

*A Covenant Understanding
of the Old Testament:*

THE LATTER PROPHETS

*You are
here!*

INTRODUCTION

LATTER PROPHETS

APPROACHING THE
NEW TESTAMENT

INTRODUCTION

We have made it together through eleven books of the Old Testament and seen how the narrative arc is unified to tell a cohesive story about God and Israel. This story can and should inform our faith today, despite the ways that it seems so distant.

By this point in our journey together, that relevance should be pretty clear. As always, if you are doing this homework on your own, consider joining our bible study group via radio, podcast, or YouTube. You will find that the conversation around our table really adds to understanding this homework. You may even hear a question asked that you wondered about, or a perspective raised that you share or are challenged by.

Now we begin the third and final leg of our road trip through the Old Testament. Keeping with the analogy, we will maintain our navigational course by using the covenants as a road map. Specifically, we will continue to look at how and why the themes of land, descendants, and a special relationship with God are important. Here in the Latter Prophets, these three themes are still faithful to keeping us on course. Remember as we continue, **concepts which occurred physically in the Old Testament often occur spiritually in the New Testament.**

Where we saw descendants strongly showing up in the genealogies of the Pentateuch, and land being prevalent in the narrative of the Former Prophets, here in the Latter Prophets we see that the special relationship with God takes center stage. So much of the content of these books is about how Israel has forsaken her relationship with God. But, like before, the other covenant themes of land and descendants play a strong supporting role. So much of what Israel and her kings do in these years has ramifications for her descendants. In fact, in some of the stories we see quite a direct influence from one generation to the next.

Similarly, we see the land playing an important part in the ways that Israel experiences blessing or curse reflecting her faithfulness or faithlessness to God. Here in the Latter Prophets we see these themes so tightly intertwined that we will have to be intentional about using our covenant lens to overview each of the 16 books.



THE HEBREW CANON EXCLUDES DANIEL FROM THE MAJOR PROPHETS BUT THE CHRISTIAN CANON INCLUDES THIS BOOK IN THE MAJOR PROPHETS. FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS STUDY WE WILL ALSO EXCLUDE DANIEL, MERELY IN AN ATTEMPT TO TRACK CLOSELY WITH THE HEBREW DEFINITION OF LATTER PROPHETS.

Before we look at the difference between Major and Minor Prophets, reiterate here the difference between Former and Latter Prophets (p. 27):

Where the distinction of Former and Latter Prophets is driven by a timeline, the distinction between the Major and Minor Prophets is, basically, in volume of words. Only the Latter prophets are broken up into this subcategory, so none of the books we classify as Former Prophets would include Major or Minor prophets. Rather, within the Latter Prophets we find a body of work so robust that this additional distinction arises, and it's simply based on this: scrolls. Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah are larger books. These prophets were prolific and their scrolls were large.

The books of the Minor Prophets are each quite short. They were originally all on one scroll, called the ‘Book of the Twelve’ which is where we get that shorthand reference for the Minor Prophets many people now use, ‘The Twelve.’

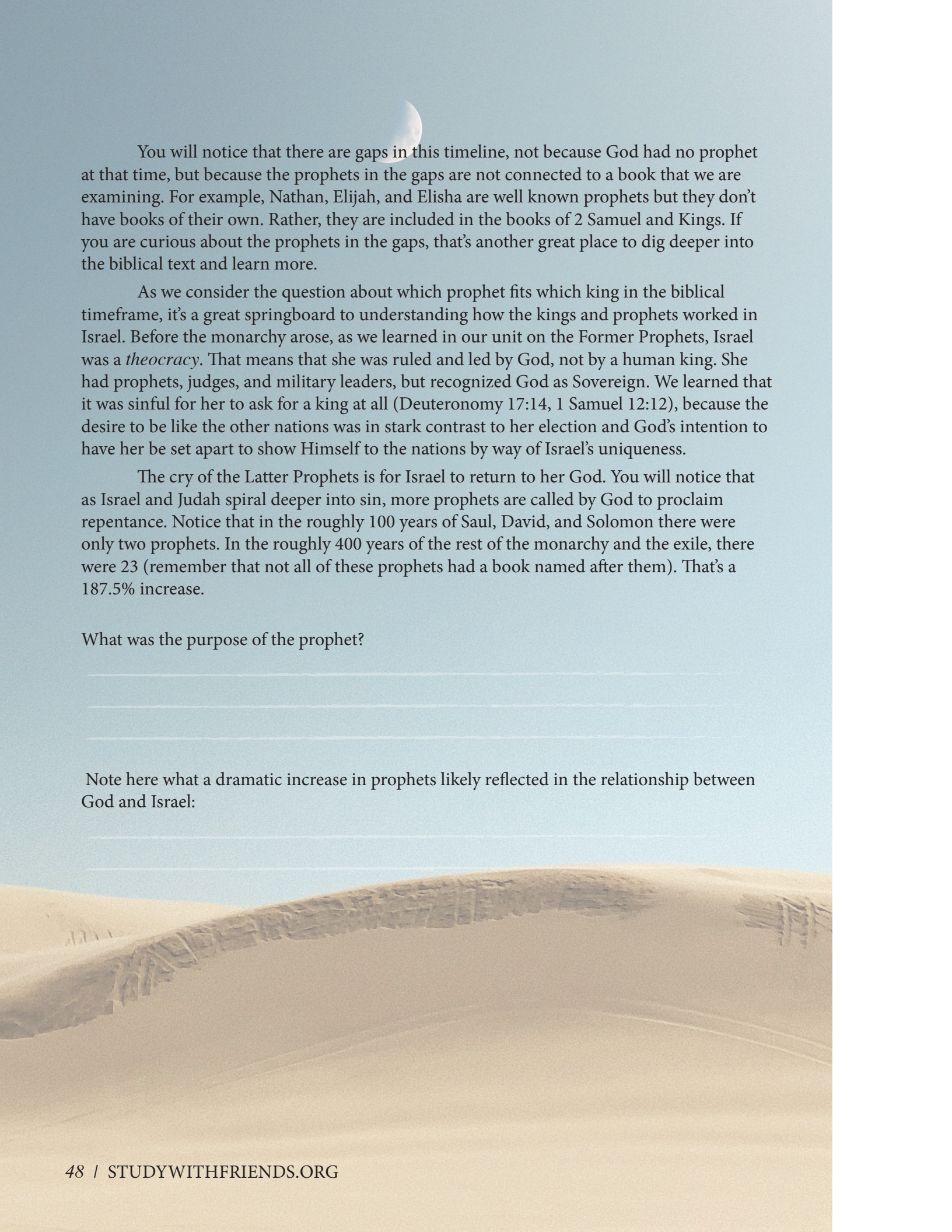
Use this space to rephrase a short summary that would help you remember all the different distinctions and titles for the prophets (Former/Latter Prophets, Major/Minor Prophets):

Another way to understand the Latter Prophets is timeline. Most Christian bibles are not compiled in chronological order. ***Below, the Latter Prophets are listed in chronological order and noted with their audience.***

I-II Kings covers 345 years, BC 931(Division of the kingdom) to 586 (the Exile). The Exile lasts 70 years, BC 586-516. The temple rebuild begins BC 536 and is completed in 516. This temple rebuilding period is the beginning of Israel’s post-exilic era.

PROPHET	ERA	AUDIENCE
JONAH	C. 781	ISRAEL
AMOS	C. 765-754	ISRAEL
ISAIAH	C. 760-673	JUDAH
HOSEA	C. 758-725	ISRAEL
MICAH	C. 738-698	JUDAH/ISRAEL
NAHUM	C. 658-615	ISRAEL
JEREMIAH	C. 650-582	JUDAH/EXILE
ZEPHANIAH	C. 640-626	JUDAH
EZEKIEL	C. 620-570	JUDAH/EXILE
DANIEL	C. 620-540	ISRAEL
HABAKKUK	C. 608-598	JUDAH
OBADIAH	C. 590	JUDAH
ZECHARIAH	C. 522-509	EXILE/POST-EXILIC
HAGGAI	C. 520	EXILE/POST-EXILIC
MALACHI	C. 465	POST-EXILIC
JOEL	??	WE'RE NOT SURE*

*We're not really sure when this book was written. It seems to serve more of a liturgical purpose.



You will notice that there are gaps in this timeline, not because God had no prophet at that time, but because the prophets in the gaps are not connected to a book that we are examining. For example, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha are well known prophets but they don't have books of their own. Rather, they are included in the books of 2 Samuel and Kings. If you are curious about the prophets in the gaps, that's another great place to dig deeper into the biblical text and learn more.

As we consider the question about which prophet fits which king in the biblical timeframe, it's a great springboard to understanding how the kings and prophets worked in Israel. Before the monarchy arose, as we learned in our unit on the Former Prophets, Israel was a *theocracy*. That means that she was ruled and led by God, not by a human king. She had prophets, judges, and military leaders, but recognized God as Sovereign. We learned that it was sinful for her to ask for a king at all (Deuteronomy 17:14, 1 Samuel 12:12), because the desire to be like the other nations was in stark contrast to her election and God's intention to have her be set apart to show Himself to the nations by way of Israel's uniqueness.

The cry of the Latter Prophets is for Israel to return to her God. You will notice that as Israel and Judah spiral deeper into sin, more prophets are called by God to proclaim repentance. Notice that in the roughly 100 years of Saul, David, and Solomon there were only two prophets. In the roughly 400 years of the rest of the monarchy and the exile, there were 23 (remember that not all of these prophets had a book named after them). That's a 187.5% increase.

What was the purpose of the prophet?

Note here what a dramatic increase in prophets likely reflected in the relationship between God and Israel:

In the previous unit we looked at this quote from Alva McClain about the Davidic covenant:
“THESE COVENANTED RIGHTS WILL NOW ATTACH PERMANENTLY TO THE HISTORIC HOUSE AND SUCCESSION OF DAVID; AND...BY GOD’S GRACE THESE RIGHTS, EVEN IF HISTORICALLY INTERRUPTED FOR A SEASON, WILL AT LAST IN A FUTURE KINGDOM BE RESTORED TO THE NATION IN PERPETUITY WITH NO FURTHER POSSIBILITY OF INTERRUPTION” (MCCLAIN 1974).

Read 1 Kings 11:1-13 in the light of McClain’s (or your own) understanding of the Davidic covenant (for a refresher on the implications of the Davidic covenant see p. 36-38). Think specifically about what McClain calls ‘interruption’:

For God’s standard regarding kings, read again Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Reflect this time on the ways that God is asking the king to be completely dependent upon him:

One easy way to capture the warnings in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 is by using a mnemonic device: w’s. God **W**arns against dependency on **W**ives, **W**eapons, and **W**ealth. He asks the kings instead to focus on **W**orship. Remember that the accumulation of wives was often in the interest of creating political alliances, so this would have been an easy way to miss complete dependency on God. The horses mentioned represent military strength, which many kings would shore up to maintain power. And wealth is a dependency trap we can relate to even today.

16 books is a lot to take on in one unit. We are going to use the chart of prophets above to provide context for each of the prophets’ audiences. We also have the foundational understanding of what a prophet’s purpose was. Now we can do a (woefully brief) survey of each prophet’s message as it relates to the covenant between God and Israel. Remember that the patriarchal covenants all share a threefold theme: land, descendants, and special relationship with God. We can track these elements all the way back to creation and the garden (see p 12).

READ the following passages and make your notes on how the words of the prophet would have impacted the people in the framework of the covenant promises of **land, descendants, and a special relationship with God**. Again, you will see a note of context about the audience for reference as you unpack the message:

Isaiah 6:9-13; 66:22-24 (Judah)

Ezekiel 2:3-4; 20:5, 33-38 (Judah/Exile)

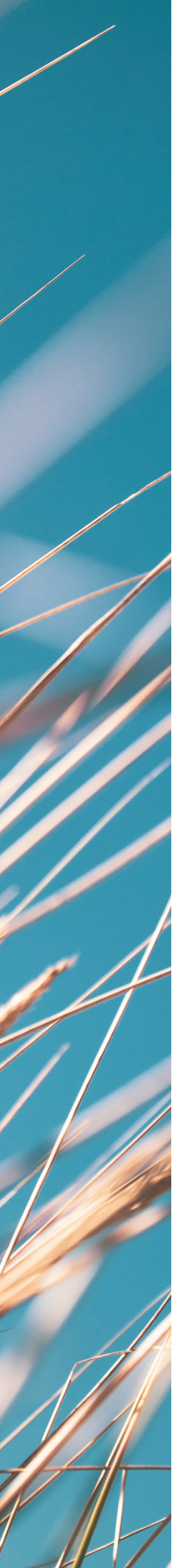
Jeremiah 3:19-23; 51:4-6 (Judah/Exile)

Hosea 4:1-3; 11:8-9 (Israel)

Joel 2:15-17 (Liturgical)

Amos 3:1-2 (Israel)

Obadiah 1:2-3 (Judah)



Jonah 2 Kings 14:23-27 (Israel)

Micah 2:12-13 (Judah/Israel)

Nahum 1:7-8 (Israel)

Habakkuk 2:3-4 (Judah)

Zephaniah 1:4-6 (Judah)

Haggai 1:7-11 (exile/post-exilic)

Zechariah 1:3-4 (exile/post-exilic)

Malachi 2:11-12 (post-exilic)

Judgement proclaimed by the prophets is never the final word. Before, during, and after the exile the same prophets who brought the necessary bad news of consequences would also bring the good news of God's grace. Through Israel's darkest era, God remained faithful to the unconditionality of His covenant promises.

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The failure of the monarchy seems disastrous. But the faithful in Israel understand that this failure sets up the expectation for a better, more perfect King, promised to and through David. Let's take a long look back in review of the ambitious study we have just done and pull it all together, rightly, in Christ.

The statements in 2 Samuel 7:13 and 16 vault this portion of God's oath beyond the time frame of Solomon's reign...this incongruity between divine prophecy and human history invited the New Testament writers to await a different son of David who would rule eternally (Grisanti 1999). This is especially evident in Matthew 22:41-46, where Jesus explains his own role in the eternal promise by referencing Psalm 110. Write your understanding of this passage here, and we will return to this passage at the very end of our study.

Isaiah chapters 9 and 11 are quite obviously a messianic reference in the context of the Davidic covenant, and not just because we all sing these verses at Christmastime. With segments like "He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this" (Isaiah 9:7, NIV) and "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:1-3), they reflect the full prophetic understanding of what is to come. For proof of this, see Romans 15:12 where Paul quotes these very verses in reference to Jesus. Reflect:

Ezekiel 34 contains Ezekiel's first explicit reference to the Messiah, after 34:1-24 where God chastens corrupt leaders and oppressive members within his flock. Verses 23-24 name David plainly. Block summarizes, "the attention moves from Yahweh's negative activity...to exciting new positive actions on Israel's behalf, culminating in the appointment of a human shepherd over them and the restoration of peace and security" (Block 1995). Ezekiel here shows his view of the Davidic covenant as an already/not yet promise. Reflect:

Amos 9 and Jeremiah 33 center on the retributive element of the Davidic covenant found in 2 Samuel 7:14-15. They prophetically and explicitly warn of the impending consequences which were promised not only in the Davidic covenant but also in the Mosaic. Even here, however, we don't lose our messianic hope. Amos 9:11-15 and Jeremiah 33:10-18 remind us of the grace and forgiveness that are part of the unconditional element of God's Davidic promise. Thoughts?

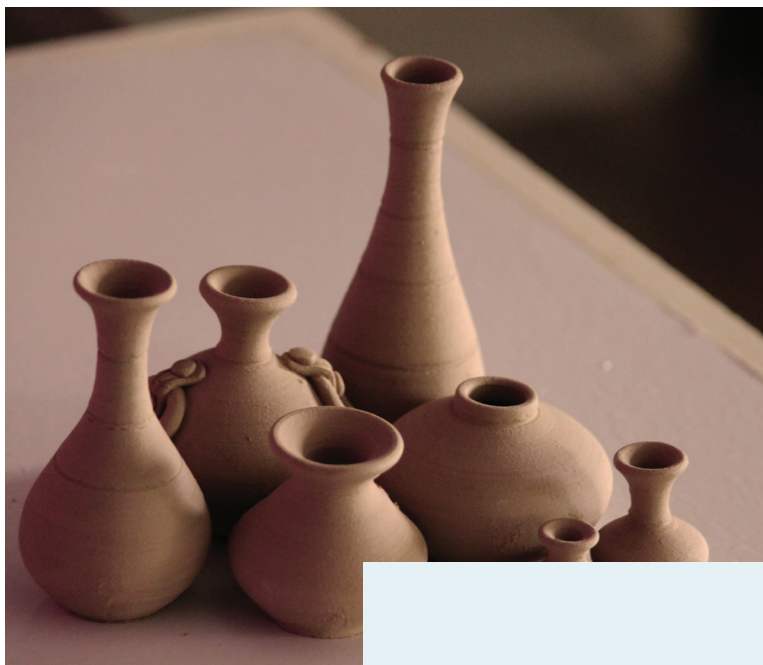
The later Old Testament texts view the Davidic covenant as a past, present, and future promise. They recognize that the failure of David's successors will be used as part of God's eternal and global plan. From our hindsight perspective on the cross, this of course, culminates in the Messiah. When history seemed to deny the fulfillment of the Davidic king promise through the failed monarchy, its fulfillment was expected in a greater Son of David in a day of ultimate fulfillment (Ps. 89:3-4; Jer. 30:8-9; Ezek. 37:21-25; etc.). Your notes on this understanding:

In the ways that they view and interpret the Davidic covenant the later texts tell us a great deal about the messianic hope found in the Old Testament. McConville asserts “[a]n understanding of the Old Testament contribution to the [messianic] theme involves a genuine two-way process (between Old and New). The validity of a Christian understanding of the Old Testament must depend in the last analysis on cogency of the argument that the Old Testament is messianic” (McConville 1995).

While all four of the gospels frame Jesus as the new David, “Matthew notes uniquely that in response to the query concerning the identity of the one whom the crowds of Jerusalem were hailing as ‘the son of David...who comes in the name of the Lord’ while juxtaposing the crowds’ dismissive response of ‘this is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee’ (Matthew 21:11)” (Block 2003).

Jesus’ status as prophet (among the other rightful titles of kingly priest, etc.) “was not derived from any link with Moses or the rest of the professional prophets, but from his connection with David, who, as ‘the anointed of the God of Jacob’ (2 Sam 23:1) claimed prophetic inspiration (vv. 2-3a)” (Block 2003).

When considering the implications of Jesus’ own statement of his connection to David, in Matthew 22:41-46, we have some help from the book of Hebrews. Here the author argues that the priesthood of the Messiah is superior to that of Aaron (Hebrews 5:1-7:28). This too appeals to Psalm 110, where we find the descendant of David will: be at God’s right hand (Psalm 110:1), have victory over all his enemies (Psalm 110:2-3, 5-7), and that this royal figure will serve as priest forever (Psalm 110:4). Of course, the listeners to Jesus in that moment were unable to answer his question about how the Messiah would relate to David in this complex way. But once again, in the light of the cross, we are able to see what Jesus meant by this connection.



THE VALIDITY OF A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT MUST DEPEND IN THE LAST ANALYSIS ON COGENCY OF THE ARGUMENT THAT THE OLD TESTAMENT IS MESSIANIC.

After the Pharisees and Sadducees have had their turn questioning Jesus earlier in chapter 22 of Matthew, Jesus takes control of the narrative. He first asks the Pharisees to name the Messiah's father (vv. 41–42). The answer is rote for the Pharisees, as well as every other Jew of the day. The different sects of Judaism at that time might not have agreed on everything, but all of them believed the Messiah would be David's son. The answer to Jesus' question, then, is simply a restating of 2 Samuel 7:1–17, as well as a synthesized understanding of the other Old Testament texts cited above: The Christ is the son of David (Matthew 22:42).

Jesus does not disagree with the Pharisees in Matthew 22:43–45. He merely points out what is an obvious truth of scripture to the post-resurrection church. The Messiah is David's son, but he is much more than that. To prove that the Messiah is David's Lord as well as his son, Jesus cites Psalm 110, which the New Testament quotes more often than any other Old Testament text. If, as most first-century Jews believed, Psalm 110 is messianic, then David's son, the Messiah ("my Lord"), is greater than his father. And who besides Yahweh is greater than David, the most exalted king of ancient Israel?

Christ is forcing the Pharisees to rethink their view of Messiah and in effect asks of them the same thing He asked of Peter: "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15–16). It is a question that He asks of us all.

We can conclude that the shared elements of the Davidic, Abrahamic, Noahic, and Mosaic covenants are proof of the permanence of God's promises, indeed, proof of the immutable nature of God himself. He has loved us and had a good plan for us from the very beginning of time.

Comprehending the promises and consequences in the covenants gives us a deeper understanding of the bible as a whole and shows that God's love is clearly evidenced in his promises kept throughout history. We see that God's prophetic word is truth, and we can look forward to those truths persisting in the near and far future, just as they have in the near and far past. His truth is eternal. Contemplating that eternality also reminds us that his truth is global, and his promises will ultimately be established in his reign over all nations, tribes, and tongues (Rev 7:9).

Note any fresh understanding you have of how Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the covenants:
