AN OVERVIEW OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

SUBMITTED TO DR. BILL PAETZ
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
BIB 497 BIBLICAL STUDIES INTERNSHIP

BY
CLARK VIERHELLER
Introduction

The way persons interpret the reality of their world is determined largely by their worldview. According to James Sire:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.\(^1\)

There are many different worldviews prevalent in the world today. Some believe humanity must transcend the meaninglessness of life by creating their own meaning, while others think spirituality is achieved by attuning one’s spirit to the spirit of the universe, because the universe is God.\(^2\) For the Bible-believing Christian, the lens through which the world is seen can be stated in one word: God. God’s character, creation, commandments and covenants all play fundamental roles in shaping how a theist sees the world. There are some additional issues which are fundamental in understanding a Christian worldview and which help to provide a foundation upon which believers stand:

1. Since God created humans, he has the sovereign right to tell them how to live their lives and to expect obedience from them. However, he does not force this obedience, but rather has given them a will to choose how they will respond to him and his will.

2. Unfortunately, humanity made the choice to exercise its will in opposition to God’s desires, and as a result, all became spiritually “dead” or alienated from their creator (Rom 3:23; Rom 5:12; Eph 2:1).

3. Fortunately, God did not abandon humanity to its lost condition, but in grace and love provided a way of escape by sending his only Son, Jesus Christ, to be the savior of all who would believe in him. Those who do so enter into a loving relationship with God, are made spiritually alive (Eph 2: 4-5) and given “eternal life” (John 3:16; 3:36; 5:24; 6:54; 10:28;)

\(^1\)James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 17.

\(^2\)Sire, 112-162
4. Humans are not the only moral creatures that have rebelled against their creator God. An unknown (but evidently considerable) number of angels, with Satan as their leader, chose to revolt and are doing all in their power not only to corrupt this world, but also to prevent as many humans as possible from believing in Jesus Christ.  

5. The Scriptures are God’s messages to us and are an accurate reflection of what God wants us to know. The best way to interpret them is to understand them against their historical context, and to normally begin with a literal interpretation of the text. However, one must also recognize that Scriptures often use phenomenological language (i.e., language of how things appear), and contain figures of speech, literary forms and structures, or other aspects of poetic language.

It is difficult to conclusively determine the overriding theological themes of the Old Testament (OT), but according to N.T. Wright, consideration should be given to three: Creation, Covenant, and Consummation.  

In regard to creation, the theist’s worldview begins with the Bible’s opening statement: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” This simple opening sentence shows us that God is creator, and that he existed before everything else. “Creation marked the beginning of time, the start of an ongoing history, and the moment of origin before which there was no such reality apart from God.” Throughout Israel’s history, the biblical writers declared that their God, not the gods of the Ancient Near East, was the creator, the only one worthy of praise, and the only one capable of sustaining them.

One of the major contributions of the OT for New Testament (NT) believers is that it provides the basis for their worldview. Not only is God declared to be eternal and transcendent,

---

3 The significance and danger of the opposition by these fallen angels is seen in II Cor 4:3-4; Eph 6:11-12; I Tim 4:1; II Tim 2:26; and I Pet 5:8. Satan is said to be the “ruler” or “god” of this fallen world system (John 12:31; 16:11; Eph 2:2; II Cor 4:4). However, the scriptures do not teach or imply “dualism”, the concept that that there are two equal forces (good and evil) in the universe struggling for supremacy. All angels (whether fallen or holy) were created by God (Ps 148:2-5; Col 1:16; Heb 1:13-14; Rev 4:11; possibly Ezek 28:15). Further, whatever Satan or those aligned with him have done or are doing has been allowed by God (Job 1:12; 2:6; Rev 12:7-9). Finally, their future judgment is certain (Matt 8:29; 25:41; Rev 20:1-3, 10).

4 N.T. Wright, Paul: In Fresh Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 21.


6 Some examples are: Gen. 5:1; Exod. 20:11; Deut. 4:32; Job 12:7-10; 26:13-14; 38:1-41:34 ; I Chron. 16:25-26; Ps. 8; 19:1-2; 24:1-2; 33:6-9; 50:10-12; 89:11-12; 95:3-7; 100:3; 115:15-16; 119:90-91; 121:2; 136:3-9; 146:5-6; 148:1-6; Prov. 3:18-20; 8:22-31; 30:4; Eccles. 12:1; Isa. 40:12-13; 40:28; 44:24; 45:18; Jer. 31:35-37; Amos 4:13; Jon. 1:9; Hag. 2:6-8; Zech. 12:1.
but he is also personal and imminent. He has taken the initiative to interact with his creatures, and the OT narratives illustrate God’s faithfulness, will, sovereignty, wrath, mercy, grace, patience, and of course, his love. To at least some degree, these join together to reflect the second major theme: Covenant. The concept of covenant, like creation, is very prevalent in the OT. In general, it refers to a contract between two parties to complete a task. In the case of covenants between God and humans, God is portrayed as the sole initiator. Whether it is with Abraham (Gen. 15:18), or Noah (Gen. 9:9-13), or Moses and the Israelites (Exod. 19:5 and 34:10), or David (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 89:3-4), God established the covenants. Secondly, although the OT is filled with examples of humans not keeping their “part of the bargain,” God is portrayed as the covenant-keeping God who can be trusted. The third theme of Consummation, however, is mostly unresolved at the end of the OT because Israel’s eschatological hopes became associated with a future messianic “Day of the LORD” when God would establish peace, righteousness, and justice, as well as culminate world history.

To some, the OT may seem outdated, dry and difficult to apply to the life of the modern believer, but within its story is a rich and exciting narrative about the God of the universe who is lovingly steering history towards his ultimate purpose. Also throughout the OT, we see that God is a personal being and longs to have fellowship with his creation. Many times we see his gentleness and care for the people that he has created, often in a more personal way than in the NT.

There are many reasons for studying the OT, but primarily it provides a background to God’s character, specific concepts, and God’s historical relationship to his creation. It would be difficult to understand the NT without the foundation established in the OT, but the OT is worthy of study on its own. Throughout biblical history, God repeatedly revealed himself and his will to humans, and he has consistently proven to be faithful. Knowing who God is allows followers of Christ to better understand how to live lives that are honoring to him. The OT gives Christians

---

7 A Bible concordance search reveals that the word occurs at least 200 times in the Old Testament.
8 The Hebrew word (berith) is commonly used with a verb which means “to cut,” a reference to cutting or dividing of animals in a ratification ceremony (e.g. Jer. 34:18-20). The two parties would normally pass between the pieces to seal the covenant, binding them to their obligations. There are many examples of covenants between humans – Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31), David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18), Ezra and the people (Ezra 10). From a biblical standpoint, however, the most important are those that God initiated with humans.
9 Some examples are Deut. 4:31; Judg. 2:1; 1 Kings 8:23; Ps 89:34; and Dan. 9:4.
10 The NT followers of Jesus did, of course, have the advantage of witnessing God in the flesh (John 1:1,14) which is why Jesus answered Philip’s question with such a bold statement (John 14:8-9). The NT claim is that Jesus is the exact representation of God’s nature (Heb 1:3) and is equal in nature to God (Phil 2:6-11).
the basis for their worldview and for their belief in not only God (the Father), but ultimately in his son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.

**CREATION – 2000 BC [Gen. 1-11]**

The first few chapters of Genesis (1:1-11:26) are commonly known as “Primeval History” because they reveal the beginning events of time and history. Henry Morris states that these chapters reveal the beginning of the universe, order and complexity, the solar system, life, humans, marriage, family, sin, language, government, culture, nations and religion. These chapters also begin to reveal God’s covenantal relationships with humans, and so it is not surprising that they are so important in the Judeo-Christian tradition. They represent a theistic worldview that tells us how we came to be, and why the world is as it is—in other words, the nature of our reality. Since God took the initiative to interact with his universe and reveal himself, these chapters also begin the process of understanding who he is, both in his character and his works. There are four key events that are described in these chapters: creation, fall, flood, and the tower of Babel.

**Creation**

The Bible, believed by Christians to be both inspired and accurate, begins logically with the creation story. While other religions also have creation stories, Christians believe that the biblical account is not only primary and authentic, but more majestic and all-encompassing. The origin of the world is a fundamental question of human existence, resulting in different worldviews by theists and non-theists. If the Bible is the basis for one’s worldview, then its first verse (Gen. 1:1 – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”) answers the question of origins and becomes critically important.

Not all worldviews accept this premise, and there has been some dissension regarding whether or not matter is eternal. Norman Geisler says that there are three primary views

---

13 Victor Harold Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (New York: Paulist, 1991), 7-15. For example, the Babylonian creation story Enuma Elish has a male freshwater ocean and a female saltwater ocean mating to produce gods. One of those deities, Marduk, in a cosmic battle kills another deity, Tiamat, and then splits her corpse, making heaven from one half and earth from the other. Marduk later mixes some earth with the blood of another deity to make humans to do the hard work of the gods, allowing the gods to be free from work.
regarding creation: “Materialists... believe in creation out of matter (ex materia); pantheists claim creation come out of God (ex Deo), and theists hold to creation by God out of nothing (ex nihilo).”\footnote{Norman L Geisler, \textit{Systematic Theology, Volume 2: God, Creation} (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2003), 423. Geisler discusses each of these views in Ch 18.} That Latin phrase, ex nihilo, summarizes the evangelical position. If matter is eternal, then God merely formed the heavens and the earth from what was already present in the universe. However, as Augustine and later Aquinas pointed out, God is the only thing that is truly eternal.\footnote{Ibid., 430-433.} This has various implications: the creation can be contrasted with the creator to show several important character qualities of the creator. He is eternal, infinite, unchanging and necessary. Without him there would be no creation. Creation is finite, temporal, changing, and relies upon its creator for existence.\footnote{Ibid., 433.} He has breathed life into this world, and the world owes him everything.

A biblical worldview also answers the question of what it means to be human. In opposition to both materialists and pantheists, humans are said to be created “in the image of God.” This does not refer to the physical body, because God is spirit (John 4:24), but it does mean that humans are composed of certain communicable traits or attributes of their creator. Spirituality, intelligence, ethical and moral capabilities, conscience, emotions, volition, social capacity, and dominion are some that have been suggested.\footnote{Ross, 112-113} Similarly, Wayne Grudem says, “The fact that man is made in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God.”\footnote{Wayne Grudem, \textit{Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 442.} Being made in his image is a great privilege, but with it came a great responsibility: to recognize God’s lordship and the need to be obedient to him as the creator.\footnote{It should also be stated that humans being made in the image of God did not preclude them from having a physical body. In contrast to Gnosticism which taught that physical and earthly existence was inherently bad, God declared everything of his original physical creation to be good.}

A debated issue among evangelical Christians is time—the issue of when God created the world. The traditional view is that Genesis clearly intended to teach six literal 24-hour days, resulting in an earth that is currently 6000-10,000 years old.\footnote{Morris, 54} Others have preferred a “Day-Age” view in which each of the individual days of creation represents very long periods of time. Still others believe the six days of creation simply reflect a literary technique showing days of
forming followed by days of filling.\textsuperscript{21} The last two views prefer the current scientific view of the earth being billions of years old. Somewhat, but not entirely, related is God’s method of creating living creatures, either having done so directly, or having used the long process of evolution. Both of these issues, the age and the process, are beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say, all Christians should agree that God is the one who created the world and continues to maintain its very existence.

**Fall**

When God originally created the world, it was perfect, containing no evil. However, the story drastically changed as the serpent (being used by Satan – Rev 12:9) tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God’s one stated prohibition: do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:1-3). Unfortunately for them and the rest of the world, Adam and Eve disobeyed, and in that moment, everything changed (Rom. 5:17-19). God’s judgment was that man would struggle to produce food, woman would struggle to produce children, and eventually they would experience physical death (Gen. 3:16-19). The world had become tainted with serious imperfection, and this would continue in successive generations. Each of the communicable traits associated with the image of God then became negatively affected and dysfunctional, falling short of their intended purpose. Humans today still retain the image of God (Gen. 9:6; Jas. 3:9), but it is a flawed image. Even more crucial than the physical judgments, the sin of Adam and Eve resulted in spiritual death, meaning separation from fellowship with their creator.

Since sin changed everything, a definition or understanding of “sin” seems necessary and appropriate. According to Grudem, “Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude or nature.”\textsuperscript{22} When Adam and Eve chose to disobey, they failed to conform to God’s moral law. Through this one simple act of disobedience, Adam and Eve “became legally guilty before God.”\textsuperscript{23} Because God is the embodiment of holiness, he cannot be tainted by unholiness. In other words, as Erickson puts it, “God not only is personally free from any moral wickedness or evil. He is unable to tolerate its presence.”\textsuperscript{24} God cannot have sin in his presence; it is not that he will not, but that he cannot. So, how then could humans have a second chance? How could God and humans be reconciled in relationship? Thankfully, God did not abandon his fallen

\textsuperscript{22}Grudem 490
\textsuperscript{23}Grudem 501; also Rom. 5:16
\textsuperscript{24}Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 312.

7
creatures. One of the most wonderful words in the English language is the word “grace” or unmerited favor. Throughout Genesis and the rest of biblical history, God continued to judge sin, but he also acted in grace to provide a means of restoration for undeserving humans who were willing to come to him on his terms. The rationale or justification for his gracious forgiveness would be the substitutionary death of his Son which is predicted (Isa. 52:13-53:12), but only seen in types or figures in the OT.\(^{25}\) It would not actually occur until much later—the NT era. God’s grace is far more pervasive than sin. The text implies that Adam and Eve were restored to fellowship (Gen. 3:21), but they were still required to leave Eden, for living forever in their fallen, physical state would itself be a curse. Humanity, along with the rest of the created world, longs to be physically restored and set free from the chains of sin, and the promise has been given that one day it will occur.\(^{26}\)

**Flood**

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve’s descendant, Cain, and then subsequent generations continued the rebellious pattern of their ancestors, escalating sinfulness alarmingly to the point that God was “sorry he had created mankind” (Gen. 6:6). His judgment was, in a sense, to start over by eradicating sinful humanity from the earth with a flood (Gen. 6:8). The only exceptions were Noah (who was blameless and “walked with God”) and his family. Noah was commanded by God to build an ark sufficiently large enough to preserve his family as well as pairs of animals of every kind, and then to reproduce after the flood. Noah obeyed and, after being on the ark for over one year, finally experienced dry land again. One of his first actions was to sacrifice to the LORD, and in a sense, the “new world” began appropriately as a worshiping community. The fact that four chapters (Gen. 6-9) are devoted to the flood story emphasizes its importance in Primeval History. Some debate has arisen among Christians as to whether it was a universal or local flood. It would seem that the textual evidence would favor it truly being not only historically accurate, but universal in scope.\(^{27}\) Like the creation stories, other religions in the ancient Near East also had flood stories, but this should not cast doubts on the veracity of the

\(^{25}\)Some examples of substitution in type are the “scapegoat” on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:8-10) and the hand of the offerer being placed on the animal’s head before sacrifice (Lev. 1:3-5). Jesus is said to be the “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) and the sinless one upon whom sin was laid (2 Cor. 5:21).

\(^{26}\)Rom. 8:18-25, esp. 21

\(^{27}\)John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 100-101. Walton presents the evidence both for and against the local and universal views.
biblical account. 28 There is no legitimate reason to believe that the author of Genesis “borrowed” from these early written sources. 29

Dispensational Theology proposes an “Edenic Covenant” in the Garden of Eden in which God promises continued life for obedience related to not eating of the tree of knowledge and evil. 30 Covenant Theology proposes a “Covenant of Works” in regard to the same scenario. 31 However, the first time “covenant” is actually mentioned is in regard to Noah. God promised he would never again destroy the world with a flood, and gave the rainbow as its sign (Gen. 9:13). In turn, Noah was expected to multiply, scatter and fill the earth. Although killing animals for food was permitted, it was forbidden to kill humans (probably because they were made in the image of God). 32 The penalty for violating this was capital punishment by the community (Gen. 9:6).

Tower of Babel

After the flood, Noah’s three sons and wives began to repopulate the earth. However, the resulting population did not scatter as God had directed them to do. The so-called “Table of Nations” in Ch. 10 is a partial genealogy after the flood, showing that all humanity is related—we are all one human race, having come from Noah’s three sons. 33 However, the various nations and their eventual locations are the result of what occurs in Ch. 11. In other words, Ch. 10 and Ch. 11 are chronologically reversed in the text. Initially, there was a single language, and it seems that all humanity lived together in Mesopotamia at a place called Shinar. 34 While there, post-flood humanity decided to build a temple (most likely a Babylonian Ziggurat) 35 that would reach to the heavens, and in so doing, make a name for themselves. This was an ultimately vain and idolatrous act, usurping the authority and glory that belonged only to God. 36 Because of the wickedness of their actions, God again brought judgment. This time, however, he did not destroy

---

28 Arnold, 59-60. Examples are the Babylonian “Atrahasis Epic”, and the more well known “Gilgamesh Epic.” In the latter, there are some similarities to the biblical account, such as the impending disaster being warned by the deity, a boat being constructed to save human and animals, birds involved in the decision to embark, and the ship landing on a mountaintop. However, as Arnold notes, the differences are much more profound, resulting in the biblical account seeming simpler, and yet more majestic.
29 It is more likely that the written creation stories from other Ancient Near Eastern cultures were based upon corrupted versions of the oral traditions that had been passed down through the centuries.
32 Morris, 224.
34 Gen. 11:2
36 Arnold, 62.
humanity, but rather he disrupted their feeble attempts at self-glorification. Since they would not scatter of their own accord, he forced them to do so by disrupting their languages. This became a significant development in human history, and the sovereign hand of God continued to work despite humanity’s failures.

Conclusion

Understanding where one comes from is one of the most fundamental components of a worldview. Knowing who God is and how he interacts with his creation is equally important.

The first 11 chapters of Genesis lay the foundation for a worldview that respects who God is and his purposes for human history. They reveal much about the nature of reality and much about history. They reveal how humanity had continued to fail in its obligations to its creator. Finally, they reveal God’s continuing intervention to direct history, as his purposes will not be thwarted. Careful study and consideration of what they teach can and should impact how one perceives the world, and how one should respond.

Patriarchal History 2000 BC – 1500 BC [Genesis 12-50]

In Genesis 1:1-11:26, primeval history is primarily concerned with humanity in general. In verse 27, however, a change occurs as the reader is introduced to a new character named Abram (later known as Abraham) who receives special attention and promises from God. Leon Wood states: “With the call of Abraham, this worldwide approach was changed. No longer did God address himself generally, but particularly. He chose one man alone. He separated him from others and gave him individual instruction. Why God did this is a mystery. The intention was to rear a new, select nation, with Abraham as the father.”\textsuperscript{37} The promises in Genesis 12:1-3, commonly referred to as the “Abrahamic Covenant,” could be considered the theme for the next thirty eight chapters, because they are repeated four more times in the book. As God’s plan of grace and redemption unfolded, it is apparent that it centered on one man’s family, and through that family, he would bless the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{38} Tracing Abram and his descendants throughout history leads all the way to Jesus, whose life and death on the cross impact the lives of Christians today.

\textsuperscript{37}Leon James Wood, \textit{A Survey of Israel’s History} (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1986), 19.

\textsuperscript{38}The calling or election of Abram’s descendants, setting them apart as a special nation, is a repeated theme throughout the Old Testament (Deut. 7:7-8; 1 Chron. 16:13; Neh. 9:7-8; Ps. 33:12; Isa. 41:8; Ezek. 20:5, etc.) Also see Paul’s comments in regard to Israel’s special status (Rom. 3:1-2; Eph. 2:11-12).
Historical Setting

When the reader is introduced to Abraham in Genesis 11:27-32, he is living in Ur of the Chaldeans, and the general time period is about 2000 BC, according to conservative scholars.\(^{39}\)

It is important to have knowledge of the ancient Near Eastern background to better understand Abram’s life, and it also helps to confirm the consistency and historicity of the biblical account.\(^{40}\) Two major cultures that impacted him are those of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Mesopotamia, which means “the land between the rivers,”\(^{41}\) refers to the land located between the Tigris and the Euphrates in the ancient Near East. In Mesopotamia, “Early in the third millennium, history, properly speaking, begins.”\(^{42}\) This early culture was unique in one respect: “It had a common culture – a single system of writing and a single pantheon of major gods – but in population it was multiethnic and polyglot.”\(^{43}\) John Bright says, “The land was organized into a system of city-states, mostly quite small . . . although now one, now another, was able to assert itself over its neighbors, no permanent and thoroughgoing unification of the land was ever achieved.”\(^{44}\) Eventually, in 2112

\(^{39}\)Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 176-177. More specifically, Abram’s life is considered to have been from about 2165 to 1990 BC.

\(^{40}\)Arnold, 83. Some examples are his ancestral role, wealth, position, semi-nomadic lifestyle, name, and faith.

\(^{41}\)Scarre and Fagan, 66.


\(^{44}\)Bright 34
BC, a man by the name of Ur-Nammu “founded the Third Dynasty of Ur.” Utilizing diplomacy, he came to control much of the ancient Mesopotamian world. His son, Shulgi, who “in a long reign of almost 50 years made Ur the capital of an extensive empire,” took his father’s diplomatic success and really put Ur on the map, so to speak. This prominent city of Ur, located in the southern part of Mesopotamia, was possibly the city in which Abram resided.

The second major culture that Abram and his descendants later came into contact with was that of Egypt. Egyptian culture began coming to fruition shortly following the rise of Mesopotamia, and it was solidified in the Proto-dynastic Stage (3100-2700 BC) when a monarchy became the political norm. The Old Kingdom (2680-2134 BC) saw the construction of the Great Pyramid of Giza, one of the wonders of the ancient world. Following this long period of relative prosperity and unity, the monarchy broke down, and the civilization was thrown into less centralized rule by drought and disunity. About 2040 BC, a Pharaoh named Mentuhotep II reunited Egypt, and in 1991 BC, this unity was solidified by Amenemhet I. This was the beginning of the middle kingdom. During this period, the Pharaohs were concerned with trading with the civilizations around them (including Syria-Palestine), internal security, and increasing agricultural capacity and production.

The Life of Abraham

When the Bible first introduces Abraham, his name is actually Abram. His wife is Sarai, his father is Terah, his brothers are Haran and Nahor, and his nephew is Lot. Unfortunately, Sarai is barren, and thus Abram has no child who might become his heir. It is not stated where Abram was born, although the patriarchal homeland and location of his extended family was Haran, possibly 500 miles northwest of Ur. Why Abram was living in Ur is also not revealed, but what seems certain is that God’s call came while he was residing there. Following this, he moved to Haran for a time until his father died. According to Bill T. Arnold:

The precise timing between the genealogy of 11:27-32 and this call to forsake all and follow God is not certain. Stephen’s speech in the New Testament (Acts 7:2-4) states that Abram received the call while he was still in Ur, before he lived in Haran. This may imply that he was honoring his father’s wishes and waiting for God’s timing before he entered Canaan.
In chapter 12, God anticipates Abram’s faith and gives him three promises and a command. The promises are: land (vs 1), seed (vs 2), and blessing (vs 3). The command was to leave his country, his extended family and his father’s household (probably implying a loss of inheritance) to go to an unknown land. It becomes clear that Abram was obedient to the command of God, and had faith in God’s promises (vs 4-5). This leads to one of the most important observations that can be made about Abram’s entire narrative: he was justified by faith and by faith alone.

Genesis 15:6 states that Abraham (had) believed God, and it was that belief which was reckoned to him as righteousness. Paul quotes this passage in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6 in his discussion concerning Abram’s justification before God. No human act or work, such as circumcision, can eternally justify humans in God’s eyes, but instead, it comes through faith. Hebrews 11:8a says “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed…” Scattered throughout the Bible, one finds affirmations of faith over works. Obedience and works are important and expected, but it is faith and faith alone that justifies (Eph. 2:8-10).

Abram, while faithful, was not perfect. He obeyed God by going to the promised land of Canaan, bringing his wife Sarai and nephew Lot with him. It is possible that Abram thought Lot would be his heir because of the barrenness of Sarai. When he arrived at Shechem, he built an altar and made a sacrifice to God. Journeying on, he built another altar between Bethel and Ai, faithfully performing his duty as priest for the family. However, in Genesis 12:10, famine came to the land, and Abram was forced to take his family and possessions to Egypt to escape. It is at

50 In Rom. 4:23-25, Paul makes it clear that the same principle of faith applies to believers in Christ today.
51 This took place prior to the introduction of the Mosaic Law, which would formalize and regulate sacrifices through the tribe of Levi.
this point in the narrative that the reader is introduced to Abram’s first foible: Abram asks his wife Sarai to say that she is his sister, not his wife. Abram knew that Pharaoh would take note of Sarai’s beauty, and might kill Abram to take her as his own. Although Sarai was truthfully Abram’s half-sister, he still told a half-truth to save his own skin. There was significant logic to what Abraham was doing, however, for as a brother he could set the bride price and all he needed to do was to set the price so high that no one could afford her, but twice this strategy failed with the Pharaoh of Egypt and the King of Gerar. Arnold correctly says, “He has lost faith in God’s protection, and has taken matters into his own hands. Though he has set out on the path of faith, following God with radical abandon, Abram’s action threatens to counteract the program God has set in motion.” However, God intervened to ensure Sarai would be protected, and they returned to the land of Canaan.

In Genesis 15, God again speaks with Abram, and the major issue is who will inherit the blessing and promises of chapter 12. Abram believes it might be his servant Eliezer of Damascus, as an adoption of a servant was a common custom of the Ancient Near East, but God reassures Abram that he will have a son of his own. Abram is also unsure how exactly he will inherit this land, since it was occupied by other nations. What then follows might seem foreign to the modern reader. God tells Abram to sacrifice a variety of animals. Arnold and Beyer describe the situation as follows: “In the eerie ceremony described here, a smoking fire pot, representing God’s own presence, passed between various animal corpses while Abram slept.” The smoking fire is an example of a theophany, an appearance of God in the OT in physical form. The ceremony was intended to be the ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant. Williamson points out, “But whatever the precise symbolism, the important point to note was that God alone (represented by the theopanic imagery of fire and smoke) passes between the dissected animals, indicating the unilateral nature of this particular covenant.” God is the one who initiated the covenant, and it is God who would ensure that it would be fulfilled. While Abraham is asleep,

52Gen. 20:12. The intermarrying among family members was not unusual at this point in biblical history.
53Arnold, 74.
54The most likely would have been Lot, but he had permanently moved out of Canaan (Gen 13:10-11).
56M. F. Rooker, “Theophany,” Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch Ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 859-64. Rooker defines a theophany as “a visible manifestation of God, a self-disclosure of the deity ... a form of divine revelation wherein God’s presence is made visible (or revealed in a dream) and is recognizable to humanity.”
God answers his question regarding occupation of the land, informing him that his descendants would first be held captive in Egypt for 400 years before eventually returning to occupy the land (Gen 15:13-16). Although Abraham would not live to see the occupation, dying in peace at an old age, he could rest assured that it would happen.

Abram was worried about having a son to carry on his line and receiving the blessings God had for him, and apparently, so was Sarai. Following the reaffirmation of God’s promise in chapter 15, Sarai, knowing she was barren, decided to take matters into her own hands. She offered her maidservant Hagar to Abram in order to bear a child which was also a common custom at that time. Here, we see another example of Abram’s and Sarai’s imperfections. Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she conceived a child who was named Ishmael.

Thirteen years after Ishmael was born, God again appears to Abraham to further clarify the nature of their covenant. This is perhaps the culmination of God’s explanation of the Abrahamic Covenant. According to Bill Arnold and Bryan Beyer, Genesis 17:1-5 is “the centerpiece in which all the important aspects of Abram’s life come together.”58 God calls Abraham to righteous living, which is an outpouring of their covenant relationship. He changes Abram’s name to Abraham, which means “Father of a Multitude”59 and Sarai’s name to Sarah which means “Princess.” He gives Abraham the sign of his covenant, circumcision (17:9-14). That very same day, Abraham (and the rest of his household) was circumcised, again demonstrating obedience to the Lord.

Isaac, the child of Abraham and Sarah, is finally born, some twenty-five years after God’s promise had been given to Abram in Ur (21:1-3). He is born when Abraham is 100 and Sarah, previously barren her whole life, is 90.60 At this point in the narrative, it seems that God has finally brought resolution to the drama of who the heir will be. Abraham thought at first that it would be his nephew, Lot, or maybe his eldest servant, Eliezer. Then it might be his son, Ishmael, but finally the true heir, Isaac, has been born.61 However, in the very next chapter, the drama returns. After an unknown number of years have passed, God tells Abraham to kill Isaac. Abraham had waited years for this child, and then sees God’s fulfillment of the promise. Now God tests Abraham with a seemingly unreasonable request. Arnold says, “With Genesis 22, you

---

58 Arnold and Beyer, 96
59 Ibid., 96
60 Rom. 4: 17-19. This birth was the result of God’s intervention in bringing Sarai’s “dead” womb back to life.
61 Because of family dissension, Hagar and Ishmael are forced to leave the household. However, God declared that Ishmael would have many descendants as well (Gen. 21:13-18; 25:12-18).
have now reached the summit of the Abrahamic narratives, in terms of both literature and theology. Its literary quality is recognized by all, having been called ‘the most perfectly formed and polished of all the patriarchal stories.’\(^{62}\) Abraham’s faith faced no greater test than this. Remarkably, Abraham obeyed and passed the test. He traveled to the place God told him to go and bound Isaac to the altar, but as Abraham raised the knife to kill his heir, God intervened. An angel came to him and told him that he had proved that he feared God. Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in a thicket immediately thereafter, and sacrificed the ram instead.\(^{63}\)

Following this, not much else is recorded about Abraham’s life. Sarah died at the age of 127 (Gen. 23:1-2), and Abraham took another wife (or concubine) named Keturah (Gen. 25:1-6). She bore him six more sons.\(^{64}\) He passed all of his material possessions on to Isaac before his death, and then died a satisfied man at the age of 175.\(^{65}\) As God had promised, Abraham fathered a great nation, and through his descendants, God would bless the entire world. His legacy is one that survives to this day in both Judaism and Christianity. He lived a full life, and will be remembered forever as one of the heroes of the faith.

**The Life of Isaac**

Isaac fulfilled God’s promise to Abraham that he would give him an heir. Isaac’s role in the biblical account is fairly limited; more time is spent on his son, Jacob, and grandson, Joseph. However, there are two stories involving Isaac that are significant: his taking of a wife and the restatement of God’s covenant.

When it comes time for Isaac to take a wife, Abraham makes it very clear that Isaac is not to marry a Canaanite woman but rather, one from the patriarchal homeland of Haran. Hill and Walton point out, “For Abraham to have a big family, not only must there have been a son, but a son who would marry and have sons of his own. The obstacle to this (Ch 24) was to acquire a wife for Isaac in a way that would neither lead to assimilation with the people of Canaan, nor require Isaac to leave the land.”\(^{66}\) Abraham’s solution is to send his servant back to his old country to find a wife for Isaac. He finds a pretty young woman named Rebekah (Abraham’s

---

\(^{62}\)Arnold, 106. Abraham was called by God in Ch 12 to leave his past, and in Ch 22 to trust God for the future.

\(^{63}\)Gen. 22:9-14. It is not surprising that Christians have seen in this story a picture of God’s love for us in not sparing his only Son as a sacrifice (John 3:16; Rom. 8:32; John 1:29). It is also not surprising that Abraham’s faith and obedience are portrayed as models for believers in the New Testament (Heb. 11:8, 17-19).

\(^{64}\)Jethro, a descendant of one of those sons named Midian, would later become the father-in-law of Moses (Exod. 2:21; 3:10).

\(^{65}\)Gen. 25:1-11.

grandniece), and she agrees to accompany the servant back to Canaan where Isaac and she are married. What is important here is that God’s promise to Abraham is still being held in high regard; Abraham and Isaac are still being obedient to it.

In Genesis 26:1-5, God restates the Abrahamic Covenant to Isaac. The Lord does this with Jacob in chapter 35:10-12 as well, and Jacob and Joseph repeat it again in 48:3-4 and 50:24-26, respectively. God’s promises applied not only to Abraham, but his descendants as well. During this time, Isaac’s character turns out to be much like that of his father Abraham. When famine strikes, Isaac journeys to Gerar, and out of fear for his own life, tells the local people that Rebekah is his sister, not his wife. This incident again serves as a reminder that God is faithful to his promises, regardless of human successes or failures. He can always be counted upon.

The Life of Jacob

After Isaac and Rebekah were married, Rebekah was barren, just like Sarah. However, Isaac prayed for children, and God eventually responded, although it was not until twenty years later that Rebekah gave birth to twins: Jacob and Esau. Esau was the firstborn, with Jacob holding on to his heel (Gen. 25:26).

Interestingly enough, as the story unfolds, it appears that God chose the wrong brother. Jacob cheats his brother Esau out of his birthright (25:27-34), and then lies to his father (27:1-33) to receive a blessing that was meant for Esau. How could God choose to carry out his plan with one such as this? His name even means “cheater.”67 However, Esau’s character cannot be described as stellar either. Because he was hungry, he sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. Hebrews says this regarding Esau: “that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.”68 Esau was concerned with immediate, fleshly gratification instead of what was really important.69

Needless to say, Jacob cheated or supplanted much that naturally should have belonged to Esau, and this led to a great deal of animosity between the brothers. Esau began plotting to kill Jacob (27:41). It was about this time that Isaac, just like his father had done, told Jacob not to marry a Canaanite, but to return to Haran and obtain a wife there. Jacob, hearing about his brother’s wrath, also felt it necessary to flee to Haran to escape from Esau. While on the journey, God appeared to Jacob in a dream (28:10-22). He confirms that his promise to Abraham will be

67Arnold and Beyer, 96.
68Heb. 12:16.
69Esau also took Canaanite wives (Gen. 36:2) and chose to live outside the promised land of Canaan (36:9).
carried out through Jacob. Arnold and Beyer note: “The reader may still not be confident of Jacob’s character and intentions, but God’s are now clear.”

Jacob worked hard in Haran and God greatly blessed him. Arnold and Beyer state: “The rest of the Jacob narrative describes his marriages to Leah and Rachel in Haran, his relationship with his uncle Laban, and the birth of eleven sons. The covenant promises finally began to be fulfilled in Jacob’s growing family.” Following some issues with Laban, Jacob headed back to Canaan, the promised land. In Ch 32-33, he reconciles with Esau who had forgiven him, and he also wrestles with God. It is during this last incident that God changes Jacob’s name to “Israel” indicating also that his character changed. Arnold and Beyer say: “As with his grandfather Abraham, the change of Jacob’s name signified a change of character due to his relationship with God. Jacob was no longer the ‘cheater.’ He had become the one who ‘strives with God.’”

Jacob’s legacy may not have been the greatest, but over the course of his life, it became clear that through God’s presence in his life, he underwent a change of character. God took a man who was imperfect and used him to bless millions of people. God is faithful always, no matter how faithless man becomes. It is at this point in the narrative that the focus begins to change to Jacob’s son, Joseph.

The Life of Joseph

God gave three promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. Those promises continued on with Isaac and Jacob, and were then furthered by Jacob’s sons. Perhaps the most important of these sons was Joseph, whose story consumes chapters 37-50 of the book of Genesis. When God told Abraham in Genesis Ch 15 that his descendants would move to Egypt and then eventually return to the promised land, God knew that it was Joseph who would be the one through whom this first relocation would take place.

The story of Joseph’s life can be broken into three parts: “Joseph and his brothers in Canaan, Joseph alone in Egypt, and Joseph in Egypt with his brothers.” The family dynamic of Jacob’s household was interesting, to say the least. Genesis 30 recounts that jealousy between his

---

70 Arnold and Beyer, 97.
71 Benjamin, the twelfth son and younger full brother of Joseph, would not be born until Jacob and the family had later returned to Canaan. Jacob’s beloved wife Rachel would die during this childbirth (Gen. 35:16-20).
72 Arnold and Beyer, 97.
73 Another example of a theophany; refer back to footnote 56.
74 Arnold and Beyer, 97-98. This name change would result in Jacob’s descendants being known as “Israelites.”
75 Kaiser, 67.
two wives, Leah and Rachel, led to a child-bearing battle of sorts that landed Jacob with twelve sons (and one daughter) from four women: his two wives and two of their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah. Rachel was his favorite wife, and the first child she produced was Jacob’s favorite: Joseph. Genesis 37:3 says, “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age . . .”76 Jacob’s preferential treatment of Joseph led to intense jealousy among his other sons. That jealousy eventually pushed Joseph’s brothers to sell him into slavery when he was only seventeen. He ended up in Egypt, serving in the household of a man named Potiphar.77

Joseph performed his duties extremely well in Potiphar’s house and was eventually put in charge of administering Potiphar’s entire household (Gen. 39). Potiphar’s wife was just as impressed with Joseph as was Potiphar. When Joseph consistently rejected her sexual advances, she became angry and slandered Joseph by saying he had forced himself upon her. As a result, he was imprisoned. While there, he interpreted dreams for two men who had previously worked for Pharaoh (Gen. 40). One of these men was eventually restored to his former position, and when Pharaoh needed a dream interpreted two years later, the man remembered Joseph’s ability. Joseph was brought out of prison to interpret Pharaoh’s dream: seven years of plenty were coming for Egypt, which would be followed by seven years of famine (Gen. 41). In his shrewdness, Pharaoh saw wisdom and divine favor in Joseph, and put Joseph in charge of everything in Egypt, including the task of preparing for the seven years of famine. Figuratively, Joseph went from a prisoner to the second most powerful man in Egypt overnight. Thirteen years had passed since he had been sold into slavery, and he had gone from slave to trusted right hand man to prisoner to the second most powerful man in a prosperous country.

Then a famine occurs in Canaan, and those living there, including Joseph’s family, were heavily affected (Gen. 42). Joseph’s brothers travel to Egypt to purchase grain. Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him. Through a long process (Gen. 42-44), he decides to test his brothers to see if they have changed since they sold him into slavery. He eventually

76Gen. 37:3
77Archer, 228-233. A tradition extending back to the historian Josephus in 90 A.D. holds that a group of Asiatic, largely Semitic invaders known as the Hyskos were in control of Egypt at this time. However, this was probably not the case. The word “Hyskos was most likely a corruption of an Egyptian word that meant “Rulers of foreign lands” (228). Assuming a date of 1875 BC for Joseph, this would have made sense, because the prevailing data at the time of Josephus indicated the Hyksos rule to have lasted about 500 years. Archer states, “But more recent evidence indicates that their rule was hardly more than 150 years. They probably began filtering into Egypt about 1900 BC and finally gained control by 1730” (229). Archer goes on to list several different reasons why native born Egyptians were most likely in power when Joseph arrived. See also page 239, “The Date of the Exodus.”
frames them for stealing, and threatens to take the youngest brother, Benjamin, as his slave as punishment. Judah, Jacob’s fourth son with Leah, offers himself as a slave, knowing the great distress Benjamin’s enslavement would cause Jacob, their father. At this point Joseph reveals his true identity to his brothers (Gen. 45). What an emotional scene it must have been! Joseph forgives his brothers, and eventually, Jacob, his eleven sons and their families move to Egypt at the invitation of Pharaoh.

There is much that can be learned from Joseph’s story. He was a man of incredible character and integrity, and the Lord blessed everything he did because of it. Theologically speaking, “The main intent of the Joseph story appears to recount how the family of Abraham ended up in Egypt.... Though the covenant is barely mentioned, God’s providential care of Joseph and sovereign control over history are evident as the plot develops and is resolved.”

Even though both Jacob and Joseph died in Egypt, both men insisted they be buried in the land that had been promised to Abram, the land of Canaan. God’s plan for the nation of Israel was unfolding. He took them to Egypt, and many years later, he would return them to the land of promise.

**Conclusion**

The nation of Israel, the nation from which Jesus Christ came into the world, had its humble beginnings in Genesis. Hill and Walton state: “The book of Genesis makes it clear that the Lord did not choose Abraham and his family because they were more righteous, more faithful, more pious, or more deserving than any other family.” They were at times polygamous, cowardly, deceptive, and jealous people. But Abraham’s faith led to a wonderful outcome. Not only were he and his family blessed, but through his family, God would bless the world with its savior: Jesus Christ. God’s promises to Abraham changed the course of history. As the period of the patriarchs came to an end and life in Egypt began, God was still at work in his young nation. His sovereign plan for history was in motion.

**1500-1000 BC  [Exodus – 1 Samuel 15]**

Genesis ends, and the fledgling nation of Israel is living in Egypt, far away from the land God promised Abraham. God told Abraham that there would be a sojourn in Egypt, and indeed

---

78 Hill and Walton, 74.
79 It is of interest that the only mention of Joseph’s commendable life in Hebrews is a reference to his faith in the Abrahamic Covenant by giving orders to have his bones buried back in Canaan (Heb. 11:22).
80 Hill and Walton, 74.
there was. Over the next several hundred years, God’s people would endure slavery, arduous treks, food shortages, and general upheaval. However, through the faithfulness of God and the obedience of a few, Israel would eventually find her way back to the land that had been promised to her forefathers. It all began in Egypt.

**Slavery and Redemption**

Exodus 1:8 says, “Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” Assuming a date of approximately 1875 BC for Joseph’s family migrating to Egypt, this verse most likely refers to the Hyskos coming to power in Egypt. This king, seeing the multitudes of Israelites in his new land, enslaved the Israelites out of fear. He did not want them to overpower him and his new kingdom. However, the more the Israelites were oppressed, the more they multiplied (Exod. 1:8-12). During their oppression, Israel underwent three distinct pogroms, or systems of devastation: “(1) the slave labor of building the two store cities (Exod. 1:11-12), (2) the order for the midwives to kill all newly born male babies (Exod. 1:15-22), and (3) the order that Israel was to gather its own straw to make bricks while maintaining the same quota as before.” Even throughout these attacks on Israel as a nation, God multiplied his people and made them mightier than before. However, they still needed a way out of Egypt. To meet this need, God raised up a deliverer: Moses.

Moses was born during the period of infanticide described in Exod. 1:22, in approximately 1526 BC. His mother hid him in a basket on the Nile where the daughter of Pharaoh found him and raised him as her own son. At age 40 (Acts 7:23), after being raised in the Egyptian palace, Moses killed an Egyptian for beating one of the Hebrews, and had to flee to Midian where he married his wife Zipporah.

While Moses was in Midian, God’s people were being sorely oppressed: “And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out, and their cry for help because of their

---

81 God intended this sojourn because He would later use the Israelites as His tool of judgment on the Amorites who were polluting the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:16).
82 Archer, 228-233.
83 Kaiser, 80-83. The Hyskos (previously mentioned in footnote 77) were Asiatics, people who originated in the same area of the world as the Israelites. The Hyskos rose to power in approximately 1720 BC until 1570 BC. When the Hyskos were overthrown by Amosis, who founded the eighteenth dynasty, the Israelites were not driven out with them because they had been oppressed by the Hyskos, despite their common origin.
84 Kaiser, 83.
85 Ibid., 88. An alternative date of 1525 BC is commonly preferred.
86 Exod. 1-4. For an excellent discussion on which pharaoh was in power, as well as the identity of Moses’ stepmother, see Kaiser's chapter, “The Man Moses and His Mission.”
bondage rose up to God.”  It was time for God’s call to Moses. After Moses lived 40 years in Midian (Acts 7:30), God appeared to him in one of the most famous theophanies of all time: a burning bush. It is here that God first reveals what will be his covenant name with Israel: Yahweh. Arnold and Beyer state: “Moses and God were on a collision course. The Lord was determined to save the Israelites; Moses was determined to forget about them. The famous call of Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3-4) is where the two collide.” Despite his many objections and general unwillingness to go, in the end Moses obeyed God and returned to Egypt. He performed the signs God had given him to perform, and the leaders of Israel agreed with his mission.

Exodus 5-13:16 tells the story of Moses’ struggle with Pharaoh and the associated plagues. Moses went to Pharaoh and asked him to free the Israelites from their bondage; Pharaoh refused, and forced the Israelites to gather their own straw in addition to their already heavy workload. The tension between Moses and Pharaoh would only escalate from there. God told Moses that he would harden Pharaoh’s heart, and that many signs and wonders would be done because of it. God rained down ten plagues upon Egypt. The plagues were intended to demonstrably identify the true God of the universe. Hill and Walton state: “By blotting out the sun in Egypt and permitting daylight in Goshen, and by interrupting the pharaonic cycle of deity in the death plague, Yahweh showed himself Lord to the Egyptians.” Pharaoh finally relented when the last plague took his firstborn son, and the Israelites were then allowed to leave Egypt.

The story continues in Exodus 13:17-18:27. Pharaoh regretted his decision, and pursued the Israelites as they were camped at the Red Sea. The Israelites, as they were prone to do, did

---

87 Exod. 2:23b.
88 Arnold and Beyer, 488.
89 D. I. Block, “God,” in Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books, Ed. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 338. Block says, “The 2,019 occurrences of Yahweh in the Historical Books represent 30 percent of the OT total (6,828)... its historical significance is demonstrated in God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, his establishment of Israel as his covenant people, and his provision of the land of Canaan...”
90 Arnold and Beyer, 105.
91 Exod. 4:31.
92 This organization of the book of Exodus is taken from Hill and Walton, 89.
93 Exod. 7:3-5.
95 The tenth and final plague was an interesting event in Israel’s history. Those who put the blood of a pure lamb over their doors were spared; the angel of death passed over their house. The significance of this event is that it became an annual reminder to the Israelites of God's deliverance from Egypt. For further discussion, see Hill and Walton, 92-96. The Passover also became a type for Christ’s sacrifice (1Cor. 5:7).
96 Lit. “sea of reeds.” For a discussion of the options of the location as well as the possible routes of the
not understand God’s plan or power, as they were pinned against the sea without any apparent hope. To their amazement, God miraculously parted the waters and they crossed over on dry land. When the Egyptian army pursued the Israelites across the dry sea floor, the waters resumed their normal position, and the Egyptian pursuers were killed.

This was a key event in Israel’s history, as LaSor, Bush, Hubbard and Allen point out, “Throughout their history, Israelites recalled this great deliverance as the constitutive event by which they became the people of God... The Exodus becomes the standard for divine redemption.”97 It is commonly seen as a type or symbol for redemption in the Bible, as Hill and Walton note: “Israel’s exodus from Egypt is the redemptive event of the Old Testament.”98 Just as Israel was physically redeemed out of bondage to Egypt, so Christ’s work is seen as spiritually redeeming believers out of bondage to sin.

Sinai, Law, and Tabernacle

---


98 Hill and Walton, 103.
At the start of the book of Exodus, God’s people found themselves in captivity in Egypt.
God provided a deliverer in Moses and took his people out of bondage. They escaped from Pharaoh, and camped at Mount Sinai for about one year. Exodus 19 through Numbers 9 tell what happened while they were there, and Numbers 10-36 continues with what occurred when the Israelites left the mountain and resumed their journey. It was at Mount Sinai that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law. Exodus Ch 20-40 deal primarily with two things: the Law and the tabernacle. The Law is sometimes divided into three parts: moral (10 Commandments), civil (regulating human interactions), and ceremonial (dealing with worship and the sacrificial system). A more useful division is one that recognizes “apodictic” laws (absolute commands like the Decalogue) and casuistic (case or “if-then”) laws. The former are probably unique to the God of the Israelites, whereas the latter were common in the ancient Near East. Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy deal with the concept of law. From that point on, the Law became a key part of the life of Israel. Not only did they have a God who revealed his identity and delivered them, but they also had a God who revealed his will and expectations for how they were to live. When reading the Apostle Paul’s writings, it is easy to equate OT law negatively with legalism. But that is not how the Israelites viewed things. The OT writers viewed the law

---

99 Arnold and Beyer, 122. The authors state this division is arbitrary and probably should not be used.
100 John C. Davis, Moses and the Gods of Egypt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 196.
101 Matthews and Benjamin, 62-67. For example, the Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian King who pre-dated Moses by about 250 years, consists of case laws with similarities to those found in the Law of Moses.
102 Although Paul recognizes the Law to be “holy, righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12), he also refers to it as a
as a positive thing that set them apart, a special gift from God that guided them in their covenant relationship with him.103

A key requirement of the law was the sacrificial system. Other nations had gods and systems of sacrifice as well, often trying to divine the will of those gods through various rituals.104 Israel’s sacrifices were unique in three ways: Israel did not use sacrifices as a means of divination; sacrifices were directly linked to their covenant relationship with God; and the concept of God’s holiness was the basis for the sacrificial system.105 While Israel’s sacrifices were unique, they were not designed to bring eternal salvation to the Israelites, but as Hill and Walton point out: “Instead, they preserved the holiness of God’s presence and a healthy relationship between the people and God . . . The external act of ritual sacrifice was symbolic and representative of the internal attitude and disposition of the heart.”106 When offered with the right attitude, sacrifices restored individuals to fellowship with their covenant God.

The tabernacle was closely associated with the sacrifices of the Israelites, because it was where sacrifices took place. Exodus Ch 25-31 deal with the instructions for the tabernacle, and in Ch 35-40, the Israelites and Moses construct it. It had great significance for Israel. LaSor, Hubbard, Bush and Allen state: “The tabernacle with its imagery and sacrificial system was the means by which the holy, transcendent, infinite God could yet be present with his people – 'tabernacling' or 'tenting' among them.”107 Not only did God manifest himself in the law, he had a physical dwelling place among his people, the descendants of Abraham. These things are what truly set Israel apart from the other nations of their time and place.

Kadesh Barnea and Wandering

In spite of all that God did for them, Israel was a nation that was ungrateful at heart.108 In Numbers, this grumbling and generally unappreciative attitude came to a head. LaSor, Hubbard, Bush and Allen say: “Numbers . . . is a complex story of unfaithfulness, rebellion, apostasy, and frustration, set against the background of God’s faithfulness, presence, provision, and

103 Especially is this appreciation seen in the Torah Psalms: Ps. 1:1-3, 19:7-8, 119:11, 16, 24, 47, 105.
104 Cutting up sacrificed animals and examining the liver patterns was one of the methods.
105 Arnold and Beyer, 118-119’
106 Hill and Walton, 107. A parallel from the N.T. can be found in 1 John 1:9.
107 Lasor, Hubbard, Bush and Allen, 76. The tabernacle and its furnishings are a type for Christ’s “dwelling” among us (John 1:14) as well as his entire sacrificial mission on earth (cf. Heb. Ch 8-10).
forbearance.\textsuperscript{109} Numbers demonstrates both God’s patience and his anger better than perhaps any other OT book.

Numbers 1-9 describe Moses’ final preparations for the departure from Mount Sinai. When they leave, the Israelites travel from Sinai to Kadesh Barnea, near the southern border of the promised land. This place was home to the most disobedient act the Israelites had performed thus far; the name Kadesh Barnea became associated with Israel's doubt and unbelief. This event is an “historical watershed.”\textsuperscript{110} From here, twelve spies were sent into the promised land of Canaan to scout it out and bring back a report. The report that came back (by ten of the twelve spies) was one of fear (Num. 13:25-33). Rather than confidently claiming the bountiful land God would give them as their own, they shrank from the task. Their fear spread to the people of Israel, who began wishing for a leader who would return them to Egypt; they eventually called for Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb (the only people calling for obedience), to be stoned. This event is recounted in later biblical history as a negative example—one to be avoided.\textsuperscript{111}

Needless to say, God was not pleased. As punishment for their actions, none of the Israelites age twenty and older would see the promised land except Caleb and Joshua, the two faithful spies. Instead, they would wander the wilderness for forty years where they died and a new generation was born. The importance of Moses as the great leader and “Lawgiver” for the Israelites should never be minimized.\textsuperscript{112} He accomplished God’s mission of being the human agent of deliverance. Yet, even he was subject to discipline from God due to an occasion of pride and disobedience in striking a rock, and was not allowed to enter the promised land that had been his goal.\textsuperscript{113}

\textbf{Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses}

In addition to Moses’ leadership, he has traditionally been honored as the author of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible.\textsuperscript{114} However, within the past two hundred years, a theory known as the “Documentary Hypothesis” has emerged claiming that these books were compiled hundreds of years after Moses’ life by four different authors, separated in history by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{109} Lasor, Hubbard, Bush and Allen, 99.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Gordon J. Wenham, \textit{Numbers} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981) 116. “Here the final break with Egypt is made. Those who yearn for the luxuries of Egyptian slavery die in the desert; their children, chastened by their wilderness experiences, will enter the promised land.”
\item \textsuperscript{111} Num. 32; Deut. 1:20-40; Ps. 95:10; 126:24; 1 Cor. 10:1-13; Heb. 3:7-19.
\item \textsuperscript{112} In addition to all of the OT references, Moses is mentioned about 70 times in the NT.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Num. 20:2-13.
\item \textsuperscript{114} The Greek word “Pentateuch” means “five scrolls.” These five books are also known as the “Torah” (the Hebrew word for “instruction”).
\end{itemize}
hundreds of years.\textsuperscript{115}

Deuteronomy (meaning “second law”), the last of these five books, contains several speeches Moses gave to Israel on the Plains of Moab at the end of the 40-year journey, and then it records his death. Moses speaks to the new generation by first (Ch 1-3) recounting events of the wilderness journey (sustained through God’s power and faithfulness), and then (Ch 4-26) repeating significant portions of the Mosaic Law for those who were not present at Mt. Sinai.\textsuperscript{116} The third speech (Ch 27-30) includes what is often called the “Palestinian Covenant,” an expansion of the Land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant.\textsuperscript{117} Although the ownership (“title deed”) of the land is unconditional, the occupation and enjoyment of the land is conditional, resulting in blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The choice was theirs (30:19-20), but unfortunately, later history would show that the Israelites often did not make the right decision.

The structure of the book of Deuteronomy is now recognized to be that of a suzerain-vassal treaty, common during that era of history.\textsuperscript{118} Moses’ death brings about the end of one era, but the beginning of another. God’s chosen people, Abraham’s descendants, are about to enter the land that He had promised them.

**Joshua and Conquest**

After Moses’ death (Deut 34:1-10), Joshua became the leader of Israel, conquering the land with the leading of the LORD. The biblical book named for Joshua can be divided

---

\textsuperscript{115}For an excellent discussion of this theory, see Archer, Ch 6-8. As Archer notes, the traditional view of Moses’ authorship has been adequately defended and should not be discarded.

\textsuperscript{116}Archer, 271


\textsuperscript{118}Arnold and Beyer, 148-150. This is one more evidence of the antiquity of the book and Moses’ authorship, as opposed to the documentary hypothesis view.
into two main sections: the conquering of the land (Ch 1-12), and the division and settlement of the land (Ch 13-24).

The land was conquered in three campaigns: central, southern, and northern. The conquest went smoothly as long as the Israelites were obedient to God's instructions. Chapter 7 deals with a hiccup at Ai; a man by the name of Achan decided to keep some of the spoils of Jericho for himself, and as a result, the first battle at Ai was lost. Achan and his family were killed, and the conquest resumed. Eventually, the land was conquered and divided between the tribes, but Israel's problems were far from over.

The Cycles of Judges

While Joshua is a book full of victory, Judges is the opposite. After Joshua died, Israel was leaderless. The verse that sums up the theme of Judges is 17:6: “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.” Moral relativism was the rule rather than the exception after Joshua's generation died off. The book opens with Israel failing to obey the Lord's commands. Not only are the Canaanites not exterminated, but Israel adopts certain worship practices of the god Baal in Ch 1-2.

The next section (Ch 3-16) deals with the seven cycles of the judges. Wood notes: “Each period involved a cycle of Israel sinning, being invaded and severely oppressed, and then (after repentance) being delivered by a judge raised up by God.” Approximate dating for these cycles is 1381-1050 BC. God's sovereignty was evident in using other nations to discipline Israel. Each time Israel finally repented, God then raised up a deliverer or judge, twelve of which are named in the book. Six are “major” judges (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson) and six are “minor,” as little is known about the latter. These judges were not necessarily spiritual role models to emulate, but God used them to bring about His purposes.

---

119 The seriousness of violating the “ban” (Hebrew herem) was not only disobedience of God's direct command, but a failure to recognize that the “victor” in their battles was the LORD, not their own power. He deserved the credit and spoils of battle. Later in Israelite history, a king named Saul will also learn this lesson the hard way.

120 Benware, 89-90. See discussion of the potential moral dilemma in God's command to exterminate the Canaanites when the Israelites entered the land.

121 Wood, 168.

122 Archer, 304.

123 One of the most prominent and powerful enemies the Israelites encountered were the Philistines who had settled on the Mediterranean coast west of the Israelites. They were one of the “Sea People” tribes, for they had come from the Aegean Sea area. The primary reason for their military might was their use of iron weapons, which was harder and stronger than bronze. Their presence in Israel is indicative of the end of the Bronze Age and the start of the Iron Age (see: Archer, 304-306; Wood, 169; Hill and Walton, 191).

124 Arnold and Beyer, 184.
Probably most famous are the exploits of the strong man Samson (Ch 13-16).

An interesting observation is related to the book of Judges: the book of Ruth takes place in this period of cyclic disobedience. This book deals heavily with ancient customs, such as gleaning, levirate marriage and Boaz’ role as kinsman-redeemer. Amidst the moral relativism and uncertainty of the period of the Judges, God was still at work in the lives of simple people in Israel. Arnold and Beyer point out: “The sovereign plan of God is worked out in the book through the faithfulness of its main characters. Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz provide a striking contrast with other characters and events of the period of the judges.” Ruth is a wonderful narrative of human faithfulness in the midst of collective disobedience.

**Samuel and Saul: Prophet and Monarch**

The final judge of Israel (introduced in 1 Samuel 1:20) was a man named Samuel. He played a greater role than this, however, as he was the high priest of Israel, and he was also the first major prophet. His appearance in the narrative indicates the transition period from the cycles of judges to a monarchy. The importance of the Ark of the Covenant (representing God’s presence) is again on display (1 Sam Ch 4-7). Samuel led the people in a revolt against Philistine oppression in Ch 7. When the people asked for a monarch in Ch 8, God told Samuel to grant their foolish request. The theocracy was being replaced with a man-centered government. God made it clear that monarchy was not in his plan for his nation. Amidst Samuel’s objections, God chose Saul to be King.

Saul started well, experiencing military victories and the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Ch 9-12). However, Saul disobeyed by offering a sacrifice in 13:13-14 (he was not from the line of Levi), and he also violated the “ban” by not killing the Amalekite King (Agag) and his animals in 15:22-23. As a result, God told Samuel that Saul’s kingdom would not continue with his descendants. Rather, Samuel was to seek out and anoint a new king; that would turn out to be a young man named David from the line of Judah.

**Conclusion**

From Egypt to Sinai, from Kadesh Barnea to the wilderness, and from the wilderness to the promised land, God was always faithful to his people. He guided them, lived among them,

125 Hill and Walton, 252.
126 Arnold and Beyer, 192.
127 See footnote 171 for further discussion of Samuel’s prophetic role during the time period of the kings.
128 Arnold and Beyer, 197; 1 Sam. 8:6-7; 12:17-18.
revealed himself to them, and remained faithful to his covenant promises even while his people disobeyed him and were ungrateful for all he had done for them.

**1000 – 430 BC  Monarchy, Captivity and Return**

It is during this period of history that Israel experienced her greatest upheaval and change. Ranging from the golden age of Israel to another prolonged captivity, this period of Israel’s history is incredibly rich with characters, drama, and of course, God’s never-ending faithfulness to his chosen people. He raised up prophets and kings, and let his people reap the benefits of their obedience or conversely, the punishment for their disobedience. Yet, he saw them through every trial, and continue to give them hope of a future restoration through the words of his prophets.

**David and Solomon**

The biblical character most associated with the 1000 BC date is David. As a young shepherd boy, God selected David, anointed by the prophet Samuel, to replace Saul as king after the latter’s repeated failure to obey. His simple faith and humble nature resulted in his being referred to as “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). The combined reigns of David and his son Solomon were hailed as the golden age of Israel's history. David’s reign also became the standard by which all other kings were judged, primarily because he did not promote or tolerate idolatry.

Even though David was anointed privately to be the next king, his commendable character was also demonstrated in his continued loyalty to Saul who David recognized as God’s anointed legitimate king in spite of his failures. Saul’s mental instability, combined with jealousy over David’s popularity, caused him to repeatedly attempt to kill David, forcing David to finally flee into the Judean wilderness for a period of at least 10 years. David resisted the opportunity to kill Saul, and was genuinely saddened when Saul died as a result of battle.

David’s kingship was markedly different than that of Saul, as Wood states: “In contrast to the rule of Saul, David’s reign was one of unification and development of the kingdom. He brought the tribes together, established an efficient government, organized the priesthood, and...”

---

129 LaSor, Hubbard, Bush, and Allen, 182. Politically and economically, the nation of Israel was at her best under these two kings.
130 Some examples of these comparisons are 1 Kgs. 15:3, 11; 2 Kgs. 14:3; 16:2; 18:3; 22:2.
131 Events associated with this period are found in 1 Sam. 19 through 30.
132 2 Sam. 1:11-12.
maintained an army that scarcely lost a battle.” He expanded the kingdom, routed his enemies, and brought peace to his nation. His defeat of the Jebusites at Jerusalem and his subsequent establishment of his capital at that easily defensible site was a critical move for Israel. Another critical achievement was David’s bringing the Ark to Jerusalem, essentially making the city the spiritual capital of the nation. Thousands of years later, Jews still consider Jerusalem their symbolic and spiritual capital.

An event in David’s life – a genuine desire to build a temple in which God might dwell – resulted in a promise of great theological significance, known as the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Whereas the Palestinian Covenant amplified the land portion of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant expanded the seed portion. Although God denied David’s desire to build a “house” (= temple) for God (David’s son Solomon would be permitted to do that), God promised to build a “house” (= dynasty) for David. His line from then on would be the only legitimate kingdom dynasty, and one from that line would eventually rule forever.

David enjoyed great success in nearly every area as king. However, even David was not without foible. Saul, David, and David’s son, Solomon, were all characterized by the same pattern: a great beginning, but a less than stellar ending. Saul began as an obedient king anointed with God’s Spirit, but seriously violated God’s commands in two major instances. David was a man after God’s own heart, as evidenced by so many of the Psalms attributed to him. However, David’s key failure was a moral one involving a married woman named Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1-12:31). What began as a bit of voyeurism quickly led to adultery, deceit, and murder. David had relations with Bathsheba and she conceived. He eventually had her husband killed to cover his mistake, and took Bathsheba as his own wife. The LORD was not pleased (12:7-12). As a result of David’s sin, their child died, and David’s household would perpetually suffer turmoil. But in spite of the imposed discipline, God also acted in grace to allow them to have another son, one who was named Solomon, loved by the LORD (2 Sam. 12:24-25).

Solomon was essentially the last king of united Israel. There was a power struggle for the

---

133 Arnold and Beyer, 216. This covenant would ultimately be fulfilled by Jesus Christ sitting on David’s throne (Luke 1:32). Many OT references such as Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24; and Hos. 3:5 predict this reign of this future “David.”

134 Besides his sacrificing (1Sam. 13:13) and violating the ban (15:23), he also consulted the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:7-11). Additionally, his extreme jealousy of David and repeated attempts to kill him were foolish and unwarranted, as David never made any attempt to usurp the throne.
kingship between two of David’s sons when David was dying (1 Kings Ch 1-2). David intended for Solomon to be the next king, and that eventually occurred. After Solomon consolidated the kingdom, God appeared to him in a dream and offered to grant him a wish; Solomon asked for wisdom in order to be able to rule over the nation.\(^{137}\) God was pleased, and this was the secret to Solomon’s success as king: “Israel flourished during his kingdom, not because of Solomon’s ingenuity or gifts, but because of his God-given wisdom.”\(^{138}\) Flourish it did; Solomon increased the defenses, built several monuments, traded adeptly with other nations and collected taxes to make Israel financially wealthy and secure.\(^{139}\) Perhaps the greatest achievement of Solomon’s reign was his construction of the temple in Jerusalem, an extravagant building that testified to God’s glory.\(^{140}\) As with the tabernacle in the wilderness, God’s presence symbolically entered and dwelt in the temple.\(^{141}\) Solomon, like his father, enjoyed great success as king.

Solomon’s wisdom served him well in most areas, but at the end of his life, he departed from obeying the Lord and fell prey to idol worship. Kaiser states: “At the root of this problem were his multiple marriage alliances with other nations, alliances that required him to provide for their foreign pantheons right in the heart of the land to pacify his wives.”\(^{142}\) Solomon’s wives led him to turn his heart away from God.\(^{143}\) Because of this departure, God raised up enemies against Solomon, and the kingdom he and his father had built began to disintegrate. God’s punishment for this blatant idolatry was that the kingdom would be divided, although for the sake of David, a portion would be retained in the Davidic line (i.e., the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin).

**Divided Kingdom and Captivity**

In 931 BC, following the death of Solomon, the kingdom of Israel split into two different kingdoms: Israel (10 northern tribes) and Judah (2 southern tribes).\(^{144}\) In actuality, it seems that Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, was primarily responsible for the schism: “One gains the impression that the division might have been avoided had Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, possessed wisdom and tact.”\(^{145}\) In the process of being accepted and anointed as king, Rehoboam traveled north and met

\(^{137}\) 1 Kings 3:5.  
\(^{138}\) Arnold and Beyer, 225.  
\(^{139}\) 1 Kings 4:21-28.  
\(^{140}\) Wood, 241-251.  
\(^{141}\) 1 Kings 8:10-13.  
\(^{142}\) Kaiser, 284.  
\(^{143}\) 1 Kings 11:9.  
\(^{145}\) Bright, 230.
with the people who demanded that he lift the oppressive taxes they had suffered under Solomon. Rather than acquiesce, Rehoboam foolishly raised taxes. Israel subsequently seceded from Judah and appointed Jeroboam as their king. On the human level, the separation had its roots in Solomon’s oppressive taxes, but Rehoboam hammered the final nail into the coffin.

Without any sort of internal cohesion, the two kingdoms became vulnerable to losing possession of their land. Throughout their respective runs as nations, both were characterized by turmoil and power struggles. The next centuries of Israelite history were increasingly bleak. However, throughout it all, God’s sovereign hand was at work. He would allow the nation to feel his rebuke, but with the intention that they might learn their lesson and return to him. In addition, the spiritual condition of the two nations was also increasingly bleak, often due to the poor leadership of the successive kings.

Hill and Walton note: “The history of the Hebrew nation is told through the lives of the Israelite and Judean kings . . . because the fortunes of the kings and the plight of the people were entwined.”146 In the north, Jeroboam had been promised that if he was faithful to the LORD, he too could have a dynasty.147 Instead, he instituted a syncretistic religion combining Yahweh worship with idols, introducing a new priesthood and new feast days.148 His

---

146 Hill and Walton, 290.
147 1 Kings 11:38.
148 1 Kings 12:25-33.
example proved costly, as every king of the north that succeeded him promoted idolatry without exception. The worst of these kings in the north was Ahab who, along with his evil wife Jezebel, was rebuked by God’s prophet Elijah, not only for idolatry, but also for social injustice. Even in the south, only eight of the kings were evaluated as having done “right in the sight of the LORD,” meaning that they implemented spiritual reforms to reduce various forms of idolatry. All the rest of the kings of Judah promoted idolatry in various degrees.

Politically, Assyria was growing in power as Israel and Judah were falling apart. Tiglath-Pileser III turned Assyria into a true empire, ruling from 745-727 BC. He pacified his most significant enemies and turned his attention towards the western region of Palestine. He was not the first to use the tactic of deporting conquered people out of their land to quell rebellion, but he popularized it. All of his Assyrian successors used the tactic as well.

The constant political upheaval in Israel left her unprepared and unable to deal with the growing Assyrian threat. Tiglath-Pileser was relentless and crushing in his collection of tributes and conquest of new lands; even Israel paid him tribute under Menahem’s rule. Pekah, Israel’s next to last king (752-732 BC), formed a coalition with Aram (Syria) to fight against Assyria; Judah refused to be a part of this coalition. As a result, Pekah and Syria attacked Judah resulting in a three year, Syro-Ephraimite War (735-732 BC). In spite of warnings by the prophet Isaiah to avoid making an alliance with Assyria, Ahaz (king of Judah) sent Tiglath-Pileser a gift, asking for military assistance against Israel. The Assyrian king took little time to respond. He crushed Syria, and likely would have destroyed Israel as well if not for Hoshea (the last king of Israel), who had initiated a coup against Pekah and who had also paid tribute to Assyria. This occurred in 732 BC.

When Shalmaneser V, son of Tiglath-Pileser III, assumed the throne of Assyria (726 BC), Hoshea refused to pay tribute and asked Egypt for help. The new king did not appreciate such disobedience, and responded by attacking Israel in 724 BC. Help from Egypt was not forthcoming, and after a long siege, Samaria, the capital of Israel, fell to Assyria (722 BC).

---

149 A significant portion of scripture (1 Kgs. 17 through 2 Kgs. 2) is devoted to Elijah’s life and ministry.
150 The reformers were Asa (1 Kgs. 15:11); Jehoshaphat (22:43); Joash (2 Kgs. 12:2); Amaziah (14:3); Azariah (15:3); Jotham (15:34); Hezekiah (18:3); and Josiah (22:2; 23:25).
151 Bill L. Paetz. Class Notes; BIB-104: Genesis to Song of Solomon; Southwestern College; refer to chart of “Kings and Prophets of Judah and Israel” on p. 42 of this paper.
152 Bright, 269-272.
153 Arnold and Beyer, 358-359.
154 Bright, 272-277.
Thousands of God’s chosen people were relocated or deported: “27,290 according to Sargon... to vanish from the stage of history.”  

Israel as a political nation was gone, not because God’s power was insufficient to save her, but because of her continued disobedience and disloyalty to Yahweh. The deportation process from the land (and resettling of foreigners into the land) took 65 years, just as Isaiah the prophet predicted.

Judah, although still somewhat intact, was now servile to Assyria as a result of Ahaz’ plea for help. This was far from a desirable situation. “After Israel’s demise, questions arise about Judah. Will it survive? Will God’s next move be judgment or grace? Will Judah renew its loyalty to the covenant?” Ahaz, unfortunately, not only indebted Judah to Assyria, but established idols of Baal and abandoned godly spirituality. This situation was partially reversed when his son Hezekiah, one of the better kings, succeeded him and implemented spiritual reforms.

Meanwhile, Sargon II had taken over the Assyrian throne in approximately 722-721 BC, followed by his son Sennacherib who succeeded him in 705-704 BC. When Sennacherib took the throne, Hezekiah thought it a prudent time to refuse tribute and free Judah from Assyrian influence. Sennacherib initially had many other rebellions to deal with, and he was new to the throne. After regaining control of Babylon, Sennacherib marched on the west. He was victorious over many fortified cities of Judah, and nearly captured Jerusalem, surrounding it with Hezekiah bottled up inside. However, God protected the city, as it was not yet time for it to fall, and Sennacherib’s army was forced, through God’s intervention, to retreat back to Assyria, losing 185,000 soldiers in the process.

Surprisingly, Hezekiah’s mostly good reign was followed by the reign of the worst king of Judah, that of his son Manasseh who ruled for 50 years. His egregious sins could be considered the “straw that broke the camel’s back” of God’s patience and ensured that Judah would be driven into captivity. Even the many admirable reforms of Josiah, an outstanding

---

155 Bright, 275.
156 Kaiser, 365. See: Isa. 7:8.
157 LaSor, Hubbard, Bush, and Allen, 212.
158 Details of Hezekiah’s reign are listed in 2 Kings 18-20.
159 Wood, 305.
160 Sennacherib’s cylinder, discovered in 1830, is a six-sided clay tablet that gives an account of his conquests and sieges. It is of great historical value for it helps to corroborate and make sense of the chronology of the biblical account. He boasts that he “had shut up Hezekiah the Judahite within Jerusalem . . . like a caged bird.”
161 Wood, 305.
king, would not reverse God’s predicted judgment. In the years that followed, Assyrian influence faded and Babylonian influence grew. Babylon, along with Media, destroyed the Assyrian capital in 612 BC and decimated the remnants of the government in 610 BC.

Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt, wary of Babylonian aspirations, traveled north to assist Assyria, and Josiah, Judah’s last good king, unwisely tried to intervene. He was killed by Egyptian forces in 609 B.C., and Judah then experienced a succession of weak kings. After a Babylonian victory over Egypt under Nebuchadnezzar, much of Palestine was now ripe for the picking. Nebuchadnezzar took the best and brightest young men from cities he conquered – including Jerusalem. The prophet Daniel was among this first group taken into captivity in 605 B.C. In that same year, Nebuchadnezzar’s father died, so he hastened home to gain kingship.

Several years later, Josiah’s son Jehoiakim led a revolt against Babylonian control of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar and his troops came from Babylon to kill it. However, Jehoiakim died and his son Jehoiachin assumed the throne as Nebuchadnezzar approached. When help from Egypt did not arrive for Judah, the rebellion was crushed. Nebuchadnezzar took the king and his court, as well as 10,000 citizens (including the prophet Ezekiel) of Judah back to Babylon in 597 BC. He established his own choice of king, Zedekiah, to be placed on Jerusalem’s throne, and then he headed back to Babylon.

Several more years passed, and Zedekiah also decided to revolt against Babylon, hoping again for help from Egypt to save Judah from oppression. Once again, Nebuchadnezzar marched against Judah, and in 588 BC he besieged Jerusalem. The city finally fell in 586 BC; the beautiful temple was completely razed, and Zedekiah and thousands of his people were taken captive to Babylon. At the height of its golden age, Israel was the power to be reckoned with in the Ancient Near East. However, persistent disobedience and idolatrous practices led to decline and God’s discipline. All of Israel was in disarray or captivity. Both its capital and spiritual center were destroyed, a devastating blow to the nation. The nation could not plead

---

163 Josiah’s many reforms are found in 2 Kings 22-23. Josiah may have been the best king and reformer of the divided kingdom (2 Kgs. 23:25).
164 Bright, 324.
165 Arnold and Beyer, 246.
166 Wood, 317-318.
167 How many people were taken captive is unknown, but decades later, 50,000 would return to Judah from Babylon (Ezra 1-2).
168 The term “Israel” was used of the 10 northern tribes, but can also collectively refer to the entire nation of Israelites. The term “Judah”, on the other hand, normally only refers to the 2 southern tribes.
169 The despair of this event is reflected in Jeremiah’s sorrow, recorded in the book of Lamentations.
ignorance, because God had provided His prophets to repeatedly deliver warnings. Although the books of the prophets conclude our English versions of the OT, this is chronologically confusing, as the prophets were God’s primary spokespersons throughout the entire period just discussed—that of the kings—a period which ended with the captivity in 586 BC. These two groups are so intertwined that the time period of the prophets is said to have begun with Samuel.

The Prophets

Three different Hebrew terms were used to refer to prophets in the OT. The most common of these is na-bî’, occurring over 300 times, possibly suggesting the idea of one who had been “called” by God to deliver his message. The prophets whose books are recorded in the Bible are known as “Classical” or “Writing” prophets, and their messages were primarily intended for the people. Although foretelling the future occurs in almost all the prophetic books, the prophets were primarily forth-tellers, speaking truth to their own generations concerning issues relevant to their times. There are thousands of verses in the prophetic books, but three key themes become quickly apparent. The first theme was the prophet’s responsibility to pronounce judgment on Israel and/or Judah for their sins of idolatry and social injustice. The prophets did not impose new religious laws or restrictions, but simply implored their listeners to return to the Torah with which they should have been familiar. Thus, the prophets’ words also included calls for their listeners to repent or modify their behavior in hopes that the judgment might be averted. The second key theme of the prophets was judgment upon foreign nations. Although God used these nations as tools to discipline his people, they were also held responsible for their many obvious sins. A corollary to this throughout the OT is God’s

170 Additionally, two more prophets (Daniel and Ezekiel) were active during the Babylonian captivity, and three more prophets (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) were active toward the end of O.T. history (520-430 BC). These last three ministered to those exiles who had returned from the Babylonian captivity. See chart of Kings and Prophets on p. 42 of this paper. The time period of these prophets whose books are recorded in the O.T. was from about 840 to 430 BC.
171 Acts 3:24; 13:20-21; Heb. 11:32. It is fully recognized that God had, at previous times, used individuals to whom the term “prophet” was also applied, such as Abraham (Gen. 20:7); Moses. (Deut 18:15); Miriam (Ex 15:20); Deborah (Judg. 4:4); etc. Of these individuals, Moses was certainly the most notable in regard to transmitting God’s words to the people, both orally and in written form as the traditional author of the Pentateuch. Also see Num. 12:5-8 and Deut. 34:9-10 in regard to Moses’ important prophetic role.
172 Arnold and Beyer, 341.
173 Hill and Walton, 504-505.
174 Arnold and Beyer, 343.
175 Prime examples are the only two “Writing” prophets to the north, Hosea and Amos, whose books primarily rebuked idolatry and social injustice respectively.
176 Assyria was called “the rod of my anger” (Isa. 9:5) because that nation was used by God to discipline Israel, but later it would be struck by another of God’s rods of punishment (Isa. 30:31-32). Likewise, God calls
sovereignty over all kings and nations. His plan for history would be fulfilled, regardless of human failures. The third key theme is that of hope and restoration promised to Judah and Israel. In spite of all the discipline that would be imposed, God never abandoned his people, and he repeatedly promised them a glorious future, returned back to their land, and enjoying all its blessings. Almost any of the prophetic books could be used to illustrate these three themes, but the relatively short book of Amos provides good examples. Related to this hope was a theme of particular importance to the prophets, the “Day of the LORD.” Although this term can refer to isolated instances during OT history when God intervened to bring justice, it ultimately refers to an eschatological time at the end of the age when Israel’s sins are purged, Israel’s enemies are punished, and peace, righteousness and justice are finally established on the earth.

According to the prophet Jeremiah, this time of future restoration would include a “New Covenant.” This covenant expanded the “blessing” promise of the Abrahamic Covenant, clarifying it to be spiritual blessings—God’s laws written on their hearts, forgiveness of their sins, and a national conversion to the LORD. According to N.T. scriptures, Christ initiated this covenant with his death on the cross, and with its inception, the Law of Moses was terminated.

This future time of peace and righteousness would only occur through the reign of a future “Messiah” or “anointed” shepherd-king who would be filled with God’s Spirit and rule on the throne of David. Almost all the prophets record either veiled or specific promises of this

Nebuchadnezzar “My servant” (Jer. 25:9) because God used him to discipline Judah, but Babylon itself would later be destroyed by God for its many sins (Jer. Ch 50-51). This theme of judgment on foreign nations is prominent in many prophetic books, such as Isa. 13-23; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32, etc.

Dan. 2:20-22; 4:17; 4:34-35. Two of the prophetic books (Jonah and Nahum) deal exclusively with Assyria and its capital Nineveh, again demonstrating God’s dealings with foreign nations.

Ezek. 37 is a good example with its “dry bones” and “two sticks” visions representing Israel and Judah coming back to life, being joined together in the land, and dwelling peacefully with their glorious king ruling over them.

See Amos 3-4 for judgment on Judah; 1:3-2:3 for judgment on foreign nations; and 9:11-15 for promises of hope and restoration;

Two prophets (Joel and Zephaniah), have the “Day of the LORD” as their key theme.

Am. 1:12; 2:1; Isa. 13:6,9; Jer. 46:10; Isa. 34:8-9, etc.

Arnold and Beyer, 348. Ezekiel also promises an expanded, glorious future temple in which the LORD will dwell (Ch 40-43); a new plan for worship (Ch 44-46); and an expanded land in which the people will dwell (Ch 47-48).

Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:24-28 also promise that God’s Spirit would dwell within them.

Matt. 20:27-28; Heb. 7:18-19,22; 8:6-8,13; Rom. 10:4; etc. The Law was added some four centuries after the Abrahamic Covenant, in order to point out sin and the need of a redeemer. However, when that One came, the need for the Law ceased (Gal. 3:17-25). Jesus taught (Matt. 23:36-40) that what was truly important was the “essence” of the Law which is to love God with all our being (Deut. 6:5), and to love others as ourselves (Lev. 19:18); also see Mark 12:28-33; Matt. 7:12; Gal. 5:14; Rom. 10:4; Rom. 13:8; Eph. 2:14-16; Jas. 2:8-9.
The collection of these writings by the various prophets was not the extent of prophetic influence on Israel. Prior to these were the “Pre-classical” (“Non-writing”) prophets, called such because there are no books attributed to them. Prophets like Elijah and Elisha were very active, particularly in their role of speaking primarily to the kings. They offered advice but also issued rebuke when necessary. Their influence in the beginning decades of the monarchy was just as important to the nation as that of the later writing prophets. Elijah served as a prophet for forty years.

The prophets were oftentimes outcast and ridiculed for their proclivity to speak the truth. This did not deter them from their commitment to follow God’s calling for their lives. Even when God asked them to do things that seemed crazy or unorthodox, they were obedient. Their lives are examples to every Christian who struggles with obedience. The prophets were an integral part of God’s people and plan.

**Return and Silence**

During the captivity, the Israelites from Judah (unlike a previous captivity in Egypt) were treated well. Whether that is due to the increasing political influence of the prophet Daniel during Nebuchadnezzar’s reign is uncertain and not stated. The captives enjoyed little restriction of their religious practices, movement within the land, and even letter-writing privileges. Many of those taken were artisans and craftsmen to begin with, so even jobs were bountiful. The prophet Ezekiel lived among the people during this time, and he was chiefly responsible for pointing out where God’s people had sinned, and for declaring promises of God’s coming deliverance. Having said that, it was still captivity, and the nation of Israel was still not living in the land God had promised Abraham many centuries earlier.

During this period, Judah’s captor began to experience upheaval. Persia was growing in power under the leadership of Cyrus the Great. A brilliant leader, he led a revolt against the

---

185 Hill and Walton, 695. Isaiah and Zechariah are the prophets with the most Messianic prophecies. Isaiah’s four “Servant Songs” also surprisingly predict that this Messiah would somehow suffer greatly in providing salvation for his people. Isa. 4:2; 11:1-5; Jer. 31:15-16; and Ezek. 34:23-26 are typical examples of Messianic promises.

186 Many examples of these interactions could be given such as Samuel/Saul; Nathan/David; Gad/David; Shemaiah/Rehoboam; Elijah/Ahab. The ministries of these “non-writing” prophets ended about 840 BC.

187 As examples, Hosea was told to marry a prostitute (Hos. 1:1-2) while Jeremiah was told not to marry (Jer. 16:1-9). Jeremiah was also told to wear a wooden yoke around his neck (27:1-8).

188 Wood, 328-329.

189 Ps. 137:1-6 reflects their sentiments of not being “at home.”
Median Empire, and when he became king, he quickly began several campaigns against the rest of the ancient Near East.\footnote{Bright, 354.} It was only a matter of time until Babylon fell under his sword, and in 539 BC, Babylon was conquered.

Cyrus took no time addressing in the situation of the Jews. Almost immediately after taking over Babylon, Cyrus issued an edict in 538 BC authorizing Jews to return to their land, plus permission to rebuild their temple.\footnote{Ezra 1:2-4. This was predicted by Isaiah at least 150 years earlier (44:28-45:4) emphasizing again that God was in control of history and that His influence was the real reason why Cyrus took this action.} This decree led to the first return of captives from Babylon of Judah, led by Zerubbabel and Joshua (537-536 BC), composed of about 50,000.\footnote{Kaiser, 420-421.} Construction of the temple began, the foundations were laid, and an altar was built amidst the ruins. After a 15 year delay, construction began again, and the temple was finally completed in 516 BC.\footnote{God used the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people to finish the work they had begun.} The 70-year captivity predicted by Jeremiah was thus fulfilled by the first temple destruction (586 BC), and the subsequent completion of the second temple.\footnote{Kaiser, 438-444. While both served under a Persian Artaxerxes, it is unclear whether it was Artaxerxes I or Artaxerxes II. The traditional understanding is that both served under Artaxerxes I.}

The next two returns under Ezra and Nehemiah are traditionally dated at approximately 458 BC and 444 BC, respectively.\footnote{It is between the first and second returns that the entertaining book of Esther takes place. The young Jewish woman became the second wife of the powerful Persian king Xerxes who ruled from 486-464 BC, and the story concerns those Jews who did not return to Judah from captivity. An evil plot to exterminate the Jews was foiled, demonstrating God’s providential care for His people.} About six decades after the new temple was constructed, a priest named Ezra led a second return of about 1,650 men (plus families and servants).\footnote{Kaiser, 441. More of Ezra’s spiritual influence and reforms are recorded in the book of Nehemiah.} He found the Israelites in a state of both ignorance and disobedience; even after having previously been exiled from their land, they still did not understand. The most pressing issue was that some Israelite men had taken foreign wives who did not share faith in Yahweh. Ezra was so disturbed by this that he cried out to God and ripped his clothes. His actions led to a moral reform in Israel; those who had married foreign wives were forced to divorce them. Kaiser states, “There is no doubt that such separations caused enormous hardship and heartbreak, but Ezra was determined to be zealous for the purity of the community’s life and faith as taught in the Law of God.”\footnote{Kaiser, 420-421.}

The third return (of an unknown number of individuals in 444 BC) was led by Nehemiah, another individual who demonstrated exemplary leadership. He was the cupbearer to Artaxerxes...
I, a position of significant prominence and trust. After hearing about the weak, vulnerable and generally impoverished state of Jerusalem, Nehemiah went to the king and asked permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, a request which was granted. The first section of Nehemiah’s book (Ch 1-7) is about his great leadership in seeing the task through to its completion. Through many struggles and threats, the walls were eventually constructed in only 52 days. After this, a public reading of the law by Ezra led to great moral reform and repentance among God’s people (Ch 8-13). Nehemiah even served as governor of Jerusalem for twelve years before returning to Persia (for possibly as long as two years). When he returned to Judah again, he encountered more problems which needed correction (Neh. 13:6-31).

Conclusion

Nehemiah’s book brings the reader to the conclusion of OT chronological history, usually
dated about 430 BC. The next period of history – between the OT and NT -- is known as the “Inter-testamental Period” or “400 Silent Years” because no canonical books were written, nor were prophets active. The next chapter of biblical history would wait until Jesus Christ and the NT writers. The OT as it is known to the modern reader was completed. (The process of OT canonization, and the process of transmission of the OT text into its present form is beyond the scope of this paper, but are thoroughly discussed by Paul Wegner.) In the OT, a fledgling nation was seen from conception to adulthood, through rebellion and piety, and from punishment to partial restoration. God’s hand was never removed from history. His sovereign purpose was always fulfilled.

Yet, at the end of the OT, things do not appear to be optimistic for the nation. The prophet Malachi was also active about this time, and his book rebukes the apathy, indifference and even impertinence toward God displayed by many. It would appear that the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah were not long-lasting. Persia was at the height of its power, and all that was left of Israel’s nation was the small province of Judah. Solomon’s temple had been replaced, but it was much smaller and less glorious than the first. Although Zerubabbel was in the Davidic line, any hopes of him becoming the next king faded, and instead, they were ruled by a Persian-appointed governor. Jerusalem (Zion) was small, and not very glamorous. The people were mostly poor, and the population had been greatly diminished. Those who hoped for the promised “Messiah” were still waiting.

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the Old Testament is worthy of study on its own merits, as it not only introduces a biblical worldview, but also reveals so much about God’s character, attributes and His plan for history. One cannot exhaust the riches found in studying its pages. As another example, this paper does not even address the contributions of poetry and wisdom literature to the lives of the Israelites as found in the books of Job through Song of Solomon. Additionally, the New Testament seems confusing without the OT

---

198 Refer to O.T. Chronological Timeline on p. 43 of this paper.
199 It was, however, a very active period in Jewish history, with many writings such as those of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and the translation of the OT into Greek known as the Septuagint (LXX). Politically, the Jews even regained some control of Judah for about a century as a result of the Maccabean Revolt, and the subsequent Hasmonean Dynasty which ended in 63 BC. Finally, the various Jewish sects such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Herodians and Essenes developed during the final 100-150 years of this period. They were influential in varying degrees in Palestine when Jesus’ ministry began.
But in the end, the OT cries out for more information and resolution. The proposed theme of “Consummation” was not realized, as so much more of God’s program awaited fulfillment. Thankfully, God continued to be faithful to his promises, and in “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4), the next stage of biblical history began -- the promised Messiah entered the world. Through the benefit of progressive revelation, NT believers can understand so much more of the “big picture.” But even we see through a “mirror dimly” (1 Cor 13:12) and are called to have faith (and patience) that God will usher in the consummation of all history with the return of Jesus Christ into the world at His second coming.202

201 Arnold and Beyer 476 These authors state there are 295 specific allusions in the NT, occupying 352 verses. Hill and Walton 744 also claim that approximately 32% (nearly one third of the NT) is composed of either quotations from, or allusions to the OT.

202 II Pet 3:3-11
KINGS AND PROPHETS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL:

**PROPHETS**

- SAMUEL
- GAD
- NATHAN

**KINGS OF UNITED KINGDOM**

- SAUL (1041 (?) – 1011)
- DAVID (1011 – 971)
- SOLOMON (971 - 931)

**DIVIDED (931 B.C.)**

- JEROBOAM I (931-910)
- AHIJAH MAN OF GOD

**JUDAH**

- REHOBOAM (931-913)
- ABIJAH (ABIJAM) (913-911)
  + ASA (911-870)

**ISRAEL**

- NADAB (910-909)
- BAASHA (909-866)
- ELAH (886-885)
- ZIMRI (885)
  + OMRI (885-874)

**TIBNI (872-848)**

- AHAB (874-853)
- ELIJAH
- ELISHA
- JEHU

**OBADIAH**

- JEHORAM (853-841)
- ATHALIAH (841-835)

**JOEL**

- JOASH (835-796)
- AMAZIAH (796-767)
- AZARIAH (UZZIAH) (790-740)

**ISAIAH**

**JONAH**

- JEHOAHAZ (814-798)
- JEHOSHAPHAT (812-798)
- JEREMIAH (798-753)
- AMOS (753)
- HOSEA (752)
- HOSEA (732-722)

**MICAH**

- JOTHAM (750-731)
- AHAZ (735-715)
- JEREMIAH (715-686)

**NAHUM**

- MANASSEH (695-642)

**ZEPHANIAH**

- JOSIAH (640-609)
- JEHOAHAZ (609)
- JEHOIAKIM (609-597)
- JEHOIACHIN (597)
- ZEDEKIAH (597-586)

**BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY (586 B.C.)**

**BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY (586 B.C.)**

AMON (642-640)

**ZEPHANIAH**

- JOSIAH (640-609)
- JEHOAHAZ (609)
- JEHOIAKIM (609-597)
- JEHOIACHIN (597)
- ZEDEKIAH (597-586)

**EZEKIEL**

**DANIEL**

**HAGGAI**

**ZECCHARIAH**

**MALACHI**

TO THE REMNANT THAT RETURNED FROM BABYLON

**ASSYRIAN CAPTIVITY (722 B.C.)**

**JONAH AND NAHUM WERE PROPHETS TO / CONCERNING NINEVEH / ASSYRIA**

**GOOD” KINGS OF DIVIDED EMPIRE**

**WRITING PROPHETS” UNDERLINED**

**DATES OF OBADIAH AND JOEL ARE DISPUTED; MANY DATE THEM AFTER BABYLONIAN DESTRUCTION OF 586 B.C.**

---

Dr. Bill L. Paetz  BIB 104 -- Genesis to Song of Solomon  Southwestern College

45
O.T. CHRONOLOGICAL TIME LINE:

- Creation
- Fall
- Flood
- Tower of Babel
- Genesis Ch 1-11
- Abraham (2000 B.C.)
- Issac
- Jacob
- Joseph
- Genesis Ch 12-50
- Exodus: Numbers
- Leviticus
- Deuteronomy
- Joshua
- Judges
- Judges (335 years)
- I Samuel
- Samuel
- II Samuel
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon
- I and II Chronicles
- (but kings of Judah only)
- Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah
- Micah, Zephaniah
- Jeremiah, Habakkuk
- Amos, Hosea
- Jonah, Nahum
- Ezekiel, Daniel
- Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- Esther
- Old Testament History ends
  "400 Silent Years"
- Birth of Christ (4 B.C.)
  (New Testament History begins)

THE ENTIRE CHRONOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WILL BE FOUND BY READING THESE 11 UNDERLINED BOOKS IN ORDER.
Works Cited


Jewishvirtuallibrary.org/source/Judaism/tribemap


Ross, Allen P. Creation and Blessing: a Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of


