mark as his “son,” shows a close relationship between Mark and Peter that developed after he deserted Paul. As Paul’s letters demonstrate, he later forgives Mark and finds him to be a helpful brother and fellow servant of the gospel.

That Mark was closely associated with Peter is perhaps also evidenced in his gospel. Many scholars have suggested that Mark’s gospel follows closely the organization of Peter’s sermon in Acts 10, suggesting the influence of Peter’s teaching on his gospel (see Figure 12 below). Moreover, it seems that this close relationship between Mark and the apostle Peter is one of the reasons that Mark’s gospel is so quickly accepted as Scripture despite the fact that he was not an apostle himself.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>The same thing can be said for Luke on account of his relationship with Paul (cf. Acts 27-28).

<b>Acts 10</b>	<b>Mark</b>
"good news" (v. 36)	"the beginning of the good news" (1:1)
"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit" (v. 38)	The coming of the Spirit on Jesus (1:10)
"beginning in Galilee" (v. 37)	The Galilean Ministry (1:16-8:26)
"He went around doing and healing all who were under the power of the devil" (v. 38)	Jesus' ministry focuses on healings and exorcisms
"We are witnesses of everything he did...in Jerusalem" (v. 39)	The ministry in Jerusalem (11-14)
"They killed him by hanging him on a cross" (v. 39)	Focus on the death of Christ (15)
"God raised him from the dead on the third day" (v. 40)	"He has risen! He is not here." (16:6)

**Figure 12. Parallels between Peter's Preaching and Mark.**<sup>64</sup>

### Message

Like Matthew, Mark does not give an explicit statement of the reason for his gospel, but readers do have some clues as to his possible motives. For example, Mark's gospel is action-orient, as opposed to Matthew's which was largely driven by discourses. In addition to recording less teaching, Mark also emphasizes the urgency of his message through the repeated use of the word *immediately* (nine times in Mark 1). Moreover, Mark has no prelude to Jesus' ministry. Whereas Matthew and Luke have birth narratives, and John speaks of the eternal existence of the Word become flesh, Mark begins with John the Baptist's first encounter with Jesus. These three features all point to an urgency on Mark's part to get to the end of the story. More than any of the other gospels, Mark's gospel highlights the urgency of the message of repentance, echoed well by John the Baptist's words in Mark 1:15—"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Mark also demonstrates that "Jesus' followers must imitate their Master by humbling themselves and serving others."<sup>65</sup> Mark communicates this point through a three point sequence that he repeats three times. After predicting his death, Jesus' disciples misunderstand his meaning. Rather than repeating or clarifying, Jesus elaborates about the cost of discipleship (see this sequence in Figure 13 below).

<sup>64</sup>D.A. Carson, and Douglas J. Moo, *Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message*, Edited by Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 34.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 29.

<b>Jesus predicts his death</b>		
8:31	9:30-31	10:32-34
<b>The disciples misunderstand</b>		
8:32-33	9:32 (33-34)	10:35-40
<b>Jesus teaches about the cost of discipleship</b>		
8:34-38	9:35-37	10:41-45

**Figure 13. Three Point Sequence in Mark.<sup>66</sup>**

### Unique Contribution of Mark

Most of the gospel of Mark shows up in Matthew and/or Luke, so it is difficult to find unique contributions of Mark apart from his use of immediately to provide urgency to his message. Nevertheless, Mark does provide a somewhat unique contribution in the strong emphasis on Jesus' suffering. At the midpoint of the gospel, Mark records Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ (8:29). Following this confession, Jesus foretells his death and teaches the disciples that the Son of man must suffer many things (8:31). This statement, immediately following Peter's confession, begins the strong emphasis on suffering in the second half of the gospel. Mark communicates one of his central purposes through this exchange in the middle of his gospel, namely that "Jesus is the *suffering* Son of God and can only be understood in terms of this suffering."<sup>67</sup>

Yet another unique contribution relates to the "messianic secret" of Mark. More prominently identified in Mark's gospel than the others is Jesus' strict charge that anyone who knows that Jesus is the Messiah is to be quiet about the fact. An example is Peter's confession stated above. In the verse between Peter's confession and Jesus' prediction of his death, Mark includes how Jesus strictly charged the disciples to tell no one (8:30). Peter's confession is further relevant to the messianic secret in that Mark does not include the second part of Peter's statement, "the Son of the Living God," which Matthew records (Matt 16:16). The reason many scholars give for this omission is that it leaves the centurion in Mark 15:39 as the first human being to confess Jesus as the Son of God, and it

<sup>66</sup>Carson and Moo, *Introducing the New Testament*, 30.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

does not occur until after his death.<sup>68</sup> Not only does this relate to the messianic secret, but it once again places emphasis on Jesus' suffering, this time as a revelatory event.

## Luke

Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke gives a clear indication of his purpose in the opening chapter. He is writing an orderly account to Theophilus that he may have certainty regarding the things he has been taught (Luke 1:3-4). This purpose statement is particularly important because it also clearly links Luke's gospel with the book of Acts, which is a continuation of the gospel. Thus, although John comes between these two parts, we ought to keep in mind that Luke is only volume one of a two part work.

## Message

Luke is the third of the synoptic gospels, and therefore Luke's message closely parallels that of Matthew and Mark.<sup>69</sup> Luke begins with the birth of Jesus but delays his genealogy of Jesus until 3:23-38, directly after the baptism. The reason for this shift seems to be Luke's concern in the genealogy to link Jesus back to Adam, the son of God, which is meant to parallel the Father's declaration at the baptism that Jesus is the beloved Son with whom He is well-pleased (3:22). Whereas Matthew shows Jesus to be the new Moses and the promised offspring of Abraham and David, Luke is concerned with identifying Jesus as the Son of God and the embodiment of perfect humanity that was lost in Adam.

Luke does include more teaching of Jesus than Mark, but he does not organize his gospel in the same way as Matthew around the discourses. Rather, Luke's concern seems to be to chronicle Jesus' teachings and miracles in Galilee (4:14-9:50), on the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (9:51-19:44), and then in Jerusalem (19:45-21:38). A good example of how this change affects the organization of the gospel is the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' sermon in Matthew 5-7 is spread throughout Luke's gospel. A small amount of the material is grouped together in Luke 6 in the sermon on the plain. Luke records the beatitudes (6:20-23//Matt 5:1-12), loving one's enemies (6:27-36//Matt 5:39-46; 7:12), judging others (6:37//Matt 7:1-5), a tree and its fruits (6:43-45//Matt 7:16-20), and building one's house on the rock (6:46-49//Matt 7:24-27). The Lord's prayer, by contrast, does not show up along with the sermon on the plain, but in Luke 11:1-4. Similarly, the passage on asking, seeking, and knocking follows the Lord's prayer in verses 9-14. Another example is the

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<sup>68</sup>I say human being because the unclean spirits do announce that Jesus is the Son of God in Mark 3:11-12, and once again Jesus tells them to be quiet.

<sup>69</sup>The word *synoptic* denotes taking a common view. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are deemed synoptic gospels because of the similarities in content, organization, and even wording.

lighting of the lamp and the eye being the lamp of the body (Luke 11:33-36//Matt 5:13-16; 6:22-23).

### Unique Contribution of Luke

Neither Mark nor John record Jesus' birth, and although Matthew does have a birth narrative, he does not include the songs of Mary and Zechariah. Luke, then, is unique in recording these two songs that contain similar themes. Mary's song, often called the Magnificat, is reminiscent of the song Hannah sings in 1 Samuel 2 (see Figure 14 below). Mary's song is also a good example of an appropriate response to God's gift of the Messiah. First, she gives thanks (1:46-47). Second, she glories in God as her savior (1:47). Third, she identifies five aspects of God's character. He has regarded the lowly estate of his people (1:48), he has shown mercy to those who fear him (1:50), he has shown strength with his arm (1:51-52), he has filled the hungry with good things (1:53), and he has helped his servant Israel (1:54-55). Similarly, Zechariah gives thanks to God (1:68) for raising up a horn of salvation from the house of his servant David (1:69). He also speaks, as Mary does, of God's mercy (1:72, 78). Both of these songs help identify Jesus as the one who will bring salvation to God's people, a salvation that will bring low the proud but grant mercy to the humble.

<b>Hannah's Song (1 Samuel 2:1-10)</b>	<b>Mary's Song (Luke 1:46-55)</b>
"My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation." (v. 1)	"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (vv. 46-47)
"Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth" (v. 3)	"he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts" (v. 51)
"those who were hungry have ceased to hunger" (v. 5)	"he has filled the hungry with good things" (v. 53)
"The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor" (vv. 7-8)	"he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate[...]the rich he has sent empty away" (vv. 52-53)

**Figure 14. Comparison of Mary's Magnificat to Hannah's Song.**

Luke records three parables in Luke 15, each which describes something that was lost. The parable of the lost sheep (also in Matt 18:12-14), speaks of the shepherd who loses one of his one hundred sheep. He leaves the ninety-nine to seek after the one, and rejoices when he finds it. In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over the one sinner who repents than the ninety-nine who need no repentance (Luke 15:7). The second story is about a lost coin. A woman has ten coins and loses one, so she seeks diligently for her lost coin. When she finds it, she also rejoices. Again, Jesus declares that there is joy over the one sinner that repents. Finally, Jesus tells a story of a lost son. The son, desiring his inheritance from his father though his father is alive and well, receives the inheritance and proceeds to waste it. When he finally returns home to his father, recognizing that his father's servants have more than he does, he finds his father not only waiting for him but ready to embrace him and celebrate his return because what the father had lost had now come home. In these three parables, Jesus is giving voice to indescribable loss. In moving from 1 of 100 to 1 of 10 to 1 of 2, Jesus speaks of the increasing value of what is lost. What we find, however, is these three parables actually tell four stories. The first three speak of what is lost being found. The final story is of the self-righteous brother. We find that he cannot rejoice over his brother's return, and he cannot repent of his self-righteous behavior. In effect, after three stories of the lost being found, we learn in the end that the one who never left home, the older brother, is in fact lost. Jesus' three stories serve to highlight this self-righteous response of the older brother, who unlike the father (both earthly and heavenly) cannot rejoice in the finding of what was lost. This message fits the context well as Jesus has just been ridiculed by the Pharisees and the scribes for eating with sinners. Jesus' message is simple: he rejoices over saving those who are lost, but those who rest in their own self-righteousness will always be lost, because they do not even know that they ought to be looking for anything.

Perhaps the most significant unique contribution is Luke's post-resurrection story in Luke 24 of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. The significance of this story is in its record of how Jesus taught the disciples that he was the fulfillment of the Law, Prophets, and Psalms (Luke 24:27, 44). Jesus was not simply the fulfillment of a few Old Testament prophecies, but rather the fulfillment of the message of the entire Old Testament in all its three fold division—the Law, Prophets, and Writings (Psalms).<sup>70</sup> This passage also records Jesus stopping to eat a meal with the disciples. During this meal, Jesus blessed the bread and broke it and "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" (Luke 24:30-31). This passage is intriguing because it may be an allusion to the garden of Eden in order to draw a

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<sup>70</sup>See discussion on this passage and its significance in Chapter 1: The Old Testament as Christian Scripture.

contrast. When Adam and Eve have the first meal recorded in Scripture, it says that their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked (Gen 3:7). In Luke's gospel, this is now the first meal after the resurrection, and their eyes were opened and they knew that it was Jesus. Luke may be drawing a contrast to show how the first meal led to death, but this first meal after the resurrection is the hope of restoration. Dane Ortlund summarizes this significance well in an article on this allusion:

When Luke tells us in his Gospel that upon two dejected disciples receiving food from the risen Jesus, "their eyes were opened, and they knew [him]," he is deliberately drawing the reader back to the ancient account in which another pair of humans receive food and, concomitantly, new sight. The first eye-opening with its attendant knowledge ushered humanity into a new moral universe of darkness, exile, sin, and death. The second eye-opening with its attendant knowledge pulled back the eschatological curtain to allow Jesus' distraught disciples to perceive that he himself had inaugurated the long-awaited new world of hope, resurrection, restoration, and new creation.<sup>71</sup>

Luke's main contributions, then, are quite varied, aiding our understanding of the Old Testament, Jesus' teaching, hermeneutics, and more.

## John

The gospel of John is the most unique of the four gospels. He lacks the birth of Jesus, opting instead to begin with the beginning—of creation, that is. He lacks much of the teaching, parables, and Galilean ministry of Jesus as well. What John does include, however, helps serve his evangelistic purpose. In John 20, near the end of the gospel, John tells his readers why he has written his gospel: "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). John is likely writing to a Jewish audience who knows the Old Testament promise of a Messiah, but does not yet believe that Jesus is that Messiah. Instead of writing to believers to assure them who Jesus is, John is writing to unbelievers to convince them that their Messiah had come in the person of Jesus Christ. Moreover, John 21:24, apparently an addition from the believing community, says that the testimony of the one bearing witness to these events in the gospel is true. They have perhaps seen the miracles of Jesus, the

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<sup>71</sup>Dane C. Ortlund, "And Their Eyes Were Opened, and They Knew: An Inter-canonical Note on Luke 24:31," *JETS* 53.4 (Dec 2010): 728.

resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the growth of the church firsthand as evidence that the Messiah had come.

### Theological Message

John focuses his attention primarily on two points. First, John is the most detailed gospel with respect to Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. He spends much of the first half of his book centered on events in Jerusalem rather than Galilee.<sup>72</sup> Second, John spends nearly half his gospel on the time from the last supper until the resurrection, by far the most lengthy such narrative among the gospels. These two points fit well together. John spends much of his time in the first half of the gospel demonstrating how Jesus' miracles were signs that manifested his glory (John 2:11). John's reasoning for his emphasis on Jerusalem may be to show that these signs were not merely in the Galilean area. The same people who oppose, arrest, and crucify Jesus in John's extended narrative in the second half of the book are those who witnessed his miracles in Jerusalem. They cannot be excused for having not seen Jesus' miraculous signs; it is rather that they failed to respond to the signs as they ought.

With respect to his purpose statement, John makes clear throughout his gospel that Jesus is the promised Old Testament Messiah by his repeated use of the Old Testament in association with Jesus. Unlike the explicit fulfillment passages in Matthew, however, John uses allusions, choosing to apply Old Testament messianic symbols to Jesus. Some examples include the temple (2:19-21), vine (15:1-11), tabernacle (1:14), serpent (3:14), and the Passover lamb. In this manner, John makes explicit that the promised Messiah of the Old Testament is realized in Jesus, which serves to support his evangelistic purpose.

### Unique Contribution of John

John has numerous unique contributions on account of his different style and emphasis in his gospel. Among these unique contributions, four stand out. First, John 1 is a significant departure from the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke or Mark's decision to start with Jesus' adult ministry. John begins, as the Bible does, in the beginning. His intentional allusion to Genesis 1 sets the stage for Jesus to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament message. More importantly, however, Jesus is not only the fulfillment of a story that began in the beginning, but he himself was in the beginning. John's revelation in chapter 1 is that Jesus is the Word of God from all eternity who has taken on human flesh and dwelt among us. Not only was he with God, but he was God and all things were created through him. Paul in Colossians 1 and the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 1 will make similar statements regarding Jesus' creative activity. Not only is this a unique contribution, but it fits well with

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<sup>72</sup>Interestingly, however, Jesus' first miracle, one that occurs in Cana in Galilee, is recorded only in John.



a second of John's unique emphases—the divinity of Jesus. Not only does 1:1 explicitly state Jesus' divinity, but 1:18 shows that the Son, Jesus Christ, who is God, has made the Father known. John 20:28 also makes Jesus' divinity clear in Thomas's statement, "My Lord, and my God." Another way that John demonstrates Jesus' divinity is through a series of "I am" statements (6:35; 8:12, 28, 58; 15:1-5). The Old Testament regularly refers to God as "I AM" and His revealed name, YHWH, is related to the statement "I AM who I AM." Not only do Jesus' "I am" statements hint at this relationship, but he more explicitly makes this claim in John 8:58—"before Abraham was, I am." Jesus' identity as the Messiah in John is equally balanced with his divinity.

A third unique contribution is John's use of light and darkness imagery. Among the many interesting aspects of the light and dark imagery is the way John brings it to a climax in the burial account. Throughout the gospel, the echoes of John 1 stir in the reader's mind when these words occur. In John 1, he writes that the true light came into the darkness of the world, but the darkness did not comprehend it (1:4-5, 7-10). The failure of the people to recognize the light of the world showed that they were still in darkness. In an interesting scene at the burial, John explicitly states two men who aid in this process—Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. The former was a secret disciple because of his fear of the Jews; the latter had come to Jesus by night (John 3). It is intriguing that as the light of the day is waning, at the moment when the darkness seems to have won and it would be most dangerous to associate one's self with Jesus, these two men reveal themselves as followers of Jesus. They shine the light of their faith at the moment of greatest darkness.

Finally, John's gospel sheds more light than the others on the role of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, the Spirit is the one who must bring new birth. In John 7:37-39, he speaks of the Holy Spirit as the one through whom streams of living water will flow out of the heart. In chapters 14-16, Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as Helper (14:15-17, 25-26; 15:26) and the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father (15:26-27) who will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment and will guide believers in all truth as he glorifies Jesus (16:7-15). These passages are the most explicit mentions of the person and role of the Holy Spirit in the gospels, thus making John the most Trinitarian gospel of the four.

## **Acts**

Similar to the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 4:23-25), Acts has a discernible summary statement early in the book. Acts 1:8 records Jesus' final words to his disciples before his ascension: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my

witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." These words are highlighted in Acts because Luke has already recorded the ascension in his gospel (Luke 24:50-53). He seemingly repeats the ascension here for the purpose of giving Jesus' final words to his disciples. As mentioned above, these words serve as a summary of the book of Acts. After they receive the power of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, the rest of the book depicts the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem (Acts 2-7) to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12) and then to the ends of the earth (Acts 13-28). Of particular importance to the theology of Acts is the recognition that the expansion of the gospel outside of Jerusalem comes as a result of the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7). Acts 8:1 says that many in the church were scattered on that day, and verse 4 adds that "those who were scattered went about preaching the word." The book of Acts will repeatedly demonstrate that the persecution of the church brought boldness (Acts 4:29-31) to proclaim the gospel, and thousands responded to this message as a result. Simply stated, the church grew strongest and fastest when it was persecuted.

Acts provides two extremely valuable components for an understanding of Scripture and the biblical worldview. First, it records the earliest sermons of the apostles, especially Peter, Stephen, and Paul. These sermons give readers insight into their interpretation of the Old Testament, their understanding of the significance of Jesus' life and ministry, and their understanding of the gospel. A perfect example that demonstrates all three of these insights is Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), which shows Peter's understanding of Jesus as the Old Testament Messiah, the Davidic king, whose unlawful death was nonetheless in the perfect plan and foreknowledge of God to bring about redemption. Peter also spends much of his time emphasizing the resurrection because raising Jesus from the dead confirms that Jesus was who he said he was and accomplished what he said he would accomplish.

The second valuable contribution of Acts is its record of the formation of the church, some of its early practices, and some of the early disputes and resolutions. For example, Acts teaches how the church came about as a response of repentance to the apostles' teaching. As believers were added day by day in great number, they also developed churches that aimed to make disciples and build community. Again, Acts 2 records some of the practices of these earliest churches: they devoted themselves to teaching (2:42), fellowship (2:42), the breaking of bread (2:42), prayer (2:42), care for one another (2:44-45), and worshiping together (2:46). Readers also learn that the immediate response to the gospel was repentance and baptism (2:38). As the church grew, certain issues arose. Chief among them was the problem of Jews and Gentiles now becoming one people of God. The roots of Christianity were Jewish—Jesus was a Jew, the apostles were Jews, and the

Scriptures of the early church, the Old Testament, were the Scriptures of the Jews. But as Gentiles continued to respond to the message of the gospel, it became clear that it was no longer a sect of Judaism, but something wholly new—a New Covenant. It was rooted in the Old Testament and Jewish practices, but it was not to be equated with Judaism. How, then, to deal with issues such as circumcision? This problem of circumcision is precisely what is discussed in Jerusalem in Acts 15. Not only can we learn from the way they handled the situation, by gathering together apostles and elders (15:6), but we can also see that the earliest resolution was that God had truly brought together one people, Jew and Gentile, through the grace of Jesus Christ (15:11). Salvation for the Jews was the same as salvation for the Gentiles, however unlikely that seemed in the historical setting.

For these two reasons—the apostles’ teaching and the record of the formation of the church—the book of Acts makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of how to read Scripture, how to understand the formation and role of the church in God’s ongoing plan of redemption, and how to identify and live out the biblical worldview.

## Suggested Resources & Bibliography

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