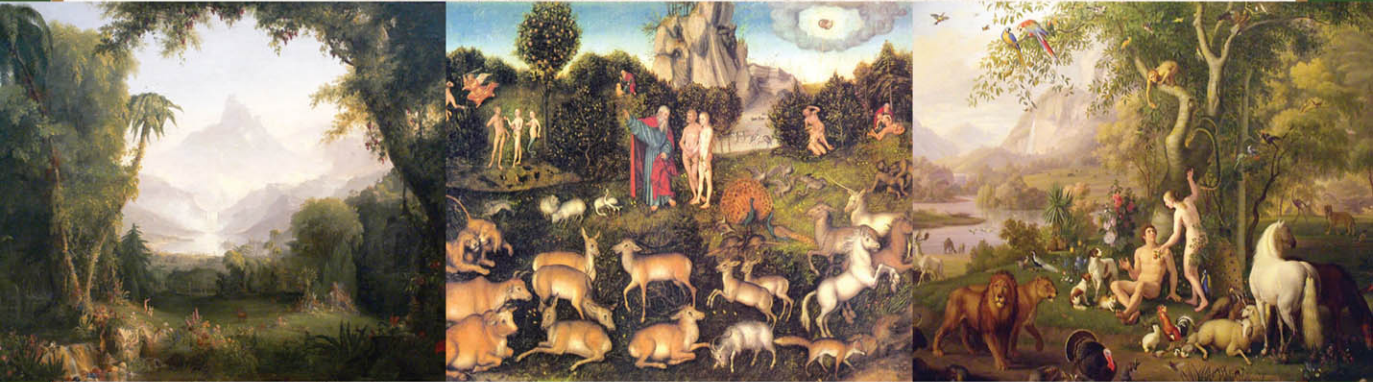


OneBook.

THE EPIC OF
EDEN

VIDEO STUDY GUIDE



Understanding the Old Testament

SANDRA L. RICHTER

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Understanding the Old Testament

SANDRA L. RICHTER

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Printed in the United States of America

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-62824-131-0
Mobi ISBN: 978-1-62824-132-7
ePub ISBN: 978-1-62824-133-4
uPDF ISBN: 978-1-62824-134-1
DVD (3-disc set) ISBN: 978-1-62824-146-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014945736

*Cover Design by Brushfire Design Studio
Page design by PerfecType, Nashville, Tennessee*

SEEDBED PUBLISHING
Franklin, Tennessee
Seedbed.com
SOWING FOR A GREAT AWAKENING

To all the amazing people with whom I've had the privilege
of exploring the frontiers of the Great Story—
my seminarians at Asbury Theological and Wesley Biblical;
the good people of RCP fighting the good fight throughout the great state of California;
the remarkably dedicated laypeople from Memphis to Marietta, Killearn to Jackson,
Old Bethel to Boston, Lexington to Lubbock, Houston to Haverhill, Asheville to Southborough;
and of course my undergrads at Wheaton—
may this study serve to expand your borders, build the kingdom, and bring the exiles home.

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

Welcome to OneBook, the Bible study resource brought to you by Seedbed Publishing.

In all of the history of the world, one book stands in a category of its own; one book towers over them all. We're referring, of course, to the Bible, the Word of God.

Unparalleled in truth and unmatched in wisdom, the Bible tells us the story of the world—from creation to new creation; it reveals the reality of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and it teaches us what it means to be a human being, created in the image of God, broken by sin yet redeemed by grace, and destined for a life of profound purpose and deep meaning.

The Bible is worthy of our highest attention and deepest devotion. To be sure, it is a complex book—sixty-six books, written in three different languages, over the course of fifteen hundred years, across three continents, by more than forty authors. It is in the marvel of such complexity that we discover the miracle of its simplicity: from beginning to end, Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells a single, unified story.

John Wesley famously said in the preface to his sermons,

I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach me the way. For this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be a man of one book.

We want to invite and inspire you to a lifelong study of the Bible. We want you to become a person of OneBook. We are determined to help you understand it and to read it for all it's worth so that you will be equipped to fulfill God's purposes for your life. This is not so much a book we seek to master as a book we seek to be mastered by.

We have carefully chosen teachers, men and women, who have given their lives to understanding Scripture and in the process have stood under its teaching. We have searched for people who love Jesus, who love the church, and who love others.

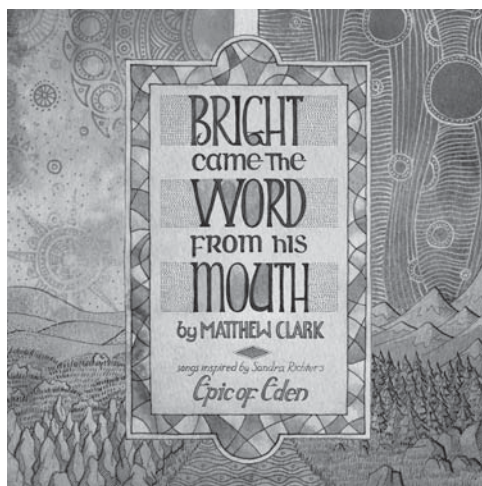
I am pleased to present to you our first release in the OneBook Collection—*The Epic of Eden Video Study Guide: Understanding the Old Testament* by Dr. Sandra L. Richter.

The Epic of Eden Video Study Guide: Understanding the Old Testament

The Old Testament makes up three-fourths of the Bible—a clear majority—and yet it is the least understood part of the Bible. Sandra Richter is one of the finest teachers of the Old Testament in the world. She has a way of teaching the Old Testament that brings it to life. As a result of engaging with her in this study of the *Old* Testament, you will come to a profound understanding of the *New* Testament and all that Scripture means for your life. She comprehends it from a deep place of faith and understanding and she has learned to teach it to ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

Richter is a wife, a mother of two daughters, a Harvard-educated scholar, a teacher, and a passionate, Spirit-filled preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. She presently serves on the faculty of the esteemed Wheaton College in Illinois.

You are in for a treat over the course of the next twelve weeks as you study the Word of God together through this workbook and the video teaching sessions. It is our hope that you and your *Epic* study group will be richly blessed by this investment of your time.



Bright Came the Word From His Mouth

Hear the music inspired by *The Epic of Eden*
Twelve original songs written and performed by Matthew Clark.
For more information visit matthewclark.net

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This epic study of the Old Testament could not have been completed without the colossal investment of many people. Our gratitude goes to J. D. Walt, the sower-in-chief of Seedbed Publishing, for having and holding the vision to make this happen. To Andrew Miller, director of publishing at Seedbed, for the nuts-and-bolts leadership necessary to any task of this magnitude. To Ryan Staples for hours of filming and diligent (tedious!) editing of the DVDs. To Nick Perreault of Nikabrik Design for his commitment to detail in creating some amazing maps and charts (and always being willing to nudge Dothan just a little further to the west). To Jason and Mary Aycock for our pedagogical template and the first run at the written guides. To Kathy Noftsinger for her dedicated, fastidious, and creative investment in bringing the written guides and so much more to their current state of *telos*. To Don Swank, who indefatigably tracked down numerous images from ancient files and the far reaches of the Internet. To Holly Jones for her masterful project management. To Maren Kurek and Tammy Spurlock for their expert copy editing and proofreading skills. To Kristin Goble at PerfectType for her artful typesetting. To Matthew Clark, whose vision and heart have set this great story to music—music that he has so generously shared with us. To the studio audiences who courageously endured hours and hours of filming. To Tiffani Walt for her unending encouragement for this project and its team members. And to every pastor and layperson who would not stop asking . . . our team is grateful to say that *The Epic of Eden Video Study Guide: Understanding the Old Testament* is at last available. Let the adventure begin!

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THE EPIC OF
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WEEK ONE

The Great Cultural Barrier

A Word from the Author

“The Bible is the saga of Yahweh and Adam, the prodigal son and his ever gracious heavenly father; humanity in their rebellion and God in his grace. This narrative begins with Eden and does not conclude until the New Jerusalem is firmly in place. It is all one story. And if you are a believer, it is all your story. . . . If our goal is to know our own story, then we first have to come to understand the characters who populate the Old Testament: who they were, where they lived, what was important to them” (Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 15, 17).

Introduction

An eight-year-old girl in the suburbs listens to her grandmother’s tale of growing up on a small midwestern farm; a ten-year-old boy listens while his grandfather tells of the time *his* father, a new immigrant, moved the family from an apartment in Brooklyn to a Craftsman bungalow in San Francisco. In school, both of these children learn about the history of the United States—its founding, growth, and westward expansion; stories of war and peace, trial and triumph, of leaders great and small. Eventually these two become young adults, fall in love, and begin their own new family. And two separate stories become one, which will, in turn, be passed down to *their* children. All of these experiences and memories, individual and shared, become *their* story, shaping who they are and who or what they may one day become.

What is *your* story?

Most of us are like the two children mentioned above. Whether male or female, married or single, we’ve grown up with a common history, a common language, and a

common literature. We share common truths and legends, values and dreams, and we pass them on to the next generation. In short, we share a common culture. Each of us adds our personal narrative, weaving our thread into the fabric of society and thereby helping to create the ever-expanding tapestry of culture. In doing so, the tapestry tells our collective story, one that we all know and share because our own hands had a part in creating it. Our thread gives shape and substance to the whole just as the whole gives shape and substance to us.

What is unique about the Christian community is that part of our story comes from a part of our “family” that we might not yet know: our forefathers in the faith—Abraham (who is known as Abram prior to his covenant with God), Isaac, and Jacob. This story is also part of the fabric of our lives, and gives shape to who we were, who we are, and who we will become.

Real Time and Space

This week, we begin to address the barrier of culture that stands between us and this other “family.” As we learn about the culture of this other family, we will traverse the land of the Bible from Mesopotamia to Canaan/Israel/Palestine to Egypt. We will travel in time from Abraham’s world somewhere around 2000 BC to the Passion of Jesus in approximately AD 30.

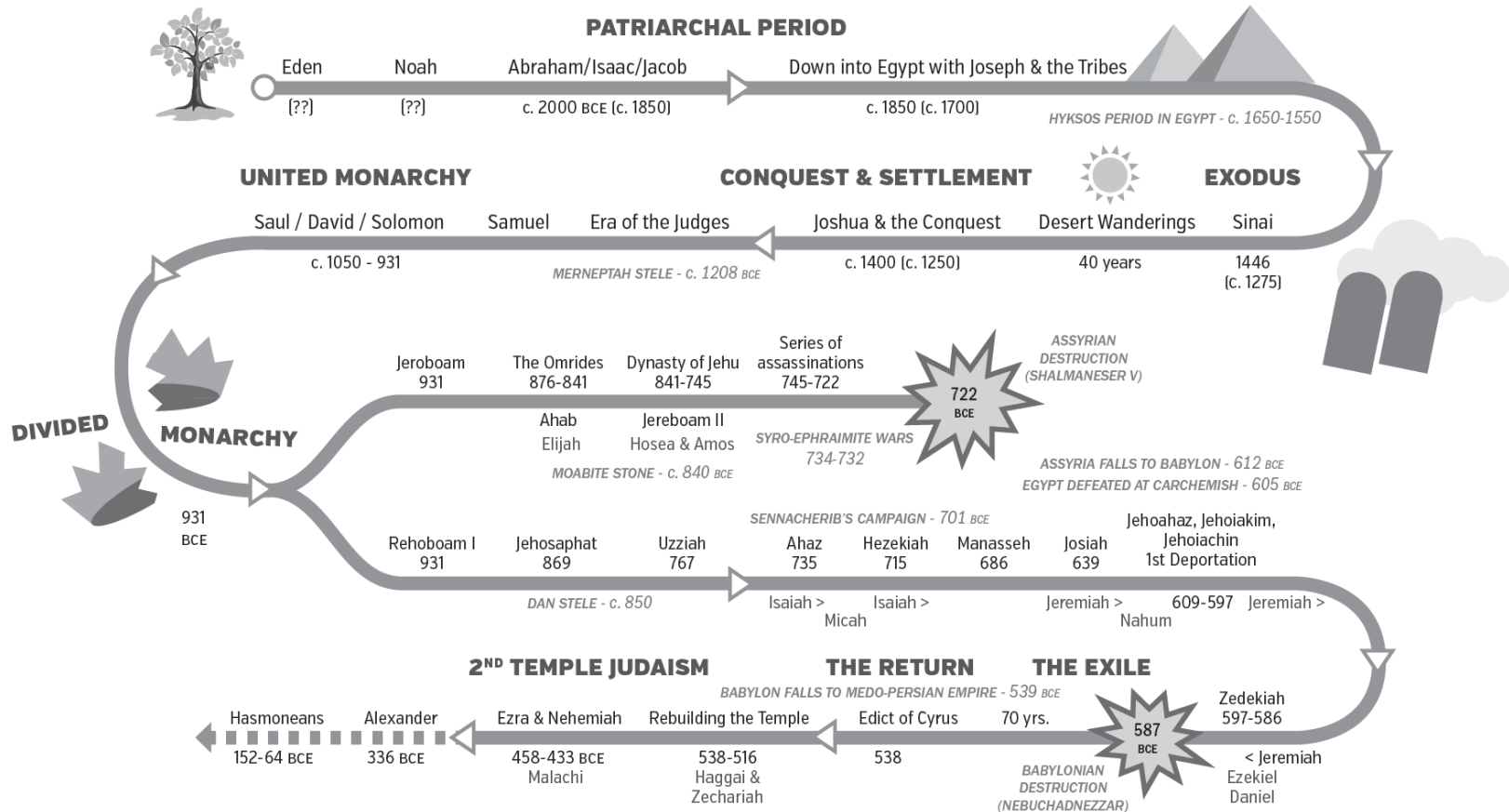
(Note: BC stands for the time period “before Christ” [or “before the Common Era”/BCE] and AD stands for the Latin Anno Domini, meaning “The Year of Our Lord” [also sometimes referred to as the “Common Era”/CE].)

As you journey through these stories, think about what it would be like to live in a culture where the family was the basic unit and regulatory force of society. Think about what it would look like for God to connect with people living and breathing in this sort of tribal culture. With those thoughts in mind, let’s open the door and enter the epic story of the Old Testament!

Humans, rather than recognizing the trappings of their own culture (and that their culture may in fact be very different from someone else’s), tend to assume that other societies are just like their own. This is known as *ethnocentrism* and is a human perspective that is as old as the hills. (Richter, *Epic*, 21.)



The Fertile Crescent



[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

Before you open your Bible, jot down the names of seven characters from the Old Testament. If that took under a minute, go on to twelve, then twenty. With your Bible still closed, try to arrange these characters in chronological order. Next to each character list some detail you know about them: an aspect of their story, their hometown, their spouse. If someone asked you why this person's story was in the Bible, could you answer? What would you say?

Into the Story

Read Matthew 1.

- From the names in Jesus' genealogy, circle any of the names that are familiar to you.
- Place a check mark next to the names of those whose stories you could explain to a friend or child.
- Draw a question mark next to any of the characters whose stories disturb or confuse you.
- Do you recognize characters here who are significant to Jesus' genealogy?
- Can you guess why the New Testament writers would launch the first book of the New Testament with a genealogy?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Out of the Old Testament characters on your list, identify one with whom you most connect. What parts of their story resonate with you? Now identify one character and/or story that you find really challenging to accept or to understand. List both characters with your reasons. What do you want to know about these characters? What doors or barriers stand between you and a clear understanding of them?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

How would you respond if someone asked you today, “Why does the Old Testament (the backstory of the New Testament) matter to your Christian faith?” List some of your responses.

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

Imagine that you needed a new job. What are the first steps you would take? Who would you ask for advice or direction? Where would you look and why? What are the five things that would be most important for you to emphasize to a potential employer on your résumé?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 29:1–30.

- Find aspects of this story that are culturally different from yours. Underline or list them with their verse references.
- Are there differences here between their culture and yours that illicit a stronger reaction from you?

Israelite society was enormously different from contemporary life in the urban West. Whereas modern Western culture may be classified as urban and “bureaucratic,” Israel’s society was “traditional.” More specifically, it was “tribal.” (Richter, *Epic*, 25.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

If you were Jacob, how would you react to Laban's deception? Put yourself in Rachel's sandals. How would you react to having the man promised to you given to someone else? Especially your older sister! Do you think Rachel was in love at this point? Consider Leah. How do you think she felt about being given in marriage to a man who wanted someone else? How in the world would these two women handle the wedding night? How in the world would they handle their future relationship? What is your opinion of Laban at this point?

My goal as regards the great barrier is to bring the heroes of the Old Testament into focus, such that you can see them as real people who lived in real places and struggled with real faith, just as you do. We are "Abraham's offspring" (Gal. 3:29 [NASB]), and his story is our story. (Richter, *Epic*, 17.)

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Compare the story of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah to your own story. Have you had any experiences similar to these characters? What significance do you see in the differences between your story and this one? Are there other stories in the Bible where your inner child screams "That's not fair!"? Perhaps the warfare techniques of the conquest in the book of Joshua or the social position of women in the Old Testament? How could understanding the biblical culture help you to better understand the Old Testament? Over the course of this study, your understanding of the time, space, and culture of the Old Testament story is going to grow tremendously. The goal? Helping you understand your Old Testament better will help you understand your God and your other family better!

DAY THREE

First Contact

Think about who and what comprises your household. Who are the members? How many are there? What is the pecking order in your household? Who (if anyone) is in charge and of what? Who leads and how? How does your household structure compare to your parents', siblings', friends'?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 38.

- In Genesis 38:6, Judah marries Tamar to his firstborn, Er. According to Israel's patrilocal culture, in whose household does Tamar reside?
- In Genesis 38:11, Tamar now lives in her biological father's house. Why has she moved?
- Do you find anything in this passage indicating that this departure was not the cultural norm? If so, what?
- What does Tamar do when she finds out where her father-in-law is? What action does she take?
- What does Judah declare to be done when he learns that Tamar is pregnant?

As we open the Bible, however, we find that the God of history has chosen to reveal himself through a specific human culture. To be more accurate, he chose to reveal himself in several incarnations of the same culture. (Richter, *Epic*, 23.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Do you find that you are able to separate yourself from your own cultural norms as you read through Tamar's story? Do you see Tamar as a real person in a real place in a real time? In your mind, which characters/actions are good and which are bad? Why? List each of the main characters and offer one word to describe each of those main characters.

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Do you ever find yourself avoiding certain Bible stories because they make you uncomfortable, disapproving of the things the characters are doing, or perhaps finding the scenarios are too violent? Have you ever noticed that a lot of children's Bibles avoid these stories as well? Throughout this study, we challenge you to stop dodging. Rather, thoughtfully consider the characters as real people who are quite human and fallen, in real places that are probably geographically and culturally very different from your own, struggling with real faith in real circumstances. The objective? To come out with a better understanding of the character of our God and a better understanding of his people past and present across the globe.

DAY FOUR

First Contact

If you were to write your last will and testament tonight, for whom would you make provision in the document? Who would be responsible for the care of your dependents? Why would you make provisions for these persons and how would you go about choosing your guardians?

Into the Story

Read Deuteronomy 25:5–10 (known as the Levirate law).

- According to this Israelite law, “when brothers live together” (i.e. in extended families living under one roof), what responsibilities does a surviving brother have to his widowed sister-in-law? List each command.
- What do you think the intended outcome of this law might be?
- In the case of an injustice, what is the surviving wife instructed to do?
- What responsibilities belong to the community leaders?

The people of Israel considered it a serious offense for a man to fail to fulfill this responsibility to his dead brother. . . . Although this system seems very odd to most Westerners, it worked. The inheritance of the deceased brother was properly conferred upon his legal offspring, and the young widow was secured within the household. Thus her current need for food and shelter was met, and her future need for a child to care for her in her old age was addressed as well. (Richter, *Epic*, 31–32.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In the setting of the shaming described in Deuteronomy 25, what were the consequences for the brother who refused his responsibilities? What were the consequences for the widow? How do you think these consequences affected the extended family?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

In today's world, would a widow in similar circumstances need help? Recast this woman into a modern-day equivalent. To whom would such a woman turn for help? Who, if anyone, would be responsible for helping her? What would the community's reaction be if she did not receive help? Would it be different if it were a widower instead of a widow? Why?

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

Have you ever gone through the loss of a mentor or leader? Perhaps a boss who had made a big impact on your professional growth or a pastor who felt called to another ministry? Perhaps the premature death of a parent? What fears came with that transition? What losses did you face? What words or actions did you find comforting?

Into the Story

Read John 13:31–14:24.

- What is the setting of the narrative?
- What happened just before Jesus' Passover meal with his disciples? What happened immediately following (John 18:1–5)?
- Focusing on 14:1–18, notice where familial or household language is used. Underline this language in your Bible.

... the scene is a private one—Jesus' closest friends have gathered for one last meal together. Just after the meal, Jesus begins telling his disciples about his impending departure and the troubles that will follow. Of course, the disciples are confused and upset. Peter asks the question on everyone's heart: "Where are You going? . . . and can we go with you?" (John 13:36–37). (Richter, *Epic*, 39.)

- Note verse 2 (NASB) in which Jesus says: “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places.” How does your Bible translate the phrase “dwelling places”? Check several translations.
- Why do you think that Jesus speaks of his father’s house here?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Think about being one of the disciples at the Last Supper. Jesus is telling you he is leaving, right at what should be the apex of the story. If you were Peter or James or John or Thomas, what would you be feeling right now? What would *you* ask Jesus?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

If we want to know our God better, we’re going to need to understand his story better. Indeed, if the Bible is going to become our story, we’re going to have to put ourselves back into the biblical characters’ time and space. As you wind down your study guide for the week, ask yourself what steps you are willing to take over the course of this study to accomplish that goal.

WEEK TWO

Redemption

A Word from the Author

“Our objective as Christians is to understand the story of redemption, the Bible. More than anything else, we want to hear the words of the biblical writers as they were intended and to claim their epic saga as our own. To accomplish this, we need to get past the great barrier—that chasm of history, language, and culture that separates us from our heroes in the faith” (Richter, *Epic*, 21).

Real Time and Space

Last week, we began to examine and inventory what we know about the characters and stories of the Old Testament—and more important, why it matters. We learned that the Old Testament is more than just an unfortunate preface to the New Testament, that it is an integral part of The Story, and that it is our story. We began to cross the great barrier by investigating Israel’s patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal culture.

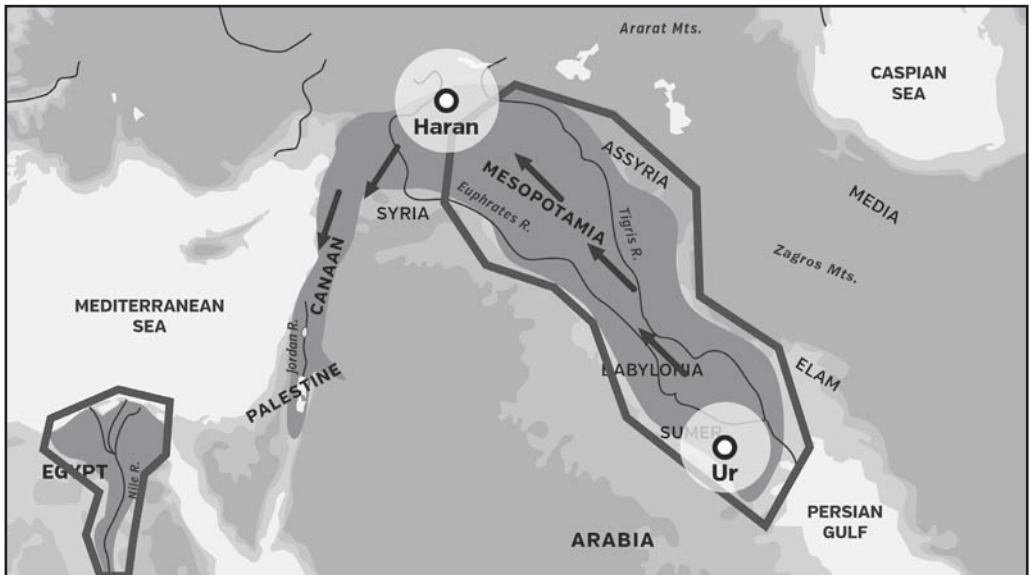
This week, we will continue to cross the cultural barrier by understanding what redemption meant to the real people of the Old Testament. This week we’re going to be all over our map, beginning in Mesopotamia in the city of Ur, and traveling to the land of Canaan/Israel/Palestine with Abraham and

patriarchal: *Having to do with the authority and centrality of the oldest living male member of a family in tribal society.*

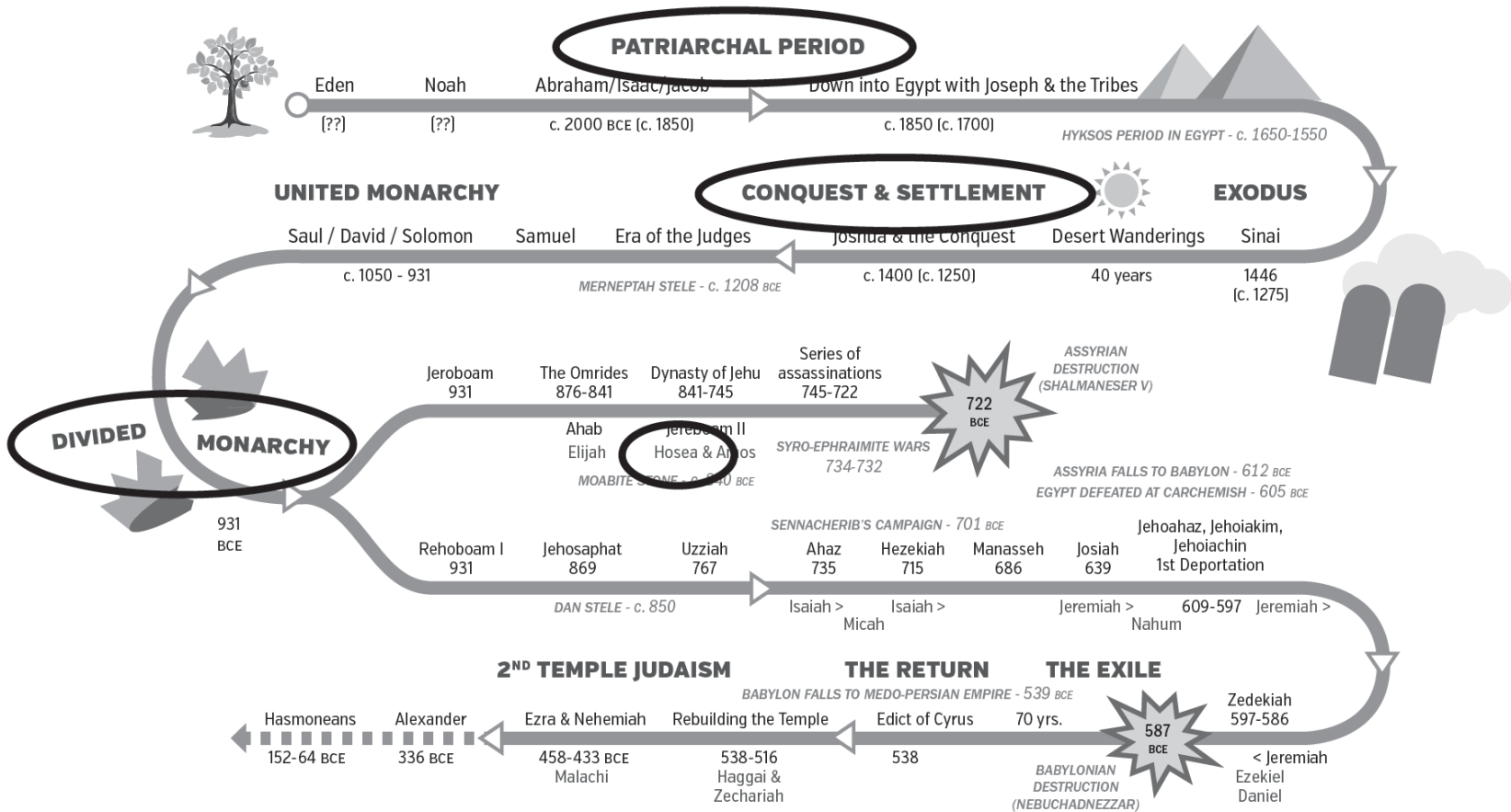
patrilineal: *Having to do with tracing ancestral descent through the male line in a tribal society.*

patrilocal: *Having to do with the living space of the family unit being built around the oldest male in a tribal society.*

his descendants in the Patriarchal Period. We will continue on through the period of Ruth during the Settlement, to the time of Hosea during the Divided Monarchy, and finally to the New Testament with Jesus and his disciples in Jerusalem. Take a moment to locate the places on the map as well as the time periods on the timeline on the following page.



Abraham's Migration into Canaan



[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

If you are married, how did you and your spouse meet? If you are not married, how did your parents meet? After you got married, where did you/they live? Perhaps you/they come from a culture in which marriages are arranged. Have you ever witnessed a clash of cultures in your marriage or that of your parents? What has been your experience?

Into the Story

We begin this week with some review about ancient Israel's patrilocal and patrilineal culture. Read Genesis 24:1–27, 50–67.

- What did Abraham ask his servant to swear he would and would not do?
- Why was the servant not to take Isaac back to Abraham's homeland?
- What was the relationship between Nahor (Rebekah's grandfather) and Abraham?
- After Abraham's servant recounts his mission and his story, how do Laban (Rebekah's brother) and Bethuel (Rebekah's father) respond?
- What was Rebekah's response? Does her response surprise you?
- What aspects of ancient Israelite culture (as opposed to your native culture) do you observe in this story?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In the biblical account, it appears that Rebekah did not hesitate to say “yes” to Abraham’s servant and thereby agree to be Isaac’s wife. Put yourself in Rebekah’s world for a moment. How old do you imagine Rebekah was? What does she agree to leave? What does she gain? If you were Rebekah’s mother or her little sister, what emotions would you be feeling right now? Write down some of your thoughts.

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

In our own cultures, the story of Rebekah may seem strange. Arranged marriages and family compounds with fifteen to thirty family members are certainly not the norm in the West! It is sometimes easy for us to be critical of cultures that are different from our own. In an attempt to understand the ancient Israelites, and therefore better understand what the biblical writers are communicating, jot down three things that you see as positive aspects of Israelite culture involving marriage.

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

What is your position in your family's birth order? Are you the oldest, youngest, middle, or perhaps fifth out of eight? If you are a firstborn, what types of privileges and responsibilities were unique to you in your family? If you are not a firstborn, what sorts of unique privileges did you see your oldest sibling receiving from your parents? How did you feel about that at the time? How do you feel about it now?

Into the Story

Read Deuteronomy 21:15–17 and Genesis 25:19–34.

- According to the law found in Deuteronomy, what does the firstborn son receive as his inheritance?
- Why do you think that is?
- To whom did Rebekah give birth?
- Who was the firstborn, and therefore the one to whom the birthright was due?
- For what did he exchange his birthright and why?
- In Jacob and Esau's patrilineal culture, what implications did the switching of the birthright have?
- Where is Rebekah in this mix? Where is Isaac?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

The biblical author tells us that Esau was famished, so much so that he chose food over his double-portioned inheritance. Thinking about Israel's tribal culture and the privileged position of the firstborn male, how do you think Esau felt after he realized the implications of his choice? How do you think his father felt about his choice?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

If you know the rest of the story of Esau and Jacob, you know that Jacob becomes the father of twelve sons who become known as the twelve tribes of Israel. One of those tribes is Judah, from whose line Jesus comes. In a tribal culture in which the norm was that the eldest son was the one to lead the family, God, in opposition to that cultural norm, has chosen the younger son to lead. What does this tell you about God's character and his ways? Do you think God felt constrained to operate according to Jacob's deceit? Or do you think God was free to do and choose as he wished?

DAY THREE

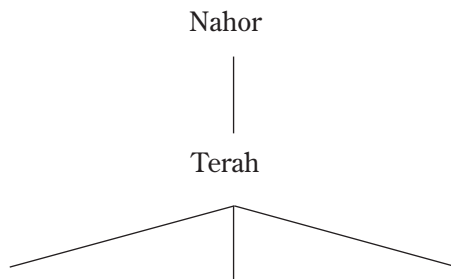
First Contact

When did you leave home (i.e., your “father’s house”)? What was the catalyst for the move? Was it school, military service, marriage, a family breakdown of some sort? When did you establish your new household? What were the economics of that move? Does your current household continue to interact with your extended family (parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins)? If so, when and how? How does your household story compare to that of other people you know?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 11:27–12:5; 13:1–14:16.

- Who belonged to Abram’s *bêt ’āb* (“father’s house[hold]”) in Genesis 11?
- Who is the patriarch?
- Where does Lot fit into that mix?
- Complete the family tree below to show the relationships.



- How does the household change in Genesis 12:5? What is the catalyst for this change?
- How does this household change again in chapter 13? What is the catalyst for the change this time?
- Who are the heads of the households now?
- What crisis occurs in Genesis 14:9–16?
- In the crisis of chapter 14, who is the enemy and what has he taken?
- In this crisis, what did Abram bring to the fight?
- How does your understanding of *bêt 'āb* and the tribal structure of the society affect your understanding of this narrative?
- Did you glean anything that you may not have noticed in previous readings?

When the patriarch died, or when the *bêt 'āb* became too large to sustain itself, the household would split into new households, each headed by the now-oldest living male family member. (Richter, *Epic*, 27.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In the story of Abram and Lot, ponder the risks Abram took on Lot's behalf. As Lot was a grown nephew with his own inheritance, did Abram *have* to take those risks? What would his community have thought of Abram if he had turned a blind eye to Lot's crisis?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

As you ponder Abram's rescue of Lot, think about what he risked to stand up for his kinsman. Would you have been willing to take the same risks for a relative, or would it have been easier to just say, "Alas, that one is out of my control."? Do you currently know someone who has been captured by a "strong enemy" such as substance addiction, domestic abuse, or pornography and sexual addiction? What do you think we as Christians and as a church should be willing to risk to rescue them?

[[DAY FOUR]]

First Contact

Remember a time when you felt you were in need. Perhaps you were blindsided by a financial crisis and needed money, fast. Perhaps you were moving to a new community and couldn't find a permanent place to live or work. Perhaps you had been abandoned or falsely accused. Perhaps your sink was overflowing with dirty dishes, your laundry piles were taller than your toddler, and your infant had not yet slept through the night. What were your fears? How did you resolve the situation? To whom did you turn for help?

Into the Story

Read the book of Ruth.

- In Ruth 1, who is the patriarch of Naomi's household?
- Who are the members of the household?
- How does Ruth come into the household?
- What crisis threatens to destroy this household?
- Why does Naomi try to send Ruth and Orpah away?
- Depending on your translation, Boaz is described as a "close relative," "close kinsmen," and/or "redeemer." Considering the narrative development in chapter 4, what might you infer about the roles and responsibilities of kinsmen, relatives, and/or redeemers in Israel's tribal culture?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Which character in this story most interests you? Do you most relate to Naomi, an older woman who finds herself in a strange land without husband or children, economic or legal stability? Do you relate to Ruth, who in loyalty makes the very risky decision to leave her home to care for another with no economic or legal resources on her side? Do you relate to Boaz, a man with influence and resources who wants to do the right thing, but does not necessarily know how? Put yourself in the shoes of your chosen character and write down what is foremost on your mind. What are you feeling? What are you worried about?

tribal culture: *A society in which the family is the axis of the community and an individual's link to the economic structures of society is through the family.*

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Think again about how seriously the Israelites took their responsibility for the well-being of the kinsmen within their households. Think again about our New Covenant in which we are instructed to consider other believers as brothers and sisters, members together of the household of faith. How might we consider emulating Boaz in stepping up to the plate as a church member and saying: "Yes, I will redeem."?

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

Have you ever been forced by life circumstances into a situation that you knew might cause great pain or vulnerability? Perhaps a relationship, central to the core understanding of yourself, ended through death, divorce, or misunderstanding. Perhaps a business venture into which you had invested deeply simply failed, and you were responsible for picking up the pieces. Perhaps you felt God calling you to make a drastic change in career or location. Did you want to escape? Could you have? What were your concerns? Your fears?

Into the Story

Read Hosea chapters 1–3.

- What does the story tell us about Hosea in chapter 1?
- Given what you now know about Israelite culture, what might you infer about Gomer's place in her community prior to marrying Hosea?
- By the end of chapter 1, who are the members of Hosea's household?
- Write down a few details that we know about each character.
- At the opening of chapter 3, where is Gomer?
- Would you consider her a part of Hosea's household? Why or why not?
- By the end of this reading, who are the members of Hosea's household?
- How is the family crisis resolved?

Hosea was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel and had the unenviable privilege of being commissioned by Yahweh to live his life as an ongoing visual aid to Yahweh's relationship with Israel. Thus we are introduced to Hosea when he is instructed to "take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD" (Hos. 1:2 [NASB]). (Richter, *Epic*, 43.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In biblical narratives, the authors have limited space and time and do not always give us all the details we want. Are there questions you would like to ask God about why he called Hosea to marry Gomer? What questions might you have for Hosea? Gomer? Write down at least one question for each character. Then choose the most significant one and try to answer it from that character's point of view.

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Read the following lyrics or listen to Matthew Clark's "Redemption" from his CD *Bright Came the Word from His Mouth* (matthewclark.net). Write about what redemption means to you.

How can understanding what our God has done for us change the way that we worship him?

R E D E M P T I O N

Matthew Clark

Lot was in a dungeon bound, no chance he could escape
From enemies too strong for him, all hope for life was gone
But the Father of the house called his family to arms
Till the battle sword was sheathed and he was saved

Ruth by bitter chance enslaved, at the margin of the town
Griefs her grave had overfilled, a life left best unfound
But a man stood upright, made a homeless girl his wife
till the barren hopes she bore they birthed a king: redemption

Prophet take a prostitute and love her as your wife
She will make her vows to you, each a vow she'll break
Thirst for lovers drank her dry, drowned in debt she would have died
When Hosea paid the dowry for his bride: redemption, redemption

The Father sends his only son, to ransom all the lost
From enemies too strong for them, from the poverty of loss
In the squalor of the pit, where the willing faithless sit,
To the depths the love of God has sent his Word: redemption

WEEK THREE

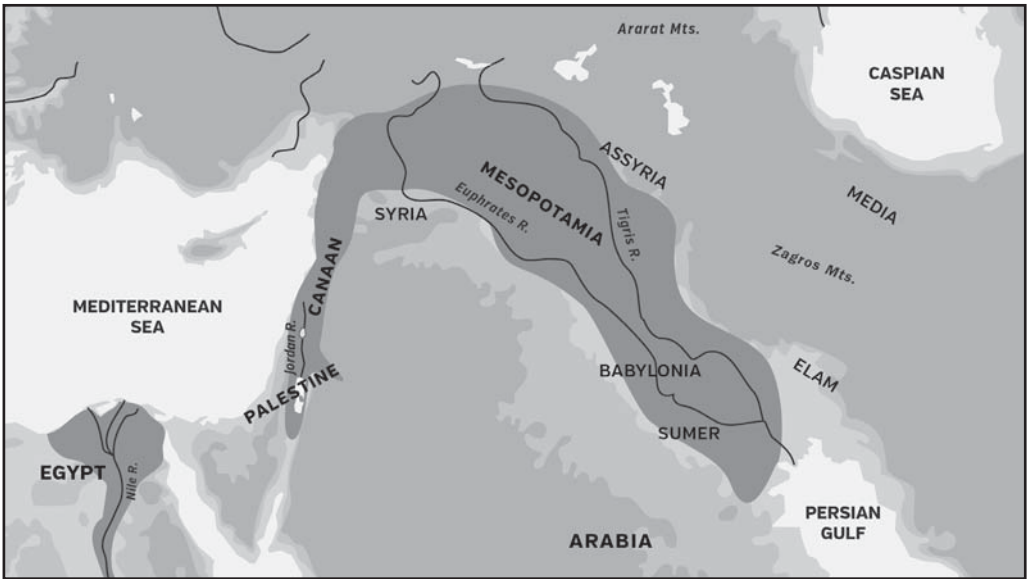
Real Time and Space

A Word from the Author

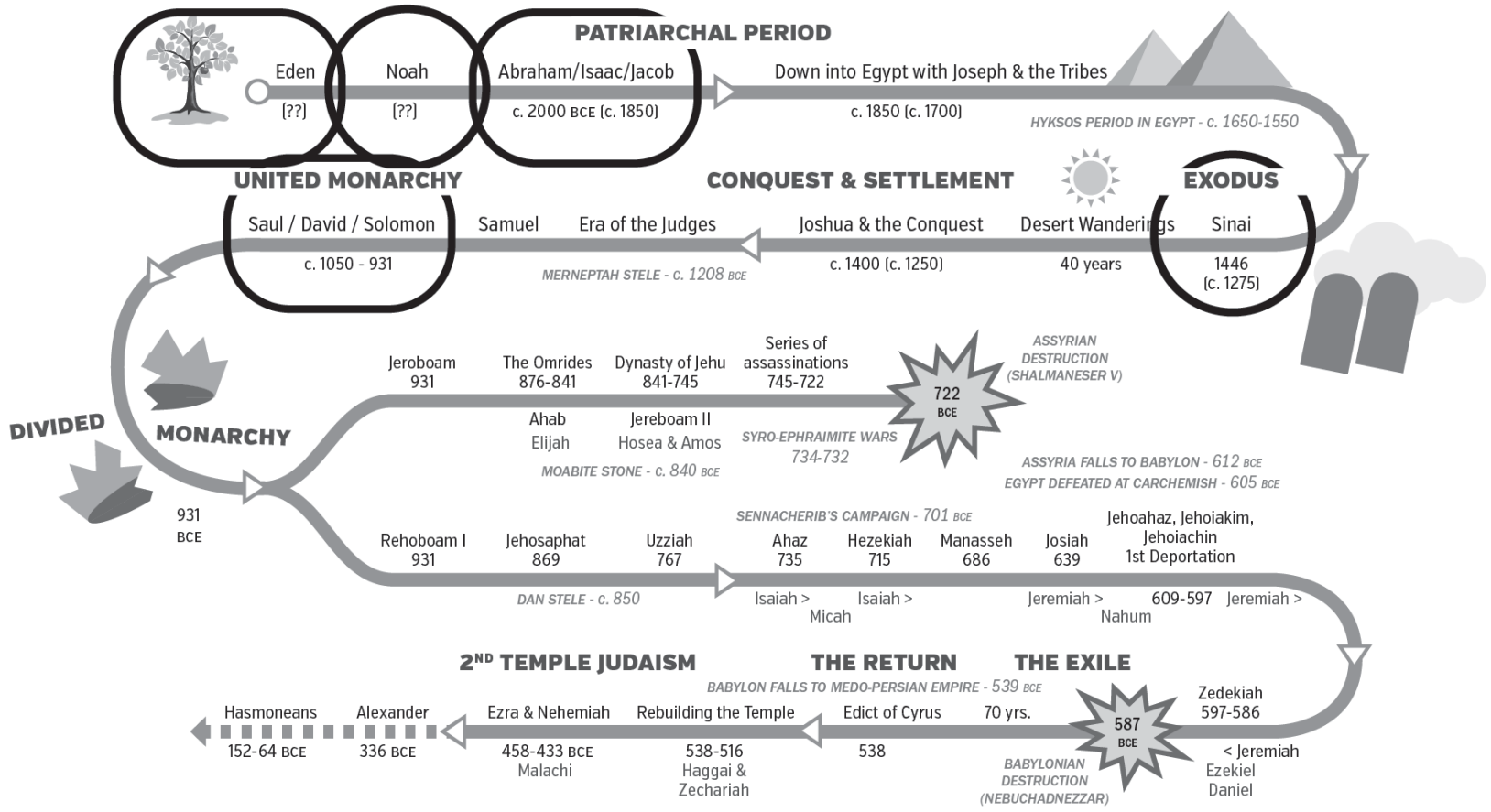
“The story of redemption comes to us through real time and space—real people, real places, real faith. And if we are going to understand this story, obviously, we are going to need to know something about the time and space our heroes occupied” (Richter, *Epic*, 47).

Real Time and Space

This week we will be on a journey through the land of the Bible, visiting the three regions in which all of the narratives of the Old Testament take place: Mesopotamia, Israel, and Egypt. We will begin at the beginning and travel through time covering more than a thousand years. On the way we will meet several people, including the five central characters in the story of redemption: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David.



The Fertile Crescent



[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

Are you the kind of person who loves geography and maps, or are you the kind of person who gets overwhelmed or frustrated with trying to figure out where things are on a map? Why do you think that is?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 2:7–17.

- Underline, circle, or highlight anything that helps to identify the location of the Garden.
- Who are the characters involved in this story?
- From the author’s perspective, where is the Garden located? What does this tell us about the author’s location?
- What are the names of the four rivers in Eden?
- Turn back to the map on page 32. Two of the rivers about which we just read are identified on the map. Highlight those rivers.

Read Genesis 8:1–4 and 11:1–9. (*If you are not familiar with the story of Noah and the flood, you may want to read Genesis chapters 6–8.*)

- In Genesis 8, where did the ark come to rest?
- Turn back to the map on page 32 again. Find and highlight the place at which the ark came to rest.

- In Genesis 11, where do you think the Plain of Shinar might be? What about the City of Babel? Turn once again to the map on page 32. Find and highlight your best guesses.

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

How do you think the landscape of the biblical writers' worlds affects the way they tell the Story of Redemption? What topographical features, flora, or fauna do you think they would imagine as beautiful and valuable?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

What is the most beautiful place you've ever been? What features of that location make it beautiful to you? How do you think your life experiences have shaped that image of paradise?

[[DAY TWO]]

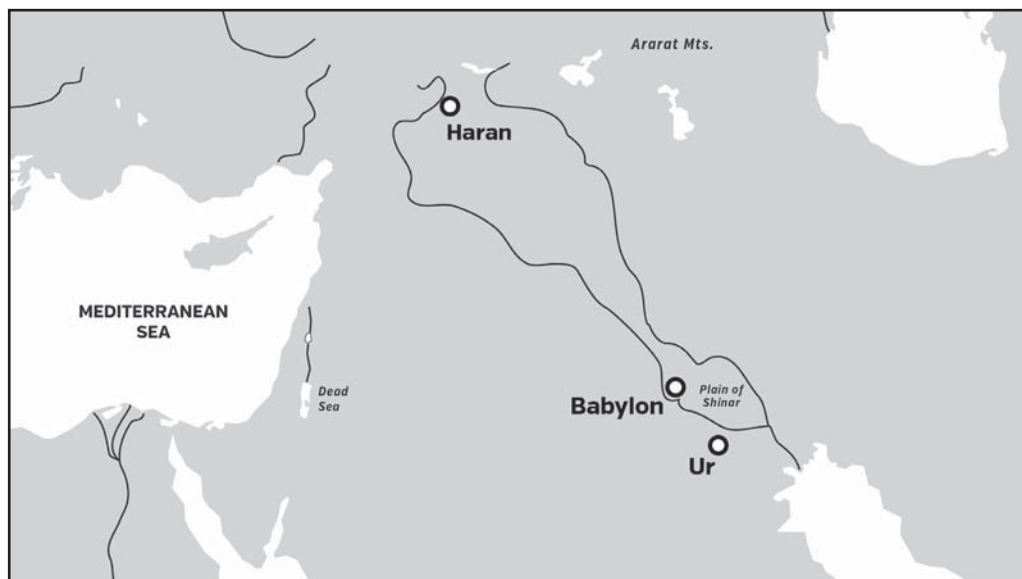
First Contact

Are you, or were your parents, immigrants? Can you recall any stories regarding the challenges of being a foreigner in a foreign land? What emotions are attached to those stories? If you have no immigrants in your story, have your travels ever dropped you into a country that was not familiar to you—where they spoke a foreign language or marked their highways with signs you could not read? How were you feeling as you approached your destination?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 11:27–12:5.

- Underline or circle place names as you read through the passage.
- From where did Terah, Abram, Lot, and Sarai begin their journey?
- Where did they intend to go?
- Where did they first settle?
- Where did Abram, Sarai, and Lot go after leaving Haran?
- On the following map, trace Abram’s journey from his hometown to his final home. As you trace his journey, label the rivers you learned about in yesterday’s study. Also label the land of Canaan. To check your work see the map for Week 9 on page 122.



Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Imagine being Sarai (Abram's wife) or Lot (Abram's nephew) on this journey. What thoughts go through your head when Abram tells you that you are packing up your lives and moving a thousand miles away? What emotions are attached to leaving your country and your relatives? How about when you ask him where you are going and his response is "to the land which Yahweh will show me"?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Have you ever had to leave your home and your family to go to an unfamiliar place? Perhaps it was for college or a new job? Perhaps your unit was deployed to an overseas location? Perhaps it was a result of your parents moving and you didn't have a choice? Suppose God asks you to go to a foreign land. How easy or difficult would it be for you to go in obedience to what he asks you to do?

DAY THREE

First Contact

Has God ever brought unimaginable good through a circumstance or situation that was incredibly difficult or painful? Could you even begin to imagine the good in the midst of the pain? Afterward, was it difficult to let go of the pain and embrace the blessing that followed? Are you still waiting for a blessing to come?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28, 36; 45:1–10.

- Underline or circle place names as you read through the passages.
- What was the attitude of Joseph’s brothers toward him? Why?
- Where did Joseph go to look for his brothers?
- Where did he find them?
- What did his brothers do to him?
- Where does Joseph end up?
- What was Joseph’s attitude toward his brothers and what they had done?
- Where does Joseph tell his brothers they and their families will live?
- Trace Joseph’s journey on the following map. Also label Canaan and Egypt on the map.



Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Put yourself in Joseph's shoes. If Joseph had kept a journal, what would the journal entry be for the day that his brothers sold him into slavery? How about when Potipher's wife's false accusation landed him in a foreign jail? What would his entry be on the night before he revealed his identity to his brothers? As you imagine his journal entries, think about his fear in the bottom of that cistern, his bitterness toward his brothers, his shock at the accusation, his despair in prison. Think about the foreign language he had to learn his first day on the job, the smells he might have encountered in that prison, and his sense of being a different person when he at last saw his brothers again.

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Think back to the events you recalled in today's opening activity. How was your response to your situation different or similar to Joseph's response? What insights have you gained from Joseph's response to his situation?

DAY FOUR

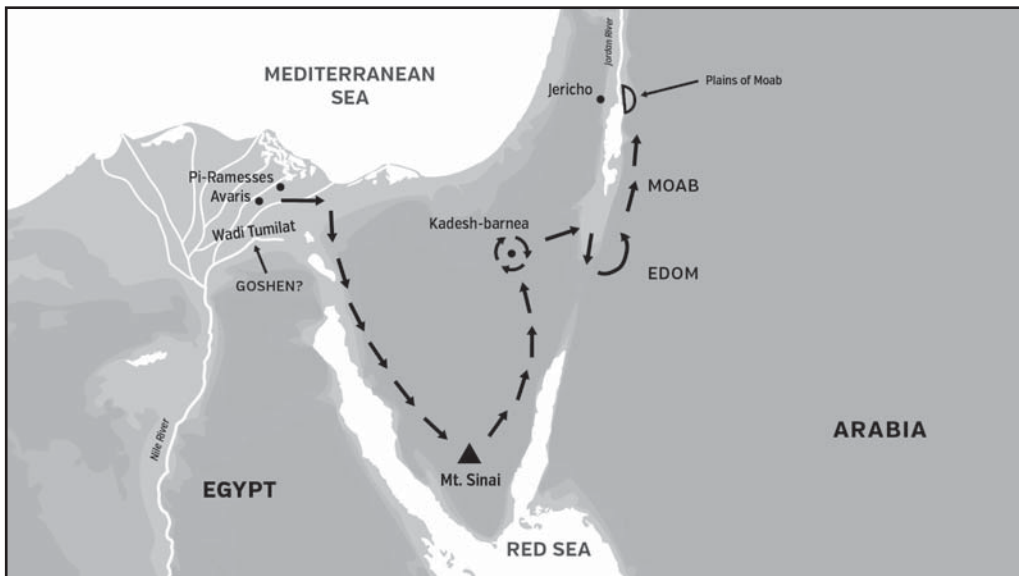
First Contact

Have you ever faced a situation in which you knew that God had promised you success? Perhaps it was a job interview, a long-awaited but difficult conversation, or a presentation at school. When you actually entered the situation, did you still have that same confidence?

Into the Story

After being miraculously delivered from Egypt, Moses and the nation of Israel spent one year at Mt. Sinai receiving the covenant from God. In that covenant, God promised them success in conquering the land of Canaan. After an eleven-day journey from Mt. Sinai to the southern edge of the Promised Land, they made their first attempt to enter the land. Read Numbers 13:1–14:45.

- Underline or circle references to time as you read through the passages.
- Underline or circle place names as you read through the passages.
- Why did Moses send the spies into Canaan? What were his instructions to them?
- What did the majority of the spies report back to Moses? What did Caleb and Joshua report back to Moses?
- In one word, what made the ten spies say they couldn't take the land?
- How did the people of Israel respond? Why?
- Ultimately, against whom were the Israelites grumbling?
- What was the result of the peoples' grumbling?



The Exodus and Journey to the Promised Land

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

If you were one of the twelve spies who were sent into the land of Canaan, what would your report have been? After a year in the desert, picture the shift from brown to green, the fertile fields, the large clusters of grapes. Now picture the fortified cities, the settled people who were “men of great size” who made you look (and feel) like “grasshoppers.” Would you be like the ten who looked at these warriors and lost confidence? Or would you have been like Caleb and Joshua whose confidence was in Yahweh (Numbers 14:5–9)?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

How often do we miss out on a blessing or promise from God because we allow fear to rule over us, robbing us of our trust in God? The psalms are an excellent place to turn when we are in these situations. Psalm 46:1–3 reminds us that God is a “refuge and strength.” Psalm 121 reminds us that the Lord who made heaven and earth is our help. I challenge you to memorize these psalms so that when fears come you can fight those fears by reminding yourself that “my help comes from the Lord.”

If you have access to the internet, you may also want to listen to Tricia Brock’s song entitled “Always” from her CD *The Road*.

P S A L M 46:1-3

God is our refuge and strength,
 an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
 and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam
 and the mountains quake with their surging.

P S A L M 121

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
 where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
 the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip—
 he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel
 will neither slumber nor sleep.
The LORD watches over you—
 the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
 nor the moon by night.
The LORD will keep you from all harm—
 he will watch over your life;
the LORD will watch over your coming and going
 both now and forevermore.

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

Have you ever wanted to step up and do something that no one else was willing to do? Perhaps it was standing up to someone who was mistreating you or a friend. Perhaps confronting an unjust situation at work. In situations like that, how many times have you heard advisors or mentors say, “You can’t do that. That problem is just bigger than you are.”?

Into the Story

Read 1 Samuel 17:1–54.

- Underline or circle place names as you read through the passages.
- Who are the characters in the story? Circle or underline their names.
- Where was Goliath from? Highlight his hometown on the following map.
- Where was David from? Highlight his hometown on the following map.
- Highlight Philistine Gath and Israelite Bethlehem on the map on the next page. Draw a line between them. The cities of Azekah and Socoh lie west of the midway point. This is the general location of the Valley of Elah where the armies camped. Which army do you think camped to the west? Which to the east?
- What was Goliath asking the Israelites to do?
- What was the response of Saul and his army?
- Note David’s brothers’ attitude toward David when he shows up. What was their response when he volunteered to fight?

WEEK THREE

- What was Saul's first response to David when he volunteered to fight?
- Spend some time with David's response (vv. 34–37). What was the source of David's confidence?
- What was Goliath's attitude toward David?
- Spend some time with David's approach to the battle (vv. 45–47). What was the source of David's confidence?
- Where did the Philistines flee? To what cities did the Israelites pursue them? Highlight these cities on the map.



Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Imagine yourself being a television reporter on the scene of the battle between David and Goliath. After reporting about David's victory over Goliath, you have the opportunity to interview David along with those who told him he was too young to fight (which technically he was!). What questions would you ask David's brother Eliab? King Saul? How do you think Eliab's and Saul's opinion of David changed after witnessing David's victory?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

If you are one of those people who hear the words of others telling you that you can't do something great because you are too small or too young or too inexperienced, how does the example of David encourage you? If you are one of those people who discourage others from attempting something great, how does the story of David challenge you?

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WEEK FOUR

Covenant

A Word from the Author

“Now that we have navigated the great barrier, it is time to start getting organized—get the clothes up off the floor, get some hangers and hooks, and get to work. The general law we will use to give order to the whole is one of the general laws that the Old Testament writers used to give order to their collection of documents: the concept of *covenant*. . . .

The biblical writers were theologians . . . [they] consciously organized their material in a systematic fashion in order to communicate certain central truths. What we want to do, then, is to rediscover their system and allow *their* system to organize *our* closets” (Richter, *Epic*, 69).

This week and next week we will look into the concept of covenant. We will discover what covenant meant in the ancient world, how covenants were made, and what their features are. We will also learn about two types of covenants found throughout the ancient Near East.

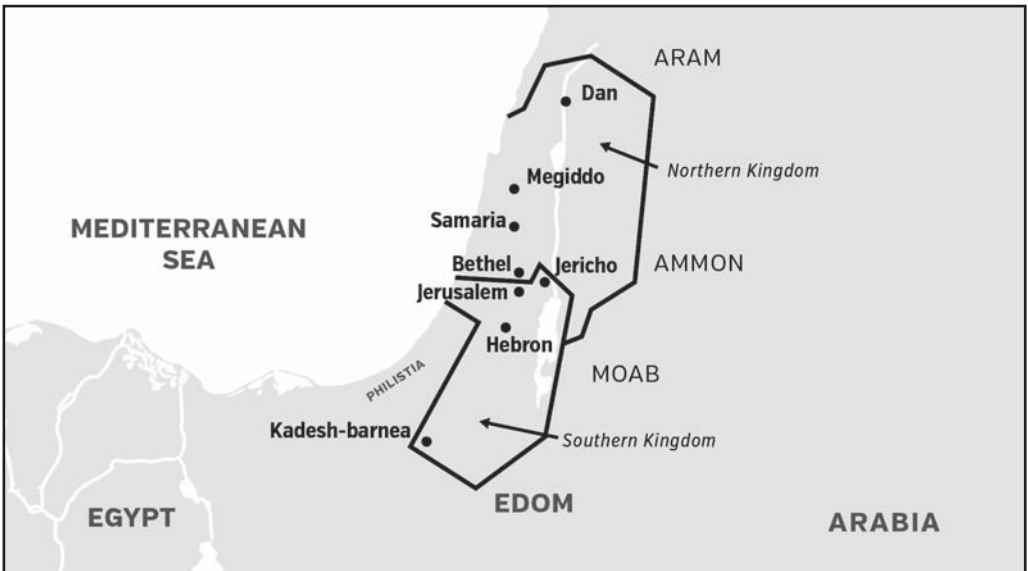
bĕrît: *A covenant is an agreement between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance.* (Mendenhall, George E. and Gary A. Herion. “Covenant.” Pages 1179–1202 in vol. 1 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New Haven: Yale University, 2008.)

Real Time and Space

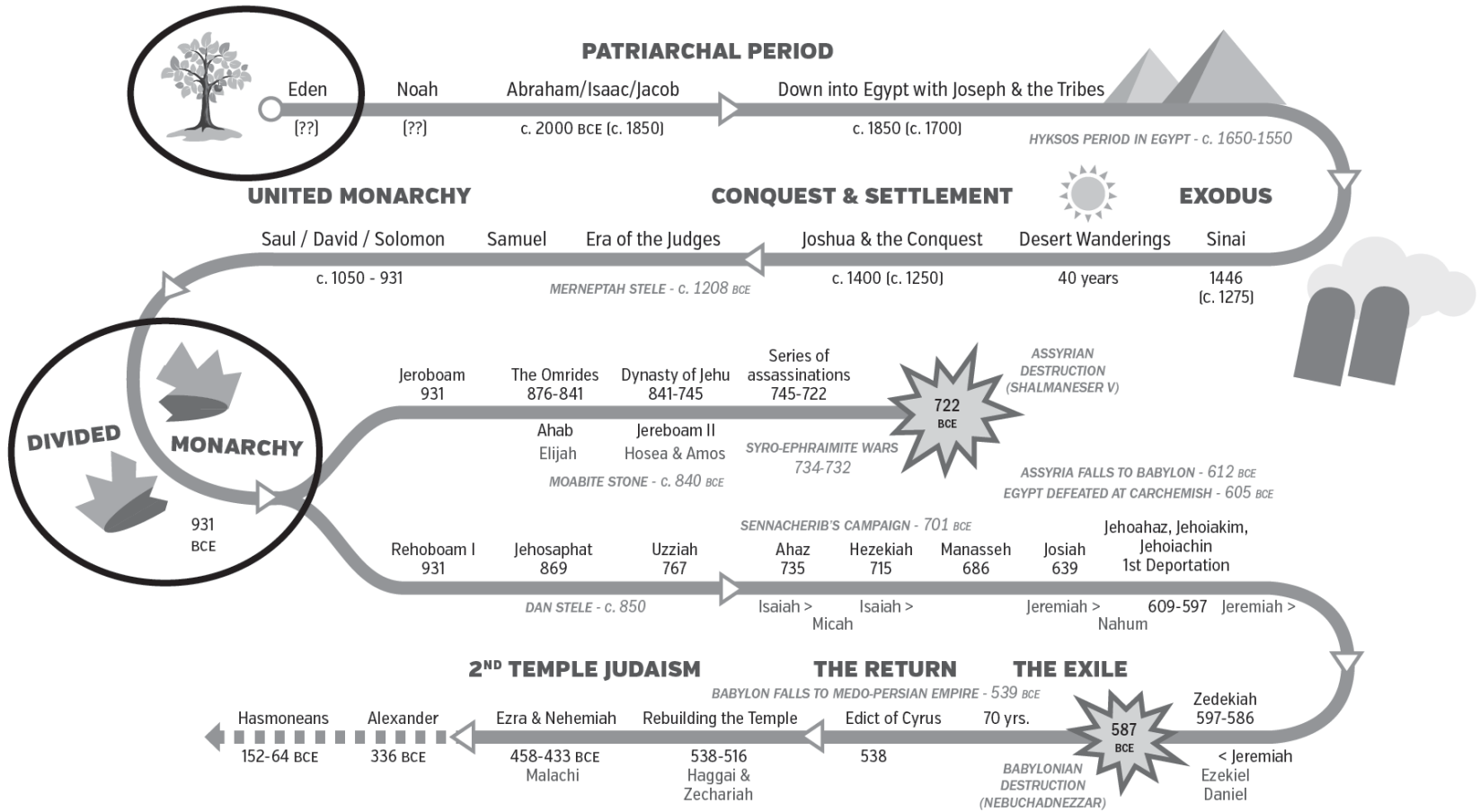
Our study this week will take us in real space from the garden of Eden to Haran and to the land of Canaan/Israel. We will also travel in time from the garden of Eden to the time of the divided monarchy in Israel.



The Fertile Crescent



The Divided Monarchy



PATRIARCHAL PERIOD

UNITED MONARCHY

CONQUEST & SETTLEMENT

EXODUS

DIVIDED MONARCHY

2ND TEMPLE JUDAISM

THE RETURN

THE EXILE

Eden [??]

Noah [??]

Abraham/Isaac/Jacob
c. 2000 BCE (c. 1850)

Down into Egypt with Joseph & the Tribes
c. 1850 (c. 1700)

HYKSOS PERIOD IN EGYPT - c. 1650-1550

Saul / David / Solomon
c. 1050 - 931

Samuel
Era of the Judges

Joshua & the Conquest
c. 1400 (c. 1250)

Desert Wanderings
40 years

Sinai
1446 (c. 1275)

MERNEPTAH STELE - c. 1208 BCE

931 BCE

Jeroboam 931

The Omrides 876-841

Dynasty of Jehu 841-745

Series of assassinations 745-722

ASSYRIAN DESTRUCTION (SHALMANESER V)

722 BCE

SYRO-EPHRAIMITE WARS 734-732

Ahab Elijah

Hosea & Amos
MOABITE STONE - c. 840 BCE

Jereboam II

ASSYRIA FALLS TO BABYLON - 612 BCE
EGYPT DEFEATED AT CARCHEMISH - 605 BCE

Rehoboam I 931

Jehosaphat 869

Uzziah 767

SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN - 701 BCE

Ahaz 735

Hezekiah 715

Manasseh 686

Josiah 639

Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin 1st Deportation

DAN STELE - c. 850

Isaiah > Micah

Isaiah > Micah

Jeremiah > Nahum

609-597 Jeremiah >

BABYLON FALLS TO MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE - 539 BCE

Edict of Cyrus 538

70 yrs.

587 BCE

BABYLONIAN DESTRUCTION (NEBUCHADNEZZAR)

Zedekiah 597-586

< Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel

Hasmoneans 152-64 BCE

Alexander 336 BCE

Ezra & Nehemiah 458-433 BCE Malachi

Rebuilding the Temple 538-516 Haggai & Zechariah

[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

Do you remember your homework from last week's video? How did you do with memorizing the three geographical areas and the five people?

Into the Story

Today we are going to review the geography and people that we studied in the last session. Take a moment to identify the three locations (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Canaan/Israel/Palestine) on the map on page 48 and the five people (Adam is represented by Eden and Moses is represented by Sinai) on the timeline found on page 49.

As we look at the structure of the Old Testament, we find that not only do the five people provide historical markers throughout the story, but they are also the people around whom the theology of the Old Testament is organized. That theology is covenant theology.

Read the following to familiarize (or re-familiarize) yourself with our five people. As you read through these passages, note how often you see the word "covenant" or the phrase "make (cut) a covenant."

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| ■ Genesis 3 | Adam (Eden) |
| ■ Genesis 6 | Noah |
| ■ Genesis 12 | Abraham |
| ■ Exodus 20 | Moses (Sinai) |
| ■ 2 Samuel 7 | David |

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Can you imagine what hearing the voice of God, whether directly or through a prophet, must have been like for these men? How do you anticipate God communicated with them—a voice in their mind, a sense of knowing in their heart, an audible sound? As we read their stories, keep in mind that it is the Creator of the cosmos speaking to each of them. How do you think they would have felt knowing that each of them played a part in God’s plan?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Read the lyrics on the following page or listen to Matthew Clark’s “Overture” from his CD *Bright Came the Word from His Mouth* (matthewclark.net).

How has your newly found knowledge of the geography of the Old Testament affected the way you read and understand your Bible? Now that you know the distance that Abraham had to travel from Ur to Canaan in obedience to Yahweh, how does your image of Abraham’s faith change? What do you learn about God’s character as you read about his interactions with his people?

OVERTURE

Matthew Clark

CHORUS

Gather all you who will, hear of the God, slain for his children's sin
Come the story recall, all he has done, to bring his family home

The overflowing holy heart, Of God begat a world of good
Adam's treason echoes still, lays the children in the ground
Waves of sin rose high and wide, Noah listened through the noise
A voice like many waters surged, Up through death will come new birth

CHORUS

Gather all you who will, hear of the God, slain for his children's sin
Come the story recall, all he has done, to bring his family home

Abram held the promise close, Raised the blade above his head
A son will surely give his life, Know the promise breaks the knife
By now Egypt like a grave, Held a captive people slaves
Moses thru the waters walked, And God made Israel his own

CHORUS

Gather all you who will, hear of the God, slain for his children's sin
Come the story recall, all he has done, to bring his family home

Israel a son enthroned, David sang I'm just a man
The only King who'll win this war, Is crowned above the cherubim
The virgin mother out of breath, Birthed the Word who dwelt in flesh
Mercy showed the world a face, Jesus punished in our place

CHORUS

Let His song fill the skies, Eden's reprise, God and man home again
Gather all you who will, hear of the God, slain for his children's sin
Come the story recall, all he has done, to bring his family home

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

Have you ever found yourself responsible for the well-being of a child? Those who are parents have obviously crossed that life-altering threshold, but what about older sisters and brothers? Long-term babysitters? Teachers? Have you ever been that random adult at the State Fair who finds a child hunched behind a concession stand sobbing because they cannot find their mom or dad? What is your first set of emotions when you perceive that a child might be in danger?

Into the Story

Read Exodus 2:1–10 and 2:16–25 and complete the table below.

	Exodus 2:1–10	Exodus 2:16–25
Who are Moses' kin?		
How did Moses become kin?		
With whom did Moses live?		
Note familial or household language.		

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

During the period when Egypt controlled the land of Canaan (approximately 1400–1350 BC), the Canaanite mayors (chiefs) of the cities were required to send to Egypt whatever the Pharaoh asked of them, including their sons and daughters. These children were immersed in Egyptian culture and educated in Egyptian customs and language. When they returned to their Canaanite homes, they were more Egyptian than Canaanite.

fictive kinship: *In tribal societies there were legal mechanisms or devices—we might even say legal fictions—by which outsiders, non-kin, might be incorporated into the kinship group.* (Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 7.

With that in mind, imagine Moses' mother as she places her baby in that basket. What are her thoughts? Her emotions? Her fears? Her hopes for her child?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Perhaps you can relate to Moses' mother. The situation may be different, but the feelings and emotions are just as real. If you have children, how did you feel the first time you left your child at daycare or took them to their first day of school? What about taking them to the doctor and watching them receive a shot? Perhaps you are not a mother, but instead you are the child who was dropped off at the daycare or school, or taken to the doctor to receive shots. What emotions and feelings do you remember?

DAY THREE

First Contact

Have you ever signed a contract or agreement? How was that contract confirmed? Have you ever had someone fail to keep the terms of a contract? How did you feel? What were the consequences of that broken contract?

Into the Story

Jacob had agreed to work for Laban in exchange for his two daughters in marriage. Laban, however, changed the terms of their agreement multiple times throughout the years (Gen. 29 and 30; 31:4–7). During his time with Laban in Haran, Jacob prospered—more children, more livestock, more property. As a result, Laban’s attitude toward Jacob changed (31:1–2) and Jacob fled from Laban to return to his father in Canaan (31:17–21). When Laban heard this, he pursued Jacob (31:22–24). Read Genesis 31:43–54.

- What does Laban ask Jacob to do (31:43–44)?
- What obligations are placed on both parties (31:52)?
- What evidence of oath-taking do you observe?
- How was this covenant sealed (31:54)?
- What evidence of blessings and/or curses do you observe?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

How do you think Jacob felt when Laban kept changing the terms of their original agreement? By the end of the narrative, what do you think Jacob's trust factor was? In light of that, how do you think Jacob felt when Laban asked him to enter into a covenant with him? Can you find something in the narrative that ensures that this covenant (unlike Laban's other promises) was indeed binding?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

In our modern world, the closest thing we have to an ancient covenant with its oaths and fictive kinship bonds is marriage. Typically people want to be married in a church, before God, and they want a minister to perform the ceremony. Now that you know something about the blessings and consequences of covenant-keeping and breaking, share some thoughts you might have regarding marriage and divorce in our culture.

DAY FOUR

First Contact

Sibling rivalry seems to be a regular visitor in most families. Sometimes it is the older one picking on the younger; sometimes it is the younger one driving the older to the point of distraction; sometimes it is parents who don't know how to value all of their children for who they are. In the end, however, if an outsider lays a hand on either sibling, just watch to see how quickly they put aside their differences and band together to protect each other. Do you have a story of this sort of situation yourself?

Into the Story

Our story today takes place during the time of the divided monarchy. Take a look back at the maps and timeline on pages 48–49. Locate the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah) on the map and the names Rehoboam I, Jeroboam, Jehoshaphat, and Ahab on the timeline.

We learned in Week 3 that the united monarchy lasted only through the reign of Solomon. Following Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam ruled with a "heavy yoke" (see 1 Kings 12), thus causing the northern tribes to split from the southern tribes in a civil war. Jeroboam was given the kingship of the Northern Kingdom with the stipulation that he would be faithful to the covenant. However, rather than being faithful to Yahweh, Jeroboam led the Northern Kingdom into syncretism by blending the Israelite religion with Baalism, from which the north never repented.

Read 2 Chronicles 18:1–3.

- Over which kingdom did Jehoshaphat rule (refer to timeline and 18:3)?
- Over which kingdom did Ahab rule (refer to timeline and 18:3)?
- What was the relationship between Jehoshaphat and Ahab (18:1, 3)?
- What was Ahab requesting of Jehoshaphat (18:3)?

- Based upon the language found in verse 3, what type of treaty existed between Jehoshaphat and Ahab? (See definitions below.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Knowing the history of the differences between the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom, how hard or easy do you think it was for Ahab to ask Jehoshaphat for help against an enemy?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

In our churches today we see many Christian brothers and sisters who are at odds with each other, usually over petty differences. Sometimes this sort of confrontation is a necessary part of a healthy Christian community. But how many times does this fighting over petty differences hinder our Christian witness? What sorts of predispositions do we have that make it difficult to get along with our brothers and sisters in Christ? Think about a conflict you are currently or have recently been involved in. Is it substantial? Or is it petty? Does it involve the essentials of the Christian faith and the well-being of your congregation? Or is it perhaps just cultural?

parity treaty: *An international agreement (covenant) made between equals.*

suzerain/vassal treaty: *An international agreement (covenant) made between a greater (suzerain) and a lesser (vassal) king.*

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

Has anyone ever lied to you? Have you ever made a promise, a covenant, or agreed to help someone because of this lie—in a manner that you would not had you known the truth? How did it feel when you realized you'd been betrayed? How did you respond?

Into the Story

Today we are with Joshua, Moses' successor, as he and the newly formed nation of Israel are in the throes of claiming their promised land—Canaan. Read Exodus 23:31–33 (cf. Exod. 34:12; Deut. 7:1–2) and Joshua 9:1–10, 15.

- In the Exodus passage, what was Yahweh's command concerning the inhabitants of the land?
- Underline all of the covenant language in the Joshua narrative.
- Who are the Gibeonites and what actions do they take to deceive the Israelites?
- What might their motivation have been?
- How do the Gibeonites describe their relationship to the Israelites (Josh. 9:8, 11, 15)?
- In light of their language, what kind of treaty did the Gibeonites ask Israel to enter into with them?
- What was the Israelites' great mistake (Josh. 9:14)?
- What was Joshua's response to the Gibeonites' deception (Josh. 9:16–20)?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Joshua's covenant with the Gibeonites conflicted with his orders from his suzerain, the Lord God. What do you think he was thinking when Gibeon was attacked and he was forced to defend them?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

How many decisions do you make a day in which you don't even think about asking God his opinion? Are some of those decisions ones that you *should* be asking him about? How can we become more intentional about consulting God before making promises or entering into agreements with others? What rewards might we gain from this?

WEEK FIVE

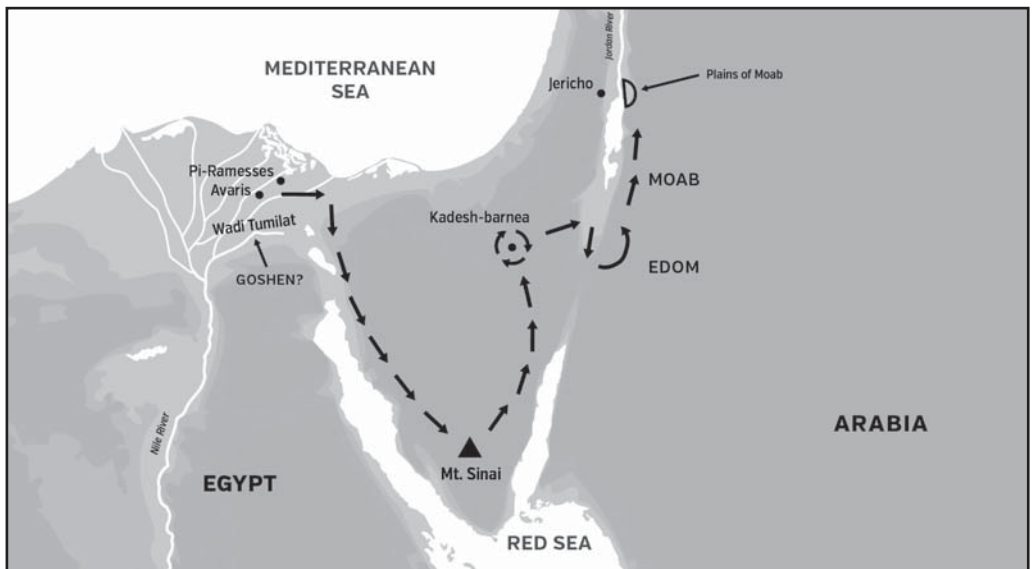
Treaty

A Word from the Author

“The secular *bĕrît* [covenant] served as a critically important element in structuring and informing Israel’s relationship with Yahweh. Through the *bĕrît* at Sinai, Israel’s self-identify was transformed from aggregate to nation. By means of the political concepts embedded in the *bĕrît*, Israel was introduced to theological concepts far beyond her ideological reach—monotheism being the chief of these. In his covenant, Yahweh declares to Israel who she is (his vassal), what she will do (his law), and when she will do it (his calendar of holy days). If she loves Yahweh, she will be blessed with peace and prosperity. If she hates him, she will be cursed with exile. Although Israel will be allowed the privilege of ruling themselves (maintaining their own government and many of their own traditions), as with any *bĕrît*, Israel will be expected to pay tribute (the laws of tithe and sacrifice), give unquestioned loyalty to her suzerain, fight his wars, obey his law, teach his stipulations to the next generation, and maintain a king who is faithful to the suzerain. Yahweh has become Israel’s sovereign lord and Israel is his servant. Although Israel will make use of the land, it is Yahweh who actually owns the land and produce. And Israel will demonstrate this reality three times a year, every year, when every male is required to appear before Yahweh with his treaty in hand (i.e., the three pilgrim feasts to the tabernacle/temple). Moreover, if Israel fails to obey the stipulations of the covenant, their sovereign lord will surrender Israel to her enemies. But if Israel is faithful, Yahweh will defend her against all military and economic afflictions. In this manner, the nation of Israel will retain the land grant of the great king—what we know as the Promised Land” (Richter, *Epic*, 90–91).

Real Time and Space

This week we will look at the way Yahweh used the political form of treaty to communicate the theological idea of monotheism to his people. We will be at Mt. Sinai this week, where Moses presents God's law to the newly rescued slaves from Egypt. We will then move with the children of Israel to the plains of Moab where Moses presents a second rendition of the law. Take a moment to locate Egypt, Mt. Sinai, and Moab on the map. On the timeline, locate the Exodus and the Conquest and Settlement.



The Exodus and Journey to the Promised Land



PATRIARCHAL PERIOD

Eden [??] Noah [??] Abraham/Isaac/Jacob c. 2000 BCE [c. 1850] Down into Egypt with Joseph & the Tribes c. 1850 [c. 1700] *HYKSOS PERIOD IN EGYPT - c. 1650-1550*

UNITED MONARCHY

Saul / David / Solomon c. 1050 - 931

CONQUEST & SETTLEMENT

Samuel Era of the Judges Joshua & the Conquest c. 1400 [c. 1250] *MERNEPTAH STELE - c. 1208 BCE*



EXODUS

Desert Wanderings 40 years Sinai 1446 [c. 1275]



DIVIDED

MONARCHY

931 BCE

Jeroboam 931

The Omrides 876-841

Dynasty of Jehu 841-745

Series of assassinations 745-722

722 BCE

ASSYRIAN DESTRUCTION (SHALMANESER V)

Ahab Elijah Jereboam II Hosea & Amos *MOABITE STONE - c. 840 BCE*

SYRO-EPHRAIMITE WARS 734-732

*ASSYRIA FALLS TO BABYLON - 612 BCE
EGYPT DEFEATED AT CARCHEMISH - 605 BCE*

Rehoboam I 931

Jehosaphat 869

Uzziah 767

SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN - 701 BCE

Ahaz 735

Hezekiah 715

Manasseh 686

Josiah 639

Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin 1st Deportation

DAN STELE - c. 850

Isaiah > Micah

Isaiah >

Jeremiah > Nahum

609-597 Jeremiah >

2ND TEMPLE JUDAISM

THE RETURN

THE EXILE

Hasmoneans 152-64 BCE

Alexander 336 BCE

Ezra & Nehemiah 458-433 BCE Malachi

Rebuilding the Temple 538-516 Haggai & Zechariah

Edict of Cyrus 538

70 yrs. *BABYLONIAN DESTRUCTION (NEBUCHADNEZZAR)*

587 BCE

Zedekiah 597-586

< Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel

BABYLON FALLS TO MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE - 539 BCE

WEEK FIVE

You will find below a chart entitled “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Format.” Each day’s study will be focused on a different section (or sections) of the treaty format. As you work through each day’s lesson, you will be asked to complete the appropriate spaces in the chart as follows:

- Day 1—Section I and II
- Day 2—Section III
- Day 3—Section IV
- Day 4—Section V and VI
- Day 5—Final blanks under the chart

Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Format and the <i>Bĕrît</i> at Mt. Sinai		
	Treaty Format	<i>Bĕrît</i> at Mt. Sinai
I.	<p>Preamble/Title Gives title of superior party.</p>	<p><i>Exodus 20:1-2; Deuteronomy 5:6a</i></p> <p><i>Who does Yahweh say that he is?</i></p>
II.	<p>Historical Prologue Furnishes the basis of obligation and the motive for accepting the covenant's stipulations as binding.</p>	<p><i>Exodus 20:1-2; Deuteronomy 5:6b; cf. Deuteronomy 1-3</i></p> <p><i>What has Yahweh done? What is the basis of obligation and motive for accepting the covenant's stipulations as binding?</i></p>
III.	<p>Stipulations/Obligations Imposed</p>	<p><i>Exodus 20:3-17; Deuteronomy 5:7-21; cf. Deuteronomy 12-26</i></p> <p><i>What is the first stipulation/commandment?</i></p>
IV.	<p>Deposition and Provision for Periodic Reading of the Treaty Before the People Treaty text archived in the temple of the vassal's chief deity (i.e., the witness to his oath).</p>	<p><i>Exodus 32:15; Exodus 25:21; cf. Exodus 40:20; Deuteronomy 10:5; Deuteronomy 31:10-12; cf. Exodus 24:7; Joshua 8:30-35</i></p> <p><i>Where were the tablets that recorded the covenant deposited? When were they read?</i></p>

TREATY

<p>V.</p>	<p>List of Witnesses The deities of both parties are summoned to act as witnesses to the oaths taken.</p>	<p><i>Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19–20; 31:28</i> <i>Who served as witness to the covenant?</i></p>
<p>VI.</p>	<p>Curses and Blessings</p>	<p><i>Deuteronomy 27:11–28:68; Deuteronomy 28:2, 15</i> <i>“And all these _____ will come upon you and overtake you if you _____ the Lord your God. . . . But if you do not _____ the Lord your God . . . all these _____ will come upon you and overtake you.”</i></p>

These acts of treaty-making were sealed by means of a ratification ceremony involving _____ and _____ (Exod. 24:3–8; cf. Gen. 15:17–21; Jer. 34:17–20).

[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

Can you remember when you first heard about the Ten Commandments? Or what you first learned about them? Perhaps as a child the story of Moses bringing the tablets down from the mountain fascinated you. Or as a college student you found yourself wondering if there might be a real God behind the giving of that law. Did you ever wonder what purposes God had in giving the Ten Commandments to the Israelites? How do those original impressions compare to your current understanding?

Into the Story

At the foot of Mt. Sinai, Moses is presenting God's law to the people en route to the Promised Land. Read Exodus 20:1–18.

- Who does Yahweh say that he is?
- What does Yahweh say that he has done?
- What does he ask the people to do?
- What is the significance of the order of the statements in verses 2–3?
- Underline or note any covenant language.
- Fill in the Sections I and II on the Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Format found on page 64.

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

What did the Ten Commandments teach the Israelites about their God? How did the Ten Commandments challenge them to live differently because of their new allegiance? Having come out of Egypt where many gods were worshiped, how do you think the Israelites understood what God was communicating to them?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

How do you think Israel's allegiance to these laws would have made them look and live differently than the nations around them? Does our allegiance to the New Covenant challenge us to live differently than those around us?

Like the Hittite treaties, the stipulations of Israel's covenant *follow* the historical prologue. The Israelites were not asked to obey Yahweh's stipulations in order to *obtain* his grace, they were asked to obey Yahweh's stipulations because he had already acted on their behalf. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. [Therefore] you shall . . ." [[Exod. 20:1–3 NASB]]. Sinai teaches the same truth as the gospel: God's actions on our behalf precede our actions on his behalf. We do not obey in order to win his grace; we obey because we have received his grace. (Richter, *Epic*, 85.)

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

Have you ever listened to a lecture or sermon when the speaker wanted to emphasize a single, critically important point? What did the speaker do to emphasize that point?

Into the Story

Today we will stay in the Ten Commandments to discover what critically important point Yahweh wanted to emphasize to his people. Read Exodus 20:1–6.

- Underline or note any covenant language.
- What stipulations/obligations does Yahweh place on the Israelites?
- Why does Yahweh place these stipulations/obligations on them?
- In one word, what is Yahweh requiring of his people?
- Answer the question in Section III of the Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Format found on page 64.

Deuteronomy is a retelling of the law. The parallel passage to the Ten Commandments is found in Deuteronomy 5:6–21. Read through these verses, noting the similarities to Exodus 20:1–17.

Read Exodus 20:18–21 and Deuteronomy 5:22–27.

- Describe (or even draw) the mountain as the Israelites saw it and heard it.
- What did Yahweh show the Israelites?
- What was their response to what Yahweh asked of them?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

The people who came out of Egypt as a “rabble of slaves” were transformed into a people at Mt. Sinai, Yahweh’s people. What do you think this meant to them? Considering they came out of a polytheistic nation and now were being asked to pledge complete loyalty to one God, Yahweh, what sorts of anxieties and emotions might they be experiencing?

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet. 2:10).

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Read the following lyrics or listen to Matthew Clark’s “The People of God” from his CD *Bright Came the Word from His Mouth* (matthewclark.net). Consider what it means to be the people of God.

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Matthew Clark

Come I am Yahweh your God, Ruler of the universe
Your cries did not go unheard, you are not fatherless
I brought you out of the house of your slavery
Come unto me all you weary

CHORUS

Once you were not a people, now be the people of God,
once you did not know mercy, Know now the mercy of God

You shall have no other gods, there is no one else but me
Serve me with all of your heart, and see your hearts made free
Have I not loved you, with covenant faithfulness?
Take on the yoke of my mercy

CHORUS

Peace in the place where you dwell, safe in the home of God
Each word I speak is your life, by them you'll live or die
Heaven and earth ever stand as my witnesses
I will be rest for the burdened

BRIDGE

Remember the Blood of the Covenant, hide all these words in your heart
You are my holy ambassadors, you are the people of God

CHORUS

DAY THREE

First Contact

Have you ever seen a picture of Moses carrying the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments down from the mountain? What is the usual explanation about the two tablets? Have you been told that the first five commandments are on one and the last five commandments are on the other?

Into the Story

As mentioned yesterday, Deuteronomy is the second rendition of the covenant from Mt. Sinai. Read Exodus 32:15–16 and Deuteronomy 10:1–6.

- According to the Exodus account, what was written on the two tablets?
- Also from the Exodus account, how much space was used on the tablets?
- Who is speaking in the Deuteronomy account?
- After coming down from the mountain, where were the tablets placed?

Read Deuteronomy 31:9–13.

- What did Moses command the priests?
- When was the law to be read?
- To whom was the law to be read?
- What was the purpose for the reading of the law?
- Answer the questions for Section IV of the Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Format found on page 64.

Read Deuteronomy 17:18–20.

- Deuteronomy 17:14–20 details the law of the king of Israel. In regard to the law, what was the king required to do and *not* do?
- Why do you think these requirements were placed on the king?

The most probable reason that Moses is portrayed with *two* tablets is because a treaty required two copies, one for each covenant partner. Each partner was expected to take his tablet home and place it in the presence of the deity by whom he swore his oath. In this case, there is only one deity between the two partners. So the tablets are archived in the ark (best translated “cabinet”), the footstool of Yahweh in the Holy of Holies. (Richter, *Epic*, 87.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

What did placing the tablets in the ark communicate to the Israelites about Yahweh? Imagine being one of those in the crowd when all Israel comes together to see the priests bringing the tablets out of the Holy of Holies to hear the words of the law. How would such an event impact the Israelites’ relationship with Yahweh?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

The Israelites kept their oath to Yahweh front and center by keeping the tablets to which they had sworn in the ark. How do we as the new people of God keep our oath to Yahweh front and center?

DAY FOUR

First Contact

Have you ever been with a large group of people on a trip? Maybe a tour group or a school trip involving several stops on the way? Most likely you were given instructions before departure, and most certainly were reminded of those instructions before getting off the plane, train, or bus! Did you have any pet peeves on that trip?

Into the Story

In today's reading, Moses is preparing the people for their entrance into the Promised Land. Read Deuteronomy 27:11–28:68.

- Choose two different colors of pens or colored pencils.
- As you read through these verses, color or underline the occurrences of the words “curses” or “cursed” in one color and the occurrences of the words “blessings” or “bless” in another color.
- Using the same colors, place a bracket around the section(s) describing/detailing the blessings and a bracket around the section(s) describing/detailing the curses.
- What was required of the Israelites in order to receive the blessings (28:1–2)?
- What would bring about the curses (28:15, 45, 47, 58)?
- What would the Israelites lose if they failed to keep the covenant (28:63)?
- Fill in the blanks in Section VI of the Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Format found on page 65.

- Using Deuteronomy 28, list five blessings that Yahweh promises if Israel keeps the treaty, and five curses if Israel breaks it. Which of these do you find most compelling?

Read Deuteronomy 30:19–20.

- Who or what was called to act as witness to the covenant? Fill in your response in Section V of the Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Format found on page 65.
- Choosing life is an enormous theme in this chapter. What does Moses mean when he says this?
- Think about Moses' perspective for a moment. Why is he so passionate about choosing life and choosing blessing?
- What would they keep if they obeyed Yahweh?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Moses was preparing the people of Israel to enter their Promised Land, the land of Canaan. If you were among the throng of people hearing all of the blessings and curses, what kinds of things would be running through your mind? Do you think they understood the ramifications of obedience and disobedience?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Reflect back to the idea of a large group on a trip from the beginning of our study. It can be really hard (and *really* frustrating) to get all the members of a large group to respond to a single set of directions. What were the consequences when certain members of the group didn't bother to listen carefully? Was there someone on your trip who seemed to think the instructions applied to everyone but them? Where did that leave you and the rest of the group? Now apply that to God's people on their journey. What might be the consequences if/when God's people don't bother to listen to the directions carefully?

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

How does your church celebrate Communion? What are your favorite and least favorite aspects of that particular practice at your church? Do you know what the symbolism of the breaking of the body and the drinking of the blood means? Do you know why the church is commanded to celebrate this sacrament as a community?

Into the Story

In last week's study, we learned that covenants were sealed with an oath and a sacrifice. Today we will look at two ratification ceremonies. The setting of one is at the foot of Mt. Sinai; the other is in Jerusalem. Read Exodus 24:3–8.

- Underline or note any covenant language.
- Where do you see evidence of oaths?
- What did the people promise to do? Underline or write down all of their words.
- What sacrifices are made to seal the covenant? What did Moses do with the blood of the sacrifice?
- What was the significance of Moses' actions with the blood? (See Exod. 12:21–27.)
- Complete the final blanks under the Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Format found on page 65.

Read Matthew 26:26–28.

- What is the setting of this passage?
- What Jewish holy day are Jesus and the disciples observing?

What an amazing moment. By oath and sacrifice the children of Abraham become the nation of Israel. The God of the cosmos becomes their sovereign lord, and a rabble of slaves is transformed into a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6 [NASB]). (Richter, *Epic*, 88.)

- Underline any covenant language.
- Do you see evidence of oaths?
- What does Jesus promise to do? Underline or write down all of his words.
- What is about to be sacrificed here?
- What was the significance of Jesus’ actions with the cup?

Record the words of Moses here [Exod. 24:8]	Record the words of Jesus here [Matt. 26:28]

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Write down all of the phrases describing what the people saw in Exodus 24. What do you think the people of Israel heard? What do you think they smelled? How do you think they felt?

Now write down all the phrases describing what the men around the table of the Last Supper saw, heard, and smelled. How do you think they felt?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

At the beginning of this lesson, we challenged you to think about how you experience Communion today. How will your new understanding of the Israelites' experience at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and the disciples around the Last Supper table, change the way you experience Communion the next time you participate?

Do you hear the echo of Exodus 24? . . . This echo is not coincidental, nor was it missed by its first-century audience. Rather, on that Passover night, Jesus announced to his disciples that something greater than the exodus was about to transpire. By means of oath and sacrifice, another rabble of slaves was about to be transformed into God's covenant-people (cf. 1 Pet. 2:10 [NASB]). As Moses sprinkled the blood of the bulls upon the people of Israel in order to ratify the Sinai covenant, so Jesus distributed his own blood that night to ratify a new covenant. And this time the oaths were not sealed by "the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer," but by the blood of God the Son (cf. Heb. 9:13–15 [NASB]). Moreover, the slaves who were freed from their bondage by this new covenant were not delivered merely from Egypt, but from death itself. Thus we see that the safe and structured communion meal that you and I participate in according to our liturgies and traditions is actually a most abbreviated representation of the ratification of the new covenant. And in this new covenant the Lord of the cosmos has served as both suzerain and sacrifice. (Richter, *Epic*, 89.)

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WEEK SIX

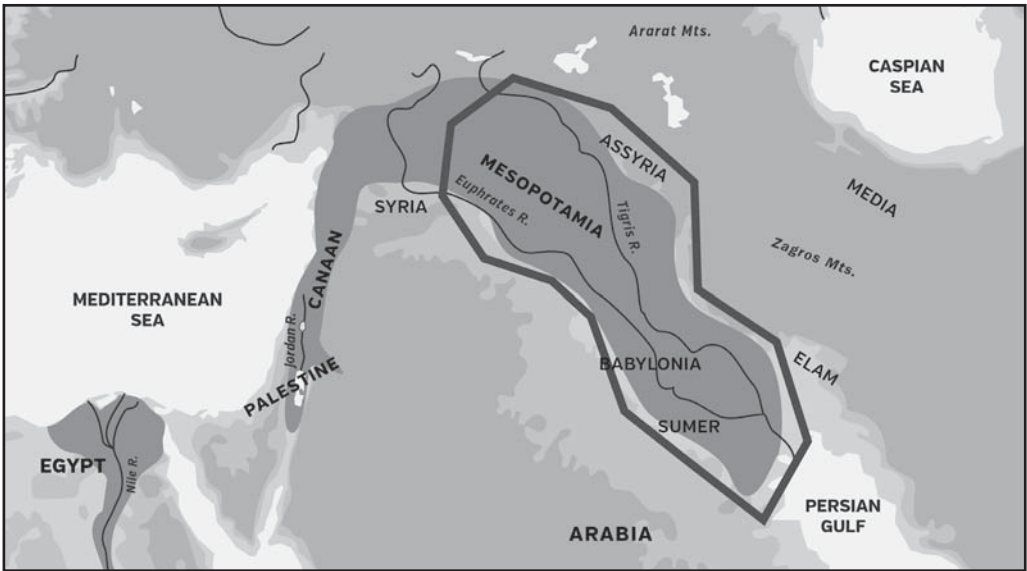
God's Original Intent

A Word from the Author

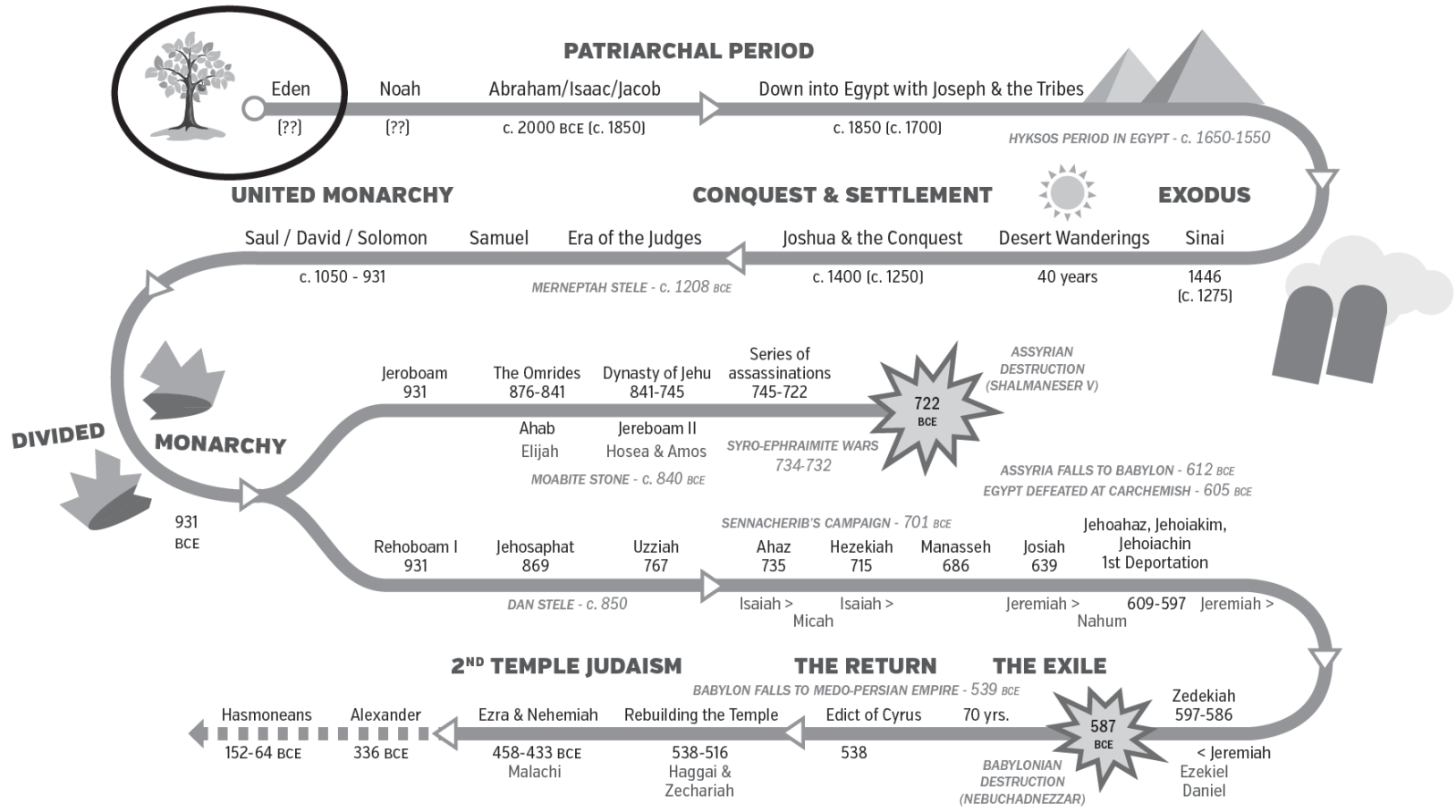
“In the first [five sessions of this study], of this book, we’ve worked hard to get past the great barrier that divides us modern readers from the world of the Old Testament. As a result, you are now a budding expert in the culture of the ancient Near East, the time and space of the Fertile Crescent, and the all-important concept of covenant. Now it’s time to get to the story. So let’s start at the beginning: God’s original intent for humanity, Eden” (Richter, *Epic*, 92).

Real Time and Space

Our time this week will be spent in Mesopotamia. This is where the biblical authors direct us when they speak of the garden of Eden at the dawn of history.



Mesopotamia



[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

What is the meaning of life? This is the question of the millennia, isn't it? Write down a one-word answer as to why you think we are here.

Into the Story

Read Genesis 1:1–2:3.

- Take at least two colored pencils/markers and underline the repeated phrases found throughout the seven days of creation.
- Circle where the creation of humanity falls in the order of creation.
- What name does the author use for the Creator?
- By what means is humanity created?
- In this first account of creation, are male and female created at the same time or separately?

Before we jump ahead in the story, let us consider the content of God's original plan—his original covenant with humanity. Or to state the topic differently, let's consider how God defined his first *relationship* with humanity as communicated in Genesis 1–2. (Richter, *Epic*, 93.)

- Complete the Seven Days of Creation chart below by filling in the appropriate box for each day with what was created on that day and what, if anything, God commanded that creature to accomplish. Record any language of dominion, rulership, or authority. Don't just look for this language involving God and humanity, but look for this language describing *any* part of creation.

1	2	3	6b	7
4	5	6a		

Seven Days of Creation

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

What strikes you about the sort of world God was creating here? Think about the relationships dictated, particularly the relationship between humanity and the created order.

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

There are many theories as to how the world began. Do you have a position on this question? If so, what are the best arguments for and against your view? Does what you believe about the how and why of creation inform what you believe about the meaning and purpose of your life?

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

When was the first time you heard the story of creation? When did you first notice that there are two accounts of the creation story found in Genesis? Do you have any thoughts as to the purpose of having two accounts?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 2:4–25.

- What strikes you first about the presentation of creation in this account?
- Note where the creation of Adam falls in the order of creation.
- Note where the creation of Eve falls in the order of creation.
- What name does the author use for the Creator?
- By what means is Adam created? By what means is Eve created?

Although there is no specific declaration of covenant-making in Eden, we find the profile of *bērit* throughout the narrative. I believe this is so because the concept of *bērit* as it was learned at Sinai so profoundly affected Israel's self-understanding that *bērit* was used to organize the earliest narratives of the Bible as well. (Richter, *Epic*, 92.)

Record the distinctions of these creation accounts in the chart below.

	Genesis 1	Genesis 2
When was Adam created?		
When was Eve created?		
What name does the author use for the Creator?		
By what means is humanity created?		

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Why might there be two accounts of creation in the Bible? Asked another way, why might there be more than one Gospel account?

Imagine being Adam, the first man, or Eve, the first woman. Try to imagine, if you can, being in the Garden with no fears, no worries, no insecurities, and with the Sovereign Lord God, the Creator of the universe, walking among you. Pause over this. Can you get your mind around it?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

What does it mean to you that the God of the universe wanted you to know that he created you *and* that he created a place for you in his world? That he entrusted you with responsibility over his prized and perfect creation? As the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve, how can we act in a way that respects God’s intended hierarchy of creation? Do you think the fall permanently changed this order? As the redeemed community, how can we in our post-fallen world reclaim our identity as the citizens of Eden in our relationships with each other and our planet?

DAY THREE

First Contact

Did your parents ever hide gifts from you in anticipation of a birthday or Christmas? When you realized there was a gift hidden somewhere in your home, what was the first thing you wanted to do? Find it, right? Or if you are a parent, have you ever told your child not to get too close to an open window or touch a hot stove or play with the cat's food? And what is the first thing that child tries to do? You know it! Why are humans like this?

Into the Story

Reread Genesis 1–2.

- Who are the players in the story of creation (1:26–31)?
- What is the relationship between the players? Think in terms of covenants/treaties.
- What is the setting (2:8–15)?
- What is the agreement (2:15–17)?
- What blessings does God offer humanity if they keep this agreement, either explicitly or implicitly (2:15–17)?
- What curses are threatened if humanity does not keep this agreement (2:15–17)?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Adam was placed in the garden and freely given everything in it—everything, that is, except the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yahweh tells Adam, “in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17 NASB). How do you think Adam responded when he heard these words? If you were in Adam’s shoes, do you think your focus would be on all that you had access to or what you were forbidden? Why?

Here the suzerain (Yahweh) offers his vassals (Adam and Eve) the land grant of Eden with the stipulation that humanity care for it and protect it. . . .

In addition to this perfect place, Adam and Eve are given each other (Gen. 2:18–25), and as implied by Genesis 3:8, they are given full access to their loving Creator. The only corner of the garden which was not theirs to use and enjoy was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Richter, *Epic*, 103.)

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

In our world today, many people find themselves in situations in which it is easy to focus on what they don’t have instead of what they do have. How can we help ourselves and others to recognize that everything we have is a gift from God?

[[DAY FOUR]]

First Contact

As a child, did you ever try to hide your misbehavior? What about as a teen or a young adult or now? How about hiding your thoughts—anger or sadness, lust or insecurity?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 3.

- How did the serpent deceive Eve?
- What motivations did Eve have for eating the fruit and, thus, disobeying Yahweh's command?
- How did Adam and Eve react when they heard Yahweh walking in the garden?
- What was the curse placed on Eve?
- What was the curse placed on Adam?
- What did they lose as a result of their sin?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Why do you think that they hid, or rather, thought that they could hide from God? What did it mean to Adam and Eve to be driven from the garden?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

What are ways that we try to hide from God today? What can we, as the church, do to create safe spaces for people to stand before God? What can we, as the church, do to remind ourselves that our God is indeed a holy God, and sin must be defeated?

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

What are some of your most persistent anxieties? Can you list them? Why do you think these particular concerns plague you?

Into the Story

Read Matthew 6:25–34.

- What is the setting of this discourse?
- Circle or underline every occurrence of the words “worry” and “worried.”
- What does Jesus tell his listeners they should not worry about?
- Why should they not worry?
- What should their focus be?

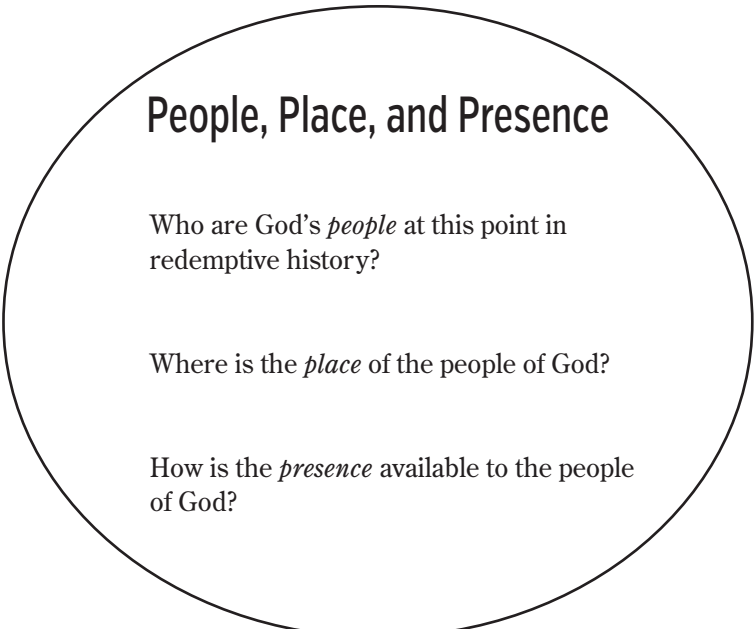
Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Imagine that you are one of those individuals in the crowd listening to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Remember that these people are barely making it and currently living under the foreign (and less than compassionate) rule of the Roman Empire. What kinds of things would the young men in the crowd be worrying about? The young mothers in the crowd? What about the heads of the households? The laborers? The soldiers? What worries might the children have? Hearing Jesus’ words, what do you think their reaction might be?

[Regarding the curse found in Genesis 3:19:] The last bit of the curse is particularly poignant. Most read the phrase “by the sweat of your face” as having to do with difficult physical labor. But an article by Daniel Fleming of New York University has demonstrated that his phrase is actually an old ancient Near Eastern idiom having nothing to do with hard work. Rather, this idiom speaks of anxiety—perspiration-inducing *fear*. Where does anxiety fit into God’s curse upon us? What we find in Genesis 3 is that because of the rebellion of the earth and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from God’s presence, humanity will now live their lives in an adversarial world with a constant, gnawing undercurrent of dread that there will not be enough, that their labor will not meet the need. (Richter, *Epic*, 111.)

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

So back to the first question: “What are some of your most persistent anxieties?” Do you think your worries are terribly different from those of the people listening to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount? For both them and us, how many of our worries would be alleviated by embracing the biblical truths that (1) God wants good things for us, and (2) God has all the resources we need?



People, Place, and Presence

Who are God’s *people* at this point in redemptive history?

Where is the *place* of the people of God?

How is the *presence* available to the people of God?

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WEEK SEVEN

God's Final Intent

A Word from the Author

“Genesis 1–2 essentially provides a blueprint to God’s original intent for humanity: God’s people dwelling in God’s place with full access to his presence. You will hear this little triplet many times throughout the course of this book. Yahweh planned a perfect world in which the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve would live eternally, stretching their cognitive and creative skills to the uttermost, building their civilization within the protective boundaries of their relationship with him. But treason bred tragedy—a broken covenant, a broken race. The end result was that God’s people were driven from God’s place and forever from his presence. The only hope in this wretched state of affairs was God’s redemptive mercy. Indeed redemptive history starts right here. For it is with *Adam’s* choice that the saga of redemption begins. Who will pay the price for *Adam’s* rebellion? How will *Adam’s* race be held accountable and delivered all the same? How do we get Eden back?” (Richter, *Epic*, 118.)

Real Time and Space

This week we are going to take a journey through the story of redemption, traveling in space from Eden to the wilderness to Solomon’s Jerusalem to the New Jerusalem. As we journey, we will be looking for evidence of cherubim, trees, and rivers. Our journey will take us in time from Adam to the exodus, from the united monarchy to the exile, and finally to God’s final intent, the New Jerusalem.



The Fertile Crescent



David's Kingdom



PATRIARCHAL PERIOD

Eden [??] Noah [??] Abraham/Isaac/Jacob c. 2000 BCE [c. 1850] Down into Egypt with Joseph & the Tribes c. 1850 [c. 1700]

HYKSOS PERIOD IN EGYPT - c. 1650-1550

UNITED MONARCHY

Saul / David / Solomon c. 1050 - 931

Samuel Era of the Judges MERNEPTAH STELE - c. 1208 BCE

CONQUEST & SETTLEMENT

Joshua & the Conquest c. 1400 [c. 1250]



EXODUS

Desert Wanderings 40 years Sinai 1446 [c. 1275]



DIVIDED

MONARCHY

931 BCE

Jeroboam 931

The Omrides 876-841

Dynasty of Jehu 841-745

Series of assassinations 745-722

722 BCE

ASSYRIAN DESTRUCTION (SHALMANESER V)

Ahab Elijah MOABITE STONE - c. 840 BCE

Jereboam II Hosea & Amos

SYRO-EPHRAIMITE WARS 734-732

ASSYRIA FALLS TO BABYLON - 612 BCE EGYPT DEFEATED AT CARCHEMISH - 605 BCE

Rehoboam I 931

Jehosaphat 869

Uzziah 767

SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN - 701 BCE

Ahaz 735

Hezekiah 715

Manasseh 686

Josiah 639

Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin 1st Deportation

DAN STELE - c. 850

Isaiah > Micah

Isaiah > Micah

Jeremiah > Nahum

609-597 Jeremiah >

2ND TEMPLE JUDAISM

THE RETURN

THE EXILE

Hasmoneans 152-64 BCE

Alexander 336 BCE

Ezra & Nehemiah 458-433 BCE Malachi

Rebuilding the Temple 538-516 Haggai & Zechariah

Edict of Cyrus 538

70 yrs. BABYLONIAN DESTRUCTION (NEBUCHADNEZZAR)

587 BCE

Zedekiah 597-586 < Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel

BABYLON FALLS TO MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE - 539 BCE

[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

As a child, when you disobeyed, how were you disciplined? How do you discipline your children? Do the punishments involve separations—not seeing friends, going to their room, having a privilege or possession taken away? What stopped you from accessing that which was forbidden?

Into the Story

Reread Genesis 3:23–24.

- What is the context of this passage (i.e., what happens before and after)?
- How are the cherubim described?
- What task does God give to the cherubim?

Read Exodus 25:1–22; 26:31–35, Numbers 7:89, and 1 Kings 8:5–12.

- According to Exodus 25:1–10, why are the Israelites building the tabernacle?
- How does Moses describe the cherubim?
- What is the function of the cherubim?

Read Ezekiel 10:1–17.

- How does Ezekiel describe the cherubim?
- What is the function of the cherubim?

Read Hebrews 9:1–10.

- How are the cherubim described?
- What is the function of the cherubim?
- When you consider the function of the cherubim throughout the story of redemption, do you see any patterns?

Read Hebrews 9:11–28.

- In Hebrews 9:5, the last of sixty-seven occurrences of the word “cherubim” is used in the Bible. Any ideas why?

cherubim: *Known throughout the ancient Near East, these composite, semi-divine creatures were understood as the guardians of sacred spaces and were therefore posted as sentries at the entrances of palaces, throne rooms, and temples.*

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Consider Adam and Eve after the fall: not only have they been sent out of the garden, but a barrier has been placed between them and the secure place that was their home, the resources of the garden, and their God. The tree of life is now guarded from them by a *cherubim* and a blazing sword. What have Adam and Eve lost? What did they gain?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Fast forward to the church today. As a result of Jesus’ death on the cross, the book of Hebrews tells us to “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (4:16). Yet often the church does not utilize this magnificent privilege that Christ has won for us. Rather than regularly accessing our God, we too often intentionally keep him at a safe distance. Sometimes our churches actually *erect* their own barriers separating themselves and their people from God. What type of barriers do you see? How can these barriers be torn down?

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

Have you ever thought about the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as icons? We want to start thinking about symbols, icons, and imagery this week. If these trees are symbols of something, what might they be symbols of?

Into the Story

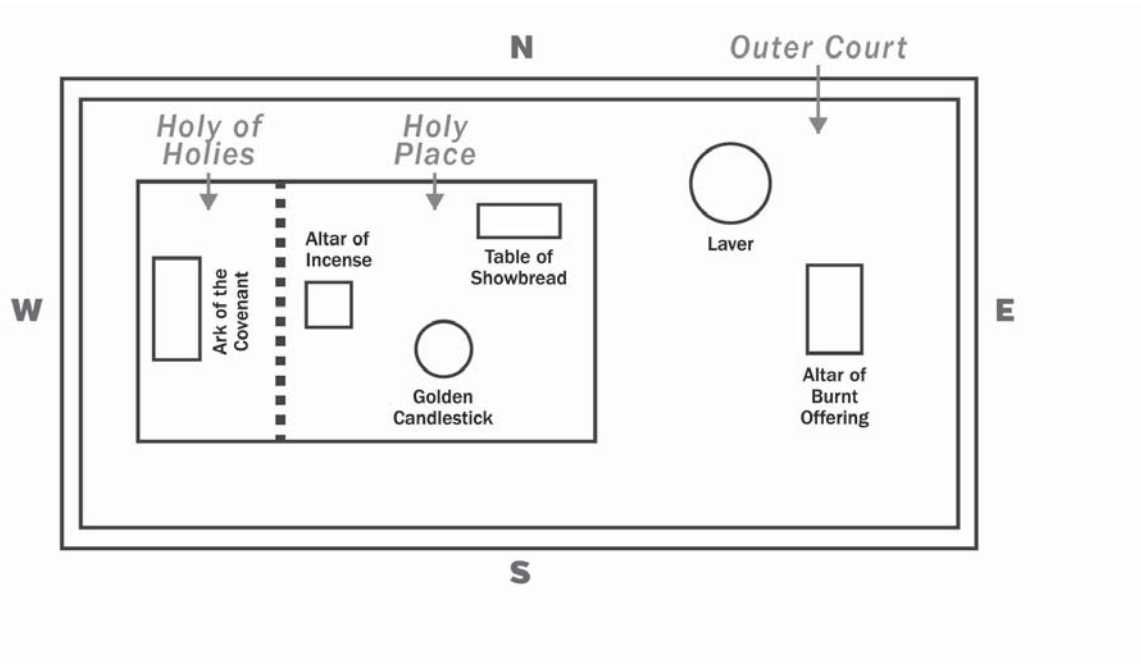
Reread Genesis 2–3.

- How are the two trees described in this narrative?
- Where are they located?
- What are their functions?
- What restrictions surround them?

Read 1 Kings 6:1–7:51 (the story of Solomon’s building of the temple).

- Can you find symbols from the garden of Eden in the construction of Solomon’s temple?
- Can you find the parts of the temple that are adorned with images of trees? Write those passages down, then indicate what section of the temple they are found in.

- See the floor plan and diagram of Solomon's temple below. What are the functions of each of these parts of the temple? Look this up in your study Bible or on the Internet. Write those functions down below the diagram.



Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

What do you know about Solomon and his temple-building? Look him up in your study Bible or on the Internet. Find him on the timeline on page 95. When did he live and rule? Who was his father? Why was it a big deal that he was building a temple in Jerusalem? Why might Solomon have incorporated images of trees into his decoration of Israel's holy place?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

What sorts of images, icons, and architecture can you find in your church? Why have these forms been chosen? If you've been a member of a couple of different church communities, how has the imagery and architecture been distinctive? Why do you think that is?

DAY THREE

First Contact

Sometimes when we read or hear about unfamiliar images and metaphors in the Bible, we unconsciously just skim over them. Let's stop and think about what significance a river would have to ancient people groups living in the Fertile Crescent. Why is a river important? What does a river bring? Why might this image become significant in the Bible?

Into the Story

Reread Genesis 2:10–17.

- How is the river of Eden described?
- Do you recognize the names of any of the four into which it divides?
- Where are these rivers located? Find as many of them as you can on the top map on page 94.

Read Ezekiel 47:1–12 (Ezekiel's vision of the restored temple, [i.e., heaven]).

- What “house” is Ezekiel envisioning in this passage?
- Where does his river begin?
- Where does the water flow *to*? Pull out your maps and see if you can track it.
- What effect does the water have on the surrounding countryside?
- Have you noticed that the river is producing trees? What are the characteristics of the trees?
- What is the function of the trees?

Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing. (Ezek. 47:12)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

What do you know about the prophet Ezekiel? Look him up in your study Bible or on the Internet. When did he live and minister? Find him on the timeline on page 95. Make sure you take note of *where* he is living. In light of his place in real time and space, why do you think he envisions heaven as a restored temple in Jerusalem? What effect would his vision of a restored temple have had upon his now-exiled Israelite audience?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

How do symbols and iconography affect you? I'm thinking of the Vietnam War Memorial and my first visit there when it was dedicated in the 1980s—vets everywhere, slips of paper shoved into every crevice of the stone, people standing silently with their hands pressed against the chiseled name of someone they loved. I'm thinking of the pitcher of water raised above my young daughter's head, while the gathered people of God wait expectantly for our pastor to say the ancient words and pour. I'm thinking of stepping onto the dock of what is now Swan's Marina in East Jordan, Michigan, the one my grandfather built with his hands. I'm thinking of the scent of incense at Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Each of these stir my soul with the power of memory. They remind me whose and who I am. What are your icons?

[[DAY FOUR]]

First Contact

Think of the images that are typically associated with heaven. Name five and write them down. How do you imagine heaven? Has a particular author or image helped you wrap your brain around it? Why? Try to paint a picture—either physically or with words—of what heaven will look like.

Into the Story

Read Revelation 21.

- Who are the characters in this story?
- Where is the place?
- How are the new heaven and new earth described?
- Who are the people of God now?
- Where are the people of God now?
- Where is God now?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

John's message in the book of Revelation is intended for the Christians of the first century in Rome. During this time, converts to Christianity faced severe persecution under Emperors Nero (AD 54–68) and Domitian (AD 81–96). To become a Christian was to become a traitor to the empire and, therefore, to become a target. Like Ezekiel,

John himself had been exiled and confined as a prisoner to the island of Patmos. Here he receives “the revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place” (Rev 1:1). Look up John and Patmos in your study Bible or on the Internet. What can you add to this picture?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

As you think about our first-century brothers and sisters, what aspect of John’s message might have given them the strength to hang in there, to pay the price for their faith, and to even be martyred for it? How about you? What could a Christian leader speak to you that would give you the courage to hang in there even if they took your job, your house, your family, or even your life?

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

Heaven is hard to get our heads around. Our first impulse is always to stay right where we are—it's familiar, it's comfortable. In fact, my children have often expressed being *afraid* of heaven. Why? Because it is unfamiliar. Or is it? Think through John's words one more time: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). What is this business about a *new earth*?

Into the Story

Read Revelation 22.

- Note that our icons have reappeared: trees and rivers.
- Describe them. Are they the same or different from the trees and rivers pictured in Eden and in the tabernacle/temple?
- Why do you think the biblical author has placed these here? What is he trying to bring to your mind with these theological bread crumbs?
- What else can you find in John's new earth? Do you see healing here? For whom? For what?
- What further similarities and differences can you find between the garden and the New Jerusalem?

Read Romans 8:1–25.

- List all of the words used to describe the present state (i.e., the old earth).
- How many times does Paul refer to the concept of waiting in this passage?

- List all the words used to describe the “glory that will be revealed to us” (v. 8). How does the description of the present state compare to the description of the future state (i.e. the new earth)?
- Who is Paul talking to here? When and where?

This text is reiterating what Genesis 1–3 has already taught us, that God’s first perfect plan was cast into futility by Adam’s choice. . . . And just as you and I are longing for release, so too is creation. When will creation’s anxious longing be fulfilled? . . . When the stewards of Eden are returned to their proper place in God’s perfect seven-day structure by means of the re-creative power of redemption, when their treasonous choice is reversed, so too will the cosmos be “freed from its slavery to corruption,” and returned to its pre-fallen state. Folks, we are not merely waiting for our personal deliverance, we wait for the day when all of creation will be “born again.” (Richter, *Epic*, 114–15.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Paul is taking his suffering audience right back to Genesis 1–2. He tells them that the curse of Adam is yet to be healed, but it *will* be healed. He tells them that even the cosmos itself is awaiting this deliverance, that *all* of creation will be freed from its brokenness and futility when the children of God are at last resurrected into eternal life. He tells his audience it is this event that will forever put the perfect picture of the seven days of creation in Genesis 1 aright, fixing not only lost humans, but a lost cosmos as well. In light of what you now know about first-century Rome, why might Paul be saying these things in Romans 8?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Can you now see that the heaven we look forward to is not unfamiliar at all? Rather it is right here, our new earth, restored for our saved race, so that we can at last fulfill the destiny for which we've been designed—in relationship with the God who designed us. How does this knowledge change your picture (and anticipation) of heaven?

This New Jerusalem (what we know as “heaven”) is all that the city of man in Eden was meant to be. In fact, it *is* Eden—a fruit-filled paradise animated by a cosmic river and graced by the Tree of Life. Here, once again, the unhindered presence of God and the unhindered maturation of a sinless humanity coexist. The most significant difference between the New Jerusalem and Eden is that there was no city in Eden; Adam had not gotten that far. But now the city built in our fallenness has been redeemed and restored. God and Adam live under the same roof once again. Moreover, the icons of Eden are now multiplied and expanded. The Tree of Life lines *both* sides of the river in the New Jerusalem and now the tree and the river bring healing to a wounded race. All of this because what had been the “outpost” of God’s presence has become the whole. Whereas the Holy of Holies had served as a small-scale locus of connection, a “bubble” in Adam’s world in which the two dimensions of God’s place and humanity’s place could be the same place, in the New Jerusalem the two dimensions are rejoined. (Richter, *Epic*, 128.)

WEEK EIGHT

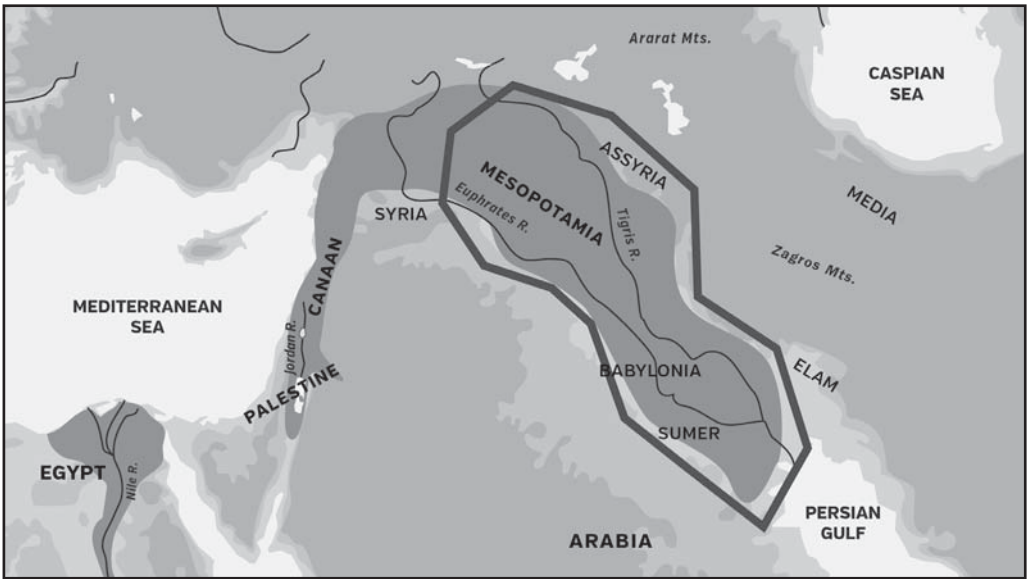
Noah

A Word from the Author

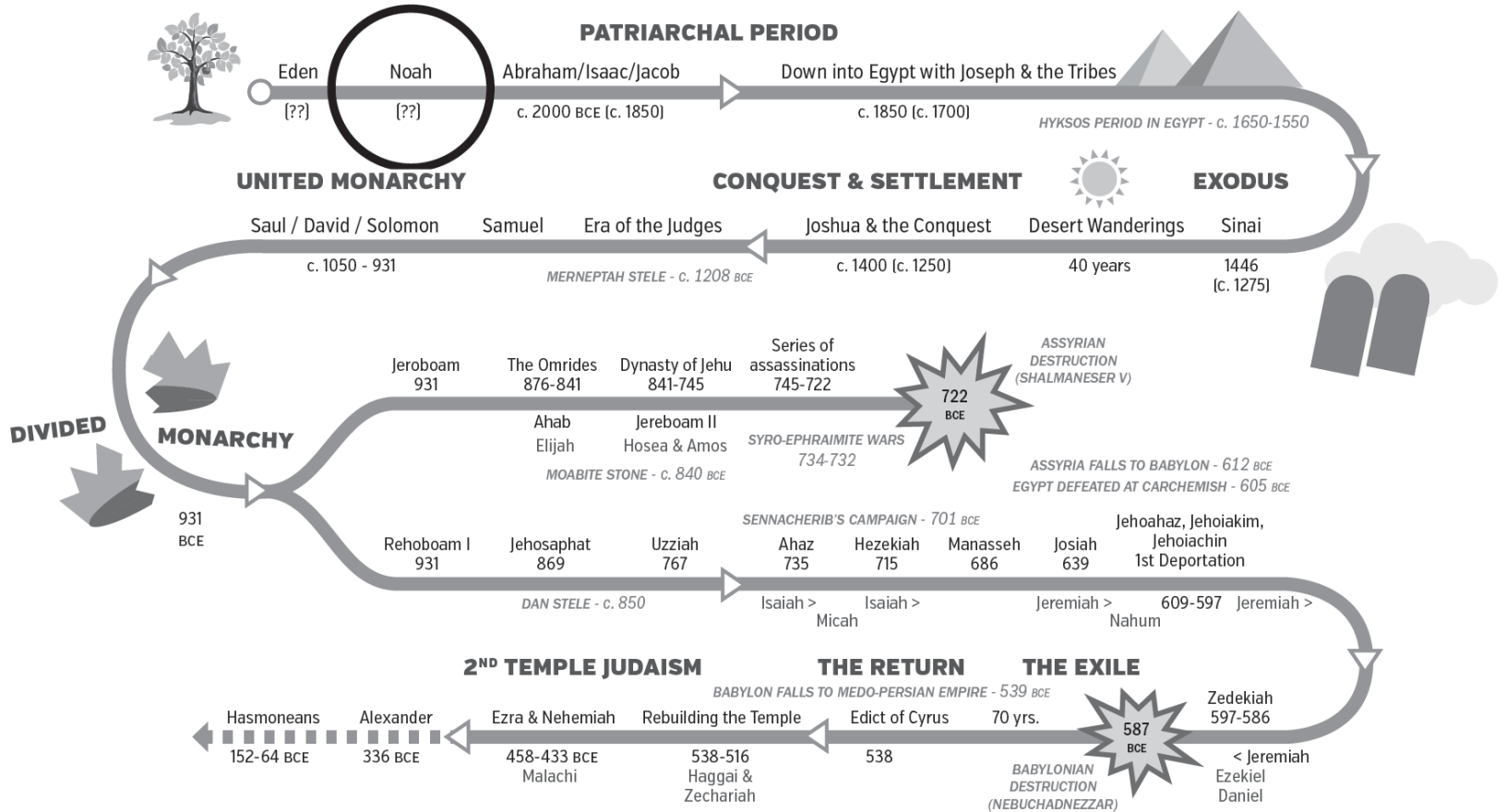
“We have begun . . . outlining God’s original and final intent for humanity. To our joy, we have found that these are the same and that Eden and the New Jerusalem may be understood as the bookends of redemptive history. . . . We have also discussed how all that lies in betwixt and between Eden and the New Jerusalem is, in essence, an enormous rescue plan. Each stage of this grand story is organized around one of six covenantal administrations: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. . . . By means of Noah’s covenant, God redefines his relationship with humanity for the first time since Eden.” (Richter, *Epic*, 137).

Real Time and Space

This week we will be looking at the real space and time of Noah. Take a moment to locate Mesopotamia on the following map. Also take a moment to locate Noah on the following timeline.



Noah's real space



PATRIARCHAL PERIOD

Eden [??] Noah [??] Abraham/Isaac/Jacob c. 2000 BCE (c. 1850) Down into Egypt with Joseph & the Tribes c. 1850 (c. 1700)

HYKSOS PERIOD IN EGYPT - c. 1650-1550

UNIFIED MONARCHY

CONQUEST & SETTLEMENT

EXODUS

Saul / David / Solomon c. 1050 - 931 Joshua & the Conquest c. 1400 (c. 1250) Desert Wanderings 40 years Sinai 1446 (c. 1275)

MERNEPTAH STELE - c. 1208 BCE

DIVIDED MONARCHY

931 BCE

Jeroboam 931 The Omrides 876-841 Dynasty of Jehu 841-745 Series of assassinations 745-722



ASSYRIAN DESTRUCTION (SHALMANESER V)

Ahab Elijah Jereboam II Hosea & Amos *MOABITE STONE - c. 840 BCE*

SYRO-EPHRAIMITE WARS 734-732

ASSYRIA FALLS TO BABYLON - 612 BCE
EGYPT DEFEATED AT CARCHEMISH - 605 BCE

Rehoboam I 931 Jehosaphat 869 Uzziah 767 Ahaz 735 Hezekiah 715 Manasseh 686 Josiah 639 Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin 1st Deportation 609-597 Jeremiah > Nahum Jeremiah >

SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN - 701 BCE

DAN STELE - c. 850

Isaiah > Micah Isaiah >

2ND TEMPLE JUDAISM

THE RETURN

THE EXILE

Hasmoneans 152-64 BCE Alexander 336 BCE Ezra & Nehemiah 458-433 BCE Malachi Rebuilding the Temple 538-516 Haggai & Zechariah Edict of Cyrus 538 70 yrs. 587 BCE Zedekiah 597-586 < Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel

BABYLON FALLS TO MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE - 539 BCE

BABYLONIAN DESTRUCTION (NEBUCHADNEZZAR)

[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

Is there a time in your life you would define as an “epoch divider”—a benchmark by which you categorize everything else as before, during, or after? Perhaps it is a major life transition (leaving for college, marriage, parenthood) or a point of great pain or crisis (an injury, a diagnosis, a divorce). Perhaps a great revelation (your conversion or calling). How do you divide the time?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 5:1–6:8; 11:10–32.

- Think about the narrator for a minute. Why do you think the narrator is making use of genealogies in his larger plot line? What do you see to be the function of those genealogies?
- As you read through the genealogy, note how long each of the characters lived—particularly those prior to the flood (Gen. 5:1–32) and those after the flood (Gen. 11:10–25).
- How does this affect your understanding of the story of Noah and the flood as an epoch divider? Be prepared to share your findings.
- How is life on earth described between the time of Adam and Eve’s exit from the garden and our introduction to Noah?
- Looking at 6:5–8, how is Noah’s generation described? List the words and phrases the narrator uses.
- What does God think of this state of affairs? What is he going to do?

Read Matthew 24:3–44. This chapter is Jesus’ description of his second coming. Notice that Jesus compares his second coming to Noah’s flood (v. 37).

- How are the flood event and the second coming similar?
- How does each event mark a time of great transition for the people of God? Describe some of those transitions.

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

What would it be like to live in a time and place where the world seethed with corruption, causal violence, and murder? What fears do you think the average citizen would live with on a daily basis? What about mothers and fathers in their attempts to protect their children? Orphans in their attempts to protect their younger siblings? If this was normal life, do you think people would even realize what was going on and that it wasn’t right? Or just adapt? What do you think Noah’s generation was thinking? How would Noah’s generation have lived differently if they realized that God’s catastrophic judgment was imminent?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

How would you live differently if you knew a great flood was imminent? Or the Great Return? List three specific examples of how you, your family, or your church would behave differently if you knew that Jesus was returning next Tuesday.

Oh no Noah look how bad it’s got
 Ain’t nothing but evil in the hearts of men, ain’t nothing in the roots but rot. . . .
 Long time coming sin had multiplied.
 Nobody to listen to the voice of God, nobody who even tried.*

*From “Let Go the Floodgates” by Matthew Clark (matthewclark.net) on his album
Bright Came the Word from His Mouth.

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

Think about what it means to be blameless in God's eyes as Noah was (Gen. 6:9). What are your standards for blamelessness? What do you think the standard of your generation is?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 6:5–12.

- Revisiting your notes from yesterday, how does the Bible describe Noah's generation?
- What is God's reaction? Look for feelings as well as actions.
- How does the Bible describe Noah? List some of the words or phrases the narrator uses.
- Compare these lists: the narrator's description of Noah's generation and the narrator's description of Noah.

Read Psalm 15.

- Underline all of the words that the psalmist uses to describe what blameless living looks like.
- What is the reward of being blameless in this fashion according to the psalm?

What is God's response to this complete and widespread depravity? He decides to start again—a choice which results in both worldwide catastrophe and a second chance. And so into this degenerate world a champion is introduced, Noah, whose name means “rest.” . . . Noah's role in this cosmic drama will be to rescue enough of the created order that a new start is possible and to reintroduce *Adam* to their Creator. (Richter, *Epic*, 138.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

What would it have been like to be as blameless as Noah in his violent and corrupt world? What do you think his neighbors thought of him? Was his righteousness recognized or criticized? Was he respected or exploited? What challenges do you think he faced? What temptations?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Meditate on Psalm 15. Listen to a musical rendition and let the words sink into your soul. (“The Psalms Project” by Emily Heilman is a good choice. It can be found on YouTube and on iTunes. Or sing it yourself to the tune of “O, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing.”)

*Lord, who may dwell within your house, or on your holy hill?
 Those who do good and speak the truth, whose lives are blameless still.
 Who have no guile upon their tongues, nor harm their neighbor's life,
 but honor those who fear the Lord, and turn away from strife.
 Who do no wrong, who keep their word, and seek no bribe or gain.
 All those who do such things shall live and safe from harm remain.*

In our churches, are we afraid to call people to be blameless? Have we underestimated either God's standards or his power to transform? Or do we swing the pendulum the other way and simply stand back and judge those who miss the mark? How can we maintain a healthy balance of striving for real Christian maturity and also acknowledging our fallen state?

DAY THREE

First Contact

Have you ever felt God prompting you to do something that seemed crazy to everyone around you? Perhaps severing a relationship that was bad for your faith? Abandoning a successful career to stay at home to raise children or to homeschool? Passing on a fabulous opportunity because you sensed that there was corruption in the mix? Think of any act of obedience that you have ever taken and what challenges you faced.

Into the Story

Read Genesis 6:11–7:12.

- As you read this narrative, underline every time God speaks.
- Box all of Noah's responses (words, thoughts, and actions).

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Imagine being Noah in this situation: surrounded by corruption on every side, living with the constant threat that the same corruption is going to target you, while living a blameless life that sets you apart as something between a freak and a bull's-eye. Imagine being told that God has decided to take action and this unprincipled scenario that you have lived with for so long is about to be wiped out. But the first stage of the plan is for you to construct the physical evidence of his strategy. How do you imagine Noah felt? Vindicated? Terrified? Grieved? Angry? All of the above?

We don't have a record of Noah's song/psalm as we have the songs of Moses, Hannah, and David. What about a captain's log? As the captain of the ark, what would Noah's entry in his captain's log read on the day that he and his family entered the ark? What would his

entry read on the day that “all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened” (Gen. 7:11)? Write these entries for him.

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

In the age of the church, we live knowing that another great epoch divider is coming soon. How do we live in the temporary and hostile world while building the kingdom of the future? Or do we?

In Genesis 6:13–22 God details his plan: “everything that is on the earth shall perish” (Gen. 6:17 [NASB]). But in the midst Yahweh promises Noah that he will establish a covenant with him: “and you shall enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your son’s wives with you” (Gen. 6:18 [NASB]) (Richter, *Epic*, 143.)

[[DAY FOUR]]

First Contact

Have you ever been stuck in an ark during a metaphorical flood? Think of a time when you knew that God was with you, rescuing you from a terrible situation, but the conditions of rescue were not ideal. Perhaps the time of deliverance went on way too long, with no certain end, and all the while you were struggling to hold on, waiting for his promises to be fulfilled.

Into the Story

Read Genesis 7:10–8:12.

- List all of the descriptors of the waters.
- What does God do? Underline those verbs.
- What does Noah do? Double underline those verbs.
- Read 7:11 and then 8:13–15. How much time has passed?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Picture yourself in Noah's shoes on the ark when the door slams shut and the "springs of the great deep burst forth" (Gen. 7:11). What are you feeling? Now endure with him through the downpour. Around day forty-seven when the rains finally subside and all you've ever known is submerged in a littered, angry, muddy mess, how is your trust factor? Imagine a conversation between Noah and his wife about now, or Noah and his sons. What do you think they thought of his plan?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Matthew Clark's "Let Go the Floodgates" says: "Clear the pathway, make an open road; God is stepping onto the scene again with a plan to save our souls." Think about ways that we individually and as the church need to embrace the moves of God among us—even when they shake things up. Too often the church is the last to allow space for God to act. A good place for all of us to start is to clear our hearts through prayer and our minds via study of his Word, so that we can clear our schedules for obedience.

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

Think back to the first time you heard the story of Noah or of your early childhood memories of the story of Noah. What understanding of God's character did you derive from these stories? Have you ever struggled with transitioning the childhood version of the story into adulthood? How are we to understand this event?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 8:13–19.

- When does this take place?
- What is the setting?
- What does God command Noah to do? Underline God's instructions.
- What is the purpose for bringing Noah, his family, and every living thing safely out of the ark?

Read Genesis 8:20–22.

- What was Noah's response?
- What did God promise? Draw a box around his promises.

Read and compare Genesis 1:28–30 and Genesis 9:1–7.

	Genesis 1:28–30	Genesis 9:1–7
What is the setting?		
To whom is God speaking?		
What is God’s command?		
To whom is dominion over the animal kingdom given? Note any differences you observe.		
What may be eaten?		
What do you observe in the Noahic instructions that is absent in the Adamic instructions?		

Read Genesis 9:8–17.

- Circle every occurrence you notice of the word “covenant.”
- With whom did God make his covenant?
- What is the sign of the covenant?

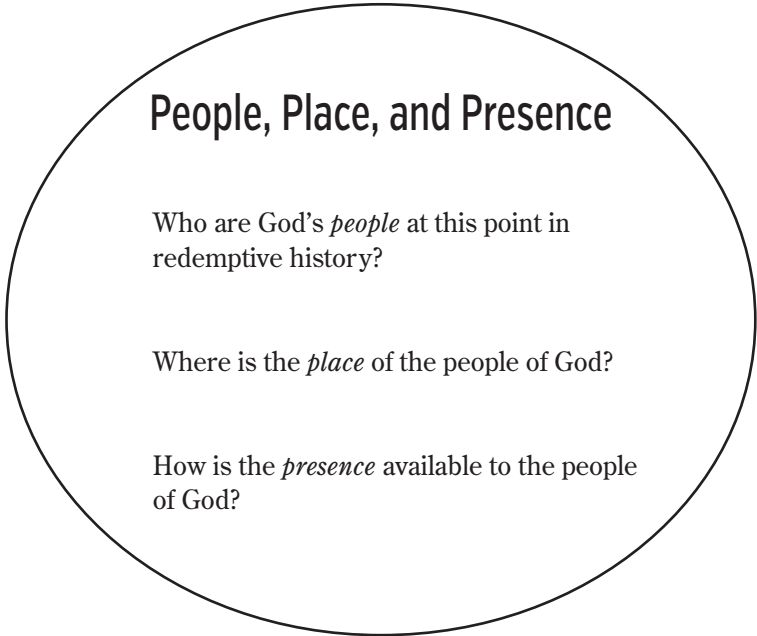
Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Noah and his family are starting life over after an epoch divider—their post-flood life will be so different from their pre-flood life. And it won’t be easy. What emotions do you think they feel as they step out of the ark? What emotions do they feel when God reaffirms his blessing and promise?

God's first, perfect world has been "washed" clean of the effects of the sin of Adam's generation, and what appears to be complete emptiness will be repopulated by the passengers on the ark. Thus God begins afresh with his fallen children. The vehicle of this fresh start being God's *re-creational* covenant with Noah. (Richter, *Epic*, 147–48.)

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Just like Noah, when we come out of our baptismal waters or when we confirm our acceptance of Jesus, we begin life afresh. So many old ways will have to change. How can we as the church prepare young people and new believers to live in their post-baptism callings?



People, Place, and Presence

Who are God's *people* at this point in redemptive history?

Where is the *place* of the people of God?

How is the *presence* available to the people of God?

WEEK NINE

Abraham

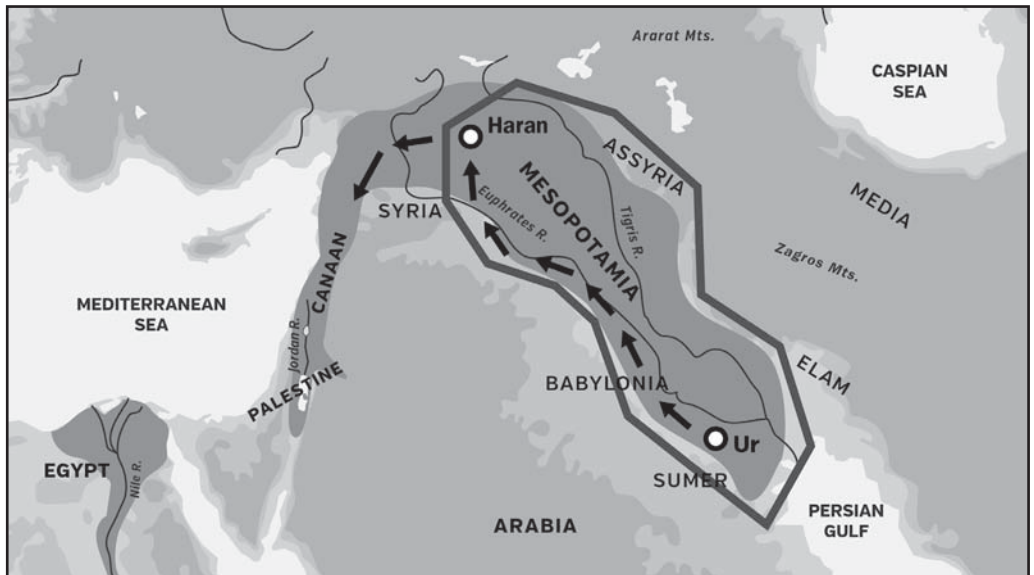
A Word from the Author

“As we pass from the story of Noah, through the Babel story and into Genesis 11, we find that the bloodline of the chosen leads us from Shem, the one called to bear God’s name, to Abram. With the genealogical interlude of Genesis 11:10–32, the primeval prologue of Genesis concludes and we step into what I identified earlier as ‘datable history.’ Here we are introduced to the ‘Father of the Jews,’ Abraham, and for the first time we begin to hear of a chosen nation. As you can tell from your Bible, the genre of the text seems to change with this juncture as well. We pass from stories that seem very foreign to us about gardens, floods, and towers reaching to heaven into a story about a fairly regular guy living a fairly regular life, which is interrupted by the call of God . . . There is really no way for us to know how much time has passed. But what we do know is that with Genesis 12, a new era opens. With this second step in redemptive history the plan begins to come into focus. Having laid the groundwork for his relationship with his fallen people in Noah’s covenant, God is now ready to begin identifying a place, a people, and a means of Presence” (Richter, *Epic*, 154–55).

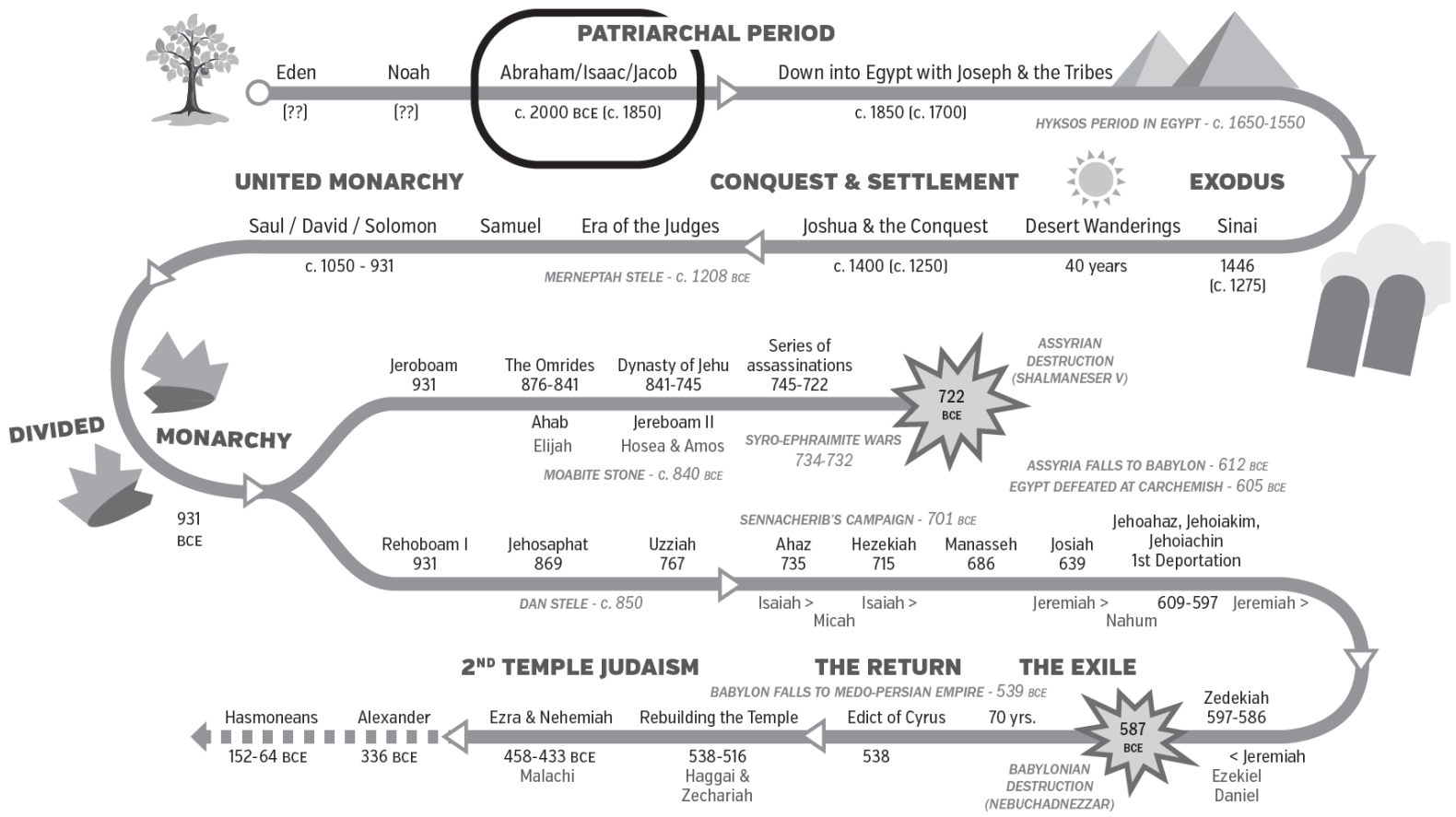
Real Time and Space

This week we will travel again with Abraham from his hometown of Ur in southern Mesopotamia to Haran, where Yahweh commands Abraham to leave his home and his family, and then on to the land of Canaan. You will notice on the timeline that the date for

Abraham is approximately 2000 BC. Although this date is an approximate date, based on events taking place in the ancient world at the time, it is plausible that it is the period of Abraham and the patriarchs.



Abraham's Migration



[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

Think of a time when you or a loved one suffered a life-and-death crisis. Perhaps an out-of-the-blue diagnosis of a rapidly moving disease. Perhaps infertility or miscarriage, a spouse transferred into a war zone, a late-night call from an emergency room. Where did your heart turn?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 11:10–32.

- Think about the narrator for a minute. How (and why) is he using these genealogies in his larger plot line?
- What similarities and differences do you find from the way genealogy was used in Genesis 5?
- What crisis is recorded in 11:30?
- Think about Abram's patriarchal society. What would happen to Abram's inherited resources and life-earnings if he had no heir?
- How might the lack of an heir affect Abram's sense of personal integrity and responsibility to his clan? How might it affect his clan's view of him?
- Think about Sarai's patriarchal society. What would Sarai's life look like if she had no children?
- How might the lack of an heir affect Sarai's sense of identity within her society? How might it affect how her society viewed her?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In Abram and Sarai's tribal society, children and family were essential to economic, legal, and social success. What sorts of anxieties do you think Abram and Sarai faced as they struggled with infertility?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Abram and Sarai had a legitimate need and what was for them a profound crisis. In that moment when crisis rolls over you like a flood, is it hard to trust God? Are you the person who drops to your knees, or picks up your phone?

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

Do you trust God? With what do you trust God? Your family? Your career? Your home? Your money? Your time? In which area of your life do you find it easiest to trust God? Which is the most difficult?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 11:31–12:9.

- In Genesis 12:1, God asks Abram to leave three things. What are they?
- Where does God send Abram and with what instructions?
- What five things does God promise in return for Abram's obedience?
- Has God addressed Abram's legitimate need?

covenant of grant or royal grant: *a covenant sworn to by individuals involving a gift of land or continuing office, bestowed upon a servant who had distinguished himself by loyal service to his sovereign.*

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In this passage, the voice belongs to God—we do not hear from Abram directly. What do you think the other side of the conversation might have sounded like? In other words, what questions do you think Abram might have asked God? Write down the top three.

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

We have no record as to whether or not Abram had any relationship with Yahweh before the command given to him to leave his home, his people, and his security. But, when Yahweh commanded, Abram trusted him and obeyed. If God called you today to go, what would be the hardest part of saying yes? Make a list here of the most difficult things.

Having originally departed from southern Mesopotamia and the city of Ur, the first leg of Abraham's migration is complete when the family reaches Haran. Here they settle. But eventually Terah dies, leaving his sons to begin their own family units, and it is at this point that God speaks to Abram. His command? "Go forth." In other words, leave everything and everyone that makes someone in a patriarchal society secure and trust God for a new identity and a new place. Take a moment to translate this into your current economic and social situation. Leave your house, your job, your friends, your church, your relatives, abandon your inheritance, a 401K that will not transfer and maybe even the equity in your home—and go somewhere where you don't speak the language, you have no business contacts, friends, or relatives . . . and trust God to make a new place for you. (Richter, *Epic*, 158.)

DAY THREE

First Contact

Are you comfortable in your life right now? Even if your circumstances are not exactly what you might have once hoped for, do you feel as though you have a pretty solid idea of what will come next? Does that comfortableness give you joy or are you restless? Have you pondered what it might look like to push forward out of that comfortable place into a new and more meaningful or (dare I say it) obedient place?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 15.

- Flip back to Genesis 12:4. How old was Abram?
- In Genesis 15, who begins the conversation? What is the response?
- How is the covenant cut? Where do you see:
 - Oaths and obligations?
 - Blessings and curses?
 - Familial language?
 - Swearing of covenant loyalty?

Read Genesis 16:1–6.

- How is Sarai responding to the status quo in this narrative?
- What does Sarai do to obtain a child and, therefore, meet her legitimate need as addressed in our study on Day 1?

- Know that for Sarai to turn to Hagar's fertility in light of her circumstances would not have been at all unusual or immoral in her day (note how Leah and Rachel will do the same decades later). In fact, for Sarai this would be much like a modern-day trip to the fertility clinic. All the same, what do her actions say about how she's feeling about God's promise in chapter 15?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Although to us Abram and Sarai seem like giants of the faith, in reality they are much like any infertile couple struggling to trust God in the midst of heart-crushing circumstances. Have you known an infertile couple? Have you been one? What are these two feeling at this point?

Years have passed since Genesis 12. Abram is now a resident of Canaan.

He has grown older, so has his wife, and his faith is wearing thin.

In light of his childless state, Abram has done what any responsible man of substance would; he has chosen an heir from among his household.

This was quite common in the ancient world, when no biological heir appeared, an adoptive one was selected. In Abram's case it was the faithful servant Eliezer of Damascus. Into this settled and comfortable state of affairs, Yahweh appears again. (Richter, *Epic*, 159–60.)

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Have you ever been in a similar place, one in which you have been waiting and waiting to see the answer to a prayer? If you are in that place right now, what gives you faith and hope? When the group gathers this week, consider sharing with the group the burden for which you've been waiting for an answer—one in which you feel you've received words and promises from God, but as of yet no action. And if you're not in that spot, think about sharing a past victory of your own that might encourage someone else.

[[DAY FOUR]]

First Contact

Have you ever had a conversation like this with God: “God, I already have this plan, please bless it. I know I didn’t ask you first, and maybe this wasn’t exactly what you had in mind, but my heart was in the right place.”

What were the circumstances? What were the results?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 17.

- What is God’s command to Abram?
- What is Abram’s physical response? What is Abram’s verbal response?
- What are the oaths and obligations?
- What are the blessings and curses?

Read Genesis 18:1–22 and Genesis 21:1–7. Abram’s name change to “Abraham” will be discussed in this week’s video study.

- How do the responses of Sarah and Abraham differ?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Look at Abraham’s plea in Genesis 17:18. Imagine a father’s heart, going out to his son. Imagine a man who knows his past wrong decision is now going to hurt someone he loves. What emotions do you think Abraham is experiencing?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Looking at Abraham and Sarah's decision-making process, and the results it brought to their family, ask yourself how you can better listen to God's direction and be obedient to his plan as opposed to your own.

This chapter [Genesis 17] records the final covenant interaction between Yahweh and Abram. Abram is now an old man, and his beautiful wife, who was a fairly young woman when he answered Yahweh's call, is now "past childbearing." Thus the bright hopes of an earlier day have faded.

And in the place of Sarai and Abram's long-awaited child, Hagar has borne Ishmael. This is another one of those biblical stories that leaves me amazed at the restraint of the narrator. If I pause for just a moment, I can feel Abram and Sarai's pain—their disappointment, their empty arms.

I'm sure there are those reading these words who can feel their pain more acutely than I. And all this hurt in the midst of trying to honor a God who promised, but has not delivered. (Richter, *Epic*, 162.)

DAY FIVE

First Contact

Have you ever had to take a bold risk in faith? What was at stake? What were your fears? What was the outcome?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 21:1–7; 22:1–19.

- What did God ask Abraham to do?
- What was Abraham's response?
- Who stopped Abraham?
- Why did God ask Abraham to offer his son Isaac?
- What did God say he would do for Abraham as a result of his obedience?

Read Galatians 3:6–9.

- What about Abraham's faith and deeds do you think God counts as righteousness?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In the text as we have it, the author records neither Abraham's thoughts or feelings nor Isaac's. As Abraham is about to do what God has asked him to do, what emotions do you think Abraham is feeling? As his father is binding up Isaac, laying him on top of the wood, and raising the butcher knife above his head, what questions do you think Isaac might have?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Meditate on Hebrews 11, focusing on verses 8–19. What does it mean to have faith like Abraham? How would having this type of faith change the way we live? How would operating with this type of faith change our churches, our communities, and our world?

People, Place, and Presence

Who are God's *people* at this point in redemptive history?

Where is the *place* of the people of God?

How is the *presence* available to the people of God?

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WEEK TEN

Moses

A Word from the Author

“With Moses we step into the next major juncture in redemptive history. Having reestablished contact with fallen humanity through his covenant with Noah, identified his *people* and *place* by means of his covenant with Abraham (and hinted at *Adam’s* returned access to the *presence*), God now sets about to fulfill the promises to Abraham through the nation of Israel. This is the most detailed chapter in all of redemptive history; it is what your New Testament writers speak of as “the old covenant,” and it lays the typological groundwork for the New Testament. Here we will also be introduced to the tabernacle—that first concrete step toward getting God and humanity back into the same space” (Richter, *Epic*, 166).

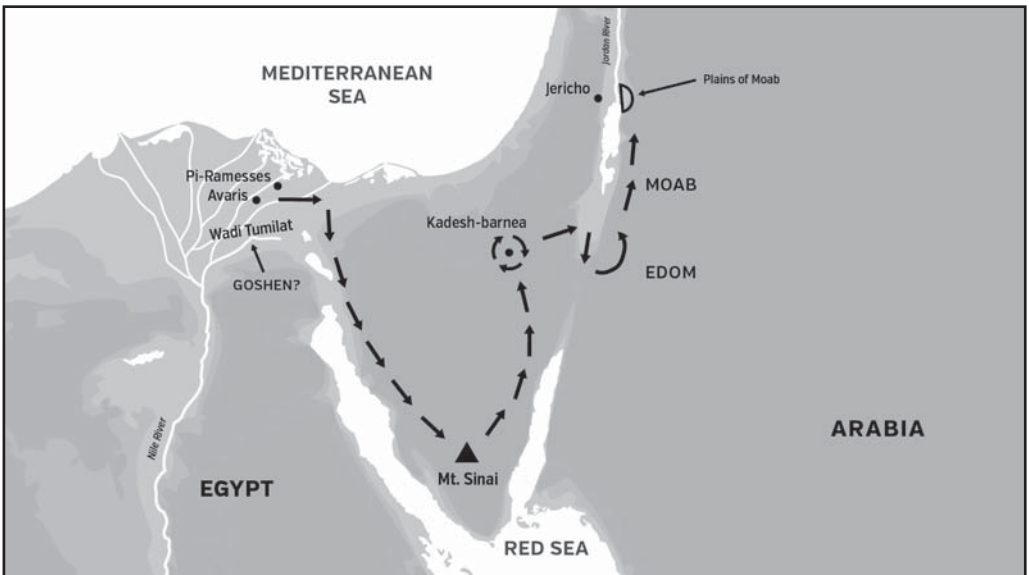
Real Time and Space

You will recall from Week 3, Day 3 that the children of Israel had relocated to the land of Egypt following Joseph’s rise to power there. This week we will move forward in time a few hundred years and see what became of the children of Israel in Egypt and how they were delivered from their situation. We will follow them out of Egypt to Sinai where they are offered Yahweh’s suzerain–vassal covenant and are transformed into a nation.

You will notice on the following timeline that two dates are offered for the date of the Exodus, one being 1446 BC and the other about 1275 BC. The early date of 1446 BC is based on internal evidence from the Bible found in 1 Kings 6:1, while the later date is based on archaeological and epigraphical evidence found outside the Bible.



Joseph's Journey into Egypt



The Exodus



PATRIARCHAL PERIOD

Eden [??] Noah [??] Abraham/Isaac/Jacob c. 2000 BCE (c. 1850) Down into Egypt with Joseph & the Tribes c. 1850 (c. 1700)

HYKSOS PERIOD IN EGYPT - c. 1650-1550

UNITED MONARCHY

Saul / David / Solomon c. 1050 - 931

Samuel Era of the Judges

CONQUEST & SETTLEMENT

Joshua & the Conquest c. 1400 (c. 1250)

Desert Wanderings 40 years

EXODUS

Sinai 1446 (c. 1275)

MERNEPTAH STELE - c. 1208 BCE



DIVIDED

MONARCHY

931 BCE

Jeroboam 931

The Omrides 876-841

Dynasty of Jehu 841-745

Series of assassinations 745-722

722 BCE

ASSYRIAN DESTRUCTION (SHALMANESER V)

Ahab Elijah Jereboam II Hosea & Amos MOABITE STONE - c. 840 BCE

SYRO-EPHRAIMITE WARS 734-732

ASSYRIA FALLS TO BABYLON - 612 BCE EGYPT DEFEATED AT CARCHEMISH - 605 BCE

Rehoboam I 931

Jehosaphat 869

Uzziah 767

SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN - 701 BCE

Ahaz 735

Hezekiah 715

Manasseh 686

Josiah 639

Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin 1st Deportation

DAN STELE - c. 850

Isaiah > Micah

Isaiah > Micah

Jeremiah > Nahum

609-597 Jeremiah >

2ND TEMPLE JUDAISM

THE RETURN

THE EXILE

Hasmoneans 152-64 BCE

Alexander 336 BCE

Ezra & Nehemiah 458-433 BCE Malachi

Rebuilding the Temple 538-516 Haggai & Zechariah

Edict of Cyrus 538

70 yrs. BABYLONIAN DESTRUCTION (NEBUCHADNEZZAR)

587 BCE

Zedekiah 597-586 < Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel

BABYLON FALLS TO MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE - 539 BCE

[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

Have you ever been asked to do something that somewhere in your heart you knew was wrong? Perhaps you noticed a classmate cheating off of you during a final exam, and you didn't know what to do. Perhaps the people with whom you wanted to be included (either personally or professionally) asked you to exclude someone else. Perhaps the numbers didn't add up to show a gain on your quarterly reports and your boss asked you to reclassify some expenses. Think about a time when a power (or perceived power) structure asked you to go against what you believed to be right. Were you tempted to accommodate them? How were you going to rationalize your complicity? How did you feel? What did you do?

Into the Story

Read Exodus 1.

- After the death of Joseph and all of his family, what occurred in Egypt?
- What did the new Pharaoh fear? Why?
- What is the relationship between Jacob's descendants and Egypt now?
- What labor was forced upon Jacob's descendants?
- What were the midwives commanded by the Pharaoh?
- How did the midwives respond to this command? Why?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Put yourself in the sandals of one of the midwives who had been commanded by the highest earthly authority to put newborn babies to death. What sorts of battles are going on within you?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Think again about complicity with evil. According to the experts, bullying in our schools has reached epidemic proportions. According to those same experts, being more than a bystander is the fastest and most effective way to disarm a bully. Just the act of another child including the victim in friendship or saying, “Hey, that’s wrong,” makes an enormous difference.

Think about this in relation to how we grown-ups treat the outsider on our work teams and in our social circles. How do we who were once slaves ourselves love, welcome, and provide a safe place for the stranger?

Every time I read this story I try to get my mind around what it would be like to be a midwife who assists a mother all the way through a birth only to suffocate the newborn in her arms . . . while the new mother lies there begging for her child’s life. I wonder what sort of Egyptian citizen would follow through on the Pharaoh’s second order? And what sort of mayhem resulted when those citizens decided it was time to ransack the Israelite villages, snatch the little ones from their parents’ arms and throw them into the river? (Richter, *Epic*, 171–72.)

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

Has your career path ever taken a serious left turn? Maybe it was a failed job experience, a failed (but necessary) course, a boss who refused to promote you, or a personal choice to limit your own success in preference to your spouse's career. When you were in the midst of that perceived failure, how did you feel about yourself? Your future?

Into the Story

Read Exodus 2.

- Who found the baby in the basket in the Nile and raised him as her own son?
- What did Moses gain from this adoption that he could not have obtained as the child of his Israelite mother?
- Whom did Moses refer to as his people?
- How did his own people respond to Moses?
- Why did Moses flee to Midian?
- In Midian, we first see Moses described as a deliverer. Who called him this and under what circumstances?
- In verses 23–25, circle the verbs associated with God, and underline or highlight the objects associated with those verbs.

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. (Exod. 2:23–25)

Read Exodus 3:1–4:17.

- What does Yahweh tell Moses that he has seen and heard (3:7–10)?
- Moses responds to Yahweh with several hesitations and excuses in this text. Identify three of those.

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Being the audience, we know that God has been preparing Moses from birth to be the long-promised deliverer of Israel. But Moses, being in the midst of his own experience, doesn't know that at all. Rather, he is intimidated by God's calling and responded with many excuses. Why do you think he was reluctant?

Into Israel's impossible situation comes a deliverer. . . . In this tremendous act of deliverance Yahweh proves himself the Lord of the cosmos by defeating the greatest emperor of that era (and his gods) on their own turf. How does he do it? Through one man whose life had been directed by an unseen divine hand, who was prepared in ways that he could never have imagined were significant, and bringing this man to a point of conviction and belief. Think about it. The typical Israelite slave was illiterate, certainly had no military training, and had never been allowed to organize into anything as sophisticated as a PTA. How would such a person organize and represent a nation? Write up a law code? Lead troops into battle? The typical Israelite slave could do none of those things. Moses, however, was not the typical Israelite slave. Rather, because of his "chance" adoption, Moses was trained *by the Egyptians* to read, write, and administrate; he was at least bilingual, confident of his ability to interact with Egyptian royalty, and trained in the arts of war and diplomacy. (Richter, *Epic*, 173.)

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Now think about your own life and the left turns in your past. Is there any chance that the God of Moses might have some plans for those rabbit trails? Can you think of three people whose lives you have been (or might be) able to speak into in a redemptive fashion because of those rabbit trails?

DAY THREE

First Contact

Name your favorite fairy tale. How about a favorite movie? How about an epic tale? Have you noticed that every one of these stories has some sort of long-delayed and long-anticipated promise upon which each main character's future depends, but whose success hangs in the balance of an unknown future? Why is this plot line so successful?

Into the Story

Fill in the chart below with the promises made to Abraham and how that promise was fulfilled.

Promise to Abraham	Fulfillment of the Promise
Genesis 15:5-6	Exodus 12:37-38
Genesis 15:7	Deuteronomy 1:6-8; Joshua 1:1-4
Genesis 15:1	Exodus 25:8; Joshua 3:1-11

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Throughout the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, the Israelites' future hangs in the balance of the long-awaited fulfillment of a promise. This promise had been made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, handed off to Moses and then Joshua . . . in hope. When the Israelites finally stand on the Plains of Moab, seeing all God had done to get them there, but seeing all that lay ahead to actually secure the Promised Land, what are they thinking?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Think back to a benchmark moment in your Christian faith. For some it will be that moment of conversion, for others that moment when God made a promise so wonderful (and so impossible) that you could barely believe. Now look at your life right now. Has God been faithful in the past? Is it reasonable to trust him for the future?

This is the exodus. This is the single most important event in all Israelite history. Without the exodus, the children of Abraham were a forgotten race.

Without the exodus, the promises of Abraham were nothing. Without the exodus, there would be no Mosaic covenant and no Israel.

“I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” [Exod. 20:2]. You would be hard-pressed to read far into the Old Testament without bumping into this phrase or allusions to it, because this is the historical prologue of the Mosaic covenant—it furnishes the basis of the vassal's obligation. According to what we know about covenants, this is *why* Israel should serve Yahweh. Moreover, it is also how Yahweh has chosen to be known. For all of history, our God has *chosen* to be identified by this singular event—the God who rescues slaves from their bondage and claims them as his own. (Richter, *Epic*, 174.)

DAY FOUR

First Contact

Every nation has some kind of government, whether it be a democracy, monarchy, republic, aristocracy, or dictatorship. How much do you know about the government of your country? The nation of Israel also had a type of government. Have you ever given any thought to what that was?

Into the Story

Read Deuteronomy 17:8–20; 18:15–22.

- Which of the three human officers of Israel’s theocracy is identified in Deuteronomy 17:8–13?
- Which of the three human officers is identified in Deuteronomy 17:14–20?
- Which of the three human officers is identified in Deuteronomy 18:15–22?
- Fill in the corresponding officer with the job descriptions listed on the following page.

theocracy: *Literally means “government by God” and is descriptive of the government in the nation of Israel during the Mosaic covenant. The three human officers of this theocratic government in Israel were the prophet, the priest, and the king. But the true sovereign of Israel was Yahweh.*

Job Description	Theocratic Office
Spoke for the people to God	
Spoke for God to the people	
Political leader; made sure the government ran smoothly and ensured that the nation adhered to the covenant	

If you are unfamiliar with the story of David and Bathsheba, read 2 Samuel 11. In this story, David, the king of Israel, had an affair with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, who was one of David's trusted men. When David found out that Bathsheba was pregnant with his child, he attempted to cover it up by arranging for Uriah to come home from the battlefield to spend time with his wife. When his attempts failed, David sent Uriah back to the war, placing him in a position in which he would surely die. Read 2 Samuel 12:1–15a.

- Who is the prophet who approached David?
- After the prophet tells David a story, what is David's reaction and response to the story?
- What is the first thing the prophet says following David's response?
- What do you think would have happened in any other throne room in the ancient Near East if the prophet dared to call out the king's sin?
- What did David do after being called out?
- Why did the prophet have the confidence to stand before King David and deliver this message?
- What does David's response to his sin tell you about the office of king in Israel? What about David's character?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In the text as we have it, we are told that Yahweh sent Nathan to David and he went to him. Having been told what to say to David, the king of Israel, do you think Nathan had any reservations about going before the king and delivering Yahweh's message? Why or why not?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Typically when a person is confronted with their own misbehavior, the first response is to rationalize. It is not easy to admit that you've blown it! When we see a friend who is living in sin but is blind to that sin, how should we approach him or her? Or, if someone approaches you and shines light on a sin to which you are blind, how do you respond?

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

Is there a physical place that reminds you of the greatness of God? Perhaps it is your own home in the early morning when the world seems new, a campsite deep in the forest that your family visits every year, or the edge of the ocean. Where do you feel safe? Where do you feel at peace? Where do you feel the glory of God?

Into the Story

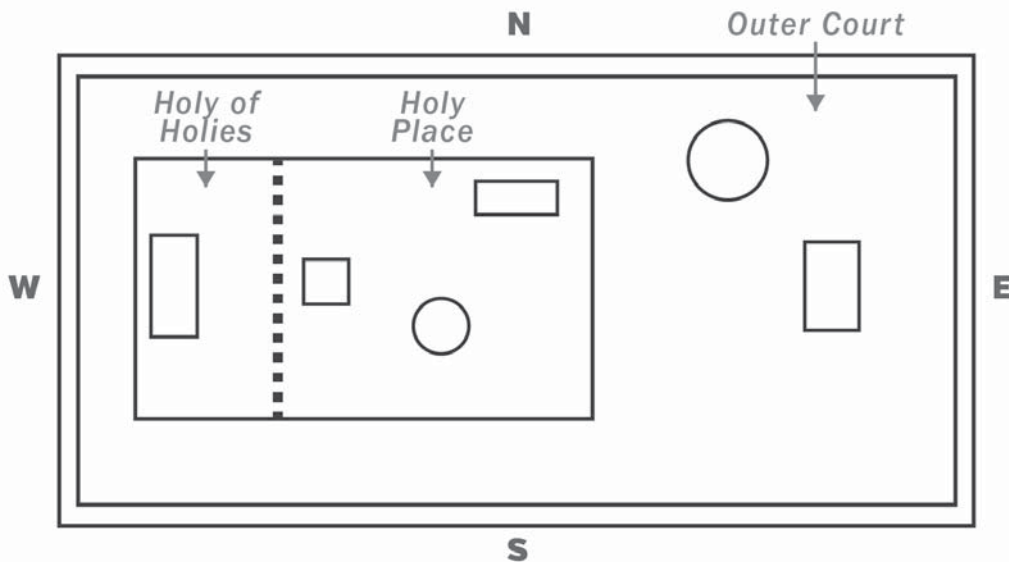
The construction of the tabernacle is detailed in Exodus chapters 25–31. Read Exodus 25:1–9.

- What does Yahweh ask of the people in this passage?
- What is the reason he gives for making this request?

Read Exodus 26:31–27:19 and Hebrews 9:1–15; 10:19–23.

- What is the purpose of the veil?
- What did the cherubim on the veil communicate to the people? (Think back to Week 7).
- What was to be placed behind the veil?
- What was the space behind the veil called? Why? Who was granted access to this space and how often?
- What objects were to be placed outside the veil?
- What was the space immediately outside the veil called? Who was granted access to this space?

- Identify and label the parts and objects in the footprint of the tabernacle below:
 - The Ark of the Covenant
 - The Altar of Incense
 - The Table of Showbread
 - The Golden Candlestick
 - The Laver
 - The Altar of Burnt Offering



- What objects were to be placed in the outer court? Who was allowed in this space?
- How did our access to the presence of God change with Jesus' sacrifice of himself?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Think about the Israelites wandering in the desert. What would it mean to them that their God, their deliverer who rescued them from slavery in Egypt, would travel with them and tabernacle with them in the desert? At the same time, what would it mean to them that the average person could not enter the Holy Place? Now, imagine the Day of Atonement, the one day of the year in which the high priest enters the Holy of Holies to offer sacrifice on behalf of the people. If Yahweh accepts the sacrifice, the high priest lives; if Yahweh doesn't accept the sacrifice, the high priest dies. As one in the crowd awaiting the verdict, describe what you might be seeing, hearing, thinking, etc.

We are first introduced to the tabernacle (Hebrew *miškān*, literally “the place of dwelling”) when Yahweh says to Moses in Exodus 25:8: “Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them.” The “so that” in this passage is critical because it lets us know that God’s purpose in instituting the tabernacle was that he might live among his people. (Richter, *Epic*, 179–80.)

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

In the Gospel according to Mark, we read about a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years (5:25–29). Not only does the woman draw near, but she *touches* God the Son and is instantly healed. Could this have happened under the old covenant? How did God resolve this issue of the separation of the unclean and the holy in the new covenant?



People, Place, and Presence

Who are God’s *people* at this point in redemptive history?

Where is the *place* of the people of God?

How is the *presence* available to the people of God?

WEEK ELEVEN

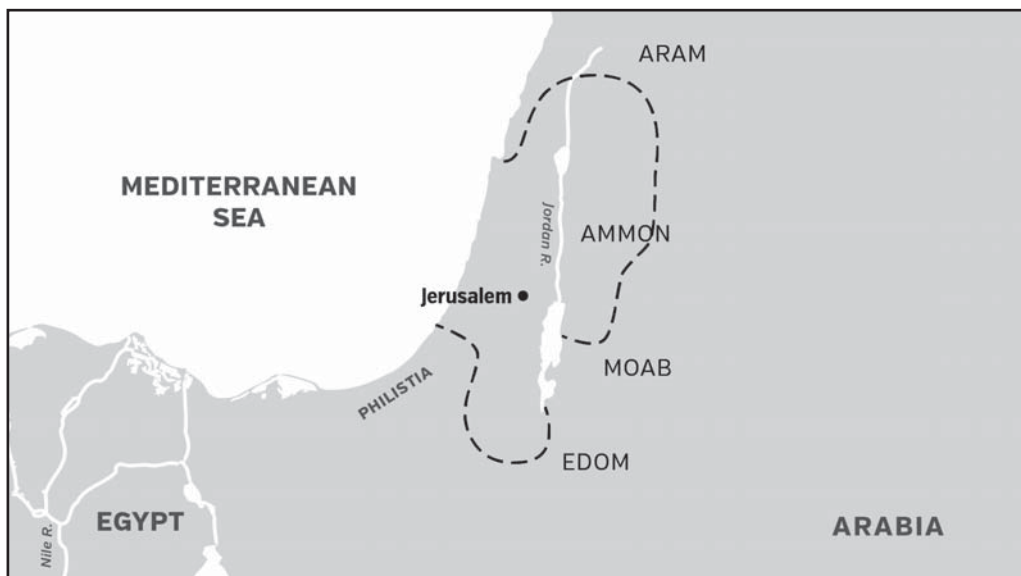
David

A Word from the Author

“The covenant with David is the last piece of the Old Testament puzzle. . . . [We’ve] learned that the Mosaic covenant established God’s theocratic kingdom on earth and that this kingdom was designed to be administrated by three human officers: the prophet, the priest, and the king. [Now] we have to examine the job description of the last of these three officers, the king, and investigate the life and times of the paradigmatic king: David. . . . But this larger covenantal administration has a ‘subcovenant,’ David’s royal grant. David’s covenant does not change the identity of the *people, place, or presence* of the Mosaic covenant, but it adds a critical new dimension—a royal, human representative who stands between Yahweh and his people” (Richter, *Epic*, 189–90).

Real Time and Space

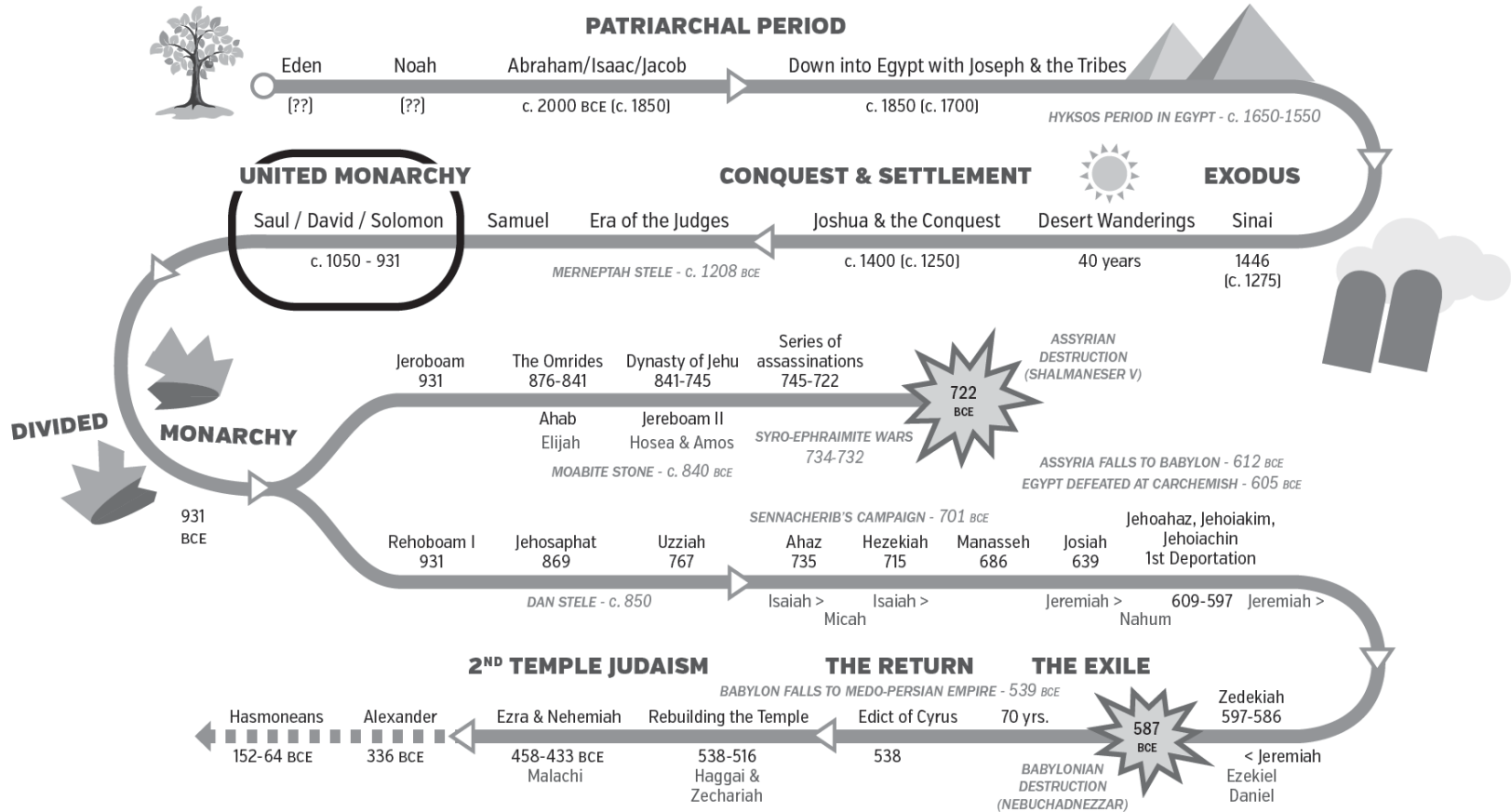
Last week we were in Sinai with Moses and saw the establishment of the theocratic kingdom of God through the Mosaic covenant. This week we move from Sinai through the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land, to the time when the judges ruled Israel as a tribal league. We will see how this tribal league transitioned into a monarchy, and how this newly formed nation flourished during the reign of David, the ideal king. It is during his reign that the national boundaries promised to Abraham are finally reached. This is short-lived, however, as David’s united monarchy becomes divided, and by 586 BC, the land of Israel is conquered and its people taken into exile.



David's Kingdom

The map above indicates the size of David's kingdom: "From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates" (see Gen. 15:18 NASB).

Take a moment to locate Joshua and the Conquest through the Exile on the following timeline.



[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

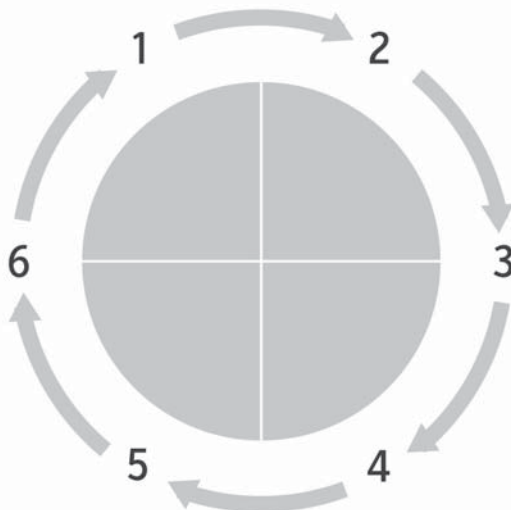
Have you ever been caught in a cycle of sin? As a child, such a cycle can seem benign. You told the small lie which led to the larger lie which took on a life of its own—until an adult found out and everything crashed and burned. As an adult, such a cycle is anything but benign. An addiction begins with one seemingly small condescension to temptation. It continues by means of smaller and then larger rationalizations. Rationalizations eventually become lies, and lies become betrayals. If tolerated, in time this cycle of sin will threaten all you hold dear. How can a person break free?

Into the Story

The following diagram and exercise illustrate the repeated cycle throughout the book of Judges. As you answer the questions in this exercise, try to complete the diagram as indicated. (The completed diagram will be explained in the video.) Read Judges 2:6–3:11.

- (Arrow 1) How were the Israelites living during the days of Joshua (2:6–7)?
- (Arrow 2) How were the Israelites living after the death of Joshua (2: 8–13; 3:7)?
- (Arrow 3) How does God react and what does the enemy do (2:14–15; 3:8)?
- (Arrow 4) How do the people react (3:9)?
- (Arrows 5 and 6) How does God respond (2:16; 3:9–11)?

In this early stage of Israel’s history, Yahweh makes it very clear that national success would be dependent on adherence to the covenant. The promise was that when Israel kept covenant, they would experience prosperity and security. When they failed to keep covenant, the nation would be disciplined by means of some sort of national disaster—typically foreign oppression. . . . Moreover, the political and economic well-being of the nation was a direct indicator of whether or not God was pleased with his people. And as the people of God during this era of redemptive history were not terribly different from the people of God during our era of redemptive history, obedience to the covenant was not always a priority. As a result, we see a repeating cycle throughout the book of Judges. (Richter, *Epic*, 191-92.)



Read Judges 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1.

- What does each of these verses have in common?

Read Judges 17:6, 18:1; 21:25.

- At the end of the book of Judges, what does the biblical author identify as the problem in Israel?

Read 1 Samuel 8:1–9.

- What do the Israelites think will solve their problem?

So how did we get from Sinai to the birth of the monarchy? The books of the Bible that detail this transition are the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and 1 Samuel. Here we read about Israel's conquest and ongoing struggle to control the land, their apportionment of the land into tribal territories, the era of the judges, and at last, the emergence of Saul as the first actual *king* in Israel's history. Politically speaking, this transition may be characterized as a transition from a "tribal league" into a "monarchy." (Richter, *Epic*, 191.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In Judges 2:10, the author tells us, "After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel." As we have seen, this generation continued in a cycle of sin, and when the people cried out to the Lord, he raised up a deliverer for them, but then they turned right back to their sin. They did this even though they had seen God's mighty acts on their behalf. If you were among this generation, how do you think you would respond to your community's cycle of sin?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

How does your church deal with repetitive sin, whether it be cycles of sin in the institution or cycles of sin in the lives of individuals in the church? Do we try to ignore these issues? Or do we seek solutions? If the response is to seek solutions, from where do we seek a solution?

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

Have you ever been so sure that what you wanted was right that you rejected the counsel of your parents, boss, or pastor and followed your own way? What were the circumstances? What were the consequences?

Into the Story

Read Deuteronomy 17:14–20.

- What is God's first instruction regarding the selection of a king?
- What are the requirements regarding nationality?
- What are the requirements for the king's possessions?
- What are the requirements for the king's household?
- What instructions does God give to the king regarding the law?
- What does God promise to the king who follows his instructions?

Read 1 Samuel 8:4–22.

- Why do the Israelites want a king?
- Why does Samuel advise against it?
- What is Samuel's warning to the people in 8:18?

These folks wanted a king who would conscript a professional army and thereby resolve their ongoing problem with foreign oppression. But what had Yahweh told them about foreign oppression? It was Yahweh's disciplinary response to covenant unfaithfulness. Thus the solution to the problem at hand was not a king and his professional army, but adherence to the covenant. (Richter, *Epic*, 196.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Put yourself in Samuel's shoes. You have just told the people what life with an earthly king of their choosing would be like, but they refuse to heed your warning, saying in essence, "We don't care!" Samuel understands that the people of Israel are making the wrong decision for the wrong reasons. How do you think he might want to respond to this scenario?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

What do we do as the church when our membership wants something that we believe is not God's will? What if the desire is for something specifically addressed in Scripture? How do we (or don't we) come together as a congregation to discern God's will and take proper action? What do *you* do when you feel your church has made a bad decision?

DAY THREE

First Contact

Have you ever known (worked with, attended school with, been related to) someone who simply could not accept correction? Was it because they really were just exceptionally talented? Or perhaps exceptionally privileged? Or perhaps they were too insecure to consider the potential of failure?

Into the Story

Read 1 Samuel 8:22; 9:1–2.

- What did God tell Samuel to do?
- How is Saul described?

Read 1 Samuel 15:10–11, 24–26.

- How does Saul lose favor in God's sight?
- Saul repents of his wrongdoing. What is his reason for disobeying God?
- What did Saul lose as a result of his disobedience?

Read 1 Samuel 16:1–13.

- What does God tell Samuel to do?
- Compare 1 Samuel 16:1 to 1 Samuel 8:22. What difference do you notice regarding the king?
- How is David described?

Read 1 Samuel 16:14–23.

- What is the relationship between David and Saul?

Look back at Week 3, Day 5 where we looked at David versus Goliath in 1 Samuel 17.

- What do you learn about David from this passage?
- How does David's character compare and contrast to Saul's?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Look at Saul's repentance in 1 Samuel 15. Which of his fears do you see shining through in the words and actions that he takes? How do those fears interfere with his ability to be an encourager, instructor, discipliner, and leader of God's people?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

As we live our lives in whatever occupation to which we have been called, how can we guard ourselves about being more concerned about God's kingdom rather than our own kingdom?

Saul is letting his insecurities get the best of him. And as 1 Samuel 15:24–31 makes crystal clear, this first king of Israel is allowing *his* career and his success to become more important than that of the kingdom of God. Saul forgot who he worked for and became confused as to whose kingdom it was. (Richter, *Epic*, 198.)

DAY FOUR

First Contact

Think of a time when you were sitting on top of the world. Everything seemed to be going exactly the way that you had hoped (or maybe even better than you could ever have imagined). You got the job. You made the team. You were admitted to the sorority. How did it feel? Did it affect the way you interacted with your family during that time? Your church family? God?

Into the Story

Read 2 Samuel 7.

- What does David desire to do?
- How does Yahweh respond to this desire?
- Why do you think there is a message of correction in here?
- In verses 9–16, Yahweh declares what he will do. As you read through these verses, highlight each occurrence of the phrase “I will,” making note of what Yahweh will do.
- What does Yahweh mean when he says he will make a “house” for David?
- What does Yahweh promise David regarding his descendant and regarding his throne?
- How does David respond to God’s promise?

Our fledgling king is awarded an *eternal* dynasty for his outstanding record of personal service to his suzerain. Pay special attention to 2 Samuel 7:14–16.

These verses are the very taproot of the messianic hope. Any attentive reader must stumble over the word “forever” in 2 Samuel 7:16. Obviously such a promise reaches beyond David, his children, and the nation of Israel itself. How could Yahweh fulfill such a tall order? The answer, of course, will be by means of a child of David who reaches beyond David and Israel and is himself eternal. (Richter, *Epic*, 203.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In 2 Samuel 7:18–29, we see David’s response to Yahweh’s promises to him. Can you hear the emotion that David felt as he prayed to his suzerain? Read David’s prayer out loud. Where do you think his emotion is coming from?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

God’s desire in our lives is to give us what we *need*, not necessarily what we *want*. Have you ever parented or mentored another person where it was your duty to give the former as opposed to the latter. How did the person under your care respond? Did you hold your ground?

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

It is hard to wait. In fact, the more we want something, the harder it is to wait. And if part of the waiting involves being delivered from suffering, the waiting can break our spirits. The time of the exile is such a time. Great suffering and great hope. For what are you waiting?

Into the Story

Turn back to Week 4, Day 4 and read the “Into the Story” section regarding the division of the united monarchy of Israel following Solomon’s death. Read 2 Kings 17:1–23; 24:1–4; 25:1–21. (*Note: Israel, Samaria = northern kingdom; Judah, Jerusalem = southern kingdom*)

- What superpower captured the northern kingdom of Israel?
- Where were the people of Israel taken into exile?
- Read through 2 Kings 17:7–23 and underline each of the reasons for the fall of the northern kingdom.
- What superpower captured Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah?
- Where were the people of Judah taken into exile?
- What is the reason for the fall of the southern kingdom?

Read Isaiah 9:2, 6–7.

- What is the promise found in Isaiah?
- What did the exiles expect of their deliverer?

- From whose line would their deliverer come?
- What would be the length of his reign?

Read Ezekiel 37:21–28.

- Underline or highlight every occurrence of the words “I will” and “they will” in this passage. What are God’s promises to the exiles? List at least three.
- What/who does Yahweh promise will be in the midst of his people forever?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Be an Israelite in the exile for a few minutes. Think about the fact that the prophet Jeremiah has told you to go ahead and build houses, plant orchards, and have children here in Babylon. In other words, this is going to be a long haul (Jer. 29:10–14). Pause from your very full day of very physical work in this foreign land and picture what the Messiah will be like. How he is going to get you out of Babylon and back into Jerusalem (Ps. 126:1)?

Throughout this era, every king of Israel will be compared (for good or for ill) to David. David is the paradigm, his covenant-loyalty the standard. And as the years go by and the storm clouds continue to gather on the horizon, the same question begins to form itself in the heart of every faithful Israelite: “Is there a son of David out there somewhere who can clean up the mess we’ve made, stand against our enemies, and speak up for the voiceless?” But the sons of David continue to disappoint.

And after years of warnings and second chances, the covenant curse is at last enacted and Judah is swept away. The land grant is recalled, the temple is razed, and the proud children of Abraham are slaughtered and dragged off into exile in Babylonia. A broken covenant, a broken dream, a broken people. . . . Yet even in the silence of exile, the promise of the prophets continues to echo. (Richter, *Epic*, 206–7.)

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Consider the lyrics of “O Come O Come Emmanuel.” Sing them to yourself or listen to your favorite version of the song. (Try the David Crowder Band or Sixpence None the Richer.)

Put yourself into the place of the exiles. Think about what it means to wait, longing, needing for God to “close the path to misery.” Keep in mind that the exile went on for *seventy years*. Now in the same breath declare, “Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee.” How can you entertain such suffering and such hope in a single heart?

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

(Traditional)

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

Refrain: Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, Thou Lord of Might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law,
In cloud, and majesty, and awe. (Refrain)

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave. (Refrain)

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight. (Refrain)

O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery. (Refrain)

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things, far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And cause us in her ways to go. (Refrain)

O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of peace. (Refrain)

People, Place, and Presence

Who are God's *people* at this point in redemptive history?

Where is the *place* of the people of God?

How is the *presence* available to the people of God?

WEEK TWELVE

The New Covenant

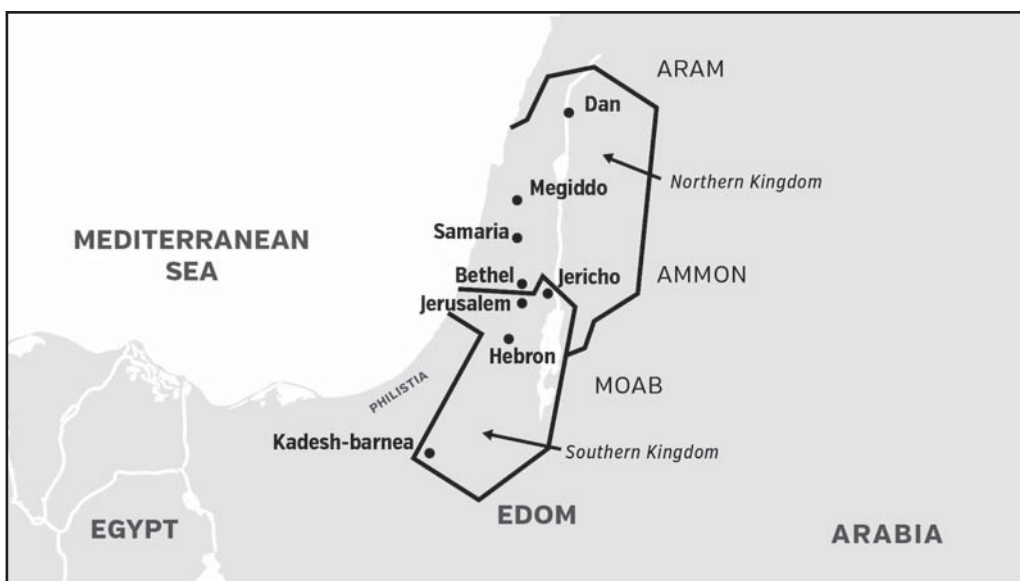
A Word from the Author

“The faithful in Israel lived with the hope of a promise—the return of the Davidic dynasty. Isaiah had promised that in God’s time ‘a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,’ and ‘in that day the nations will resort to the root of Jesse who will stand as a signal for the peoples’ (Isa. 11:1, 10 [NASB]). The prophet had said that one day a child would be given to the nation, and ‘there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom’ (Isa. 9:6–7 [NASB]). Predictably, the Jews understood these promises to mean that this coming child of David would throw off their foreign overlords, restore their national sovereignty, reunite north and south, and bring back the golden days of independence and prosperity as they remembered them under David. And so the citizens of Judah watched and waited for their deliverer” (Richter, *Epic*, 211).

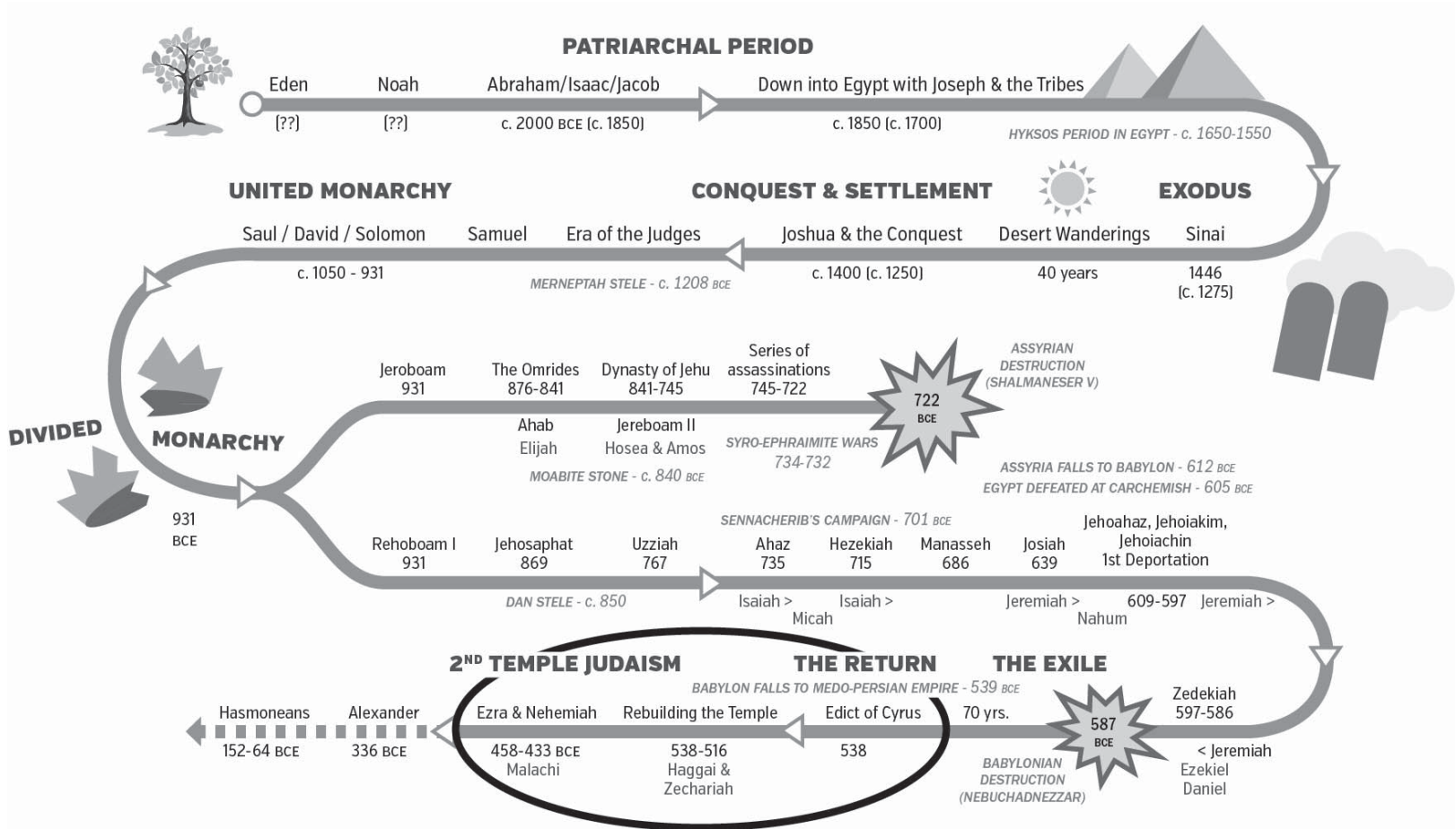
Real Time and Space

Last week we saw the southern kingdom of Judah taken into exile by the Babylonians in 586 BC because of their unfaithfulness to Yahweh’s covenant. This week we will see how some of the Israelites came back to the land of Judah in 538 BC. They will return, however, as a subject people, citizens of another country who were longing for the return of their king.

Take a look at the timeline on the following page and refresh your memory about the divided monarchy and the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians (722 BC) and the destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians (586 BC). Note that in 539 BC the Persian king Cyrus defeats Babylonia and thereby ends the Babylonian Empire.



The Divided Monarchy



[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

Do you know any missionaries? Have you ever considered what it would be like to grow up as the child of missionary parents, living in the same foreign country for as long as you can remember? What do you think it would be like to wake up one day and have your parents tell you that you are going home to a place you had never seen before?

Into the Story

Read Jeremiah 29:10–14. Keep in mind that these words are spoken by the prophet Jeremiah who himself will witness the siege and defeat of Jerusalem as the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant curse due to Israel’s complete failure to uphold their end of the agreement.

- Circle all the places in which Yahweh says “I will” and underline what it is he says he will do. Record Yahweh’s promises.
- Choose another color to underline all of the places in which Yahweh says what the Israelites will do. Record what the Israelites will do.

Read Isaiah 44:24–28.

- What does Yahweh say regarding Cyrus?
- What does he say regarding Jerusalem and the temple?

Read Ezra 1:1–3.

- Whom did Cyrus say appointed him?

- What was Cyrus appointed to do?
- What did he declare regarding the Israelites?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

History tells us that less than a tenth of the Judean citizens exiled from Jerusalem in 586 B.C. chose to go back to Jerusalem after the Exile when Cyrus offered them the opportunity. Imagine you are one of the exiles at the time of Cyrus' edict. You have heard stories from the older folks about life in Jerusalem and the glory of the temple of Yahweh, but you have been in the land of Babylonia for your entire life and it is the only home you have known. Now you are being told that you can go to back home to Judah. How would you feel? What would you do?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

The Jews who chose to go back to Jerusalem after the Exile were called "the Remnant." Like Abraham, they left a comfortable and familiar life to return to a burned out, collapsed land and build a new life. And all this was done based on a promise. Where in your life is the Holy Spirit whispering to you to leave comfortable behind and follow the promise?

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

How many times have you read the account of Jesus' baptism? Have you ever wondered what was happening or why it was viewed as so important? What questions have you had about Jesus' baptism?

Into the Story

Read 1 Samuel 16:6-13	Read 1 Kings 1:32-48	Read Matthew 1:1, 18-25; 3:13-17
Whose son was David?	Whose son was Solomon?	How does Matthew introduce Jesus? How does the angel address Joseph?
Who anoints David? With what?	Who anoints Solomon? With what?	Who baptizes Jesus?
What happens to David after being anointed?	What do the people do after Solomon is anointed?	What happens when Jesus comes out of the water?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Imagine that you are standing among the crowd when Jesus comes to John to be baptized. Obviously something very important is happening, but what? You see John's deference to Jesus; you hear the thunder. Is that the Spirit of God descending onto this preacher from Galilee? And then you hear the words of Psalm 2—the ancient liturgy used to appoint the kings when David ruled in Jerusalem. What is your response to Jesus?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

How has your understanding of the significance of Jesus' baptism changed?

In the Old Testament, if there were some doubt or controversy over who should be king, the chosen one was identified by public anointing. . . . In this ritual, the oil was a symbol that the Holy Spirit had come upon the one chosen in order to empower him to serve as God's steward over the kingdom. . . . Here the last prophet of the Mosaic order *baptizes* the newly identified king (a sign of the new covenant) while the heavens open, and the reality of which the oil of the old covenant was merely a symbol (the Holy Spirit) visibly descends upon the Chosen One, and the voice of God himself (as opposed to merely the voice of the prophet) announces in the words of the coronation psalm of David and his sons (Ps. 2:7) that *this is the One*. (Richter, *Epic*, 214.)

DAY THREE

First Contact

Have you ever taken a course in which the teacher tried repeatedly to explain something, but you just didn't get it, no matter how many different explanations the teacher tried? Then, at last, something clicked and voilà, you got it! What was the subject?

Into the Story

Read Matthew 13:24–50.

- Why does Jesus teach in parables?
- In this chapter, Jesus compares the kingdom of God to three everyday realities. List them.
- Do some research on what tares are. What do you think the point of the wheat and the tares is as it compares to the kingdom?
- Do some research on what makes mustard seeds unique. What do you think the point of the mustard seed is as it compares to the kingdom?
- Have you ever used yeast to bake bread? Describe yeast and how it works. What do you think the point of the leaven is as it compares to the kingdom?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

If you were one of the twelve disciples, what would you have expected the kingdom of God to be like? How would your expectations compare with Jesus' everyday descriptions? How would you feel about the clear implication here that there was more waiting to come?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Do you know any people who expect the “not yet” right here and now? Perhaps friends who think that sickness, famine, and war should no longer happen to the redeemed? People who are disappointed in a God who still allows that sort of thing to happen after Jesus has been resurrected from the dead? Now that you have some understanding of the “not yet,” what would you say to them?

So what is Jesus talking about? In Matthew 13:36–52 of the same chapter, Jesus goes on to explain what theologians have come to call the “already . . . not yet” principle of New Testament theology. The idea is that with Jesus’ entry into our world, the kingdom is *already* here. The new covenant has begun. God has invaded our exile, and every man, woman, and child of Adam’s race has been extended the invitation to come home. Death is defeated, Heaven is ours. Satan knows it is just a matter of time. Yet we still await the kingdom’s consummation, the *not yet*. The plan is not complete until the New Jerusalem arrives. It is with Jesus’ second coming that all is restored. This is the end of the story. . . . It is with the New Jerusalem that Eden is restored and the people of God return to the place of God with full access to the presence of God. What we live right now is the “already,” but the hope of our lives is the “not yet.” (Richter, *Epic*, 219.)

DAY FOUR

First Contact

Are you familiar with Jesus' parable about the workers in the vineyard? Early in the morning, the owner of the vineyard hired men for a certain wage to work all day. Later in the day, the owner hired more workers who did not work a full day, but only a partial day. At the end of the day when it was time to collect their wages, the one who worked a partial day received just as much as the one who worked a full day. You can imagine how the early-morning workers felt! Have you ever had such an experience? If so, how did you feel toward the other person?

Into the Story

Read the passages listed below and answer the people, place, and presence questions for both the "already" and the "not yet."

	Already	Not Yet
Who are the people of God?	Galatians 3:26-29	Revelation 21:21-27
Where is the place of the people of God?	Revelation 21:1-2 Hebrews 11:8-10	Revelation 21:1-2
How is the presence available to God's people?	John 1:14; 1 Corinthians 3:16	Revelation 21:3, 22

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Imagine yourself a first-century Jew who has waited all your life and the lives of your fathers, for the Son of David to come and rescue your people from their oppressors. You are among the Remnant who risked it all to return to Jerusalem. You have relatives who have been martyred for their Jewish faith. You have joyfully embraced Jesus, the Messiah. But now one of your own, Paul, a Pharisee among Pharisees, comes preaching that the Gentiles—the faithless, pagan, outcast Gentiles—are to be welcomed into the community of faith. Even though they claim Jesus, they are not of the line of Abraham. They have not waited and suffered for centuries. They are not circumcised and they do not honor the Sabbath! How would you respond to Paul's message?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Imagine (if you need to) that you have been raised in the church. As a child you could not participate in many of the things your friends enjoyed because of your family's faith. More than once you were mocked for being a goody-two-shoes and excluded because you stuck to your convictions. You made moral choices in college that cost you the really lucrative career path and lost you a boyfriend/girlfriend or two. You were passed over for promotion last year in large part because you were not part of the boss's inner circle—a circle that would have cost you hours away from your family or that participated in activities you just could not condone. Now someone you knew from college has started showing up in church—attended by his supermodel wife and his new Jaguar. He's made a commitment to Christ, and you can see that it's real. But he clearly has not paid for his faith as you have. How do you feel about welcoming him into the inner circle at church?

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

What does the word “reconciliation” mean to you? Can you identify one story in your life in which the reconciliation of a relationship had a profound impact on the trajectory of your personal story?

Into the Story

Read Romans 5:1–21; 8:12–17.

- Who is writing this letter? And to whom is he writing? See Romans 1:1–7.
- According to 5:1–2, what two things do believers have through Jesus?
- The writer of this letter states in 5:3 that “we also exult in our tribulations knowing that tribulation brings about . . .” (NASB). Depending on the version you are reading, rather than “exult” you may see “rejoice” or “boast.” List the three things tribulation brings about.

Tribulation → → →

- In what state were we when Jesus died for us? See 5:6–8.
- According to 5:9, by what are we justified? From what were we saved?
- According 5:12–17, what did Adam bring into the world?
- What did Jesus bring?

- In 5:10–11, what do we have in Jesus?
- In 8:12–17, what are we with Jesus?
- As you read through chapters 5 and 8, make note of anything else you see regarding what we have in Adam versus what we have in Jesus.

Thus the long plan of redemption comes to its first climax. As the book of Hebrews states, Jesus is prophet, priest, and king. He is the Last Adam who defeats Eden's curse; the second Noah commissioned to save God's people from the coming flood of his wrath; the seed of Abraham; the new lawgiver who stands upon the mountain and amazes his audience by the authority with which he speaks; and he is the heir of David. (Richter, *Epic*, 216–17.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Paul wrote his letter to the Romans during the first century AD, explaining that the gospel was intended for all humanity, both Jew and Gentile. His message was radical to both communities. Pagans were called to monotheism; Jews were called to embrace their Messiah; both communities were called to a new allegiance that required them to embrace each other. Moreover, anyone affirming this new faith knew without question that they were risking their lives. Caesar would execute Roman converts for their treason against the empire; the Jews would shun and persecute any Jewish converts to the new heresy. If you lived in this tornado of revival and new alliances, what would you be feeling right now?

I trust that as you read these final lines, the Old Testament has become your story, that you have crossed the great barrier, and that the God of Israel now seems anything but strange. Moreover, my hope is that you now have a fully functioning closet in which to store the treasures of your Old Testament heritage. In closing, my prayer for you is this: *May the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who delivered the children of Abraham from the slavery of Egypt and the exiles of Eden from the curse of death, live in your hearts and bring you home.* (Richter, *Epic*, 224.)

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Read the lyrics on the following page or listen to Matthew Clark's "Kingdom Come" from his CD *Bright Came the Word from His Mouth* (matthewclark.net).

As you consider the fact that you have now been reconciled to God, your Father and Creator, and how that reconciled relationship has reoriented and transformed your life, identify at least one person in your life with whom you want to share the fact that they too can be reconciled. Think specifically about what aspects of this study have broken through for you. Think specifically about what aspects of this study could break through for them. Write their name. Pray for them. Pray for yourself. Pray for reconciliation.



People, Place, and Presence

Who are God's *people* at this point in redemptive history?

Where is the *place* of the people of God?

How is the *presence* available to the people of God?

KINGDOM COME

Matthew Clark

Jesus, the second Adam, Jesus, praise the Lamb
Jesus, the greater Noah, Saved us from the flood of wrath
Oh Jesus, seed of Abraham
I have heard a better word on the mountain of the Lord
That a king will sit on David's throne forever

Pre-CHORUS

Let your family on earth abide
In the house of our hearts be welcome
Till the King returns and all the earth will

CHORUS

Open their eyes to the light of the face of the Faithful God

Kingdom, is like a wheat field, growing up with weeds
Kingdom, is like a small seed, sending branches to the sky
Unseen the yeast will raise the bread
One day when the heavens part and the Lamb of God rides forth
Bodies borne of faith will rise to meet him

Pre-CHORUS

CHORUS

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Leader's Session Guide

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INTRODUCTION

This week your group is launching into an adventure that I pray will change their lives and yours. Our objective is to put the great story of redemption back into the hands of the average Christian. You'll be the captain of this quest.

The Epic of Eden Video Study Guide is intended as homework material that the members of your group will prepare each week *before* you gather and view the video. The weekly studies have five days of exercises that draw your members into the inductive study of their Bibles. These should be accessible, time-efficient, and allow for further inquiry as desired.

Each week commences with “A Word from the Author” introducing the topic and a short section situating the week’s study in “Real Time and Space.” After those introductory pieces, the daily studies begin with a section titled “First Contact,” designed to get your members thinking about what is to come from their own real space and time. Each day then moves “Into the Story.” This is where the inductive Bible study begins in earnest. Our primary goal is to *lead* your group members into the discovery of the Bible. The questions direct students into a close reading of the text. Next the “Real People, Real Places, Real Faith” section provides further information about the original setting of these biblical narratives and characters, and challenges your group members to get back into the Bible’s real time and space—to put *themselves* into the shoes of these not-so-ivory-tower heroes. Finally “Our People, Our Places, Our Faith” will bring the ancient story back into a contemporary setting. This exercise teaches your members *how* to responsibly interpret their Bible (the science of hermeneutics) and transports texts that might have appeared irrelevant into front-and-center relevance for our contemporary contexts.

Our hope is that we’ve included enough different learning styles that every member of your group will find themselves engaged and challenged. As long as your members feel this way, we’ve succeeded.

The *Leader’s Session Guide* is designed for you, the facilitator. Ideally, to accommodate the video and discussion, an hour and a half should be set aside for each group session. This can certainly be modified to suit your group’s schedule. In a perfect world, we recommend that the leader read the book upon which this study is based (*The Epic of Eden*, IVP Academic, 2008). You will find it immensely helpful as you attempt to guide the group. If you’re reading, you don’t need to preview the videos. If not, you should preview the videos. Keep in mind that curriculum is a tool, not a straight jacket. You are the leader. You are called to lead this group. You need to adjust according to your own style. We suggest

that group members be allowed to talk, ask questions, offer their “ah-hah” moments, and personal research. These elements are critical to the success of your group. Trust your group members, trust the study of the Bible, trust the Holy Spirit, and let your people talk. Questions are provided to facilitate the discussion.

Our prayer is that this material will rock your world. Know that “where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there I Am in your midst” (Matt 18:20). And know that the team behind this curriculum is praying daily that wherever you are, the Holy Spirit is with you, and the kingdom is being built. Godspeed!

First Things

We are including here a few *suggestions* for the group’s introductory meeting. You are welcome to plan this gathering in any way that best suits your group. Let the Holy Spirit be your guide.

- Introduce yourself to the group and introduce the purpose of the study.
- Allow members of the group to briefly introduce themselves. (i.e., first name and in one sentence what they hope to gain from this study)
- Pass out materials and explain how the study works.
- View introductory video with J. D. Walt.

Practical Tips

- Choose a space for your study that matches the size of your group, facilitates note taking, and encourages discussion.
- Have refreshments. Lots of studies have shown that adults do way better in small groups when there are snacks available!
- Have someone serve as host/hostess and have name tags. These are very helpful for welcoming newcomers and breaking down barriers.

SESSION 1

The Great Cultural Barrier

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Make the statement, “The Old Testament is your story” and then invite participants to share whether or not they believe this statement is true or not, and why.
- Why do *you* think many Christians struggle with the study of the Old Testament?
- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week’s homework.
- Richter makes the point that not only is the Old Testament our story, but our story is a part of the Old Testament as well. Take a few minutes as either a group or as small groups to introduce yourselves to each other and tell each other how each member first claimed Christ as their own. (After introductions, the leader can emphasize the fact that this group is one small expression of the body of Christ, and their story will become part of the Great Story.)

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- How have you (or your church) framed Jesus in your image? What are some benefits to seeing him through your cultural lens? What are some risks?
- What parts of the Bible would you like to hear in surround sound? Are there areas where the message seems obscured by cultural interference?
- In *The Epic of Eden*, Richter writes, “God did not *canonize* Israel’s culture . . . he simply used that culture as a vehicle through which to communicate the eternal truth of his character and his will for humanity” (Richter, *Epic*, 23). What are some ways that the church or some members of the body of Christ have canonized Israel’s culture in the past? What dangers can arise from this?
- How has ethnocentrism affected your understanding and interpretation of the Bible, especially the Old Testament?
- What are some misconceptions you have encountered about ancient Israelite society? Where did they come from? Why is it important to recognize these misconceptions? (You may want to consider Genesis 38 in this discussion.)

Decide and Do

- Are you willing to make the commitment to spend the time and effort to develop a better understanding of the Old Testament?
- Are you open to examining and wrestling with those beliefs that may be ethnocentric or culturally canonized?
- What about the process do you expect will be difficult?
- What excites you about the process?

Closing Prayer and Challenge

SESSION 2

Redemption

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week's homework and/or last week's discussion and video.
- What new insights have you gained into the stories of Ruth and Boaz, Lot and Abraham, or Gomer and Hosea upon studying this lesson?
- What insights into the heart and character of our God did you gain from these stories?

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- Let's rehearse for each other some of the nuts and bolts of the concept of redemption. What aspects of this concept in Israel's world impacted you the most? Did anything surprise you? Offer some other words you would use to define redemption.

- In the video, Richter states: “The metaphor of Scripture is the metaphor of the redemption of a lost family member by the patriarch of the clan, who sends his firstborn son, to not only *redeem* the lost family member, but to share his inheritance with them as well. His goal? To restore them to the *bēt ’āb* so that where he is, they may be also.” Discuss this statement.

If time remains, consider discussing:

- How do the stories of Lot, Ruth, and Gomer play into your understanding of the story of redemption as expressed in the Bible? Are these new insights for you?
- What new insights have you developed into the meaning of redemption and Christ’s sacrifice on the cross?
- How might your new understanding of redemption affect your prayer life or your worship life? How might it affect how you go about serving in the church or ministering to others?

Decide and Do

- The Old Testament had specific laws that defended the widow, orphan, and refugee. How can the church respond to people who are outside the economic and political safety nets of our society?
- How can we do better to meet the needs of the disenfranchised and bring the lost and the disconnected into the household of God?

Closing Prayer and Challenge

SESSION 3

Real Time and Space

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week's homework and/or last week's discussion and video.
- During this week's lesson, you were asked to imagine yourself as a television reporter interviewing David, his brother Eliab, and King Saul following David's victory over Goliath. Ask for volunteers who would be willing to act out their interviews.
- What new insights have you gained by putting the story of redemption into real time and space?
- Take a moment to reflect on what you currently know of the story contained in the Old Testament. What is the basic order of major events and who are the primary people associated with those events? Can you place those people and events into specific books of the Bible?
- Briefly reflect upon what you know about the geography of the ancient Near East. Can you identify the regions of Mesopotamia, Canaan (Palestine), and Egypt on a map? Can you associate specific people and events set in the Old Testament with these geographic regions?
- If you were to break the Old Testament narrative into sections based upon major characters of the Bible, how would you do it and why?

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- Recite as a group the five names and three regions that Richter offers as the anchors for real time and space.
- What major biblical characters and books of the Bible are not included in the basic description provided by Richter? Any ideas as to how these characters' other books might connect to her scaffolding and how they might play into the larger framework of the Old Testament?

If time remains, consider discussing:

- In the discussion of real time, Richter argues that some of the early events described in Genesis are not datable even though some people in the history of the church have attempted to do so. She bases this conclusion upon the function of genealogies in ancient cultures and how ancient peoples reckoned time and numbers. What are your thoughts about dating Eden or the flood and the use of genealogies in the Bible after reading this material?
- If you have studied the genealogies in Genesis, what do you say is their purpose? Is it theological, scientific, both, or something else?
- How has the discussion of geography and the five major plotlines of the Old Testament helped you to better understand the story?

Decide and Do

- How might the information presented in this chapter be helpful for use in the church today? (If possible, use a white board or flipchart to brainstorm the ideas brought up by the questions below.)
- Why do you think most church classes bypass maps and timelines?
- Are there ways apart from just Bible study that this material might be applied to the life and work of the church?
- How could you use this information to teach the Old Testament to children, youth, or adults?
- How might you incorporate what you have learned in this chapter into the worship of God (whether at church on Sunday, at home, or any other place)?

Closing Prayer and Challenge

SESSION 4

Covenant

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week's homework and/or last week's discussion and video.
- What new insights have you gained into the unique redemptive nature of God's work?

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- Work together and develop a working definition of "covenant." Write several synonyms of the word "covenant" on a white board (for example, *contract*, *agreement*, *pledge*, *promise*, etc.). Where do we see covenants in our society? In what types of covenants have you entered?
- Brainstorm a list of laws in the Bible. Why do you think they are included in the covenant?

- Discuss the concept of fictive kinship. How does it play out in our society? Think about ways that understanding the concept helps us to better understand the ancient Israelite culture and concept of covenant.
- Take a few minutes to come up with a definition for a parity treaty and discuss examples from the Bible, ancient history, or modern times.
- Take a few minutes to come up with a definition for a suzerain/vassal treaty and discuss examples from the Bible, ancient history, or modern times.

Decide and Do

- This particular lesson covers mainly the secular functions of covenant. The next session will show how God uses this form to introduce himself to his chosen people. For this week, discuss how we as the church can use concepts and metaphors that are common in culture to introduce people to our God. What are the advantages of this method? What fruits can come from this? What are the dangers?

Closing Prayer and Challenge

SESSION 5

Treaty

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week's homework and/or last week's discussion and video.
- What new insights have you gained into the unique redemptive nature of God's work?
- Are you beginning to see some of the ways that God has shown his character to us through his promises, his covenant to us? If so, how?

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- Review the standard format of the ancient Hittite suzerain/vassal treaty and brainstorm the parallel biblical passages from the covenant offered to Israel at Mt. Sinai. (If possible, do this on a white board or flipchart.)

Decide and Do

- Have someone read Matthew 26:26–28 aloud. After studying the concept of covenant found in the Old Testament, how might you explain this passage to another Christian? How might you explain it to a non-Christian?
- With your new understanding of covenant as found in the Bible, how might you explain (to a Christian or non-Christian) what is celebrated and reenacted during the Communion service in the local church?

Closing Prayer and Challenge

SESSION 6

God's Original Intent

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week's homework and/or last week's discussion and video.
- What new insights have you gained into the unique redemptive nature of God's work?
- Are you beginning to see some of the ways that God has shown his character to us through his promises, his covenants to us? If so, how?

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- Discuss the idea of Eden as a “civilization without greed, malice, or envy; progress without pollution, expansion without extinction” (Richter, *Epic*, 104).
- Richter describes the results of “Adam's choice” as “not just the removal of blessings, but a *reversal* of blessings. What had been a blessing now becomes a curse, a

benefit becomes a burden, paradise is exchanged for prison” (Richter, *Epic*, 106).
What do you think of this description?

- The curse placed upon Eve includes pain (and death) in childbirth and the “desire” for her husband who will “rule” over her. Adam’s curse includes the curse of the ground, fruitless work, anxiety, and death (this applies to Eve as well). How are these “reversals of blessing”?
- Discuss the idea of the “sweat” as anxiety and worry.

Decide and Do

- How can we act to counter our fallen nature and fallen creation’s scarcity?
- How can we actively turn the sovereignty over our lives back to God through our worship, prayer, and life in the church?

Closing Prayer and Challenge

SESSION 7

God's Final Intent

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week's homework and/or last week's discussion and video.
- What new insights have you gained into the unique redemptive nature of God's work?
- Are you beginning to see some of the ways that God has shown his character to us through his creation? If so, how?

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- Do you agree with the statement "God's original intent *is* his final intent" (Richter, *Epic*, 129)? Why or why not?
- With the bookends of Genesis 1–2 (Eden) and Revelation 21–22 (the New Jerusalem) in your mind, do you feel you have a better grasp of the plan of redemption? Do these bookends help you to better understand the relationship

between the Old and New Testaments? Do they help you understand how your own salvation fits into the big picture?

- How helpful is Richter’s illustration of rescuing a fallen rock climber for grasping the concept of the multi-staged plan of redemption and covenant in the Bible? Can you suggest a better one?
- Take a moment to briefly describe what happens with each part of the rescue plan: Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David.
- What is your response to Richter’s explanation of evil in the world, or “why bad things happen to good people” (Richter, *Epic*, 116)? Do you believe there are no good people? Has Adam’s choice established a fallen and, therefore, evil world?

Decide and Do

- Have someone read Romans 8:18–25 aloud.
- What struck you about what Richter says about the redemption of all creation?
- What would it look like if the church lived out its calling recognizing that redemption is not simply about individual souls but about an entire cosmos gone wrong?
- What would being salt and light entail if the salvation of *all* of God’s creation was the goal?
- How would you describe the narrative of redemptive history to someone given what you know at this point?

Closing Prayer and Challenge

SESSION 8

Noah

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week's homework and/or last week's discussion and video.
- What new insights have you gained into the unique redemptive nature of God's work?
- Are you beginning to see some of the ways that God has shown his character to us through his rescue plan? If so, how?

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- Richter describes the flood as a “de-creational” event (Richter, *Epic*, 144, 147). How does this explanation of the flood alter your interpretation of it?
- Richter says, “God makes use of the Israelite perception [of the sea] in his carrying out of redemptive history” (Richter, *Epic*, 146). What do you make of

God using our perceptions and what we know to carry out his purposes? Can you think of other ways God does this throughout history or even today?

- Brainstorm about other occasions found in Scripture in which God delivers people from the sea. Make a list of what you come up with (cf. *The Epic of Eden*, 145–47; cf. Gen. 1:1; Exod. 15; Josh. 3:14–17; Mark 4:35–41; 1 Pet. 3:18; and Rev. 21:1). Does the sea embody the same fears for us today as it did for the Israelites? If not, what has replaced that fear? What are the waters God delivers us from?
- Use the term “re-creational.” Did you hear the echo of the Eden narrative in Noah’s covenant in Genesis 9? Had you ever noticed that language before? What do you make of the similarities and differences between Genesis 1 and 9? (Refer to your chart on Day 5 of this week’s study). What is the significance of Noah’s covenant being made with all of creation?
- Had you ever associated Noah’s flood with Jesus’ second coming before (Matt. 24:37–39)? How does that connection alter your picture of what the second coming might look like?
- Do you now have a new interpretation of the flood story given what you have learned? Given the realities of what the flood really was, should we reconsider the way we teach it to children?
- Discuss the significance of the bow as a symbol. How does understanding this ancient symbol help us understand the modern message of this text? Does this help us to better understand the character of God and better explain his redemptive plan to others?

Decide and Do

- If someone were to ask you to explain the flood, how would your new understanding of the flood being a re-creational event rather than merely a natural disaster affect your explanation? In light of what you now know about the second coming of Jesus, how might this knowledge affect your sense of urgency in living a life committed to him and evangelism of those you love?

Closing Prayer and Challenge

SESSION 9

Abraham

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week's homework and/or last week's discussion and video.
- What new insights have you gained into the unique redemptive nature of God's work?
- Are you beginning to see some of the ways that God has shown his character to us through his rescue plan? If so, how?

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- In Session One, we talked about the *bêt 'āb*. Given what you now know about the *bêt 'āb*, what do you make of God's request for Abram to leave his extended family and Abram's willingness to do so?

- In Genesis 12, we find the description of the covenant with Abram. What are the two elements of the *people*, *place*, and *presence* explicitly referred to in this covenant?
- The type of covenant God makes with Abram is called a “covenant of grant” or a “royal grant.” What are the differences between this kind of covenant and the suzerain/vassal treaty we have previously studied?
- What might Paul say about the nature of Abram’s covenant (cf. Rom. 4:3, 20–22; Gal. 3:6)?
- Discuss the significance of the smoke and fire walking between the pieces of the sacrifice in Genesis 15. How does understanding this inform your understanding of the depth of God’s promise to Abraham and Jesus’ sacrifice?
- In Genesis 17, God changes the names of Abram (exalted father) and Sarai (princess) to Abraham (father of a multitude) and Sarah (princess) to mark the new roles they have in the story of redemption. Can you think of any way the same thing has been done for us as Christians?

Decide and Do

- What are your thoughts about circumcision and baptism as marks of the old and new covenants? The people marked? The means of marking?
- How can we teach and preach about these marks of a covenant in a way that reveals God’s redemptive character?
- Read Hebrews 11:8–19. What does it mean to have faith like Abraham? How would having this type of faith change the way we live? How would operating with this type of faith change our churches, our communities, and our world?
- Reread Galatians 3:26–29. How is it that non-Jews (Gentiles) might be called “sons of Abraham”?

Closing Prayer and Challenge

SESSION 10

Moses

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week's homework and/or last week's discussion and video.
- What new insights have you gained into the unique redemptive nature of God's work?
- Are you beginning to see some of the ways that God has shown his character to us through his rescue plan? If so, how?

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- With the exodus and the covenant at Sinai the renewed *people*, *place*, and *presence* of God is taking greater shape. Who are the *people* of God at this point? Where is the *place*? And by what means is God's *presence* present with his people?
- What is significant about the way the identity of God's *people* has changed over time with the various covenants?

- What strikes you about the means by which God is *present* with his people in the Mosaic covenant?
- At Sinai, God establishes a theocracy with Israel. Have the group define this term. What are the significant characteristics of Israel's theocracy? What are the implications of Israel being *God's* kingdom? How does this political reality make Israel different from the United States or even the modern nation of Israel today?
- Richter states: "If we are to understand the God of our salvation, the faith of Israel, and therefore our own faith, we *must* understand the exodus" (Richter, *Epic*, 174). Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

Decide and Do

- How does our understanding of the exodus affect our understanding of Christianity as a whole and our faith today?
- How big of an impact has the exodus had on your faith before now? Has this changed since this week's homework and video session?
- Consider the tabernacle. What are your thoughts on the movement of the presence, housed in the Holy of Holies in the Mosaic covenant, to the church and the individual believer in the new covenant. Think about your own body as the Holy of Holies. How does the reality of the *presence* inside each of us who believe affect your faith? How does it affect how we go about our lives? What are the ramifications of our bodies as the temple?
- From the video this week, what does it mean that the church is the place where the believer and unbeliever alike can catch a glimpse of the presence of God? (See *Epic*, 182–83.)

Closing Prayer and Challenge

SESSION 11

David

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week's homework and/or last week's discussion and video.
- What new insights have you gained into the unique redemptive nature of God's work?
- What new insights have you gained regarding God's character as revealed to us through his rescue plan?

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- We read about the Israelites repeating a cycle during the period of the Judges. What was this cycle? Reproduce the cycle with the class's help on a white board or flipchart.
- What was the request of the Israelites as the period of the Judges drew to a close and what was wrong with this request?

- How did the monarchy develop in Israel? Was God opposed to a king in Israel? How do the biblical authors view the choice of Saul and David as king? How was the choice of David different from the choice of Saul?
- What kind of covenant is the Davidic covenant? How is it different from the Mosaic covenant? What elements of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants are similar?
- What are the similarities and differences between the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants?
- What does God say he will do in response to covenant loyalty and disloyalty regarding the Davidic covenant?

Decide and Do

- Do we in the church today face similar temptations as David in his desire to build a temple? In what ways?
- How does David help us to understand Jesus as Messiah? Think in terms of redemption and restoration of the kingdom.
- Israel will receive a great deal of instruction as the years go by as to how the promised Messiah (the Son of David who would be King) was to be recognized. What were some of those indicators?
- As the monarchy collapses and the exile ensues, the Jews will live with their eyes on a promise. What is that promise?

Closing Prayer and Challenge

SESSION 12

The New Covenant

Opening Prayer of Preparation

Debrief and Discover

- Open the floor for discussion regarding the prior week's homework and/or last week's discussion and video.
- Share one or two “ah-hah” moments you experienced regarding the unique redemptive nature of God's work throughout this week's study.
- Are you beginning to see some of the ways that God has shown his character to us through his rescue plan? If so, how?

View Video

Dialogue and Digest

- Allow the opportunity for class members to respond to the video through open dialogue.
- Note the changing dynamic of Israel from the exile to the restoration, politically, socially, and religiously. How had Israel changed?
- Does the way the New Testament announces the Messiah (through genealogies and the proclamation of John the Baptist) speak any differently to you now given

your new understanding of the story of redemption in the Old Testament and the nature of the promised Messiah?

- Describe the *people*, *place*, and *presence* of God in the New Covenant. How do these elements shift when we reach the New Jerusalem?
- Regarding the “already,” what do you think about the idea that as Christians we are, first, citizens of another kingdom? Do you agree? If this is true (Phil. 3:20), how should that direct the way we live right now?
- Regarding the “not yet,” think about the idea that the citizens of *your* kingdom belong to every nation on earth (Rev. 7:9–10). How does that affect the way you (and your nation) interact with other nations?

Decide and Do

- As we conclude this study, name one (or at the most, two) of the most important insights you have discovered for your personal faith.
- Name one insight for the communal faith of the church.
- What do you feel called to do or change as a result of these new insights?
- Has this study affected your concept of evangelism?
- Do you feel your understanding of the Old Testament is better organized?
- How has your understanding of the God you serve changed?

Closing Prayer and Challenge

- We, as believers, are called over and over again in the Bible to be witnesses of what we’ve seen, heard, and learned. How are you going to make use of this new understanding of the great story of redemption to build God’s kingdom?