

# Understanding the Pentateuch

UNDERSTANDING THE  
OLD TESTAMENT, PART I

# Understanding The Pentateuch

## INTRODUCTION

We are going to embark on a trip together through the Old Testament. This will be a survey and not an in-depth study. The purpose will be to provide you a new, fresh way to see 26 of the 39 books in the Old Testament.

In each part of our study, we will look through the lens of a unifying theme: the covenants. The patriarchal covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic) provide a touchstone for our global understanding of the Old Testament.

Whatever text we might be reading at any given time, we can use the touchpoints of these covenants to understand exactly what was happening between God and his people (Israel) and

why. What we will uncover together is quite amazing: God shows love and grace to his people in very specific and identifiable ways that are consistent through the entirety of redemptive history and ultimately realized in the person and works of Christ. This is an important anchor both for our understanding of the Old Testament and our understanding of the Christian faith, because this perspective provides us with a lens to rightly view Christ: the fulfillment of all the covenant promises. We will see together that God is unchanging and the bible is a *unified narrative*.



INTRODUCTION

*You are here!*

GENESIS

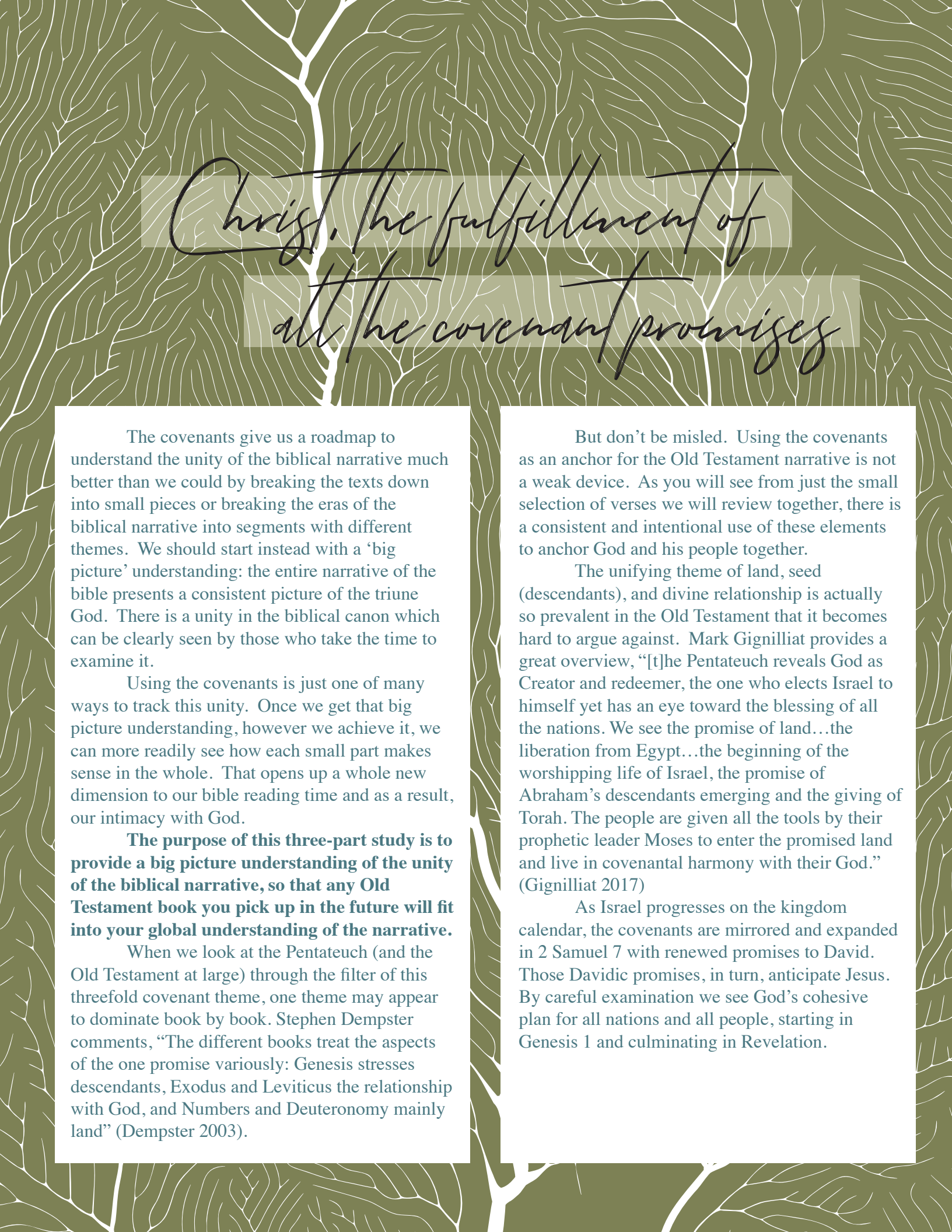
EXODUS

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# Christ, the fulfillment of all the covenant promises

The covenants give us a roadmap to understand the unity of the biblical narrative much better than we could by breaking the texts down into small pieces or breaking the eras of the biblical narrative into segments with different themes. We should start instead with a ‘big picture’ understanding: the entire narrative of the bible presents a consistent picture of the triune God. There is a unity in the biblical canon which can be clearly seen by those who take the time to examine it.

Using the covenants is just one of many ways to track this unity. Once we get that big picture understanding, however we achieve it, we can more readily see how each small part makes sense in the whole. That opens up a whole new dimension to our bible reading time and as a result, our intimacy with God.

**The purpose of this three-part study is to provide a big picture understanding of the unity of the biblical narrative, so that any Old Testament book you pick up in the future will fit into your global understanding of the narrative.**

When we look at the Pentateuch (and the Old Testament at large) through the filter of this threefold covenant theme, one theme may appear to dominate book by book. Stephen Dempster comments, “The different books treat the aspects of the one promise variously: Genesis stresses descendants, Exodus and Leviticus the relationship with God, and Numbers and Deuteronomy mainly land” (Dempster 2003).

But don’t be misled. Using the covenants as an anchor for the Old Testament narrative is not a weak device. As you will see from just the small selection of verses we will review together, there is a consistent and intentional use of these elements to anchor God and his people together.

The unifying theme of land, seed (descendants), and divine relationship is actually so prevalent in the Old Testament that it becomes hard to argue against. Mark Gignilliat provides a great overview, “[t]he Pentateuch reveals God as Creator and redeemer, the one who elects Israel to himself yet has an eye toward the blessing of all the nations. We see the promise of land...the liberation from Egypt...the beginning of the worshipping life of Israel, the promise of Abraham’s descendants emerging and the giving of Torah. The people are given all the tools by their prophetic leader Moses to enter the promised land and live in covenantal harmony with their God.” (Gignilliat 2017)

As Israel progresses on the kingdom calendar, the covenants are mirrored and expanded in 2 Samuel 7 with renewed promises to David. Those Davidic promises, in turn, anticipate Jesus. By careful examination we see God’s cohesive plan for all nations and all people, starting in Genesis 1 and culminating in Revelation.



## THE BENEFIT OF HINDSIGHT

If you are familiar with the Old Testament, you already know that the covenants come into the narrative at different times and are named for the patriarch they engaged: Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic. So, you might ask, how do we look backwards and view all of the Old Testament through the lens of covenants before they even happened?

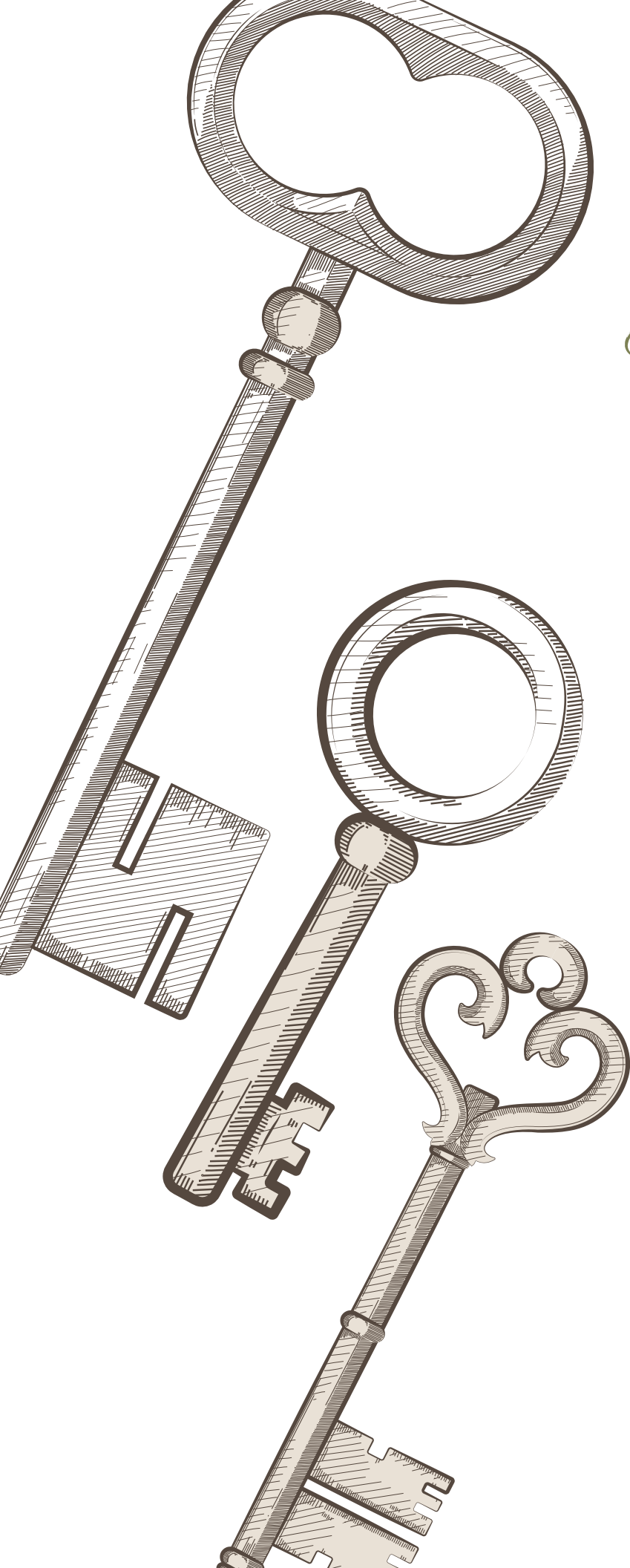
You actually already know the answer to this, because you are blessed to be a New Covenant believer. As such, you can see the entire bible in the light of Christ. Don't you love to look at the prophecies he fulfilled, the metaphors for him that show up in the Old Testament, and even the pre-incarnate physical appearances (aka: Christophanies)? You know that Christ was the purpose and plan all along, and because you have that realization you can understand the Old Testament better. Hindsight is, after all, 20/20.

The same is true for the covenants. Each one reveals a bit more to us about God and his ultimate plans for Israel (and for "all nations, peoples and tongues" -Revelation 7:9). As we examine each covenant, we can see that God anticipated it in his commands, promises, and grace even before he formalized it with one of his beloved patriarchs.

Israel struggled to follow Yahweh consistently and this is wholly due to the influence of sin. But they also didn't have as complete a picture as we do now. We get the blessing of reading the Old Testament through Christ-focused eyes. We have a distinct advantage in unpacking exactly how it all led up to him.

In this first unit of our study, the Pentateuch, we'll start by examining the threefold theme common to each covenant. Then we will look at the Pentateuch and pull out a small subset of the examples where these covenant elements show up, considering the implications for Israel and for ourselves.

This exercise is meant to inspire you to look even deeper on your own time. You'll continue to find ways that you see these three threads running through the entire Old Testament. Some are more obvious at first, but as you build your covenant lens, you will see more and more examples you may have overlooked before. Our time together might inspire you to think differently about the promises that God made to the patriarchs and how personal they can be for you today. Begin your study, as every bible study, with prayer that God will reveal to you the beauty and simplicity of his redemption plan, for you and for all people, in new and exciting ways.



# Biblical Covenants

## WHAT IS A BIBLICAL COVENANT?

R.C. Sproul calls God the Promise Keeper. (Sproul 2020) This is a critical way to think of the covenants and the God who initiates them. The covenants we are examining are covenants of grace, which means they are promises dependent upon God to fulfill.

One thing remains consistent through the biblical narrative: humanity's need for grace. God provides this grace from the beginning, understanding and loving his people all the way to the finished works of Christ on the cross.

Bruce Waltke reminds us that Israel's "election, not their own merits, constitutes the sole basis for all that follows. In other words, the Torah is an outgrowth of their election through Abraham. Moreover, I AM, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, not humans, authors the holy covenant." (Waltke 2007) As we consider the covenants, let's bear in mind the burden is on God to see them to completion - humanity never could. Waltke goes on to remind us that "to keep covenant denotes fidelity and devotion, not perfection." God does not institute these covenants just to watch us fail. The covenants are rooted in the love God has always had for us and the good plan he had for us from the beginning, the very beginning, even as far back as creation.



# The Three Keys

**The three key components of each covenant are land, descendants, and a special relationship with Yahweh.** They are emphasized in the life of Israel in different ways and different times, each administration allowing her to better understand herself and her God.

As much as we want to have a good theological foundation for understanding the Old Testament, we also want to understand the personal application. Take some prayerful time below to reflect on the questions. As best you can, hold on to these personal reflections about the covenant themes as we dive into the biblical text together. Refer back to this part of the study often, so that you can continue to hold on to the personal ramifications of these covenants, even as you apprehend the theological ones.

## LAND

What do you think of when you reflect on the biblical ‘promised land?’

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Changing the word ‘land’ to ‘home,’ how do you feel about this concept? Describe your feelings about home:

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If you have people in your life whom you love, one of the desires you might have for them is ‘home.’ When reading the Old Testament, which can often feel distant and not particularly relatable, it’s helpful for us to imagine these concepts in a more personal way. Share any thoughts you have about God’s demonstrated love for his people Israel (and us) through the promise of ‘land.’

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## DESCENDANTS

What do you think of when you think of biblical descendants?

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Changing the word ‘descendants’ to ‘family,’ what feelings are evoked in you?

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How does the idea of ‘family’ add to your reflections on ‘home?’ How are these ideas related to each other?

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Spend time reflecting on God’s love as it is exemplified in family and home:

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## RELATIONSHIP

The third element in the covenantal promises is a special relationship with God. Relationship is a big word, so start with your reflections on a biblical understanding of relationship:

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Now think about your own relationships. Don’t be shy. We all know that sometimes they are joyful, sometimes complicated. As you write about that here, try to include any reflections you might have on what causes relationships to be joyful and what causes them to be complicated:

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## BRING IT ALL TOGETHER

Let's pull all of the elements together to synthesize the totality of these covenants. Think again about home and family. You reflected on the partnership of these ideas earlier, now add relationship to this. Mix up these three concepts, adding and removing any of the three, and write your reflections here (family and relationship with no home, home with no family or relationships, etc.):

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Finally, take each of these elements together and reflect on God's demonstrated love for Israel (and for you) through the promises of land, descendants, and relationship.

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**REMEMBER** an important point: we are not promoting a prosperity gospel which implies that God's love is tied to your material wealth (land). Not at all. A helpful way to understand is this: **concepts which occurred physically in the Old Testament often occur spiritually in the New Testament.** As God was leading up to his grand redemption in Christ, he orchestrated the Israelites' lives to be a witness to that fulfillment. He set the Israelites apart by providing them a safe and fruitful land, protecting the actual family descendants so that his promise would be fulfilled, and maintaining relationship with them even in the face of their disobedience. He had a plan - nothing and no one (even Israel) could thwart it.

With that in mind, reflect on your own parallel experiences with God in these three ways:

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# Genesis

Two of the four covenants we want to address in this Old Testament study appear in Genesis. They are named for the patriarch they engaged: Noahic, Abrahamic. The Mosaic covenant appears in Exodus, and the fourth covenant, the Davidic covenant, appears in 2 Samuel 7. The Davidic covenant is foundational to the works of the prophets and, in fact, cast a light towards the ultimate fulfillment of all covenantal promises in Christ.

It's important for us to keep our eye on the trajectory of the covenants even as we examine them in greater depth. Take a moment to reflect on the careful planning God executed as he rolled out the plan for Israel and for all people:

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## THE FIRST COVENANT

The first covenant that occurs in the bible is sometimes called the 'covenant of works:'

*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. – Genesis 2:16-17*

R.C. Sproul explains it best, "The covenant of works refers to the covenant that God made with Adam and Eve in their pristine purity before the fall, in which God promised them blessedness contingent upon their obedience to His command. After the fall, the fact that God continued to promise redemption to creatures who had violated the covenant of works, that ongoing promise of redemption is defined as the covenant of grace. Technically, from one perspective, all covenants that God makes with creatures are gracious in the sense that He is not obligated to make any promises to His creatures. But the distinction between the covenant of works and grace is getting at something that is of vital importance, as it has to do with the Gospel. The covenant of grace indicates God's promise to save us even when we fail to keep the obligations imposed in creation. This is seen most importantly in the work of Jesus as the new Adam." (Sproul, The Covenant of Works 2006)

# The covenant of grace indicates God's promise to save

**WRITE YOUR REFLECTIONS** on the difference between a covenant based in works and grace here:

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**At its heart the creation story is a story about land, descendants, and a special relationship with God.** God designs and develops his creation in the way that he sees fit for perfection. When he adds Adam to this creation, he has begun the process of relationship which he will sustain despite humanity's downfalls. He places Adam in a perfected land - Eden. As early as Genesis 1:28 God shows the desire for his first patriarch to "be fruitful and multiply" which, alongside Genesis 3:15, looks forward to the element of descendants through all the covenants. Before we even leave the garden, we see God's divine intention for his image bearers to have relationship with himself, a multitude of descendants, and a fruitful and beautiful land.

**WRITE YOUR REFLECTIONS** on the creation story and how it aligns with the threefold theme of land, descendants, and relationship:

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**IN GENESIS 9:1-17** God renews his desire to establish his beloved Noah with land, descendants, and a special relationship with himself. Read this passage and make note of the places where land, descendants, and relationship appear:

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**IN GENESIS 12:1–3** this covenant is clearly laid out again with Abraham. “God unconditionally grants his faithful servant Abraham a fief that consists of eternal seed, sustained on an enduring land, and includes kings to rule the nations. Obviously, these eternal rewards far exceed a lifetime of investment and so are packed full of God’s grace.” (Waltke 2007) Read the passage and pull out our trifold theme:

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This theme is supported through the rest of Genesis. In chapter 15 we observe the theme in verse 5, “...count the stars..so will your seed be,” verse 7, “...I ... give you this land to inherit” and verse 40, “...I am Yahweh your God. (relationship).” The theme persists in chapter 17, verse 2 “I will multiply you exceedingly,” verse 8, “I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land of your sojourning, all the land of Canaan” and verses 16-17 where the repeated use of ‘bless’ reinforces the promise of relationship. Genesis 22:16ff mentions seed three times, including a second thematic element in tandem, “Your seed will possess the gates (land) of your enemies.”

In chapter 26:3 this thematic stacking happens again: “to you and your seed I will give all these lands and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.” The last element, less readily visible, is the fulfillment of the covenant which recalls the relational component of our theme. In chapter 28:13, observe “[to Jacob] I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac [relationship]; the land on which you lie, to you I will give it and to your seed.” Finally, though not as exhaustively as is possible from the entire body of Genesis, we can see the theme from verse 48:21, “God will be with you [relationship] and will bring you again to the land [land] of your fathers [descendants].”

Longman notes Genesis “contains a unity of narrative plot that takes the reader from the creation of the world to the sojourn in Egypt.” (Longman/Dillard 2006) This sojourn is marked with a reiterative emphasis on the three important elements of the covenants.

**WHAT DO YOU WANT TO NOTE** about Genesis, in the covenants, the examples of the theme, or both?

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**WHAT OTHER EXAMPLES** can you find in Genesis that reiterate this theme?

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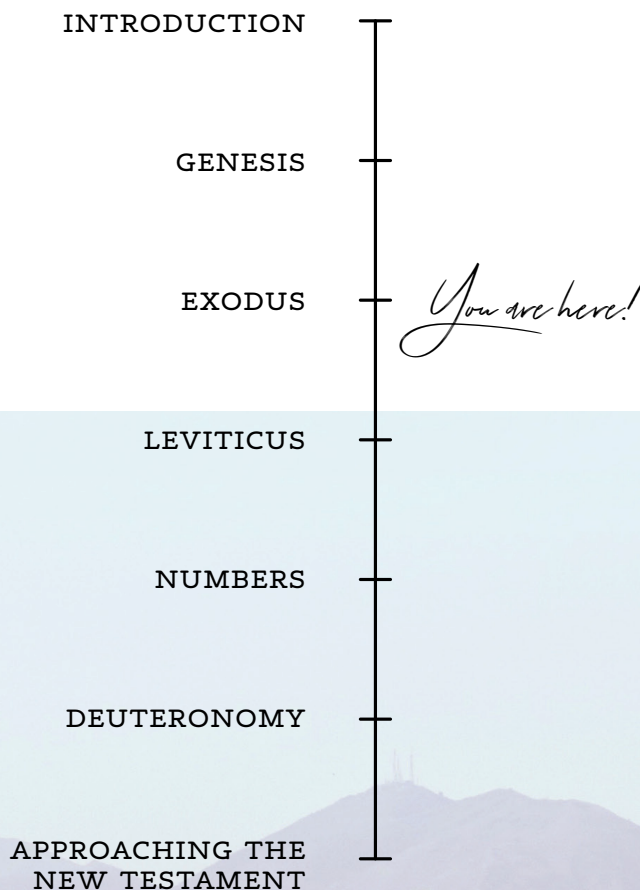
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# Exodus

The Exodus is the greatest act of salvation in the Old Testament and as such, it's steeped in the loving and grace-filled relationship between God and his people. God calls Moses in a watershed moment at the burning bush (Ch. 3). In this interaction he begins a new chapter of intimacy with his people by revealing his name (v. 14) and his plan to Moses. Don't move too quickly past this moment, it is one of the greatest acts of intimacy in the Pentateuch. The closeness that God invites Moses into at the burning bush foreshadows the relationship with Israel which he will ask Moses to mediate in the years to come. "A consideration therefore of Israel's call to which the name Yahweh has been attached cannot be made in isolation from the detail surrounding the revelation of the divine name to Moses in Exodus 3:13-15." (Dumbrell 2013)

As he prepares the nation for exodus, God reminds Israel that he has elected them for this special relationship in the past (3:6, 3:15, 4:5) and he promises to continue to do so in the future (3:12). God reiterates the plan for relationship and deliverance in chapter 6, reinforcing Moses' call to the task.

By his mighty acts God delivers Israel from Egypt because he desires for them to worship him in this special relationship (4:23, 5:1, 6:6ff, 7:16, 8:1, 8:20, 9:1, 9:13, 10:3). In the wilderness he abides with them in intimate, albeit sometimes terrifying, experiences (chapters 19-20). Chapters 25-27 and 35-40 carry detailed architectural plans which allow Israel to step into the Tabernacle: a representation of heaven on earth. Even the laws given from Sinai create intimacy and a 'set apart' relationship status between Israel and Yahweh.





Wedge into this narrative of law and tabernacle, however, is Israel's misstep with the golden calf in chapter 32. This moment shines a light on the import God places upon relationship with Israel and the covenantal promise of descendants. When the nation betrayed him in this way, God could have wiped them out. But instead he protects the covenant of descendants and balances justice with grace. God had blessed this nation with descendants even in Egyptian oppression (1:7, 9, 12, 20) and he would surely continue to bless them with descendants as they moved into the promised land. The physical movement of the people was as real an act of deliverance as the movement of their hearts.

God was making a sweeping readjustment to bring his nation out of Egypt back to the land where he wanted them to reside. As we examine the book for our theme verse by verse, let us not become blind to the setting and movement of this book: getting Israel out of Egypt so that they can inhabit the land God has for them (3:8, 3:17, 6:6ff, 23:23-33, 34:24). This overarching theme of land is so tightly connected to the deliverance/relationship element in Exodus that the three are completely interdependent. As we look far forward to the exile, we recognize just how symbiotic these covenantal elements really are.

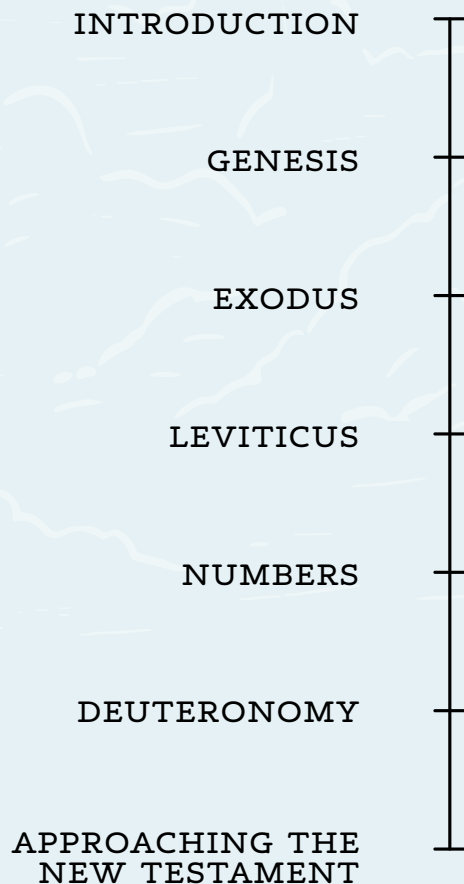
CHOOSE A SELECTION OF THE VERSES ABOVE & WRITE YOUR REFLECTIONS ON THE THREEFOLD THEME AS EVIDENCED IN EXODUS.

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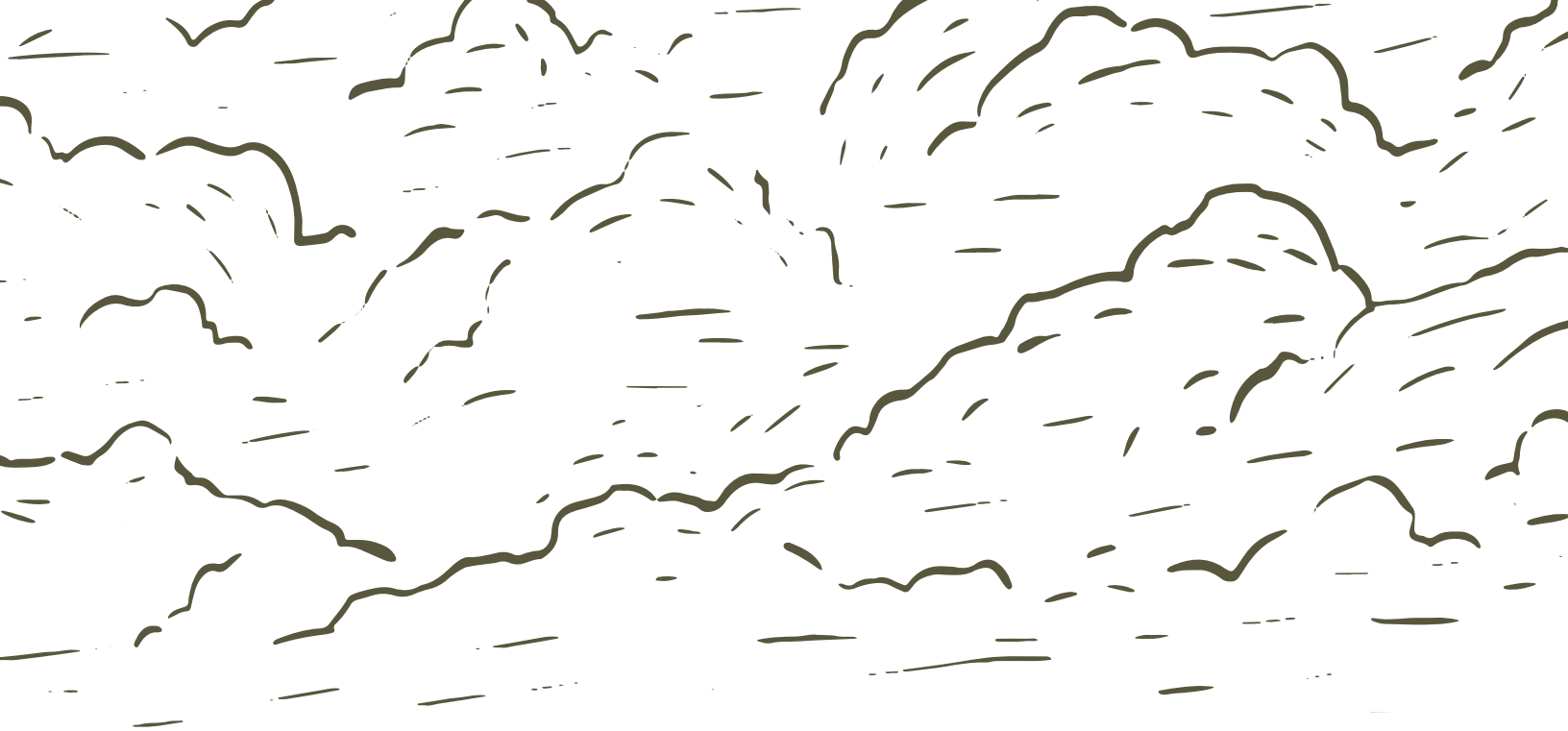
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*You are here!*

## *Leviticus*

The book of Leviticus emphasizes the relationship between God and his people as it lays out proper worship in great detail (chapters 1-7). “The priestly content of Leviticus focuses on maintaining the Covenant relationship between God and His people.” (Gignilliat 2017) Witness the interplay between land and relationship, especially highlighted in chapter 26, which describes blessings for obedience that are connected to the land, like rain for the land to increase its yield (v. 4) and peace in the land from enemies (v. 6). In verse 12 God reminds Israel of his desire for this relationship and appeals to them to honor him as he has delivered them: “I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.” (v 13).



In the second half of chapter 26 God reveals the result of disobedience: broken relationship. How that broken relationship plays out will be felt as a punishment to Israel, both personal and corporate. Panic, disease, and fever will afflict the individual, and the land will not yield wealth for Israel but rather for her enemies (v. 16). This chapter goes on to list the awful outward manifestations of broken relationship with the God of all creation who is sovereign over everything that happens to and through Israel.

In chapter 26 we also have a new reflection on God's love for the land which underscores the value he places on it and, by extension, Israel: that "the land shall rest" and "have its Sabbaths" is mentioned three times, reminding us that God has love and care for this land even when Israel does not. In keeping his covenant to Israel, he will preserve and restore the land from their abuse of it, even as they have abused their relationship with Him.

All throughout Leviticus the narrative includes the current generation and the generations to follow (descendants), as God shows the nation how the covenant will be enacted in years to come, for example, 26:45. This naturally leads to the book of Numbers where the theme of descendants becomes more prominent.

Choose a selection of the above verses and write your thoughts on the three-part theme in the book of Leviticus:

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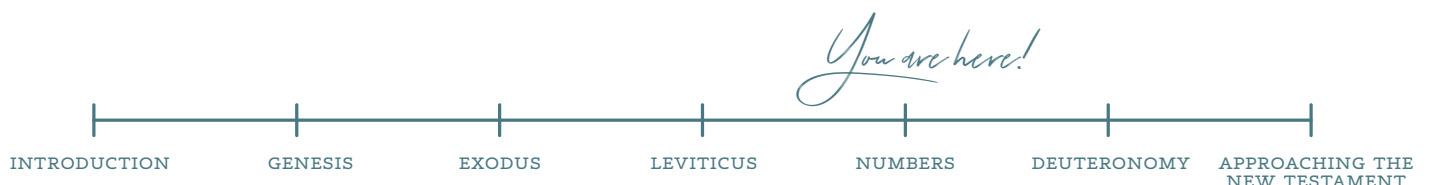
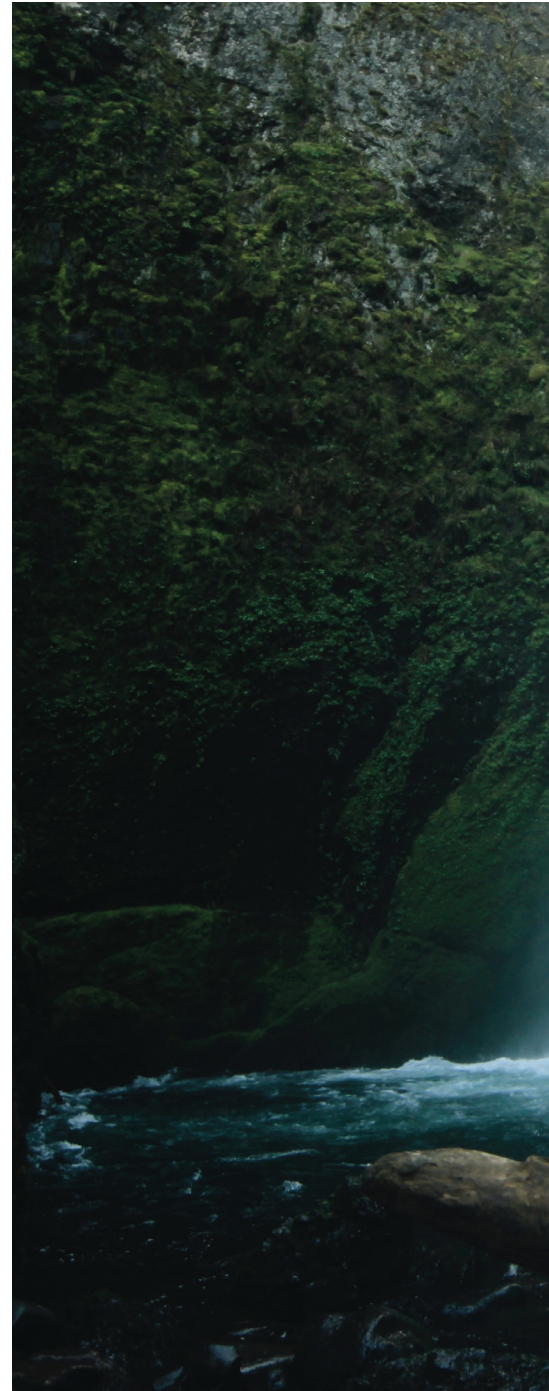
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# Numbers


There is significant narrative in Numbers regarding the land but the first several chapters (1-9) are saturated in sections on descendants (the census texts), and relationship – the priestly offices and services devoted to maintenance of the relationship between God and Israel. “The meaning of the priestly rituals in the book of Numbers is not located in one law but in the intersection of all the laws that precede them. Laws can’t be isolated, but they must be examined in concert with the whole. The priestly ritual in Numbers has symbolic meaning: the interrelation of God, humans and the created order.” (Gignilliat 2017) Notably 9:15-23 provides a beautiful visual of the relationship between God and his people.

In chapter 10 the nation is on the move and the text begins to focus again on the covenant of land (10:29). As the nation progresses toward the promised land, God continues his relational provision for them in both social (11:16-30) and physical (11:31-34) ways. Moving into chapters 13 and 14 we see Israel approaching the land but experiencing a crisis of confidence in her God and his promises to them. Once more we see the interplay of the three elements in the Pentateuchal theme: Israel sends spies into the land (Ch. 13), doubts the relationship with God as provision for it (Ch. 14), and sees a consequence for her descendants (14:20-38).

At the end of Numbers Israel is at the edge of the promised land. In 26:1-5 another census is taken for the allotment of land, stacking the themes of descendants and land together from the covenantal promise. This leads us into Deuteronomy where Moses gives his last instructions for how Israel is to live in the land in relational peace with her God.







The priestly ritual in  
Numbers has symbolic  
meaning: the  
interrelation of God,  
humans and the  
created order.

CHOOSE A SELECTION OF VERSES FROM  
ABOVE AND WRITE YOUR REFLECTIONS  
ON THE TRIPARTITE THEME AS IT SHOWS  
UP IN NUMBERS:

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# Deuteronomy

“Possessing the land in the first place and keeping it in the second are both tied to Israel’s obedience to God’s commands (4:25–31; 11:26–28; 28:1–2; 30:15–20).” (Longman/Dillard 2006) As the people are at the edge of the promised land, the connection between the land and their relationship with God is tightly bound. “Deuteronomy portrays what an ideal Israel would be. It presents an Israel with ‘one God, one people, one land, one sanctuary, and one law’” (Longman/Dillard 2006).

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*You are here!*



Specifically, chapters 6 and 7 shed light on the overarching narrative of land, descendants, and relationship by epitomizing the importance of the Mosaic covenant in the context of all the patriarchal covenants. “By keeping I AM’s command, Israel will ‘fear I AM’ (i.e.: enjoy a relationship with him by obedience to his word out of awe for his person), and enjoy long life and prosperity in the land (Deut. 6:1-3).” (Waltke 2007) In 6:20-25, Israel is reminded of the law not as a slavish call to obedience but rather as an outcropping of their love for God. Gignilliat puts it this way, “I will love you with all my mind soul and strength by attending to your call on my life.” (Gignilliat 2017) In 7:7-9, Israel is reminded of her election not because she can or does keep the law but because God has promised to keep his covenant to her. In this all-important moment, God reiterates the covenant with Moses (Chapters 19-24) and goes into great detail on how it will play out.

As Moses recounts the law given to Israel at Sinai, he is also calling their minds back to the root of relationship with God: his promises in the previous covenants. This lens provides theological significance to the entire Old Testament and provides Israel with her marching orders into the land: keep the covenant and live there in peace.

Chapter 26 recapitulates evidence of God’s saving hand in Israel and their right-minded relational response. “The commands about the first fruits convey a simple elegance that makes the Yahweh-Israel relationship sound loving yet powerful.” (House 1998)

The promise of descendants is “reinforced by strategically located references to the ‘God of the fathers,’ one of several epithets that appears in apposition to the divine name YHWH...in order to emphasize YHWH’s sovereignty over past, present, and future eras of Israel’s history.” (Hwang 2012) Examples can be found in 1:8, 1:10f, 1:20, 4:37, 5:3, 6:3, 6:10, 6:18, 6:23, 7:8, et al.

Deuteronomy sits squarely in compliance with the tripartite theme of the covenants and elegantly anticipates how this theme will continue throughout the remainder of the Old Testament.

*Deuteronomy portrays what an ideal Israel would be.  
It presents an Israel with one God, one people, one  
land, one sanctuary, and one law.*

# Approaching the New Testament

The threefold theme of land, descendants, and relationship applies not only to the Pentateuch but to the entire Old Testament. Understanding the theme here, early in the reading of the narrative, helps us to make sense of the rest of scripture. By tracing this theme through the Pentateuch and beyond we can make connections we might have otherwise missed.

These covenants are *only partially fulfilled* in the Old Testament. When we appreciate that partial fulfillment, we can anticipate complete fulfillment in Christ. Read the following passages and reflect on the ways they relate to the foundational principles we have developed in this study:

## HEBREWS 3-4 (LAND)

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## GALATIANS 3 (DESCENDANTS)

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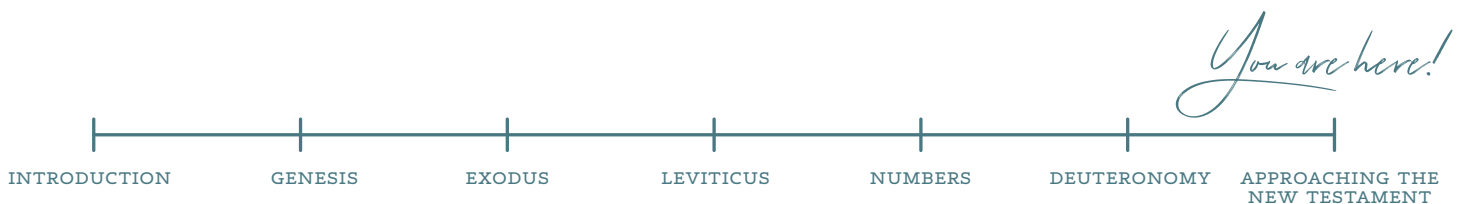
## JOHN 1:9-14 (RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD)

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Clines makes a short but power-packed statement that the covenant promises affirm “the primal divine intentions for humanity.” (Clines 2004) If we take seriously the depth and breadth of this theme in the first five books of the bible, we must also take seriously the implications for us today.

However, many modern Christians experience a disconnect here. “In recent years there has been a growing awareness of a theological and spiritual crisis in Western Culture not unlike that in ancient Judah. The Bible has been lost as far as its essential message is concerned, or if it has been found, it has been cut up into a thousand pieces and thrown into the fire.” (Dempster 2010)

Understanding the unified message of the bible is primary to adopting that message and its implications. “[I]f one is constantly using the zoom lens on a piece of sculpture such as Mount Rushmore, one will note the worn surface of some rocks and the sedimentary contours of others. But unless one is able to step back with a wide-angle lens and take in ‘the big picture’ the point of it all has been lost.” (Dempster 2003)

**WRITE SOME REFLECTIONS ABOUT HOW, AS A RESULT OF YOUR STUDY HERE, YOU ARE TAKING IN THE BIG PICTURE OF THE BIBLE WITH A WIDE-ANGLE LENS:**

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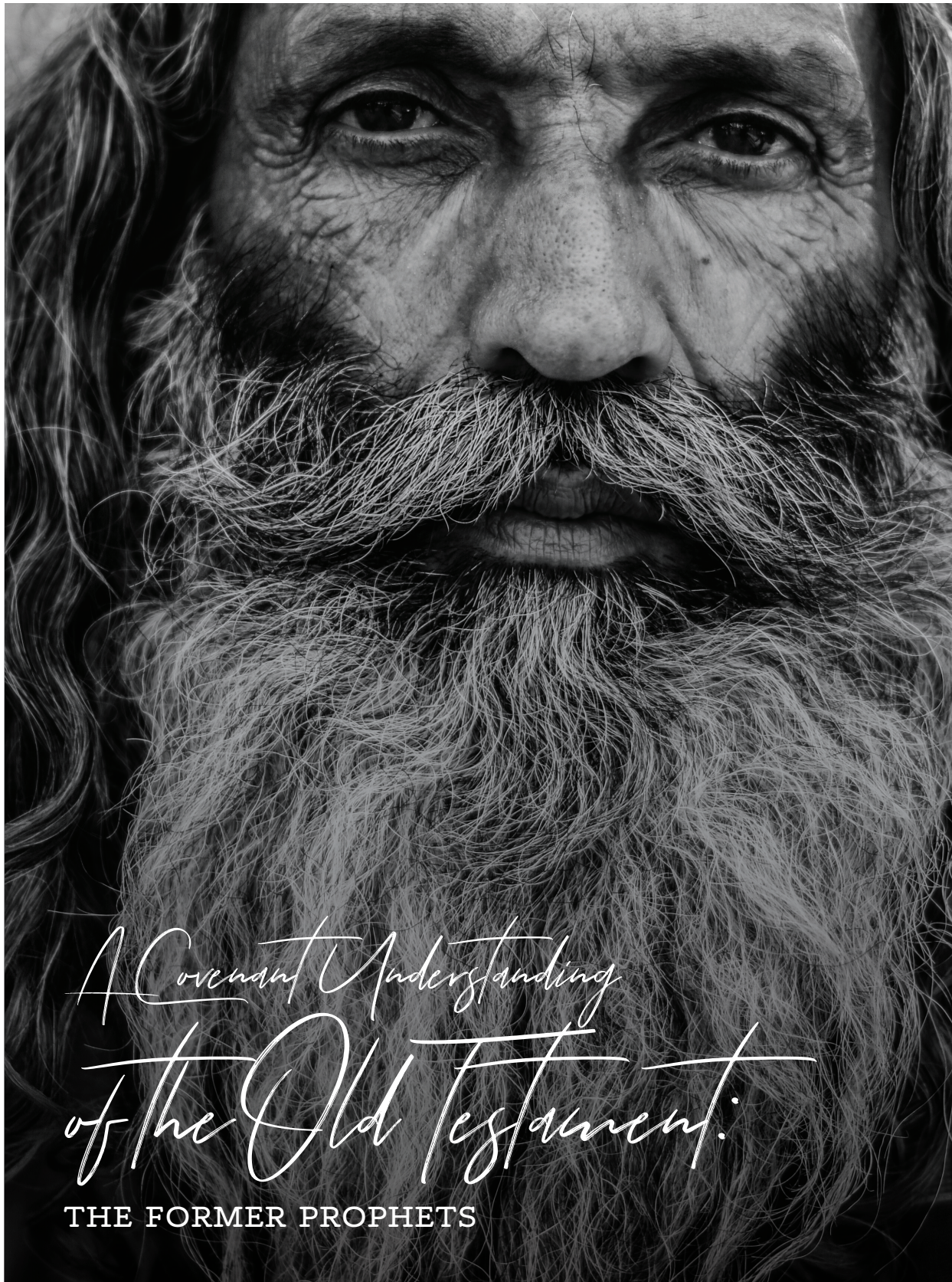
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By examining God’s unified theme in the Pentateuch, we prepare ourselves to see that unity throughout the entire bible. This is the way that we properly orient ourselves in awe of God’s plan for his beloved image bearers throughout time. With the proper point of view we can see God’s cohesive plan for all nations and all people, starting in Genesis 1 and culminating in Revelation. A canonical approach to all of the bible means that when reading a single verse or an entire section we see the bigger narrative that points us to Jesus. This helps us to appreciate our own place in God’s salvation plan.

*The bigger narrative  
points us to Jesus.*





*A Covenant Understanding  
of the Old Testament:*

THE FORMER PROPHETS



# Introduction

As we transition out of the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy) into the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings), we will continue to anchor ourselves in the threefold theme of the covenants: land, descendants, and relationship with God. Here in the Former Prophets we see the fourth of our covenants, the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7).

The last book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, heavily exerts itself on the Former Prophets from the starting point, but so does the exile from the end point. These are our bookends for the time when Israel enters into and lives in the promised land. By the way, the exile also marks the break between the former and latter prophets. The books of the Former Prophets occur before the exile, the books of the Latter Prophets span before, during, and after the exile. In fact, the best way to look at the Former Prophets is as a cohesive narrative arc *which explains the exile*.

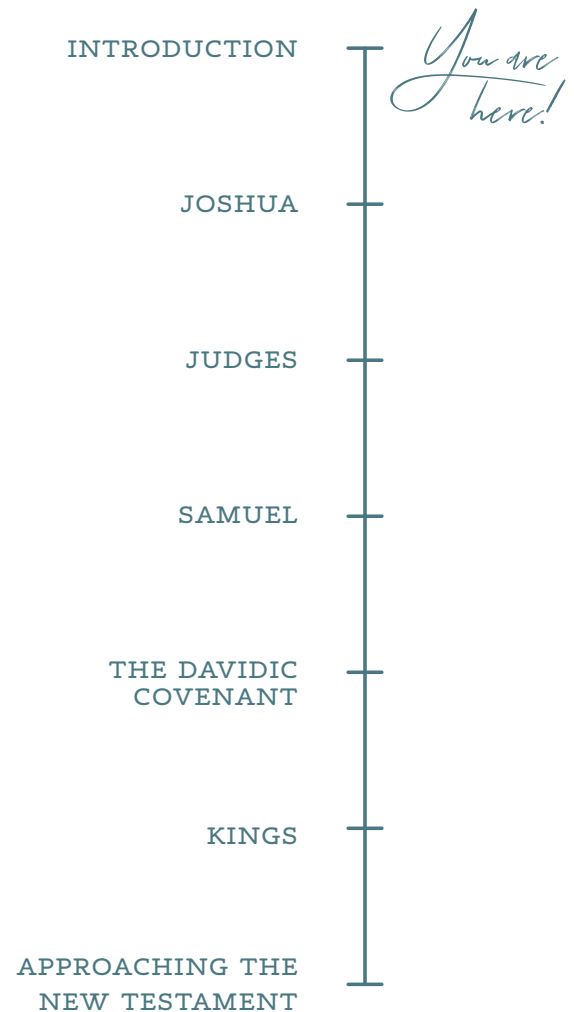
There are many theories about when the books of the Former Prophets were written, but some scholars believe that these books were written during the exile to help Israel hold on to (or regain) her faith during that dark time (Longman/Dillard 2006). One can only imagine the question Israel was asking herself during the exile was ‘How did this happen?’ The record of the Former Prophets answers that question with little room for argument. Authorship and date of writing is not as important for our purposes as the theological unity that we find in these books.

One of the unique characteristics of the Former Prophets is found in the seams, or transitions between the books. In all cases we see a tight movement from one to the next. This further underscores the way that they should be read and understood: as a unit.

If the Pentateuch provides the foundations of our Old Testament understanding with the themes of land, descendants and relationship with God, the books of the Former Prophets continue to expand on those themes and provide additional strength to these foundations which enlighten all of the books that follow, including the New Testament. Looking at the stories about Israel conquering and living in the promised land helps us to see humanity’s desperate need for God.

Reiterate here the marker between the Former and Latter prophets:

*Look at the former prophets as a cohesive narrative arc which explains the exile.*



# Look AT Context

To understand the bookends that border the Former Prophets, read the following passages and reflect upon them.

**DEUTERONOMY 31:14–29** leads us into the Former Prophets. Reflect on the notable prophecies.

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**2 KINGS 25:1–26** leads us out of the Former Prophets. Note any parallels between this passage and **DEUTERONOMY 31:14–29**:

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Based on your look at **DEUTERONOMY 31:14–29** and **2 KINGS 25:1–26**, what do you expect to see happen inside the books of the Former Prophets?

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Can you put these expectations into the context of land, descendants, and relationship with God? Think broadly about these thematic threads. Feel free to refer back to the Pentateuch section of this study if needed:

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*You are  
here!*

INTRODUCTION JOSHUA

JUDGES

SAMUEL

THE DAVIDIC  
COVENANT

KINGS

THE NEW  
TESTAMENT

# Joshua

Just as we found in the Pentateuch, some books are more easily identified with one particular part of the threefold covenant theme. This trend continues into the Former Prophets. There is no doubt the books of the Former Prophets are all land-heavy. They are, on the surface, about entering into and living in the promised land. Therefore, the book of Joshua is the next natural progression from where Moses left us in Deuteronomy, at the border of the promised land.

One important note about the transition from Deuteronomy to Joshua is zero elapsed time. This is one of the tight seams between the books in this unit of the Old Testament.

Read **DEUTERONOMY 31:1-8** and note the close handoff:

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Look at the following passages and note your overview of the land theme in the book of Joshua:

**DEUTERONOMY 6:10-12, 19:1-2**

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**EXODUS 23:23-30**

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## NUMBERS 33:50-56 (CROSS REF. JOSHUA 6:24, 8:28, 11:13)

The book of Joshua can be easily split into three segments: the taking of the land (Joshua 1-12), the allotment of the land (Joshua 13-21) and the retaining of the land (Joshua 22-24). This is the refrain of Joshua: the Lord gave the land and Israel took it (v 11:23). However, the success we see Israel experience in chapters 1-12 begins a steady decline as the Former Prophets progress.

How does the book of Joshua fit in the larger story arc? The interplay of land, descendants, and relationship with God is so tightly woven that it's almost indiscernible where one begins and the other ends.

Write your reflections on some examples of land, descendants, and relationship with God in the book of Joshua, found in the following verses: 2:24, 3:5, 3:15-16, 5:15, 6:20, 7:11-12, 8:30-35, 10:14, 11:23:

*This is the refrain of Joshua: the Lord gave the land and Israel took it.*



# Personal Application

Take a moment here to reflect on the principle we introduced in the first part of this study:

**CONCEPTS WHICH OCCURRED PHYSICALLY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT OFTEN OCCUR SPIRITUALLY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.** Using some of the verses above as a springboard, how can you personally apply the concept of the physical promised land in your spiritual life?

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Extend the concept into descendants and relationship with God. Do you identify with Israel as they experienced God in these ways?

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Run a spiritual trajectory from your salvation experience (Exodus) and your wilderness wanderings (Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy) to your spiritual promised land (Joshua). Describe the ways that relationship with God and descendants coincide in your spiritual journey. Don't forget that you would *be* a spiritual descendant as easily as you might *have* spiritual descendants:

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## PAUSE BEFORE YOU GO ON

This is deep internal work. You will be blessed to do it thoughtfully and prayerfully. Ask God to show you the personal applications you can take away from these Old Testament narratives. But shore up your strength. As we walk with Israel into the time of the judges and the monarchy, we will be tracking our own sinful tendencies so that we can really learn from what Israel experienced, not just observe it.

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here!*



# Judges

The very end of the book of Joshua also has a tight seam into the book of Judges, though not in the way we saw between Deuteronomy and Joshua where there was no elapsed time.

Read Joshua 24:31. Prayerfully interpret this passage in the context of land, descendants, and relationship with God. Note how it foreshadows what we find in Judges:

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Bruce Waltke says that the judges we find in this book would be more appropriately called ‘warlords’ in our modern English (Waltke 2007). These are not robed, esteemed interpreters of the law. Rather, they are powerful and courageous leaders whom God uses to enact his judgement on the surrounding peoples and continue to set Israel apart as a people unto himself. By taking on the role of ‘divine warrior’ God “enacts justice for the benefit of Israel and for the sake of creation” (Brueggemann, Warrior God 2013). In each case God is sure to make clear that the victory is divine, not human.

The trajectory of Israel during the time of the judges is often described as a downward spiral. To understand this downward spiral, we must first understand the cycle of the narrative in the book of Judges: sin, oppression, repentance, deliverance, rest. When Israel finds rest in the land (Joshua 23:1) it doesn’t take long for that rest to become complacency. In complacency, Israel sins. The divine retribution for this sin is oppression by her enemies. This oppression leads to repentance, the repentance to deliverance. Then, unfortunately, the rest leads again to sin.

For more on this cycle, review the following passages:

**SIN:** 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1

**OPPRESSION:** 2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:9

**REPENTANCE:** 3:9, 15; 6:6–7; 10:10

**DELIVERANCE:** 2:16; 3:9, 15; 10:1, 12

**REST:** 3:10–11; 8:28–32; 10:2–5; 12:9–15

You won't necessarily have to share your thoughts with the group, but for the sake of your own spiritual growth, can you note the ways that this cycle may have applied to you? What parallels do you see in your own spiritual journey?

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Can you also note ways that you identify and break this cycle? Or even better, prevent it from getting started in your spiritual life?

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Noting that we saw in both Joshua and Judges that when Israel was trusting and obeying God, she was virtually invincible, can you relate this to your spiritual life?

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With each progressive judge you will notice the sins become more and more heinous, until the dark end of the book, Judges 21:25. This is why the book of Judges is described as a downward spiral. Each time the nation returns to the beginning of the cycle, it does so a little (or a lot) lower in moral depravity than the cycle before.

God is willing and able to lead Israel in relational victory. As in Joshua, the military victories are often miraculous, leaving no doubt Who is responsible. However, after strong spiritual leaders like Moses and Joshua, the judges fall short. They often experience only fleeting intimacy with God just in time for the moment of the battle. Afterwards they turn (or return) to wicked ways. This book makes acute the need for God-honoring leadership. Compare the last verse of Judges (21:25) with Deuteronomy 31:27-29:

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Write your reflections on the book of Judges and how you see the covenant themes of land, descendants, and relationship with God playing out in this book:

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## *Samuel*

The book of Judges, and especially the foreshadowing of verse 21:25, leads directly into the book of Samuel, where we meet Israel's first kings. This is another of the close-knit seams we described earlier. Each of the books in this section of the Old Testament builds upon the one before. Therefore, it's ok to read any section of one of these books or indeed the whole book apart from a reading of the rest, but we must stay cognizant of the entire story. Anything else would be like walking in during the middle of a movie and walking out before the end, then complaining the story didn't make sense to you.

There are a few important components to the book of Samuel. First, we want to understand why it was a sin for Israel to ask for a king.

Second, we want to look carefully at the Davidic covenant both in light of the previous covenants and also in light of what would come after David.

We don't want to limit this 'after David' consideration to the immediate historical context of the subsequent kings in Israel/Judah. That would be short-sighted and not in keeping with our primary goal of incorporating this information into a New Testament point of view. We are, however, limited by the constraints of this study which is a survey of the Old Testament and not a deep dive. Be encouraged to come back to this study often as you dive deeply into whatever parts light you up! The goal is to get you excited about reading and understanding how it all fits together so that you are never without context to understand exactly what you are reading and how it informs your understanding of Christ.



In the book of Samuel, again, we see the application of Deuteronomy over the entire narrative of the Former Prophets. Particularly Deuteronomy 17:14-20 which also provides insight to our first challenge: why was it a sin for Israel to ask for a king?



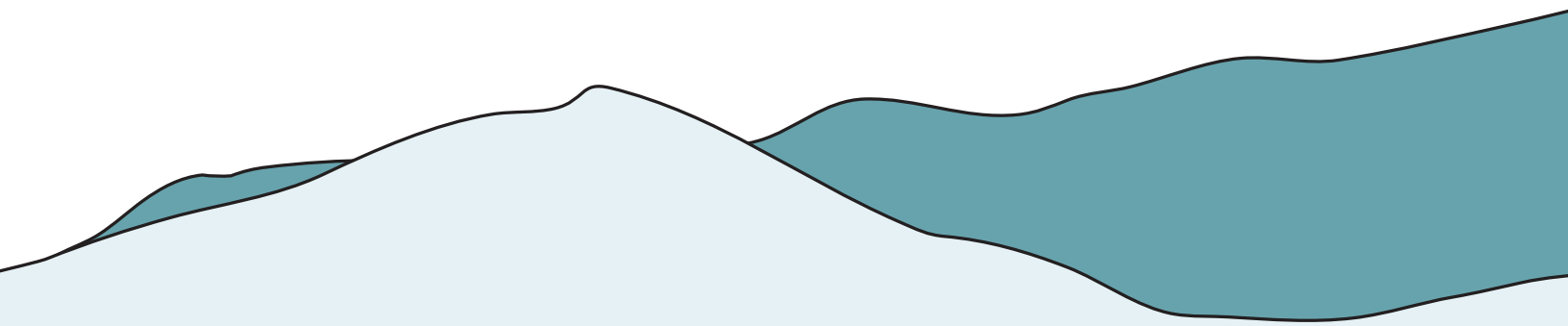
Read Deuteronomy 17:14-20. List as many ‘do’s and don’t’s as you can find:

Look carefully at Deuteronomy 17:14. Do you see any hints about what Israel was asking for and why?

Read 1 Samuel 12 and note two things: How does this passage show us the sin of Israel in asking for a king (v 12)?

How does this passage compare with Deuteronomy 31:14-22?

How do these passages integrate the covenant themes of land, descendants, and relationship with God?



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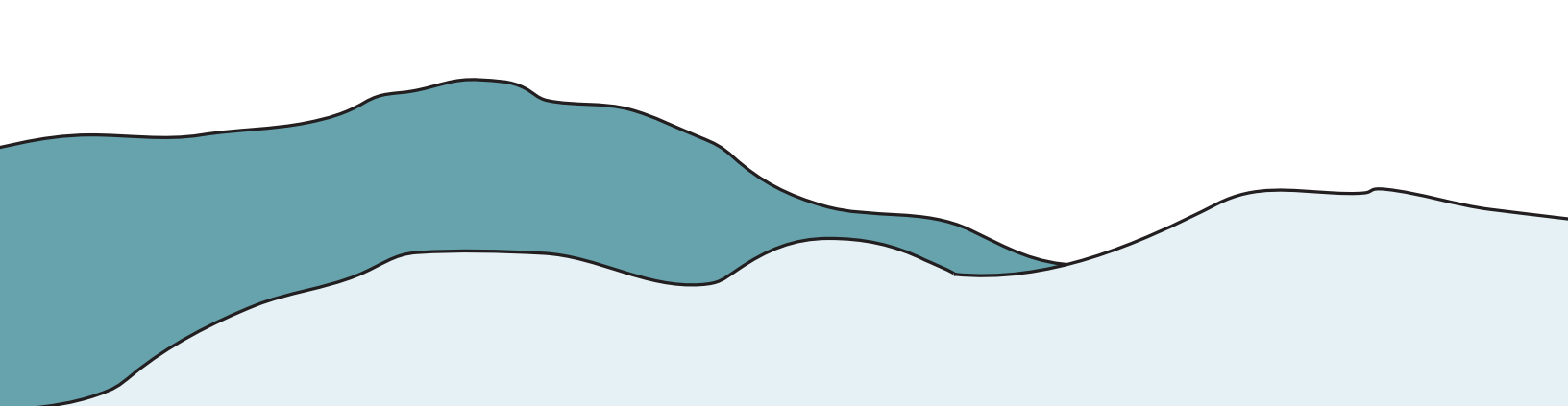


# *The Davidic Covenant*

The close ties which bind the Davidic covenant to the Abrahamic, Noahic, and Mosaic covenants are evidence of continuity in the promise of God, ultimately realized in Christ. Understanding the implications and promises in the Davidic covenant gives us a deeper understanding of the bible as a whole and shows that God’s love, demonstrated in the characteristics of the promise and plan, is eternal and global, with past, present, and future implications. The Davidic covenant “builds on the preceding covenants and looks forward to the ultimate establishment of God’s reign on the earth” (Grisanti 1999).

We have, of course, the special advantage of Messianic perspective on this and other Old Testament texts, which gives us the ability to synthesize them in light of the cross. While some texts show the Messianic hope in more overt ways than others, the Messianic hope expressed in the Old Testament is pervasive. “The conclusion that David was the anointed historical figure par excellence and that the eschatological messiah is to be found in his descendants is reinforced throughout the rest of the Old Testament” (Block 2003).

To see clearly the thread that runs through all eternity, we must not only look back at the promises that came before, but also the ways that the Davidic promise echoes through many of the biblical texts that follow it, most notably in the Prophets and the Psalms but also into the New Testament. Here also is where we see the wide global reach of this promise, to God’s reign over all of the earth. As such, we could regard the Davidic covenant as the “most crucial theological statement in the Old Testament” (Brueggemann 1990).



Read the Davidic covenant found in 2 Samuel 7:1-17. Note the following: How does this covenant differ from those in the Pentateuch (Noahic Genesis 9, Abrahamic Genesis 12, Mosaic Exodus 19, 24)?

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How is it similar?

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How does it demonstrate an expansion to understanding God's plan for all people across all time?

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In what verses do you see the covenant themes of land, descendants, and special relationship with God?


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McClain beautifully sums up the implications of the covenants being so closely tied together by saying the Davidic covenant “consisted of a reaffirmation of the regal terms of the original Abrahamic Covenant; with the further provision that these covenanted rights will now attach permanently to the historic house and succession of David; and also that 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). That last part is key, and we will return to it when we study the Latter Prophets in the next unit.



The promises of the Davidic covenant in vv. 1-17 cannot be read in isolation. David's response in the following verses (18-29) provides us a lens through which to see the magnitude of what God has promised.

First, we should note that we see David oscillating between singular and plural wording. This “exhibits the biblical writer’s concept of corporate solidarity” (Kaiser 1974). The covenant echoes through his time in the nation of Israel and through our own time as well.

David’s response shows prophetic recognition of the far-reaching implications of God’s promise. He responds to each segment in turn by showing recognition for: what God has done for Israel in the past (vv. 6-7, 22-24), what God has done for David in the present (vv. 9-11, 18-21), and what this promise means for the future (vv. 12-14, 25-29).

David later demonstrates his understanding of the promise in Psalm 95\*, including spiritual elements of belief and trust (Kaiser 1974), as well as in Psalm 21:7b where David rejoices in the fact that Yahweh “has made him most blessed forever” (Kaiser 1974).

Finally, at his life’s end, David knows this promise is the sparkling gem of his years and intimate loving relationship with Yahweh. This is reflected in 2 Samuel 23:5. A good beginning to understanding the implications of the Davidic covenant, then, starts with David’s own understanding of it in the moment. This passage demonstrates “both the centrality of this promise in the unfolding revelation of God and the conscious awareness David had of the universal and messianic implications of that promise” (Kaiser 1974).

That’s a lot to absorb. Write your reflections here:

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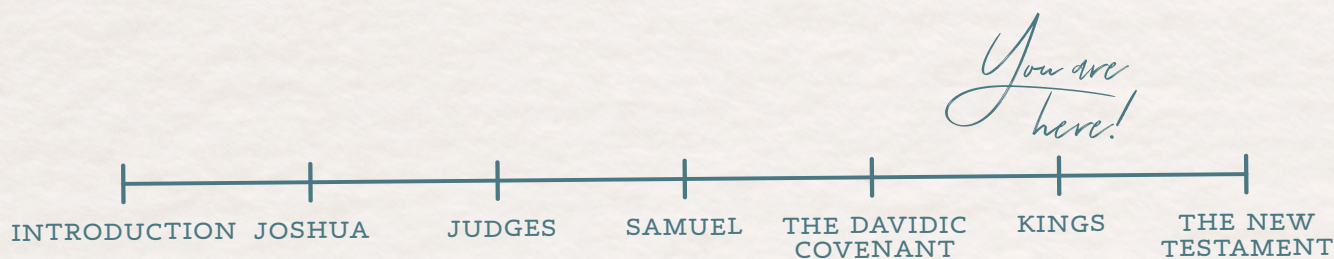
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# \* Psalm 95

DOESN'T OVERTLY CLAIM TO BE WRITTEN BY DAVID. SO HOW CAN WE BE SURE THAT IT IS REFLECTING AN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD AS KING AND MOREOVER, THAT IT WAS WRITTEN BY DAVID IN RESPONSE TO THE COVENANTAL PROMISES OF GOD? PSALMS 93-99 ARE CALLED ROYAL PSALMS. EACH OF THEM REFLECTS DIFFERENT FACETS OF UNDERSTANDING OF GOD AS ISRAEL'S KING. SINCE 95 IS NESTLED SQUARELY IN THIS SECTION OF THE PSALMS, WE KNOW THAT THE REFLECTIONS IN IT ARE IN PRAISE OF GOD AS KING OF KINGS (V.3). IN HEBREWS 4:7, THE AUTHOR CITES THIS PSALM AND CREDITS DAVID WITH THE AUTHORSHIP. SO IN THIS CASE, WE ALLOW SCRIPTURE TO TEACH SCRIPTURE. ANY TIME YOU FIND SOME CONFLICT OR CONFUSION IN YOUR BIBLE READING, PRAYERFULLY ASK GOD TO LEAD YOU TO OTHER SCRIPTURES THAT CAN SHED LIGHT.





## *Kings*

David Block claims that “the Old Testament is a record of God’s gracious reach to fallen humankind within history, it is indeed filled with hope, but to characterize this as an overtly and pervasively messianic hope is to overstate the case” (Block 2003). As we progress in our study together, we might find that we disagree. As Block astutely observes, the messianic hope may not often be overtly stated. However, to miss the pervasiveness of messianic hope in the Old Testament would be to miss the point of God’s eternal and global promise. Allowing for the retrospective position we occupy, and also allowing for the fact that some implications may even have been hidden from the prophets and writers themselves, it still seems clear that the later texts understand the Davidic covenant and the failure of the kings as pointing to a greater king in the future: Christ.

Bearing in mind the book of Kings, a big part of the narrative which explains Israel’s predicament in the exile, we can candidly say any reading of the book of Kings is a frustrating one, since none of the kings seemed to get it right. First, we have the split into northern and southern kingdoms. It can be a bit confusing how the text bounces back and forth between north (Israel) and south (Judah), so here is the cheat sheet for the book of Kings: none of the northern (Israel) monarchs was good. None. Only 8 of the southern (Judah) monarchs were good: Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham, Hezekiah and Josiah.

To be sure, land is a prevalent theme in Kings, since the nation was still enjoying the promised land. But we continue to see the weaving together of our other two elements: descendants and special relationship with God. In fact, at this point in the narrative there is a decided shift. Centrality of worship becomes predominant.

God had always been clear on how he was to be worshiped and that he alone was to be the object of worship. This now is the measuring stick by which each of the kings is judged. In the narratives of each monarchy, the king is noted whether he did or did not ‘tear down the high places,’ which means he did or did not destroy the worship of other gods in his kingdom. Of course, in this, we see our covenant theme of special relationship with God. God offers a special relationship with himself to Israel, but he expects the same in return. Scan the book of Kings and give a rough estimate of how many times the ‘high places’ are referenced:

Here is a short list (not complete) for reference about the high places: 1 Kings 3:2-3; 1 Kings 11:7; 1 Kings 12:31; 1 Kings 15:14; 1 Kings 22:43; 2 Kings 12:2-3; 2 Kings 14:3-4; 2 Kings 15:3-4; 2 Kings 17:11; 2 Kings 18:4; 2 Kings 23:5, 8, 20. Why do you think this is so important in the book of Kings?

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Read the following passages from Deuteronomy and note your observations on how each text applies to Kings:

Deuteronomy 12

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Deuteronomy 17:14-20

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Deuteronomy 18:9-22

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Deuteronomy 28

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Reflect here on how the words in Deuteronomy, written so many years before the time of the kings, inform your understanding of the element of descendants in the covenants:

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The stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant provide the standard for the reign of each of these kings (2 Kings 18:6; 21:7-9; 23:24-25). The king was to lead Israel in keeping the covenant and relying on God for deliverance. The king was the covenant administrator, trusting Yahweh to deliver on his promises. He was obligated to be personally loyal to Yahweh and to lead Israel in loyalty as well. When necessary, the king might need to take action on behalf of Yahweh (i.e., tearing down the ‘high places’ of worship to other gods). The king was to prioritize Torah and ensure Israel did the same.

Recalling that the Mosaic and Davidic covenants share elements of blessing/curse resulting in the conditions under which elements of the promise could be enjoyed, we see that promise executed throughout the book of Kings. When the king honored the covenant both he and, by extension, the people he ruled were blessed in the ways that God promised. When the king dishonored the covenant, both he and, by extension, the people he ruled were disciplined in the ways that God promised (clear statement of penalty in Deuteronomy 30:15-18, clear penalty in 2 Kings 24). The king was always held accountable for the direction of Israel’s affections.

Indeed, God will always keep his word. Thankfully, “the treacherous conduct of any one or series of Davidic rulers does not hazard the ultimate realization of [the covenant] provisions” (Grisanti 1999). Because of the unconditional components of the promise, fulfilled in Christ, we can see from our present perspective that all of these historical occurrences point to messianic hope. Perhaps not overtly, as Block points out, but pervasively.

How do you think influences of land, descendants and relationship with God positively or negatively impacted the kings?

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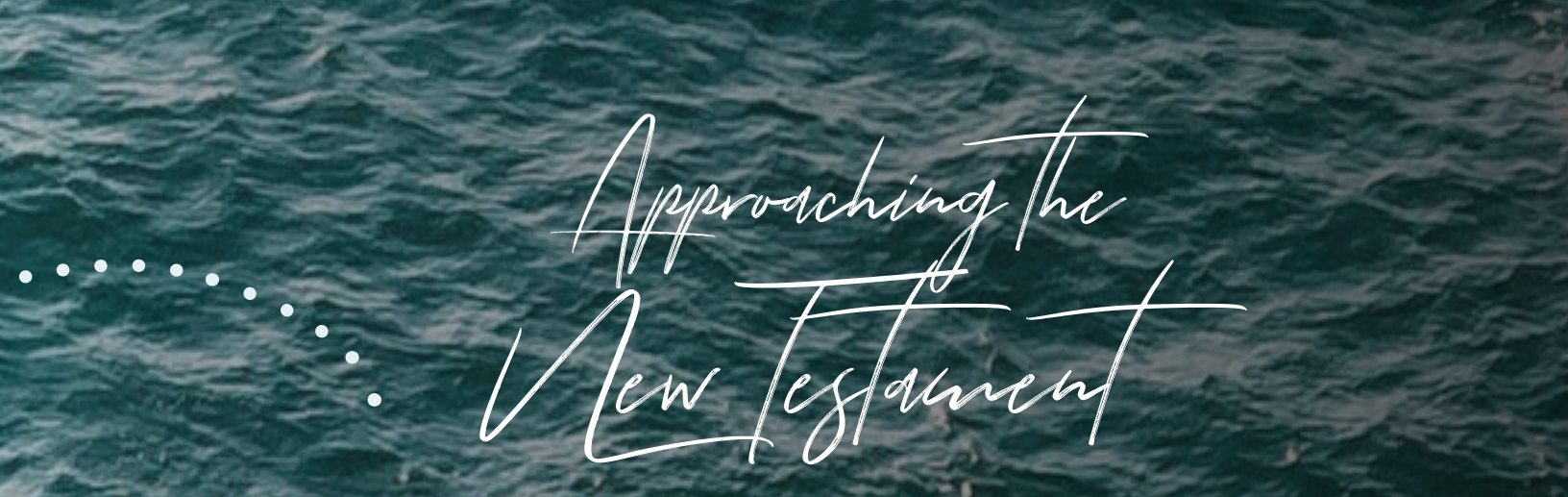
Do the concepts of scarcity (wilderness) vs. bounty (promised land) and dependence (wilderness) vs. sufficiency (promised land) have any spiritual echoes in your own faith?

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# Approaching the New Testament

We're going to do the heaviest lift of New Testament consideration at the very end of our study. However, at this juncture, we can look at an important facet: a Trinitarian read of the Old Testament. The early church read the Old Testament without redaction and the strength of the Old Testament canon was assumed. When Jesus became a reality, the early church did not ask the question, 'What do we do with the Hebrew canon now that Jesus has arrived?' Rather, the question was 'How do we understand Jesus in the light of the Old Testament?' The unit of the Former Prophets is an important component in understanding that answer.

Read Luke 24 and reflect on what Jesus might have been explaining from the unit of the Former Prophets:

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Read Romans 1:1-4 and note the relevance to the Former Prophets.

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A Trinitarian read of the Old Testament is not an imposition. It organically flows from all of the elements that always existed. A Trinitarian read of the Old Testament is also not anachronistic: God is timeless. The Trinity was in existence even before God revealed that truth to us. The Trinitarian read of the Old Testament mirrors our understanding of the covenants: we see only in hindsight how the elements of land, descendants, and relationship with God were present as early as the garden. God formalized these elements later in the covenants, which gives us a different perspective on the primeval history, but it doesn't change that these elements were already in play whether people were able to define them at that time or not. The same is true for the Trinity.

Write your reflections on how the Trinity shows up in the Old Testament:

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# *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.

# Latter Prophets

*You are  
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INTRODUCTION

LATTER PROPHETS

APPROACHING THE  
NEW TESTAMENT

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. 25):

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):

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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?

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

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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. 34-36). Think specifically about what McClain calls ‘interruption’:

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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:


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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)

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

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

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

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Joel 2:15-17 (Liturgical)

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Amos 3:1-2 (Israel)

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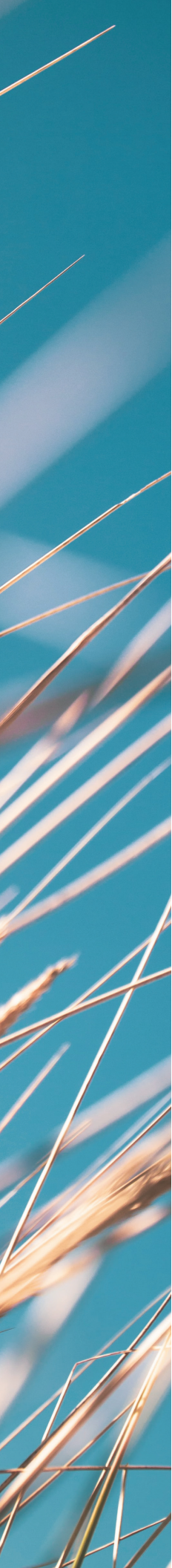
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Obadiah 1:2-3 (Judah)

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Jonah 2 Kings 14:23-27 (Israel)

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Micah 2:12-13 (Judah/Israel)

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Nahum 1:7-8 (Israel)

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Habakkuk 2:3-4 (Judah)

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Zephaniah 1:4-6 (Judah)

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

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

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Malachi 2:11-12 (post-exilic)

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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.

# Approaching the New Testament

INTRODUCTION

LATTER PROPHETS

APPROACHING THE  
NEW TESTAMENT

*You are  
here!*

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:

*This failure sets up the expectation for a better,  
more perfect King*

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:

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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?

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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:

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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  
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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:

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