OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY COMMENTARY

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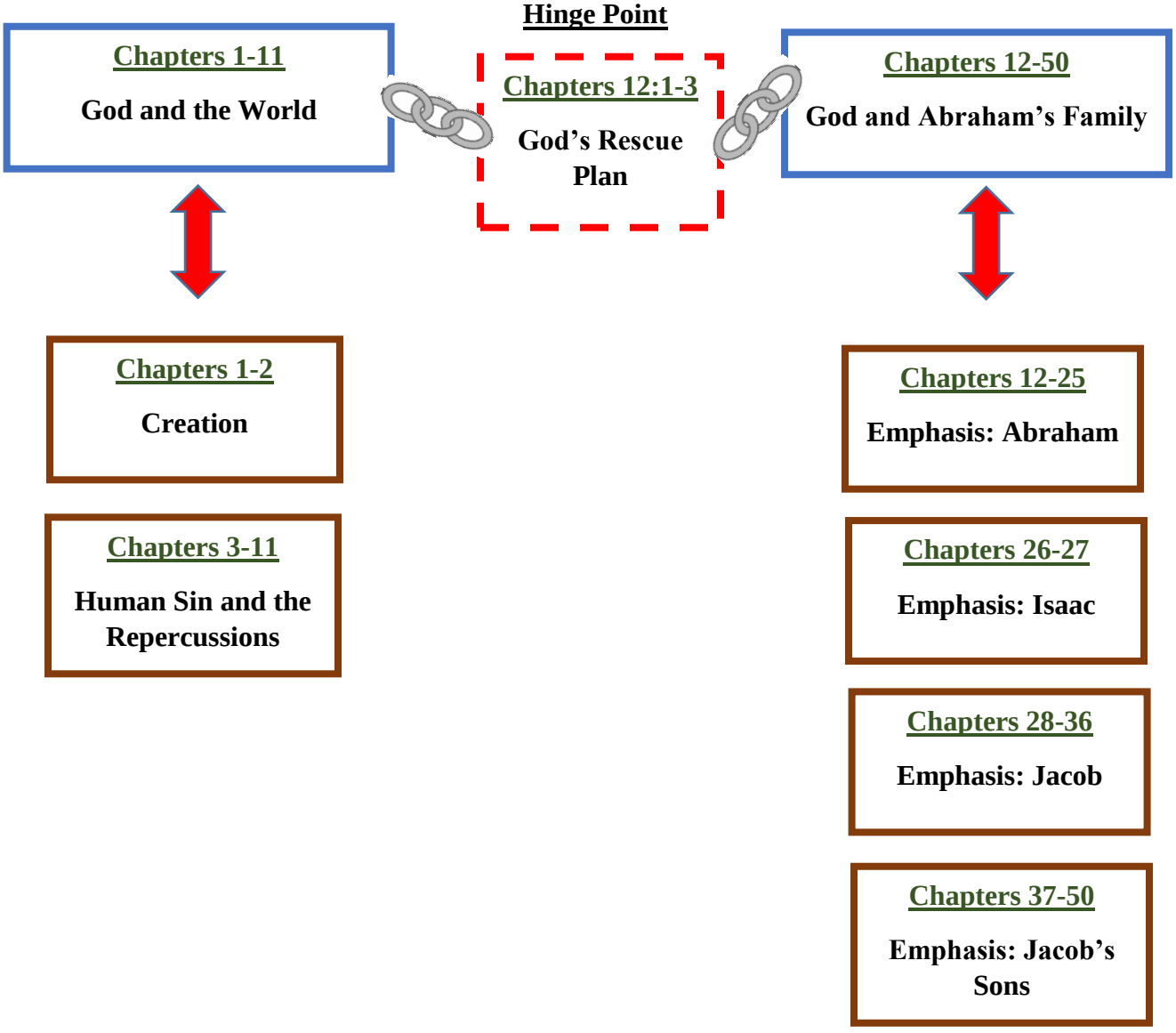
The Book of Genesis

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Genesis is the fountainhead of the Bible, a story of beginnings concentrating on creation and God's plan to reconcile his covenant people from a fractured world, despite their continued rebellion.

Main Idea Explained

Genesis begins with the account of God creating, forming, and giving order and beauty to a chaotic, void, and formless land. God makes a place where the crown jewel of his creation, humanity, can live and flourish amidst imminent presence. What God creates is said to be "good" (7 times in chapter one). Mankind is unique in that they alone, out of all the living creatures God formed, are made in His image and likeness. Humans are to reflect the creator's nature and character, but as we find in chapter three, Adam and Eve forfeit their opportunity to reign as God's vice regents, to trust his

goodness. They choose to defy his authority and to define for themselves what is good, true, and beautiful by giving in to the snake seizing autonomy by partaking of the forbidden fruit. This fractures God's good world bringing sin, evil, and death upon it. The rest of the Bible seeks to answer the question: "What is God going to do to restore and redeem a sinful and rebellious humanity?"

In Genesis three God responds to the man and woman's sin in two ways: Judgment and Grace. There are consequences for their actions, but also hope as God makes a promise, that a "seed" from the woman, Eve, will one day triumph over evil. Chapters four through eleven record the downward spiral of sin and rebellion. Even after the flood narrative in chapters six through nine, the descendants of Adam only become more evil, violent, and corrupt, leaving the reader to wonder how God is going to fix this problem, ultimately.

Chapter twelve is God's response to chapters three through eleven. In response to the defilement of his world that is taking place, God chooses Abraham and his family out of all the peoples of the world, to be the chosen ones through whom he will restore his blessing to the nations, entering into a covenant relationship with him (chs. 12,15,17, 22). The "seed" mentioned in Genesis 3:15 is then traced through Abraham's family line as Genesis 12-50 concentrates on this one man's family. The thread of hope running through all of these stories about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons is God's continued goodness and faithfulness despite man's habitual rebellion and sin.

Chapters 37-50 particularly highlight Jacob's son Joseph who is sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. Joseph's life is a rollercoaster of ups and downs, but because of his faithfulness to God, God blesses him, and he is eventually promoted to being Pharaoh's right-hand man. Through Joseph many lives are saved including the lives of his brothers and their father, climaxing in chapter 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." Despite humanity's sin and rebellion against their creator, the testimony of the entire book of Genesis is this: God is sovereignly working all things for the good of his covenant people, to fulfill his good redemptive purposes.

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Genesis is primarily theological, to show us who God is. Many of the theological constructs and reoccurring themes throughout the rest of the Bible are found in seed from here (such as creation, image of God, the fall of man, sin, covenant, salvation, redemption, sovereignty, etc.). Genesis provides us with a world view in which to interpret our existence. It asserts that there is one almighty creator God who has exclusive authority over his good creation. However, God's greatest creation, humanity, chose to defy him therefore bringing sin, evil, and death into the world. Chapters three through eleven serve as a case study of the human condition, while chapters 12-50 begin to reveal God's gracious plan to restore sinful and broken humanity through Abraham's family. Essentially, Genesis says, "This is how God designed the world to be, this is what happened, this is how it is now, and here is what God is beginning to do about it."

Key Themes

Image of God

Mankind is unique in that they alone, out of all the living creatures God formed, are made in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). This gives value, dignity, and worth to man (Matt. 10:29-31),

therefore all humans should be treated with respect and honor as image bearers of the living God. Humans as covenant partners with God, have the ability and responsibility to make known the character and attributes of their Creator on earth, as His representatives. Man was created with the intention that they should glorify God, enjoy an intimate relationship with him, and fulfill his purposes on the earth. Image bearers are to do things that stimulate human flourishing according to God's ideals, reflecting the creative energy of their maker through work done in service to others. Just as God took chaos and made it into something beautiful (Gen. 1), humans are supposed to do that with their environments, to make it fruitful and maximize it (we see Noah commissioned with this task after the flood, and God promising to make Abraham fruitful as well with offspring as numerous as the stars). The image of God is not something we have, it is what we are. Therefore, it gives profound meaning to our existence.

However, this beautiful portrait of what it means to be an image bearer, becomes perverted just a few pages in. Much of Genesis shows us the opposite of what humans should be doing such as: Adam and Eve seizing autonomy (Gen.3), Cain killing Abel and Lamech acquiring women like property (Gen.4), Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.19), Dinah being violated (Gen.34), and Joseph being sold into slavery by his own brothers (Gen. 37), to name a few. God's image bearers are disfigured by sin, yet still bear his image, but are in need of rejuvenation. It is God who initiates its restoration starting here in Genesis.

The Fall, Sin and Rebellion

Man was originally created free of sin, holy, and shared perfect companionship with their creator (Gen. 1:26-31). Sin's origin in mankind takes place in the lives of Adam and Eve and their willful choice to succumb to the temptation of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, partake of the fruit from the forbidden tree, and therefore claim the right for themselves to decide what is good, true, pure, holy, and beautiful (Gen. 3:1-6) rather than continue in obedience to God's will. After the Fall, all of God's creation became fractured and marred in this rebellion against God (Gen. 3:18-19) bringing forth sin and death (Gen. 3:19). Because of their rebellion against God, humanity became alienated from God, damaged their relationships with others (Gen. 3:16), are intrinsically corrupt loving to do evil (Gen. 6:5), objects of God's wrath, and subject to punishment (Gen. 2:17). The testimony of Scripture is that every man and women since Adam, revives their story, just in different ways.

Genesis explores deeply the human condition and God's plan to rescue his covenant people from their own demise. If Genesis three through eleven teaches us anything, it's that man apart from God becomes a ravenous animal spiraling downward into greater and greater wickedness, evil, and corruption. God returns the earth to chaos in the flood narrative of chapters six through nine, and is completely justified in doing so, however he promises to not do that again, but instead enters into a covenant relationship with humanity. As we come to chapter twelve, this covenant relationship is shown to be funneled through a particular family. Abraham is told what this will look like (explored below), and the remainder of the book follows the trail of the "seed" through all the ups and downs, the shortcomings and the victories. All the characters are flawed and sinful. Cain kills his brother, Lamech collects women, and Pharaoh is a brutal dictator, but even the so-called "good guys" fail too. Noah, after being saved from the great flood, builds a vineyard and gets drunk, Abraham sleeps with one of his wife's servants and gives Sarah away to other men twice, and the promised "seed" which we learn will come from the tribe of Judah, has as its clan father a man who slept with his daughter-in-law because he thought she was a prostitute. They are not moral examples, but rather people we can find

ourselves in and relate with. Throughout Genesis the sin-laden events are met swiftly by God's judgements, but even more so by his grace and continued faithfulness to his promises despite what circumstances may lead one to believe. God is at work to restore broken humanity.

"Seed"

In chapter one Adam and Eve are told to be fruitful and multiply. They are to have many children, and take care of God's creation. When Adam and Eve commit the first sin, amidst the curses and horror God makes a promise in chapter 3:15. One day there will arise a "seed", a serpent crusher, a wounded victor, from the woman that will defeat evil at its source (Mackie, Lecture). The way the author of Genesis has written this narrative, we can trace the "seed" through Noah (Gen.5), Shem (Gen.10), Abraham (Gen. 11), and all the way to Judah who is elevated above all the other tribes (Gen. 38 and 49). The key word that helps us trace the seed is *generations,* mentioned 10 times in Genesis (2:4, 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 27, 25:12, 19, 36:1, 37:2) {Mackie, 1}. Genesis only introduces us to this theme that runs through all of Scripture, but leaves us hanging, and in pursuit of who this promised "seed" will be. It is through this seed that the curse will be lifted, and God's redemptive purposes will be fulfilled.

Covenant

Covenants are the deepest of all agreements and promises human beings (and God) make. They are not simply contracts, for they are personal and define relationships and how parties interact with one another. God's decision to bind himself with humanity through his covenants was his graciousness to all mankind, in which he refused for human sin to get in the way of his plan set forth in Genesis 3:15. The first time the word covenant appears on the pages of Scripture is only a few pages in, Genesis 6:18 (see also chs.8-9). The context is the great flood (6:9-8:19). Genesis 9:8-17 show how remarkable this first-of-all covenants was in terms of permanence and expansiveness. It is said to be "everlasting" (v.16, though everlasting is qualified by 8:22) and embracing "every creature" (v.10).

Then God made another covenant with Abraham promising to make his name great, give him a special land, and bless the families of the world through him (Gen. 12:1-3, and chs. 15,17,22). The Abrahamic Covenant is called 'eternal' (Gen. 17:7, 13, 19; 1 Chron.16:17; and Psa. 105:10), and we see God continuing to fulfill his covenant through Abraham's family from chapters 12-50. The rest of the Bible sets out to show how God fulfills and keeps his promises regarding this covenant.

God's Sovereignty: Evil for Good

The Sovereignty of God is a major theme in the book of Genesis. No matter what stupid sinful humans do, we see that God's rescue plan to redeem and restore humanity cannot be thwarted. God works all things for his glory and our good. There are many stories within the narrative that make this theme very vivid, such as the events surrounding the barren women: Sarah {Gen 17-18, 21}; Rebekah {Gen. 25:21}and Rachel {Gen. 29:31-30:24}, and Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers, being falsely accused of sexual assault, being thrown in prison, but eventually rising to prominence and saving many lives including this own family (Gen. 37-50). God is continually shown to make good out of the evil humanity does. We learn in Genesis that God can even use the evil things that people do, for his good purposes (Gen. 50:20).

Implications for Today

I suppose that many in our 21st century, western culture and society would ask the quotation, "What does a book that's thousands of years old have to say about today?" However, when one cracks open the pages of this divinely inspired book, it becomes evident that Genesis speaks to every time and culture, and draws people into itself as they find themselves in the characters and the events surrounding them.

The message and themes found in Genesis help us to understand what kind of a God the god of the Bible is. They teach us what humanity's purpose is, and what is to define our existence and our relationships with others, and the creator God himself. Genesis explains how God created the world to be, how we fit into that plan, how we corrupted His good world, and his response to our sin and rebellion. It diagnoses what is wrong with our world. It demonstrates this it in a fashion that shows us we aren't any different today. Everyone gives in to the serpent, and defies God. Humanity is so corrupt that no one can remedy the problem; only God can fix what is wrong. Genesis gives us the roots for the Messiah that is to come, as it paints the first strokes of this portrait that gets filled out as we read through the rest of Scripture, eventually reaching its fulfillment in Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

What is so captivating about Genesis is its honesty. It does not sugar coat the human condition or the gravity of our sin. The world is not okay, it's fractured to its core. Humans cannot fix their situation on their own. Our world is stuck in the repetitive cycle of sin. Hate, greed, theft, murder, and sexual immorality run rampant in our society and are constant reminders of our sin and corruption, and also our need to be rescued from it. Additionally, the stories we find with Genesis are relatable on fundamental levels. They aren't fables that teach a nice moral story about a general truth. They deal with real issues like barrenness, dysfunctional families, identity crisis, greed, betrayal, murder, loss of loved ones, forgiveness, redemption, loyalty, and love.

We can be comforted by the book of Genesis, because in it we see God bringing about good from every situation despite sin and evil. He is actively involved in our lives and bringing about his plan today in and through us too. At times, it may be hard to distinguish what is a blessing and curse (or what is good). We can know with certainty that the almighty, sovereign God of creation, who is intimately involved in our lives working good for his glory and for our betterment no matter what the circumstance we find ourselves in, shows us. Genesis portrays a God who pursues his creatures. Our only hope is in this covenant-keeping God who is shown in Genesis (and throughout Scripture) to be a faithful and true to his promises, even when we are not. He is a God who doesn't only keep his end of the deal, but ours as well (Gen. 15).

As those saved from our sin, we are to operate in righteousness and justice in all relationships, as image bearers of our creator. We are to reflect the nature and character of our God and bless those that we encounter, seeking that they would come to know him as well.

Study Questions

1. What does God create in Genesis one? (think past the physical things mentioned).
2. What does it mean to be made in the image of God? What is the significance of this truth?
3. What does the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil signify? Why was it in the garden?
4. How does God's grace show itself in the account of the Fall in Genesis three?
5. In God's covenant with Noah, what do we learn? What does it encompass?

6. What things did God promise Abraham in chapter 12?
7. Name a few examples of God working good out of people's evil.
8. In Genesis, many people struggle with believing the promises of God. Share a few examples.
9. How does Genesis help us understand the character of God more deeply?
10. How does knowing that you serve a God that is sovereign over everything, effect how you pray?
11. What keeps you from trusting in the promises of God?
12. God uses imperfect people throughout this narrative. How do you think God is wanting to use you in your community, church, job etc.?
13. Has there ever been a time in your life where you have seen God work good out of the evil the was surrounding a person or situation?

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The Book of Exodus

Structure

Chapters 1-15
Exodus from Egypt

Chapters 15b-18
Wilderness Journey to Sinai

Chapters 19-40
Israel at Mt. Sinai

Chapters 1-2
Moses Raised up as a Deliverer

Chapters 3-4
Moses' Commission to Israel

Chapters 5-7a
Moses' Commission to Pharaoh

Chapters 7b-11
The 10 Plagues

Chapters 12-13
Passover

Chapters 14-15a
The Exodus Story

Chapters 19-24
Mosaic Covenant

Chapters 25-31
Tabernacle Blueprints

Chapters 32-34
Mosaic Covenant Broken and Reestablished

Chapters 35-40
Construction of the Tabernacle

Main Idea: The book of Exodus continues the story of Abraham's descendants from the book of Genesis, showing how God keeps his promises, delivers, rescues, and sets a part a covenant people for himself to be a kingdom of priests to the surrounding nations, who are to display his nature and character to the world.

Main Idea Explained

The book of Exodus continues the story of Israel from Genesis, just fast forwarded about 400 years. Jacob's family of 70 from the end of Genesis has grown as we are told, "Israel was fruitful and multiplied and filled the land" (Exod. 1:7). This is the same language and blessing given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1, again to Noah in Genesis eight and nine, and to Abraham in Genesis seventeen. God's covenant blessing is taking place. However, not all is well for the Israelites. There is a new Pharaoh in the land of Egypt and he takes this immigrant population as a threat to his kingdom and way of life. He devises a plan to worsen working conditions, and of mass genocide against all of the male Hebrew babies, who are to be thrown into the Nile River. Pharaoh proves himself to be the most evil character in the Biblical narrative so far, and Egypt emerges on the scene as the new Babylon on the block. Once again, they show what happens when sinful humanity gives into the serpent when they define what's good and evil for themselves.

Even in the midst of this, we see the hand of God working to thwart the evil Pharaoh is trying to do here. The more evil Egypt does, the more God responds by doing good. In a moment of poetic justice, one Hebrew boy who is placed in the Nile River, floats into Pharaoh's own home and is raised by Pharaoh's daughter. His name is Moses, the man God will raise up as Israel's deliverer. However, Moses gets off to a rocky start, and murders an Egyptian while trying to stop the injustice being done to his own people, forcing him to flee into the desert. At the end of chapter two, we receive these beautiful and encouraging words, "Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew" (Exod. 2:23-25). So, what is God going to do about it?

In chapter three God appears to Moses at Mt. Sinai in a burning bush. He commissions Moses to go to Israel and to Pharaoh that God may reveal himself to them. This is crucial, because here God reveals himself to Moses in a way that he hasn't disclosed himself to anyone else in the story so far. Inviting him into his holy presence, he tells Moses his name "Yahweh" (I am or I will be). After receiving his commission Moses then returns to Egypt as the conduit through whom God's purposes would be fulfilled.

Chapters five through fifteen record the confrontation between God and Pharaoh over the message Moses delivers to him, "Let my people go" (5:1) But Pharaoh responds, "Who is Yahweh?" (5:2). God sends ten plagues upon Egypt, to display his power and make himself known to Pharaoh, culminating in the tenth and final plague, filling the first born (retribution for Pharaoh's genocide). However, God provides a way out in the Passover (ch.12-13), in which the blood of a lamb (a substitute) shields one from judgment. After this final plague, Pharaoh lets the Israelites go, but changes his mind, pursues them, and is killed when God parts the Red Sea for his people, but releases the waters upon the Egyptians burying them at the bottom of the sea.

Chapters 19-40 record God's Covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai, and we learn more about how God is going to fulfill his covenant with Abraham in this next installment. In chapters 20-23, we

receive the terms of the covenant, which begin to reveal how a sinful humanity is to relate to a holy God. If Israel holds up their end of the deal, they will be God's special people, a kingdom of priests who will mediate his blessings to the nations. In chapter 25, Moses is told to build place where Yahweh can dwell with his people (the Tabernacle) which, as we read the verbal blue prints (ch.25-31), is laden with Edenic imagery. God is restoring his physical presence with humanity. However, it doesn't take long for Israel to break the covenant, recorded in the incident of the golden calf (ch. 32-34). God wants to destroy his people and start over with Moses, but Moses intercedes on behalf of Israel and calls God to keep is promises made to Abraham. God changes his mind, and reestablishes his Covenant. God got cheated on, and is angry and wants to exercise justice, but he covenanted with humanity, so instead of destroying them he allows himself to be interceded with, and shows mercy rather than exercising wrath and justice (Mackie, Lecture). He stays faithful to his promises.

It is in this context that God reveals, verbally his nature and character, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exod. 34:6-7). The rest of the book of Exodus describes the building of the Tabernacle, climaxing in God's divine presence and glory filling the tent.

Purpose of the Book

The main purpose of the book of Exodus is to reveal who God is that we might know him. It was written for the purpose of knowing God, his nature and character. To have a relationship with someone you have to get to know them first. Before Israel can say, "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"' (Exod. 15:11)

In the first movement of the book God reveals himself to all parties through the plagues (particularly to the Egyptians {ch.7-11; 14:4;18}), the Exodus, and the crossing of the sea. In the second movement God reveals himself more specifically to Israel, establishing a close intimate covenant relationship with them culminating in his presence descending from Mt. Sinai to take up residence among his people in the Tabernacle. From the burning bush in chapter three to the Tabernacle being filled with his glory in chapter 40, God is on mission to make himself known to Israel, and through them restore his blessing to all the nations of the earth.

Key Themes

God's Sovereignty: Evil for Good

This theme gets carried over from the book of Genesis. Its presence can be felt through the whole corpus of Scripture, but particular books turn up the volume of this theme more than others. In chapter one we see that, like in the story of Joseph from Genesis, the more Egypt does evil the more God responds by doing good. Pharaoh attempts three plans to oppress and destroy Israel (harsh labor, slavery, genocide, etc.), but all are thwarted by God and used to bring about good. Even under great oppression, the Hebrews prospered. Pharaoh's final attempt actually later becomes the means of his downfall. By throwing all of the male babies into the waters of the Nile, God provides a savior in Moses for his people, raised in Pharaoh's own home (2:23-25; 3:5-10; 6:1-8). No matter how grave human sin and evil becomes, it cannot and will not thwart the redemptive purposes of Yahweh.

Covenant

Jacob's family of 70 from the end of Genesis has grown as we are told, "Israel was fruitful and multiplied and filled the land" (Exod. 1:7). This is the same language and blessing given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1, again to Noah in Genesis eight and nine, and to Abraham in Genesis seventeen. God's covenant blessing is taking place. Despite humanity's shortcomings, God is faithful to his promises. Even under great oppression (Exod. 1:8-2:25) God's people prosper. They are not shown to be spared from trials and evil being done to them because they are his covenant people, however because they are his, they come to know that he remembers his covenant promises, he hears, sees, and he knows their situation (Exod. 2:23-25; 3:7-10).

The first eighteen chapters show how God proves himself to be faithful to his promises made to Abraham. In Exodus, we learn many things about who Israel's God is. Particularly highlighted is the fact that what God says he also does. Yahweh's speaking is his acting, his words come to fruition. He is always consistent. He rescues his people from slavery and oppression so that they may know that he is who he says he is. In the incident of the Golden Calf (ch.32-34), God gets cheated on, but in his anger remembers his covenant promises, and establishes his covenant with Israel. Yahweh continually shows that he is a God who signs up for heartache and pain, to be true to his word.

Chapters 19-24 record God's covenant with Israel. It did not abrogate God's covenant with Abraham, but rather added further nuances. The primary focus of the covenant was the construction of a nation through whom the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant could be facilitated (see Gen. 12:1-3 and Exod.19:1-6). It has a lot to say about morality and relationships. However, it is vitally important to remember that Israel was already Yahweh's people and he was already their God. Israel's redemption was because of God's love, mercy, and grace, not because of anything they had done. God chose them because he loved them, and he loved them because he loved them, so he chose them (Deut. 7:8). God had redeemed and rescued his people before the covenant at Sinai. Israel, as God's chosen people, were always elected by grace, not performance or obedience (though obedience is expected, commanded actually as the appropriate response to the grace that is received). The laws and stipulations were given to help God's people keep from sin, and to honor his name. It was given to help a sinful humanity relate to a holy God. This was so they could be a witness to the other nations. A country's legal system reflects its culture. This was Israel's constitution. The law shows us how to mirror God's perfections. That is the culture God wanted to create, a people that would mirror his image, like Adam and Eve were supposed to (Ps. 8:5; Gen 1:26).

Hard Heart/The 10 Plagues

This is an important theme that runs through much of the first movement of the book of Exodus. Pharaoh is shown to be yet another character who has given in to the snake, and like Adam and Eve has chosen to define what is good and evil for himself (which includes mass genocide and brutal treatment of people not like him, who pose a threat to his way of life). When confronted by Moses, Pharaoh replies, "Who is Yahweh, I don't know this god" (Exod. 5:2) The plagues recorded in chapters four through eleven are designed so that Pharaoh will know who God is. The phrase "that they/Egyptians/Pharaoh may know that I am Yahweh" gets repeated a couple dozen times in this section (Mackie, Lecture). The ten plagues are ten acts of divine justice that God sends upon Egypt. Each one begins with an opportunity for Pharaoh to repent, humble himself, and let the Israelites go.

Now, what is happening with Pharaoh's hard heart? Is God hardening Pharaoh's heart or is Pharaoh hardening his own heart? The text answers the question, "Yes!" Both are taking place here. In Moses' commissioning to go back to Egypt, God says he "knows" Pharaoh will resist (3:19-20), and that he will harden Pharaoh's heart (4:21 and 7:3) {Mackie, 2}. However, if we read the sequence of events as they appear in the text carefully we discover that through the first five plagues that Pharaoh's heart was hard, or that he hardened his own heart. It is not until the sixth plague that Yahweh is said to have hardened his heart (Exod. 9:12). After the 6th plague, God takes control and all instances (minus the seventh plague) are about God hardening Pharaoh's heart (Mackie, 2). God hardens what is already hard. Pharaoh had many chances to repent, but he does eventually reach a point of no return, and God seals Pharaoh in his state of hardness. As we see in chapter fourteen, Pharaoh's evil brings about his own destruction as the waters crash upon him and his army at the Red Sea, killing them.

What we learn is that God is merciful and patient, but his patience is not everlasting. He will extract justice and make things right. Additionally, people don't always get their entire lives on earth to yield to God's will and his ways. One's own evil can reach a point of no return.

Knowing God and the Presence of God

As mentioned above, this is really the purpose of the book of Exodus, to reveal more explicitly who the God of Israel is. Egypt is to learn who God is by experiencing the plagues (Exod. 7:5), Israel is to know who God is by his redeeming and saving them from bondage and slavery (Exod. 6:6-8), and the nations are to know God through the Israelites who are called to be a kingdom of priests (Exod.19:6). From Moses' experience with God in the Burning Bush (3:1-4:7, particularly revealing of his name), to the glory of Yahweh filling the Tabernacle (40:34-38) Exodus is concerned with people knowing who God is and experiencing him. Yahweh desires to be with his people, to merge his space with theirs. However, he is holy, pure, just, and righteous. Humans are sinful, impure, corrupt, and evil, therefore that cannot just waltz into God's presence. In Exodus, God begins to reveal to his people, how they can and are to relate to and with him, so that he may dwell with them and bless them. The design and imagery of the tabernacle is meant to portray the garden of Eden, where God dwelt with humanity in unencumbered intimacy (Exod. 25-31; Gen. 2:8-14). The entire priesthood was set up so that God's people could have mediators between themselves and God, being able to have counsel with him. Yahweh is a God who desires to dwell with his people and to bless them, that they may bring and share his blessing with all the other nations.

Passover/Eschatology

The Passover (chs. 12-13) is a symbolic reenactment of the tenth plague brought upon Egypt (the killing of the first born). Part of God's response to evil is retribution, that oppressors suffer the consequence of their evil in equal measure. Just as Pharaoh destroyed the first-born sons of Israel, God is going to do the same to Egypt, but God provides something that Pharaoh never provided, a shield, a way out of this divine judgment and justice (Mackie, Lecture). Passover is this shielding. Blood is a sign, a way of escape, anyone can do the Passover sacrifice in place of the first-born. The blood of the lamb is not for atonement for sin, but it is a substitute and the seed bed to be developed further as the biblical narrative progresses. By smearing the blood on the door frame and the door post, the people are symbolically dedicating themselves to God, marking themselves off, and trusting him at his word to spare them. It is also here that Israel receives her first laws from God. Passover memorializes the

whole Exodus event and shapes the Hebrew calendar from here forward. It is also here that Israel receives here first laws from God.

The way the narrative is written, the Exodus event is spoken of as a past historic event, but also looks forward to a future act of redemption (seen most clearly in the Song of Moses in chapter 15). The real historical Exodus event is also a paradigm for future exodus events, for future acts of redemption that are to take place. Our very concept of redemption and salvation have their origins here (Exod. 6:6-8; ch. 14; 15:13). The prophets use Exodus language to refer to Yahweh's future triumph over sin and evil, as do the apostles (Isa. 11; Rom. 6 and 8; Rev. 15).

Other Themes to Look For: ***Redemption, Salvation, Obedience, Compassion, Justice, Holiness***

Implications for Today

If the only thing one took with them after reading the book of Exodus was, "Man, God really wanted people to know who he was!", that would be a win, for this is its purpose. There is a God who, as Genesis tells, has created this world, and is Sovereignly working to move history toward a goal and to accomplish his purposes. As we come to Exodus, we can no longer be mistaken by thinking that God is a cosmic creator who brought everything into being, but has stepped back and no longer gets involved unless he absolutely has to. No, Yahweh though transcendent, desires to dwell with his people, and have an intimate relationship with them. After reading this narrative we too should respond like the Israelites did, "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? . . . You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode." (Exod. 15:11 and 13). However, often we respond to God's character, his will, and his commands with hostility with "grumbling" (the other response the people of Israel have to Yahweh in chapters 13-18). What we find in this narrative are more sad portraits that mirror our own inconsistencies, finiteness, and sin, despite all that God has done for us and who he is.

How amazing it is, as Exodus shows, that God does not give up on his children. He signs up for continual heartbreak in being faithful to his covenant even when we are not. Even further, to fulfill our end of the deal for us on our behalf through his Son Jesus, the greater than Moses, the great high priest, the fulfillment of the Law, and the ultimate Passover Lamb. All of this done so that we may know him, that we may be brought back into relationship with our creator and worship only Yahweh as our God.

No matter the circumstance we find ourselves in we can know that we serve a God who hears, listens, and understands what we are going through. Further, he has not only the power to do something about it, but the desire to exercise both compassion and justice perfectly and in all righteousness. We must as the people of God, as the church, and his image bearers, when facing trials and temptations remember who he is and what he has done, as proof of his love for us, not the current and momentary predicaments we find ourselves in.

Exodus teaches us what it is like to meet the creator God of the universe and how we are to respond to his redeeming us from sin and bondage. It is here that humanity on a large scale is invited into a new way of life, empowered by the presence of Yahweh dwelling with his people.

Study Questions

1. In light of God's promise to Abraham, why is Israel's slavery such an issue? What is at stake if God doesn't rescue them?
2. What does Pharaoh's "hard" heart teach us about human freedom and God's will? How does God display his patience with Pharaoh in Exodus?
3. Explain the Passover meal/event to someone next to you. What is the significance of the lamb and the blood on the doorpost? How does Jesus play into this theme?
4. How are the themes of the Abrahamic (Gen. 12:1-3) and the Mosaic (Exod. 19:1-6) covenants similar to each other? What difference to you notice?
5. What led the Israelites to commit idolatry in the Golden Calf incident?
6. In Moses' intercession, what two reasons does he offer as to why God should not destroy his people again?
7. What character traits and attributes of God are reflected in the laws we are given in the book of Exodus?
8. In what ways does the book of Exodus display the balance between God's justice and his mercy? How does this effect how we discipline our children, or show grace to a coworker?
9. After the first fifteen chapters of Exodus, the Israelites grumbling in the wilderness in chapter sixteen seems ridiculous. Why is this? How do we grumble against God? What is something you need to repent of for grumbling about?
10. After reading about God's desire for us to operate in righteousness and justice in all of our relationships and all facets of our interactions with others, what are some habits we can form to help us walk in obedience to this call?
11. What write down one thing you can do this week to show compassion and mercy to a friend, and to an "enemy".
12. Why should God's holiness inspire us to be holy?

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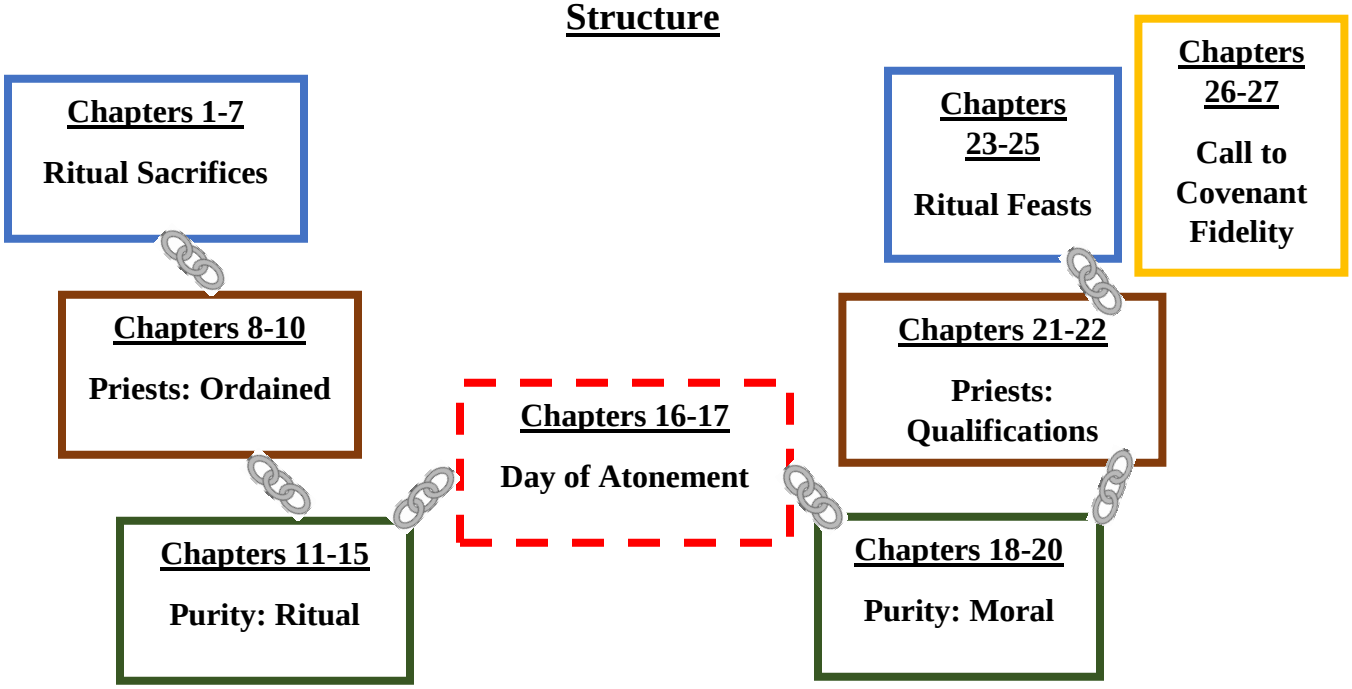
The Book of Leviticus

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Leviticus is concerned with showing how sinful humanity can live with and have a relationship with a holy God, and carry out the proper responses to receiving the gifts of his mercy and grace as his treasured possession.

Main Idea Explained

The book of Leviticus begins with God's people at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and points out the problem the Israelites were left with at the end of the book of Exodus (40:34-38). God's glory has come down from the mountaintop and has filled the tabernacle. God's presence has taken up residence with his people! This is awesome and good, but there's a problem. Moses can't enter the tent (Exod.40:35). God's glory is pure goodness and beauty, but it's also dangerous, so God must make a way for sinful humanity to be able to be in his presence. Leviticus 1:1 reads, "And God called to Moses ***from*** the tent", and the first verse of the next book of the Bible, Numbers, reads, "And the Lord spoke to Moses ***in*** the tent". Therefore, the Book of Leviticus is the answer to the question posed in the final verses of the book of Exodus, providing a way for God's people to dwell near him despite their sin (Mackie, 1).

Each section in the book contributes in some way to solving the problem mentioned above. The first section is about ritual sacrifices (chs. 1-7), and is linked with similar themes with its symmetrical partner (chs.23-25). The sacrificial system was an elaborate arrangement of symbols through which Israel expressed their worship and allegiance to Yahweh. It also served to show God's purposes in covering for humanity's sins, and his covenant faithfulness to be true to his promises. There are five sacrifices described in this section: two ways of saying thank you to God (the grain and fellowship

offering {Lev. 2-3}) and three ways of saying forgive me (the whole burnt offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering {Lev. 1,4-5}) [Mackie, 1]. The sacrifices were not the means by which Israel achieved a relationship with God, they were already his people, rather it was the appropriate and good response to the grace they had received. It was how they were to enter into God's invitation to them to come live in his presence.

The next section (chs.8-10) and its partner (chs. 21-22) are all about Priests, and record how priests become ordained, and the qualifications for those in the priesthood. Much of the book of Leviticus is really a tech-manual for priests on how to operate this elaborate system. The priests were the ones who now took Moses' role as mediator to the next level, and were responsible for carrying out the ceremonies and rituals prescribed. What we learn from their duties and obligations is that one cannot just waltz into God's presence or respond to his grace in any way they jolly-well-please. Everything must be done with intention, precision, and the utmost care.

The next section (chs. 11-15) and its companion (chs. 18-20) are all about ritual and moral purity. These chapters alone are talking about the day-to-day life of the average Israelite. The rest of Leviticus is almost entirely dealing with things regarding what priests do. The ritual and moral purity laws were designed to give Israel tangible ways in which they could be holy like Yahweh was holy. Understanding God's holiness was to transform all areas of their lives. In doing what was written in these holiness codes, Israel would set herself apart as unique among the nations, and so reflect Yahweh's nature and character.

Literarily framed in the middle of the book is the Day of Atonement (chs.16-17). It is performed for all of Israel once a year. On the Day of Atonement, one goat is sacrificed as a "purification" offering, and the other (the scape goat) has the sins of Israel symbolically placed on it, and is loosed into the wilderness (Mackie, 2). The animals act as substitutes for sinners, who are offered on their behalf, and it is the blood that covers (makes atonement) for sin (Lev. 17:10-11). Human sin brings death into he world, but God has provided a way to rid humanity of their evil and vandalism of his creation, without destroying them in the process.

The final chapters (26-27) record the Lord's words spoken through the prophet Moses to the people of Israel regarding their keeping the commands and statues laid out in this book. It is Moses' motivational speech to spur on his fellow countryman to stay faithful to the covenant. If they do, they will be greatly blessed, but if they don't, they will be cursed. We are told that when failure ensues, repentance and restoration are possible, but restoration requires repentance in order for the covenant blessings to be reestablished. Each generation must decide what they will choose: to live according to God's ways and be blessed, or choose to define good and evil for themselves (Gen.3/the fall) and bring curses down upon themselves.

Purpose of the Book

Leviticus is dedicated to this paradox: How can people who are morally bankrupt live in nearness to the one who breathed into existence all goodness, beauty, and life? The book of Leviticus is about how to get people inside the tent. How can sinful humanity live in the presence of a holy God? The purpose of Leviticus is to answer this question. Each section (which can be seen in the graphic above), contributes to answering different aspects of this central concern of the book. Perhaps of all the books thus far in the biblical narrative, the purpose and main idea of the book have the most

overlap. Leviticus 1:1 reads, "And God called to Moses ***from*** the tent" and the first verse of the next book of the Bible, Numbers, reads, "And the Lord spoke to Moses ***in*** the tent". Therefore, the Book of Leviticus explains how Israel got from point "a" (outside the tent, unable to approach God's glory) to point "b" (being able to live in nearness to Yahweh's holiness). Yahweh provides, in Leviticus, a way for God's people to dwell near him despite their sin (Mackie, 1).

Key Themes

Covenant

God promised to Abraham three things: a people (Israel and one day the nations), his presence (a covenant relationship), and a place (land). Particularly highlighted in Leviticus is the covenant relationship. How can Golden Calf worshippers live in the presence of a holy and pure God? Yahweh proves his covenant faithfulness by making a means for his people to relate and enjoy intimacy with him. In the book of Exodus, Israel receives her first laws, and it's where we receive the Mosaic Covenant. Leviticus, however, is more concerned with how one can stay in that convent relationship, even when they fail to uphold the law, or become unclean. God wants to be with his people, but there are certain things that must take place to make sure that happens in the right way. Leviticus is about how to maintain the covenant relationship.

Israel was redeemed by God's grace in the Exodus, and now they are forgiven, and held fast in the covenant relationship by that same grace. This does not abrogate them of any responsibility. Israel is to be holy as their God is holy (Lev. 11:44) and the covenant blessings depend upon their faithfulness to Yahweh (Lev. 26-27). Unfortunately, these final chapters of Leviticus set up the basic arc of the rest of the entire Old Testament narrative storyline, "Israel will enter the land (Joshua-Samuel) and become corrupt, resulting in exile (Kings). However, God will not abandon his promises to Abraham, which opens up the main themes of hope in the books of the prophets (Isaiah-Malachi)" (Mackie, 4). The covenants are the heartbeat of the Scriptures.

Holiness/Purity/Cleanness

Holiness, purity, cleanliness, and their anonyms are a core theme driving this book. Yahweh wants his people to be like him, to be holy (Lev. 11:44), but humans are shackled by their depravity. In order to be in his presence, one must be in a state of holiness, a state that mirrors and reflects the creator's goodness and beauty. In chapters 11-15 Israel is called to honor God's holiness by observing the cultural system God creates, laden with symbolism, that will set Israel apart from the nations. This system falls under two categories: ritual purity (chs. 11-15) and moral purity (chs. 18-20).

Ritual purity is concerned with separating the clean from the unclean, the pure from the impure, which are symbols for life and death (Mackie, 2). Leviticus 10:10 reads, "You must distinguish between the holy and the profane, between the impure and the pure." When reading through this section it can look like everything makes one impure, however, there are only five things that actually make a person ritually impure: certain animals (Lev 11), dead bodies (Lev 11), childbirth (Lev 12), mold and skin diseases (Lev 13-14), and genital discharges of males and female {when fluids escape they don't produce life} (Lev 15) {Mackie, 3}. Coming in contact with these made one impure because in Israelite culture they were associated with death and decay, which is contrary to what Yahweh represents which is life. It is important at this point to notice that being ritually impure is never called a sin, it's just the normal stuff of life. What is wrong is waltzing into the temple in an

impure state. Impurity is a temporary state, that ended after purity rituals of waiting, washing, and offering sacrifices (Mackie, 3).

Secondly, Israel was called to be ***morally pure***. Israel was called to be different, not to live like other cultures, but to observe Yahweh's ideals for forming a distinct society. His holiness was to transform all areas of life, and mark them as distinct among other cultures for his purposes (a kingdom of priests and a holy nation {Exod. 19:6}). That is why it covered all areas of life such as food (Lev. 11), health (Lev. 13-15), sex (Lev. 18), business/commerce (Lev. 19:19) agriculture/farming (Lev. 19:9-10), community relationships (Lev. 19:11-13), social justice (Lev. 19:15, 35-37), and time/calendar for doing life (Lev. 23, 25) {Mackie, 3}.

If one wants to live in close proximity to God, they needs to be pure. All of the things here are ways for the Israelites to mark themselves out as a kingdom of priests, ways of living their lives that help them mediate God's blessing to the nations, calling them to himself and to be like him.

Atonement/Sacrifices

Animals, sacrifices, and blood all have deep symbolic and theological imagery. The Hebrew word for "atonement" is תְּכַפֵּר (*kipper*) meaning "to cover" (BDB). When atonement is made, it covers over, it erases the wrong that has been done. There are many sacrifices that are done for specific things, that are said to make atonement for one's sins. In the Day of Atonement (chs. 16-17), we learn more explicitly what is meant by the word "atonement" which is used frequently throughout Leviticus (especially in chapters one through seven). On the Day of Atonement, one goat is sacrificed as a "purification" offering, and the other (the scape goat) has the sins of Israel symbolically placed on it, and is loosed into the wilderness as a symbol of forgiveness (Mackie, 2). The animals act as substitutes for sinners, who are offered on their behalf, and it is the blood that covers (makes atonement) for sin (Lev. 17:10-12). Human sin brings death into the world, but God has provided a way to rid humanity of their evil and vandalism of his creation, without destroying them in the process.

Sacrifices were not the means by which Israel achieved a relationship with God, they were already his people, rather it was the appropriate and good response to the grace they had received. It was how they were to enter into God's invitation to them to come live in his presence. The ultimate cost of human sin and evil is death. When one does a sacrifice, it shows them that there is real cost, and it's life itself. God has made it clear though, he doesn't want to destroy us; he wants to be with his people. However, Israel can choose to cover for themselves and suffer the consequence. Or, they can enter into his grace, by choosing to use these symbols (that form the sacrificial system) and in so doing feel deeply the gravity of their sin, but also enter into and accept his offer of forgiveness. The basis of relationship with God is and always has been his covenant grace and mercy (Gen. 15 only God walks through the animals remember!?). Sacrifice is how one responds to God's grace, not how they elicit its merit.

Implications for Today

I think typically Leviticus is one of the most dreaded books of the Bible for most people to read. In my experience, this is generally where most fall off of their "Read the Bible in a Year" plans. Questions arise like, "What do ancient rituals and ceremonies have to do with me today? What is going on here? This seems so barbaric and strange? What's the point?" These are legitimate questions and much of what takes place in the book of Leviticus does seem strange to the 21st century mind.

However, Jesus said all of Scripture pointed to him (Lk. 24), and the apostle Paul taught (mind you after the death and resurrection of Jesus) that the nature and purpose of the Old Testament was for giving wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in the messiah, Jesus, and equipping one for living a life of righteousness (2 Tim. 3:14-17). Therefore, the Bible itself says that Leviticus speaks to us as Christians in a profound way to this day.

One cannot understand the full significance of the death of Jesus without the book of Leviticus, particularly in the atonement. Jesus' death as the ultimate atoning sacrifice (1 Pet. 3:18; Heb. 10:12), was what all previous sacrifices were pointing toward. Jesus' death was substitutionary (Isa. 53:5-6; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 21), like the animal sacrifices were in Leviticus. Christ suffered the penalty of sin that humanity should have undergone, and in taking man's place, died on the cross as a sacrifice (Heb. 7; 9; 10:10, 12; John 1:29; 36) for the sins of the world. Thus, he fulfilled the demands of God's righteousness and His desire to show mercy, through the redemption and reconciliation of an alienated and fallen humanity unto himself (Rom. 3:23-25, 6:6, 8:3; Eph. 2:16; 1 Pet. 2:24). The shed blood of Christ fully cleansed believers from the effects of sin, and satisfied, took away, and appeased God's just wrath (Rom. 1:18; 3:25, 5:10-11; Rev. 1:5; Col. 1:20-22).

This should show us God's love. Leviticus should show us God's love for us in providing a way for us to be with him despite our sin. We serve a God who doesn't just demand things from us like an angry tyrant, but who literally bled for us. He became the sacrifice which he himself demanded, dying on our behalf. That is why the apostle John in 1 John 4:10-11 (a man who was Jewish and participated in the cult activities) could describe sacrifices not as barbaric or cruel or done out of God's anger, but as a deep expression of God's love, in providing a way to deal with human sin.

Israel is called in Leviticus to be holy, and different from the broken and sinful cultural practices that that surround them, by what they do and how they live their lives. Just as in the Mosaic Covenant established on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19:5-6) where holiness served to mark Israel as unique and distinct, set apart for God's mission; the New Testament speaks of holiness working to the same end in New Covenant believers (1 Peter 1:13-16, 2:9) {Mackie, 3}. In one of the passages just noted, Peter quotes Leviticus 11:44, essentially saying, "Hey, this is how we are to be today too, holy like Yahweh is holy."

The book of Leviticus should challenge us a individuals and a community to live lives worthy of the gospel, seeking to pursue holiness, put sin to death in our lives, and enter into the grace that is offered us by God the father through the sacrifice of his son Jesus.

Study Questions

1. Read Exodus 40:33-35, Leviticus 1:1, and Numbers 1:1. How does Moses' inability to enter the tent demonstrate the problem between God and Israel?
2. How do the first sentences of Leviticus and Numbers give us clues about the purpose of the book of Leviticus?
3. There are five sacrifices described with different purposes and meanings. Into two categories can they be broken down?
4. Is being in an impure state sinful? Explain.
5. Sexual purity and social justice are given significantly more space in the moral purity section of Leviticus (chs. 18-20). Why do you think this is?

6. Explain the meaning and significance of the atonement. How does it relate to Jesus?
7. Imagine having to go through an "atoning" sacrificial ritual. Your hands are on the animal and you can feel it breathing, you can feel its heart beating vibrating your hand, but in a few short moments, just a few seconds you feel nothing, but see the blood, the life coming out of the animal. How does that make you feel the gravity of your sin? What about the grace God has extended to you in providing a substitute?
8. Are there any rituals (spiritual disciplines, activities, set apart times) that you have developed in your life to make sure you are in orbit around God, and to remind you of your identity in him? Why or why not?
9. How does the atonement highlight God's justice and mercy?
10. As a New Covenant believer how is one, holy like God is holy?
11. How does knowing that your "sacrifices" to God are a response to his grace already shown to you, motivate you to greater holiness and moral purity?
12. What are some things you can begin to start doing to orient the structure of your life to revolve more around God? What is something you can give up, in order to make this happen?

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The Book of Numbers

Structure

Chapters 1-10a	Chapters 10b-12	Chapters 13-19	Chapters 20-21	Chapters 22-36
In the Wilderness of Mt. Sinai: Preparing to Travel to the Promised Land	**Travel to Paran**	**In the Wilderness of Paran:** Rebellion in the Desert	**Travel to Moab**	**In the Wilderness of Moab:** The Next Generation Prepares for the Promised Land

Main Idea: In the book of Numbers we learn that Mt. Sinai has not transformed Israel's heart; she is hardly better off than she was before, however, their rebellion and sin is met by God's judgment, mercy, and covenant faithfulness.

Main Idea Explained

From Exodus 19-Numbers 10a Israel is camped out at the foot of Mt. Sinai after being rescued from oppression and slavery in Egypt. This is where God made a covenant with Israel as a nation, where they received the Ten Commandments and other laws, and it's where the Tabernacle was built. Israel has spent about a full calendar year at Mt. Sinai, and it's time to move toward the land God had promised to Abraham. That's where the book of Numbers steps on to the scene.

The book of Numbers develops and expands on the main themes and laws particularly from Exodus and Leviticus. Reading through the first ten chapters (the first major section of the book) makes one feel like they are still in the purity codes. This is due to the fact that Israel is about to embark on an epic road trip with Yahweh to the Promised Land, so they need to know how to organize themselves, the rules, and responsibilities for the journey. The first ten chapters are mostly about the census that was taken before they left Mt. Sinai, and travel preparations. The Israelites will be led by God's presence, a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night (Num. 9). When Yahweh stops, they stop. When he moves, they move. Everything is going pretty well, but soon becomes a feeling of the past just a few days into the journey.

Chapters 10b-21 record seven rebellion stories with chapters 10b-12 and 20-21 (the travel narratives), surrounding the bigger block of the third big movement of Israel in the wilderness of Paran. These seven narratives develop their literary partners from Exodus 15b-18, but on a larger scale. The volume is turned up as we tune into the rebellion station. The people persistently grumble and rebel in the wilderness, making the reader ask, "Haven't I read this before, about them complaining about food and water in the wilderness, and God providing for them?" Yes! However, in the book of Numbers, when presented with the same circumstances, they reject God's provision, his leaders, and the Exodus itself. The very thing Yahweh did to rescue his people, they now reject.

Israel refuses to enter the land in chapters 13-14, and instead tries to appoint a new leader and go back to Egypt! In chapter 14:26-34 God gives them what they want, he honors their choice, and he allows them to not go into the promised land, but now this generation will wander in the wilderness for 40 years and all die off. Only their children, Joshua, and Caleb will get to see the Promised Land. But it's not just Israel who rebels, but Moses does too, disqualifying himself from entering the Promised Land (Num. 20). Throughout their rebellion, God both disciplines his children and shows them mercy.

In chapters 22-36 his mercy, covenant faithfulness, and protection despite Israel's rebellious heart, is shown beautifully in the account of the events that conspired between Balak and Balaam (22-25). Balak the king of Moab hires Balaam, a pagan sorcerer, to curse Israel, but three times his efforts turn into blessing instead, in an amazing story with echoes for God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12), and the promise of a future deliverer (Gen. 3 and 49). Despite Israel's rebellion Yahweh is protecting and blessing them. The final ten chapters records the preparation of next generation of Israelites to enter the Promised Land, in which a new census is taken, Israel is shown to be victorious over her enemies, and the tribes begin to make settlements.

Purpose of the Book

The book of Numbers is a showdown of sorts between Israel's rebellion (even coming from Moses now!) and Yahweh's faithfulness to his covenant promises. The purpose of the book of Numbers (to borrow language from the New Testament and the Apostle Paul), is to show the "goodness and severity of God" (Rom. 11:22). Numbers does display, vividly, Yahweh's mercy and faithfulness despite Israel's rebellion, but it does not come at the expense of his justice and holiness. The choices Israel makes have real and significant consequences.

Key Themes

Rebellion and Apostasy

Chapters 10b-21 record seven rebellion stories. These seven narratives develop their literary partners from Exodus 15b-18, but on a larger scale. The volume is turned up on this theme in these chapters. The people persistently grumble and rebel in the wilderness, rejecting God's provision, his leaders, and the Exodus itself. Israel refuses to enter the land in chapters 13-14, and instead tries to appoint a new leader and go back to Egypt! The people's rebellion is linked to their lack of faith and unbelief (Num. 14:11, 20:12).

No matter what God does, the people keep saying they wish they had died in slavery in Egypt (Nub. 14,21). The most heartbreaking moment of this narrative is the apostasy of Israel in chapters 14-15 which displays the condition of her heart through most of the narrative. Israel knew who God was, they had seen him perform many signs and wonders in Egypt as well as provide food and water in their wilderness journeys. Further, his very presence came and dwelt in their midst (his glory in the tabernacle, the pillar of cloud and fire etc.). Yet, despite all of these things Israel rejected him and refused to believe that he wanted good for them, that he was faithful, that he was mighty enough to deliver on his promises (Num. 14). They had seen his glory and experienced his power, yet they chose to walk in unbelief and reject their covenant relationship, suffering the consequences (wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and an entire generation eventually perishing never to enter the land of promise). Even Moses rebels (Num. 20) in another heart-breaking episode. The experience of the first generation is a case study in the blessings and curses laid out in the last chapters of the last book

Leviticus. Each generation must make a choice for themselves. This theme is picked up and retold specifically (from the book of Numbers) in the prophets, the wisdom literature, and by the New Testament authors (Isa. 63; Ezek. 20; Jer.; Psa. 78,95,106; 1 Cor. 10; Heb. 3-4) {Mackie, 3}.

Covenant Faithfulness

This theme is first recognizable in the first section of the book, when we learn how Israel is preparing to depart from Mt. Sinai. In keeping his covenant promises with Abraham, God made a people in the book of Exodus, established his presence (the blessing of a covenant relationship with his people) in Leviticus, and now the "land" promise comes into focus. The Israelites will be led on this journey to the promised land by nothing less than God's very presence, a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night (Num. 9). However, things turn south (see *Rebellion and Apostacy* section above). Despite God's provision (Nub.11 and 20 {food and water}) for them in the wilderness, his imminent presence, and their knowledge of his power and faithfulness, they continue to turn away from him in rebellion and sin. They don't trust Yahweh, and their unbelief costs them dearly. At the end of chapter 21 the reader can't help but ask the questions, "How can God put up with such people? What is he going to do about this situation; things just keep getting worse and worse?"

It is at this point that we receive the strange account of Balaam and Balak (Num. 22-25). Usually this story is only mentioned in a children's Sunday-school like fashion because of the appearance of a talking donkey, which is weird, but even more weird is how Balaam talks back like this is a normal occurrence! However, there is much more going on here, and it is deeply profound. The Israelites are now in the wilderness of Moab, and the King of Moab, Balak, is not happy about it, so he pays a pagan, Mediterranean sorcerer to try and place a curse on Israel. The question is, " Even though Israel has been unfaithful, can that thwart God's plan to bring blessing to the nations through Abraham's family?"

Balak king of Moab, bears a striking resemblance to another character in biblical narrative who was afraid of Israel's numbers and power, Pharaoh of Egypt. Balak is a type of Pharaoh, the new Pharaoh on the block. Balak and Pharaoh feared Israel because they were a people "too numerous" (Num. 22:3 = Exod. 1:9) and "more powerful than me" (Num. 22:6 = Exod. 1:9) {Mackie, 3}. The language of these stories is precisely that used by Pharaoh in Exodus , but just like in Exodus, here God uses his evil for good. Balak wants to "curse" Israel, which should make the reader recall Yahweh's warning in Genesis 12:1-3 about those who curse Abraham. Additionally, Balak makes three attempts to curse Israel and fails (Numbers 24:10) just as Pharaoh made three failed attempts to destroy Israel in Exodus 1. Each time Balaam tries to curse Israel, he can only bless them. When it comes to God's promise to Abraham, whether Israel is faithful or unfaithful it doesn't matter, for Yahweh is going to accomplish his purposes to bless the nations, somehow through the sinful people despite what they do and how they treat him. In this narrative, unbeknownst to Israel as they grumble against god in the wilderness, he is up in the hills protecting and blessing them.

From chapter 20-36 this theme can also be seen in God giving Israel victory over her enemies (Edomites: 20:14-21, Arad: 21:1-3, Amorites: 21:21-31, Bashan: 21:32-35, Moab: 22-25, and the Midianites: 31-32) {Mackie, 4)}.

"Seed": A Future Deliverer

The concept of the promised deliverer (Messiah) figure permeates the book of Numbers. The story of the sacrifice of the red heifer anticipates Jesus, the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for our sins (Num. 19). Further, the image of the bronze snake lifted up on the pole to save the Israelites from the deadly snake bites in chapter 21 also prefigures the lifting up of Jesus upon the cross. Whoever responds to his call in faith may be healed of their most fundamental disease (Jn. 3:14).

In the Balaam narratives (Num.22-25), Balak's third and final attempt to curse Israel results in the promise of a future deliverer for Israel, (a parallel to Pharaoh's 3rd attempt in Exod. 1:22-2:10 which results in God raising up Israel's deliverer) {Mackie, 3}. Balaam uses a peculiar phrase in his poem of blessing, "***The seed in the waters***" (Num. 24:7 see Exod. 2 Moses coming up out of the waters and later to be a deliverer). What does this mean? Balaam's poems in Numbers 24:3-9 and 24:15-24 are closely connected to Jacob's blessing given to Judah (Gen. 49 future messiah), and the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12). The "seed in the waters" is an image of the future king that is to come from the line of David (Mackie, lecture).

This is a poem linking us back all the way to Genesis 49 and 12 and Exodus 1-2. How is God going to bring blessing? Through Israel obeying and doing what they are supposed to? No, it sure doesn't seem like it if we're reading the narrative even somewhat closely. It's going to be through the surprise blessing of a king from the line of David who will restore the world to Eden-like conditions. A future deliverer who will restore blessing to the nations.

The Word of the Lord

The word of Yahweh is a prominent theme throughout the book of Numbers. The first ten chapters highlight how everything was done "according to the word of Yahweh" (this phrase appears about ten times in the narrative as a whole). God's word is to direct his people (Num. 1:1; 36:13). God's word is shown to be unchangeable, what he says he also does. This is shown to give Moses confidence and assurance as he leads God's people (Num. 10:29; 14:17-19). In chapter 14 Moses pleas with God to be faithful to his promises (reminiscent of Exod. 32 and 34). In the same chapter, prior to Moses' encounter with God, (14:7-9) Joshua and Caleb trust in the word of the Yahweh that he will deliver the land into their hands when they bring back their scouting report (they quote Exod. 3:8). Their confidence flowed out of their faith in God's word, that he would be true to his word. Further, those who rebelled against the word of God (those who refused to go into the promised land and wanted to go back to Egypt), died. Additionally, Balaam couldn't curse Israel, but only bless them, "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything of my own accord, good or bad, to go beyond the command of the Lord—and I must say only what the Lord says"' (Num. 24:13). God's word is sure, true, powerful, inspiring, good, and also dangerous. It is to be believed and it is to be obeyed.

Other Themes: The Presence of God, Priesthood, the Law, Obedience/Disobedience, Blessing/Curse

Implications for Today

I would imagine that many of us skip sections in the Bible where the authors start numbering off names, and what seems like countless generations, but this would be a mistake. If we recall the pattern/theme in the book of Genesis, of listing the "generations" we see how this is to remind us of

God's promise to Abraham to make him into a great nation. The book of Numbers highlights this theme, but turns up the volume even more so on the land promise. Therefore, I think the more original title for the book is more fitting, "*In the Wilderness*" (Mackie, 1). Not only as a title, but what takes place in the narratives.

Numbers bridges the gap between the giving of the law (Exodus and Leviticus), and Moses farewell speech before the second generation enters the Promised Land. The experience of the first generation is a case study in the blessings and curses laid out in the last chapters of the last book Leviticus. Each generation must make a choice for themselves just like we must do today. In Numbers it can seem like rebellion and mercy are going tit for tat as the narrative develops. However, Yahweh's mercy is displayed in amazing and surprising ways, destroying any doubt of God's love and compassion for his covenant people (Num. 22-25). Despite their sin and rebellion, God is shown to be protecting and blessing them and they are unaware!

The New Testament uses these narratives extensively as warnings about rebelling and rejecting God (also for comparing Aaron and Jesus, Christian pilgrimage, and images for the messiah for a few examples. We are no different than the Israelites were then. God is always consistent and faithful and trustworthy, yet we struggle to believe that our heavenly father actually wants what is best for us. Usually by default we think that we know better than God does what is good for ourselves (just like Adam and Eve and the Israelites, Egyptians, Moabites etc.). Humans are incapable of fixing their condition on their own. Nothing has changed today. We grumble against God because of our job, our kids, our circumstances, our bank account, the death of a loved one, a sickness, you name it. When things don't go how we think they should, we begin to doubt God and his goodness, our view of God affects our interpretation of his word. If we doubt God's character and goodness, how can we hope to apply his comfort and his promises to our life? If you doubt God's goodness, all these commands we find in Scripture are going to fall on your ears like God is trying to take something from you, like he's an angry dictator, when in fact God's words, are actually words of a lover who wants the best for you.

The struggle is in the endurance of faith. God will always be faithful and gracious, but his patience is not everlasting, and he will not pardon at the expense of his holiness and justice either. We need to take this challenge from the book of Numbers seriously. Unbelief is costly, so is belief, but only one leads to eternal life and an intimate relationship with Yahweh. Will we repent and believe? Do we trust God when he says in his word through the apostle John, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jon. 1:9)?

Study Questions

1. Approximately how long were the Israelites camped out at Mt. Sinai? Exodus 19-Numbers 10a are dedicated to what takes place at Mt. Sinai. How does that speak to its significance?
2. What is the first movement of the book dedicated to?
3. What do the people grumble about in the wilderness?
4. What are the two differing reports brought back to Moses from the promised land? Who do the people listen to?
5. How do the rebellion narratives in Numbers 11-21 mirror those of Exodus 15a-18? What are similarities and differences?
6. Eleven days of travel in the wilderness became 40 years as a result of Israel's unbelief. What events led to this horror? How did Israel land herself in such a place?

7. Why can't Moses and Aaron enter the Promised Land?
8. Summarize the story of Balak and Balaam. How does it relate to God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12)? How does it relate to Jacob's blessing upon his son Judah (Gen. 49)?
9. Even in all their sin and rebellion, God still displays his amazing faithfulness and patience. How have you experienced God's faithfulness in your own life? How about in the past week, month, or year?
10. In the book of Numbers, the people's rebellion is linked to their lack of faith/unbelief. Are there any areas in your life right now that you need to either repent from your lack of faith/unbelief, or grow in faith/belief? What are you trusting God for/in right now?
11. God is merciful, but the book of Numbers also teaches us that Israel's rebellion provokes judgment and discipline from Yahweh. How do these themes interact and why is this balance important to remember?
12. Think of some ways how you can be an encouragement to someone this week, to spur on their faith, to walk alongside them

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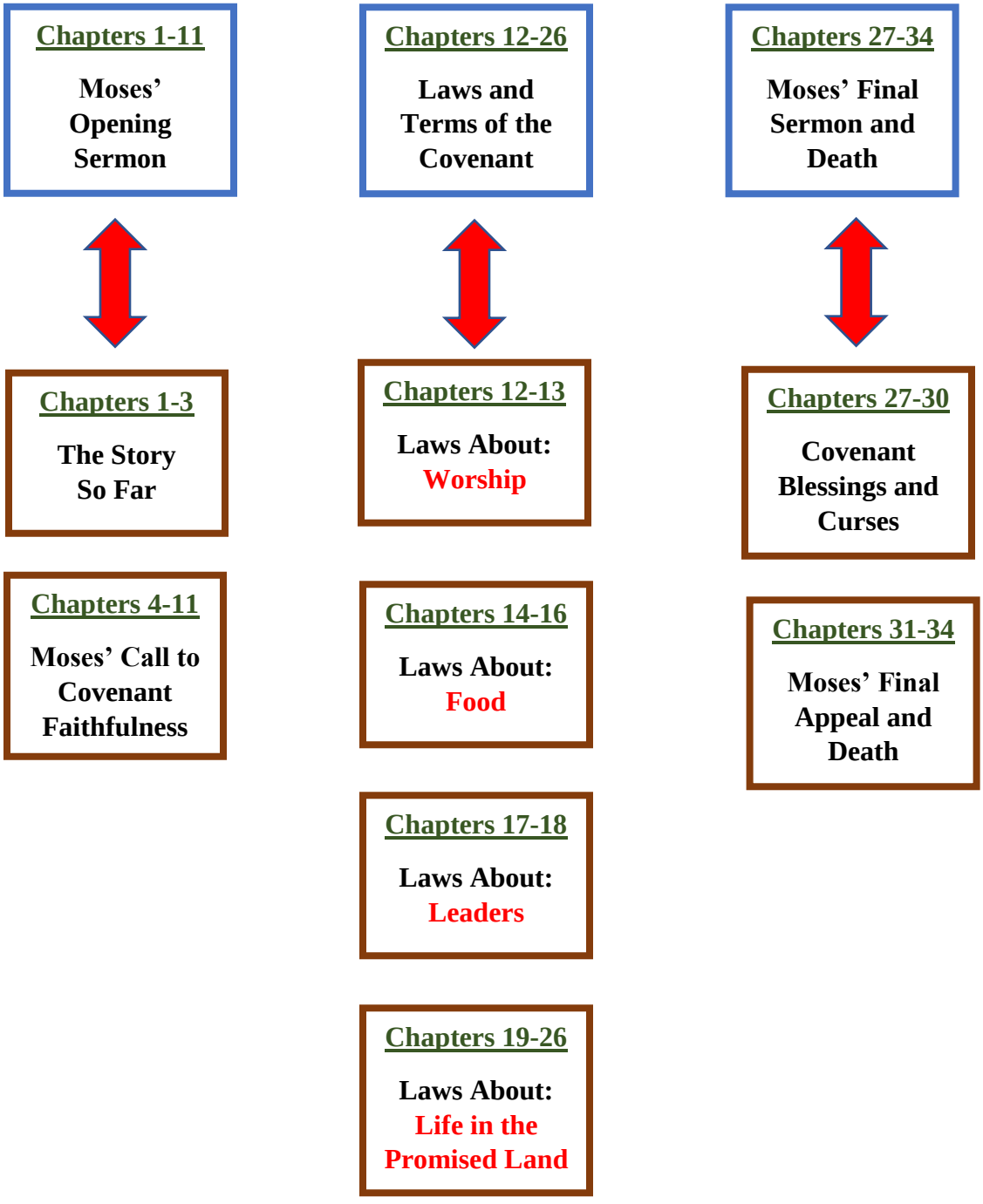
The Book of Deuteronomy

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Deuteronomy is a call to covenant faithfulness, to remember all that Yahweh has done for Israel, and to show future generations how to pursue lives that exude justice and righteousness.

Main Idea Explained

After the Exodus event, Israel entered into a covenant relationship with God at Mt. Sinai (Exodus and Leviticus). From there they set out on an epic road trip that turned into a disaster. It was filled with one rebellion story after another resulting in the exodus generation disqualifying themselves from entering the Promised Land (the book of Numbers). A journey that should have taken roughly two weeks, took 40 years. The book of Deuteronomy carries this narrative forward and is a collection of Moses' final words to the next generation of Israelites right before they enter the Promised Land. In essence, the book is like Moses' locker room speech akin to those coaches give to their teams before they go out on the field. Chapters one through three recount this story for the new generation.

Chapter 1:5 says, "Moses undertook to explain this (the) law". In the first three chapters Moses retells Israel's story so far, and in chapters 4-11 he calls the new generation to covenant faithfulness. Deuteronomy is Moses' passionate exposition on the Torah. In his view, the law represents God's covenant plan to bring blessing to all of the nations. Yahweh desires people who will be faithful covenant partners, those who will listen to him and trust him. In chapter four we learn that Israel's obedience to the laws of the Torah is a part of them being a kingdom of priests to the nations (Mackie, 2). The laws are said to be, "…your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations" (4:6). God wants to shape Israel into a new type of human community, and the laws represent God' s righteousness and wisdom. In obeying them Israel will reflect the character of their God and so fulfill their priestly duty to bring blessing to the nations (Exod. 19:4-6; Gen. 12:1-3).

In chapter six we receive the "Shema" (Deut. 6:4-9), in which Israel is called to worship the "one" God (Yahweh), to "listen" (hear + respond = obey), and to "love" (emotion + decision =devotion) {Mackie, 2}. Israel is to pledge their allegiance, loyalty, and love only to Yahweh and in so doing, will live in wisdom, be blessed, and be a blessing to others. The Shema is a powerful confession and prayer to remind Israel of two things: (1) who God is (2) in light of who God is, how his people ought to respond.

Chapters 12-26, record how to do life in the Promised Land. Moses continues/re-gives and expands on the laws already specified in the narrative so far. Some laws are new, but many are repeated. If Israel truly loves God they'll do life in a new way that looks like what we find here. Chapters 12-13 record laws about worship, chapters 14-16 are commandments about food, chapters 17-18 provide rules for Israel's leaders, and chapters 19-26 give guidelines for life in the Promised Land (marriage, family, business etc.). Underlying all of these sections are the core themes of justice and righteousness. Israel's elaborate cultural symbol system serves to mark them out as different/holy from the other nations (the book Leviticus). Particularly highlighted in chapters 14 and 15 is how Israel was the place to be as a vulnerable person. It was exceedingly better than the other nations around them in their treatment of the immigrant, the orphan, and the widow. God notices the needy, poor, and vulnerable (Israel in Egypt before the Exodus), so Israel is to reflect their experience with God to the nations.

Deuteronomy 27-34 records Moses' final sermon and his death. The book concludes with Moses, "looking into the future to see Israel's failure, restoration, and the culmination of the entire biblical story" (Mackie, 3). Moses pronounces "good" and "blessing" and "life" if Israel will only do the "Shema" (Deut. 28:1-14 and 30:11-20). However, Moses has been with Israel in the dessert for 40 years and he knows their hearts, therefore Moses also predicts Israel's future failure, rebellion, and exile (Deut. 28:58-65 and 29:22-28). Yet, even though Israel will fail and bring the covenant curses upon herself, Moses knows God will be faithful to enable Israel's repentance after the exile through "circumcision of the heart" (Deut.4:30-31, 30:1-10) {Mackie, 3}. The hope Moses offers lays the footing for the hope of the complete transformation and renewal of Israel's heart and mind spoken of in the prophets (Jer. 31:31-34 and Ezek.36:22-27 = New Covenant). The repetition of the key words and their antagonists: "blessing/curse," "good/evil," and "life/death" recall, "the core themes of Genesis 1-12 and shows how the human condition is being replayed in Israel's story in a more intensified way" (Mackie, 3).

The final chapter (ch. 34) closes not only the book itself, but also the entire corpus of the Torah (first five books of the Bible). Moses dies, and his legacy becomes the architype for all future prophets, especially "the" Moses-like prophet that is to come (Deut. 34:10-12).

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of this book is to spur on Yahweh's people to covenant faithfulness. Deuteronomy is a book about loving God, which is to be displayed in fidelity to him and his commandments, and fueled by remembering his grace. The book begins and ends with Moses' passionate sermons (1-11; 27-34) calling Israel to not be like the former generation who rebelled and suffered the consequences (chs. 1-3), but to choose life and blessing (Deut. 28:1-14; 30:11-20). The path to life is paved by obedience and devotions to God (Deut. 6:4-9). An obedient life, lived as a response to God's grace leads to covenant faithfulness, and life lived wisely, resulting in being blessed, and blessing others as one reflects accurately the nature and character of Yahweh.

Key Themes

Covenant Faithfulness

This theme is the challenge of the entire book. The book begins and ends with Moses' passionate sermons (chs.1-11; 27-34), and exposition of the law (chs.12-26) calling Israel to not be like the former generation who rebelled and suffered the consequences of God's just anger and wrath (chs.1-3), but to choose life and blessing (Deut. 28:1-14; 30:11-20). The path to life is paved by obedience and devotion to God (Deut. 6:4-9). In Deuteronomy Yahweh is trying to tell his people through Moses, how they can live life wisely and successfully in the land of promise. He is about to give Israel the land he promised when he covenanted with Abraham (Gen. 12,15,17). Yahweh loves Israel, and calls her to respond by loving him back through obedience to the covenant, fueled by their reembrace of who God is and what he has done for them. If they do the "Shema" it will lead to good and to life (Deut. 28:1-14 and 30:11-20), but if they do not and follow in their parents' footsteps, they will reap the covenant curses (Deut. 28:58-65 and 29:22-28).

The "Shema"

In the Hebrew Bible, שׁמע "Shema" (hear, listen, obey) occurs nearly 50 times in the book of Deuteronomy. In chapter 6:4-9 we receive the "Shema", one of the most important texts in all of Judaism (which became a twice-daily prayer), and very important to Jesus in the New Testament (Mk. 12:28-34). It essentially summarizes how to be faithful to the covenant. The most recognizable lines and the ones holding the central meaning read, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4-5). It is a confession and prayer to remind Israel of two things: (1) who God is (2) in light of who God is, how his people ought to respond.

The word "Hear" (Shema) is also frequently translated "obey". There is no separate word in the Hebrew language for *obey* rather, "the word *shema* is used (see Exodus 19:5: 'if you ***listen*** and keep my covenant…'). The word refers both to 'hearing' and 'responding' to what one hears"' (Mackie, 2).

The second part is a statement about Yahweh's Identity. Yahweh is Israel's God, and he is one. Now reading this in context (see vv.14-16), Moses is not going on a philosophical tangent about Yahweh's essence. Moses is speaking against the polytheism and syncretism of his day (Mackie, Lecture). Yahweh is the one God of Israel. You become what you worship, an Israel is to worship Yahweh alone.

One of the most significant repeated words in Deuteronomy is love ('ahav) which appears nearly 30 times. Yahweh is the one God who ransomed captive Israel from the clutches of Egypt, therefore Israel is to love God in return for the love that has been shown them. The word love is synonymous with devotion, obedience, and loyalty (Deut. 5:10 and 7:9). Israel is to be obedient and devoted to Yahweh with their, "Heart, soul, and strength" (Deut.6:5). This encompasses all that makes up a human being, the very center of their existence, and all facets of life. Later in the Biblical narrative Jesus would reference the Shema as the greatest commandment (along with Lev. 19:18, see Mk. 12:28-34).

Obedience as Mission: Cutting Edge Righteousness and Justice

This is a new theme in the Torah, but it is particularly highlighted in the book of Deuteronomy. In chapters 4-11 Moses calls the new generation to covenant faithfulness. In his view, the law represents God's covenant plan to bring blessing to all of the nations. In chapter four we learn that Israel's obedience to the laws of the Torah is a part of them being a kingdom of priests to the nations (Mackie, 2). The laws are said to be, "…your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations" (4:6). Wisdom is the ability to think and act well. It is applied knowledge. You know cognitively and you respond rightly. It involves knowing and doing. God wants to shape Israel into a new type of human community and the laws represent God' s righteousness and wisdom. In obeying them Israel will reflect the character of their God and so fulfill their priestly duty to bring blessing to the nations (Exod. 19:4-6; Gen. 12:1-3).

If Israel truly loves God they'll do life in a new way that looks like what we find in chapters 12-26 (the major law section of the book). Underlying all of these commands and guidelines are the core themes of justice and righteousness. Righteousness looked like loving God and loving neighbors well (Deut. 6; Lev. 19) and justice looked like taking actions and making laws to ensure that would happen. Israel's elaborate cultural symbol system serves to mark them out as different/holy from the

other nations (the Book of Leviticus). Particularly highlighted in chapters 14 and 15 is how Israel was the place to be as a vulnerable person. It was exceedingly better than the other nations around them in their treatment of the immigrant, the orphan, and the widow. God notices the needy, poor, and vulnerable (Israel in Egypt before the Exodus), so Israel is to reflect their experience with God to the nations.

The "Moses" Type (Mackie,4)

The final chapter (ch. 34) closes not only the book itself, but also the entire corpus of the Torah (first five books of the Bible). Moses dies, and his legacy becomes the architype for all future prophets, especially "the" Moses-like prophet that is to come (Deut. 34:10-12). Moses' story gives us a template, the vocabulary, the themes and ideas for every single story that follows in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings for a future or "new/greater than" Moses figure (Mackie, Lecture). Therefore, every time we come across a character that resembles Moses (his character, his actions, what he says etc.), it is intentional, down to the vocabulary, to connect us back to the final words of Deuteronomy. Moses is a type of the anticipated future king and prophet (Deut. 33:4-5; 34:10-12).

Other Themes: Wisdom, Remembrance, Love, Blessing/Curse

Implications for Today

The way Deuteronomy is written, speaks volumes for its ability to be applied to our lives. All the speeches addressed to "You" in Deuteronomy is speaking of the Children of the Exodus generation (2nd generation), but not just to them. Moses starts talking to a continuous "you" meaning all future generations as well. Therefore, Deuteronomy becomes not just something said to people back then, it becomes the book of the Torah that speaks to all future generations who trust in Yahweh. Every generation is to see themselves as the generation at Mt. Sinai, and every generation is called to covenant faithfulness, and to hope in the future of a coming Messianic king.

In the book of Deuteronomy, we do receive the words of the prophet second only to Jesus Christ, but we receive something else very profound as well. The passionate pleas and desires of a shepherd for his flock. We get a glimpse into the heart of Moses for Israel, the heart of God for his children through Moses his mediator. Deuteronomy is a book about loving God and remembering his grace. God wants a relationship of love and covenant faithfulness, that flows out of his love lavished upon us. The laws are given so that we may know how to live wisely and operate in righteousness and justice accurately reflecting the nature and character of our God.

Social justice was not an abstract ideal in this book; it was taken very seriously as can be seen by the legislation that was put in place to protect the vulnerable in society (see especially Deut. 14-15). Those who have the power to do so are expected to be the ones who effect the change in society that should be taking place, and enforcing the laws already laid out. In Deuteronomy God pleads the case for the needy and weak, and we as the church should be following his lead, entering into the lives of those in need and getting our hands dirty and be willing to have our hearts broken at times for the sake of the spread of the gospel. To love God is to love your neighbor (who is everyone you encounter!), and to love your neighbor is to love God.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was in Mark 12:28-34 he said two things: love God and love your neighbor. For Jesus, the most important command was actually two

most important commands, meaning they are inseparable. We can't do one without the other. We might think we can, but in reality, we aren't worshiping the God of the Bible as he has commanded if we fall prey to this deception. The call of the Torah is bi-directional as it is both toward God and toward others. For Jesus, this is what it means to truly know God and to truly be human. It's interwoven so that in showing love for God by responding to his love, means I do so by loving my neighbor which is showing love for God in return. My love for God is most vividly and beautifully shown in my love and care for others, when its work is done under the umbrella of the grace with which I have received from Yahweh's overflowing fountain of goodness and mercy.

Study Questions

1. To whom is Moses' address aimed in the Book of Deuteronomy?
2. Summarize a few sentences what the meaning and purpose of the book of Deuteronomy is.
3. Chapter 4:1-9 explores Moses' understanding of the purpose of the laws of the covenant. What was his take on the purpose of the laws?
4. Explain the significance of the Shema. What does it teach us about God? What does it call Israel to?
5. How is forgetting linked to sin and rebellion? How is remembering linked to obedience blessing?
6. Give a couple of examples showing how Israel was on the cutting edge of social justice.
7. What implications does the Shema have for us today? Was it important to Jesus?
8. How does knowing God's heart for the vulnerable in society (the orphan, widow, Levite, and the foreigner) shape how you are to think of the "least of these" (Matt. 25:31-46) in our culture and society?
9. How were you convicted, encouraged, or challenged by this book as a parent, teacher, coach, son/daughter etc.? Please share.
10. Why do you think we struggle so much to believe that God's way is the best way to live life and live it wisely? What are some challenges you've had to overcome in your life to believe God and take him at his word?

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The Book of Joshua

Structure

Chapters 1-5	Chapters 6-12	Chapters 13-22	Chapters 23-24
Joshua Leads Israel into the Promised Land	**Battles with the Canaanites**	**Joshua Divides up the Land between the 12 Tribes**	**Joshua's Final Words**

Main Idea: The book of Joshua is primarily concerned about the "land promise", and shows how God was faithful to his covenant promises made to Abraham by bringing Israel into the Promised Land.

Main Idea Explained

In Genesis God chose Abraham, and his family became the people of Israel. They became enslaved in Egypt, but God rescued them through a deliverer named Moses. Then God made a covenant with his people at Mt. Sinai and led them through the wilderness. In Deuteronomy, the book preceding Joshua, Israel is called to covenant faithfulness, to remember all that Yahweh has done for Israel, and to show future generations how to pursue lives that exude justice and righteousness. In so doing this, they will show the other nations what God is like once they enter the land of promise. The book of Joshua begins with Israel poised to go into the Promised Land.

In the first few sentences of the book we are given the entire plotline for the narrative account of the book of Joshua {its possession (chs.1–12), its distribution (chs.13–21), and how to keep it (chs.22–24)}. Chapters one through five portray Joshua as a "new" Moses, the one who will lead Israel into the land of Canaan and guide them in faithfulness to Yahweh (1:1-9; 5:2-12; 8:30-35; 22:1-6). In chapter two Joshua sends spies out to Jericho, and in chapters three and four Joshua leads Israel into the Promised Land when God parts the Jordan river and Israel once again walks across on dry land (Exod.14-15). Once in the land, they celebrate Passover, and the men are circumcised. In chapter five Joshua is met by the commander of Yahweh's army who reshapes Joshua's categories of thinking about what God is doing with Israel. This isn't about Israel versus the Canaanites, this is about, is Israel going to be faithful to Yahweh? The real question is: are you on Yahweh's side, not is he on yours.

God wants to give Israel the land so he can fulfill his promises to Abraham, and so he can reconcile and restore all of the nations and all creation. In chapters 6-12, we receive the accounts of Israel's battles with the Canaanites. In these chapters we see that Yahweh uses Israel to bring judgment on the Canaanites and to drive them from the land (Mackie, 2). However, Joshua shows that the Canaanites who turned to Yahweh were spared from judgment (Rahab and the Gibeonites in chs.2 and 9); and those who attacked Israel were conquered (chs.10-12). This was not a mass genocide (see "Holy War "theme below), because Canaanites could and some did, turn to Yahweh and were spared. In this section we learn that Israel will succeed when they trust in God alone (battle of Jericho ch.6 and treaty with Gibeanites ch.9), but they fail when they break the covenant (Achan and the battle of Ai

(chs.7-8) = the "fall" narrative in the land). God doesn't play favorites (see ch.7). To inherit the land, Israel must be obedient.

Chapters 13-22 read like a description of a map, but with no pictures. It reads similar to the verbal blue prints of the Tabernacle in Exodus 25-31. It may not be super stimulating for the modern-day reader, but it was very important for the Israelites then, for it was the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:6-7).

Chapters 23-24 record Joshua's final words to the Israelites before his death. In these speeches Joshua calls Israel to covenant faithfulness (like Moses at the end of Deuteronomy chs. 29-34) Israel's continued occupation of the land is dependent upon their faithfulness to Yahweh and the Mosaic covenant. Obedience and faithfulness will lead to life and blessing, but unfaithfulness and apostacy will lead to curses, death, and exile from the land. The question as Joshua comes to a close is this: "What are the Israelites going to choose?"

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of the book of Joshua is to show how Yahweh is faithful to his covenant promises (particularly highlighted in Joshua is the land promise to Abraham {Gen. 12}). Despite Israel's continued sin and rebellion, God is true to his word and he will not give up on his people. His nature and character are unchanging. Yahweh will bring about his redemptive purposes for this world and restore his blessing to the nations.

Main Themes

Joshua as a "New" Moses

Throughout the book of Joshua, the character of Joshua is portrayed as a "new" Moses, the one who will lead Israel into the land of Canaan and guide them in faithfulness to Yahweh (1:1-9; 5:2-12; 8:30-35; 22:1-6). Joshua sends spies (Josh. 2) to Jericho like Moses sent spies in Numbers 13-14. In chapters three and four Joshua leads the people of Israel through the Jordan River on dry ground (like Moses at the Red Sea in Exodus 14-15). Following their crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 5), Joshua performs the first Passover in the land of promise (like Moses in Exodus 12-13). Both Joshua and Moses have encounters with the Lord where they are told to, "take off your sandals, for this is holy ground" (Josh. 5:15; Exod. 3:5) and both men renew God's covenant with Israel (Josh. 8:30-35; Exod. 24). Lastly, Joshua's final speeches in chapters 23-24 recall how Moses gave a final speech before his death too (Deut. 29-34) that called Israel to covenant faithfulness and obedience, that Israel would choose life and not reap the curses for infidelity through disobedience. The author is clearly trying to get his reader to recognize the connections here. The historical Moses, is also a "type" that gets filled out by many characters throughout the rest of the Biblical narrative, but never fully. Moses' legacy becomes the architype for all future prophets (clearly seen in Joshua), especially "the" Moses-like prophet that is to come (Deut. 34:10-12).

Covenant Faithfulness (particularly the land promise)

The purpose of the book of Joshua is to show how Yahweh is faithful to his covenant promises; particularly highlighted in Joshua is the land promise. The Book of Joshua is obsessed with the "land" {its possession (chs.1–12), its distribution (chs.13–21), and how to keep it (chs.22–24)} God wants to

give Israel the land so he can fulfill his promises to Abraham and so he can reconcile and restore all of the nations and all of creation (Gen.12,15,17). In chapters 6-12, we receive the accounts of Israel's battles with the Canaanites. Their military successes in the land are chronicled in chapter 12. Chapters 13-22 read like a description of a map, but with no pictures. It reads similar to the verbal blue prints of the Tabernacle in Exodus 25-31. It may not be super stimulating for the modern-day reader, but it was very important for the Israelites then, for it was the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:6-7). If you glean one thing out of these chapters (chs.13-22) let it be this: God is faithful to his promises, he is trustworthy, he does what he says.

Holy War

The volume is turned up on this theme particularly in chapters 6-12 where we receive the accounts of Israel's battles with the Canaanites. In these chapters we see that Yahweh uses Israel to bring judgment on the Canaanites and to drive them from the land (Mackie, 2). It is important to remember that Canaanites were not poor, innocent, and vulnerable people. Their sin, evil, and corruption had been deteriorating for hundreds of years (Gen. 15:16; Lev. 18:1-4 & 24-28). Their imminent eviction from the land was punishment for their sin (Deut. 9:4-6; particularly child sacrifice, Lev 20:1-6) {Mackie, 2}. As Dr. Tim Mackie states, "The defeat and expulsion of the Canaanites is explicitly not framed in terms of political rivalry, but rather in terms of divine justice" (2). The book of Joshua shows that the Canaanites who turned to Yahweh were spared from judgment (Rahab and the Gibeonites in chs.2 and 9); and those who attacked Israel were conquered (chs. 10-12). This was not a mass genocide, because Canaanites could turn to Yahweh and be spared.

Secondly, this type of warfare was only to be carried out by Israel with a handful of Canaanite people groups (including the Midianites in Numbers 32 and the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15) {Mackie, 2). Israel was to seek peace with all other nations as their default strategy (Deut. 20). The three side-by-side stories of the battles of Jericho, Ai, and the treaty with the Gibeonites are intentionally placed together as representative stories from all of the battles recorded in chapter 12 (they are the only ones that receive significant air time).

They teach us a few things: (1) God uses the people of Israel as an instrument of divine justice against corrupt nations (battle of Jericho), after showing immense patience (hundreds of years, remember Gen.15) (2) God plans no favorites as the disobedient among Israel were subject to the same standard of justice (chs.7-8 the Battle of Ai and Achan's sin as well as later in the biblical narrative when God will use the evil nations of Assyria and Babylon to punish Israel) (3) Canaanites who turned to Yahweh were spared from judgment (Rahab and the Gibeonites in Josh 2 and 9).

Thirdly, the annihilation language found in Joshua is actually the intentional use of hyperbole and non-literal language to make a theological point about Yahweh delivering Israel, and her successes in battle. It is like ancient locker-room trash talk, "We wiped the floor with them! We totally destroyed them out there!" One might use this hyperbolic language if say they won a basketball game by 20+ points. Let's look at a couple of examples from text.

Deuteronomy 7:1-6 has this language, "totally destroy", referring to the Canaanites. However, it also proceeds to say not to make treaties with them or to intermarry with them. How are these things even on the radar as a threat from people you've just "totally destroyed"? Dr. Mackie also points this out in the book of Joshua, "In Joshua 10:36-39 or 8:17-22 we're told that Israel left 'no survivors' in

Hebron or Debir or Bethel, but later in Joshua 15:13-15 or Judges 1:22-26 those same towns are still full of Canaanite inhabitants" (2). There are many other examples of this throughout the book of Joshua and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. This isn't Israel v. Canaan. Yahweh doesn't play favorites, rather it's Yahweh against human evil and sin and corrupt societies (whether Canaanite or Israelite).

Key Repeated Words: Crossover, Take, Divide, and Serve

A neat feature in the book of Joshua is that in each of its four major sections, it has a key word that gets repeated: In chapters 1-5 it's "cross-over" (28x), in chapters 6-12 it's "take" (13x), in chapters 13-22 it's "divide" (15x), and in chapters 23-24 it's "serve" (15x) {Mackie, 1}. These key words actually describe the emphasis of each of these major sections of the book: (1) crossing the Jordan river to enter the promised land (2) taking possession of the land (3) dividing the land amongst the 12 tribes (4) the call/warning to serve Yahweh.

Implications for Today

If we learn but one thing from reading the book of Joshua it should be this: God is faithful to his promises. We can trust the God of the Bible, because what he says, he does. His speaking is his acting. He is trustworthy and true. Despite sin and rebellion, he is still working his plan to rescue and to bless, and he works in and through his sinful and corrupt people to accomplish his redemptive purposes. It is truly astounding.

Some might say, "That's great that God was true to his promises made to Abraham, but what about all of the blood shed?" A hot-button issue in our society still to this day is, "How do Jews and Christians make sense of the supposed annihilation or genocide texts?" What makes these stories in Joshua difficult to read and perhaps challenging to understand is that they are divinely sanctioned violence against the Canaanites. This is a challenge to understand in light of a Christian world view. The questions asked around this issue are important, and we must answer them well, with love and compassion. Considering these isolated stories in light of the whole overarching narrative of the Bible, we see that Yahweh is not committing mass genocide, and the death of some is not without purpose, it is God's justice coming down on human evil (See "Holy War" theme above). Yahweh is a just, holy, and righteous God. He must punish wickedness because if he doesn't, then he is not good and he is not holy. However, God's grace, love, and mercy is beautifully displayed in his ultimate plan for defeating evil. Yahweh allows human sin and evil to kill his son, Jesus, the Messiah. On the cross, God takes a dose of his own medicine, joins himself with humanity by taking their pain and death upon himself, and he lets himself be killed on behalf of his enemies. God is not a genocidal maniac; he's a father who wants what is best for his children.

The challenge Joshua gives the Israelites at the end of this book is our challenge today as well. Will we choose life and blessing by being obedient to Yahweh, or will we choose to define good and evil for ourselves and so choose death and divine judgement? God has proven himself to be faithful and trustworthy. Will we choose to follow him, or spiral down into deeper and deeper depravity and sin digging our own graves?

Study Questions

1. In what ways does the figure of Joshua resemble Moses?
2. What does the figure of Rahab represent in the narrative?

3. In chapter five when Joshua asks the commander of the Lord's army if he is for him, or against him and he responds, "no" or "neither", what does he mean? What is the significance of that statement?
4. What do the three battle accounts given in chapters 6-9 tell us about Israel's future successes and failures in the land?
5. Although not very stimulating to read, what is significant about the land divisions in chapters 13-22?
6. Summarize Joshua's final words in chapters 23-24. What is he calling Israel to, what is he warning against, and what question are we left with as the book comes to a close?
7. How does knowing that God is faithful to his promises give you strength and patience in seasons of waiting or trials? Please share some personal experiences if you feel comfortable.
8. How does Rahab's story bolster your confidence in God's ability to bring salvation to anyone, from anywhere, regardless of background, ethnicity, religion etc.?
9. How would you explain the so called "annihilation" or "genocide" text to someone who asked you about them?
10. Why do you think obedience to God is such a daily struggle for Christians when we have these texts like Joshua that teach us what our various responses to God's commands lead to?
11. Seeing how God is unrelentingly faithful, how does that inspire you to be this way toward your spouse, your kids, your work, your relationship in return to God?

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The Book of Judges

Structure

Chapters 1-2
Israel's Failure to Drive out the Canaanites and the Intro of the "Judges Cycle"

Chapters 3-16
The 12 Judges

Chapters 17-21
Israel's Corruption and Apostacy in the Promised Land

Chapters 3-5
Judges=Good

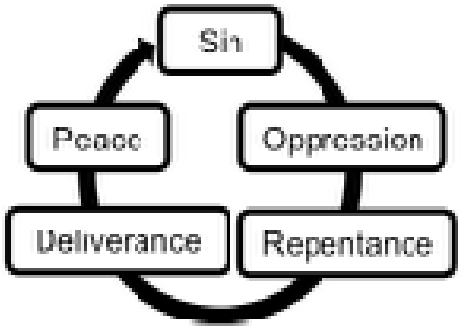
Chapters 10-12
Judges=Bad

Chapters 6-9
Judges=Okay

Chapters 13-16
Judges=Worse

"The Cycle"

Narrative Pattern of Central Section



(Mackie, 2)

Main Idea: The book of Judges recounts Israel's failure in the Promised Land as they become increasingly corrupt perpetuating the cycle of apostasy and oppression, which is met by Yahweh's judgement and graceful acts of deliverance.

Main Idea Explained

At the end of the book of Joshua, Joshua calls Israel to be faithful to their covenant with God by obeying all that he has commanded (23-24). Joshua gives his final speech and then he dies, and the book of Judges picks up the storyline here. Judges is a long exposition on how sin decays human beings, communities, and entire nations. However, God's is still shown to be faithful despite Israel's grotesque sin and failure (Judges 2:1).

Chapters 1-2 record how Israel failed to drive out the Canaanites from the Promised Land, and introduces the key themes for the rest of the book. This is a big deal because the whole purpose of driving out the Canaanites was so that Israel would not be corrupted by them. Israel was called to be a "holy nation" (Exod. 19:6; Deut.7:6), but as we come to chapter two we learn that Israel has intermingled with the Canaanites and adopted their culture and religious practices as their own (Judges 2:1-15). Therefore, Yahweh must act. Being faithful to his covenant means he must also discipline and correct his children. When Israel would sin, God would allow them to be conquered by their enemies. Joshua and Moses' commands to be faithful to the covenant and receive life and blessing (Deut. 29-34; Josh. 23-24) have fallen on deaf ears, so it seems. Israel's failure to obey Yahweh leads to oppression by other nations, as a result of their covenant violation and becoming like the Canaanites (2:10-21).

Chapter 2:6-23 is the author's summary of the entire book, as well as this time period overall of Israel's history. It illustrates the brutal cycle (repeated six times in chapters 3-16) of sin and apostasy followed by oppression by foreign enemies, repentance, deliverance, and then peace (Mackie,2). Yahweh repeatedly raises up "judges" (rulers who were military and civil leaders, a "mini Moses") to deliver the people following a period of oppression by Israel's enemies, only to see his people keep spiraling downward into greater and greater sin.

The largest section of the book, chapters 3-16, tells the stories of the 12 judges, particularly giving significant air time to six of them: Othiniel (3a), Ehud (3b), Barak/Deborah (4-5), Gideon (6-9), Jephthah (10-12), and Samson (13-16). The stories of these Judges go from pretty good (Othiniel, and Deborah (though Barak is the main judge figure at this time) to okay (Gideon), to bad (Abimelech and Jephthah) to worse (Samson) {Mackie, 2}. These characters are no role models. The further we read along, each judge is more morally corrupt than the one before, yet what rings true throughout this section is that, despite their character flaws, Yahweh still temporarily empowers sinful leaders with his Spirit to accomplish his redemptive purposes and mighty acts of deliverance {Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), Samson (13:25)}. It is not that Yahweh condones or endorses what these people say and do, rather it is him working in and through sinful humanity to accomplish his purposes, because he remains committed to his covenant with Israel, always (2:1). The purpose of this section is to show how bad things have gotten as one can hardly tell the Israelites and Canaanites apart anymore.

The previous section showed how Israel's leaders had become corrupt to the core, and now the final section of Judges shows how the people of Israel have also hit rock bottom morally. This is demonstrated in two disturbing stories that describe how Israel has abandoned Yahweh to follow other gods (chs.17-18) which leads to rape, murder, civil war, and a near annihilation of the tribe of Benjamin (chs. 19-21). The purpose of these graphic stories it to serve as a warning showing what happens when Israel forsakes God, when they turn away from the one who rescued them out of Egypt. They self-destruct and become like the nations that surround them.

In this final section, there is a key repeated phrase, "In those days ***there was no king in Israel***; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6; see also 18:1;19:1;21:25). This points out two very important things: (1) all humanity replays the fall narrative from Genesis 3 in their own lives and in their own way, choosing to define good and evil for themselves (2) the author highlights Israel's need for a good and just king and inserts hope for the future (see Gen.3 and 38; Deut.33:4-5). This phrase at the end of Judges is a perfect segway into the books of Ruth-Kings.

The Purpose of the Book

The book of Judges serves as a warning of what human beings become apart from God. It is a case study in the human condition. Just as Joshua and Moses warned (Deut. 29-34; Josh. 23-24), Israel in choosing to violate the covenant has self-destructed and brought upon themselves many of the covenant curses. Instead of choosing to be faithful to Yahweh, "all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25) and suffered the consequences. However, this tragedy is not without hope. Yahweh continually shows his faithfulness in delivering his people out of oppression. The book as a whole, points out the need for God's grace and his sending a king who will rescue his people.

Key Themes

The "Judges Cycle"

It would be helpful at this point to look back to the structure graphic on page one to see this cycle represented visually. Chapter 2:6-23 is the author's summary of the entire book, as well as this time period over all of Israel's history. It illustrates the brutal cycle (that will be repeated six times in chapters 3-16) of Israel's sin and apostasy followed by oppression by foreign enemies, repentance, deliverance, and then peace (Mackie,2). Yahweh repeatedly raises up "judges" (rulers who were military and civil leaders, a "mini Moses") to deliver the people following a period of oppression by Israel's enemies, only to see his people commit even more grievous sins. The pattern is shown to be progressive, but not in a good way. Each time the cycle is repeated, the corruption and evil increases, creating a spiral downward into deeper wickedness and transgression. History repeats itself, but with worsening ramifications.

The judges are not held up for their moral character. Just because the Spirit of God comes upon these characters doesn't mean that God indorses their moral character. The whole point of the book is that Israel is going down fast, and these are the only leaders God has to work with. They're not pretty, but God works through human beings and despite them to carry forth his purposes.

Sin and Apostacy v. Covenant Faithfulness

In the book of Judges, we're watching a story unfold where the vast majority of Israel has turned off all of their moral sensitivities, "all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (17:6;18:1;19:1;21:25). As the "Judges cycle" (see above) has taught us, the repeating spiral downward of apostasy, oppression, calling on the Lord, deliverance, peace and renewed apostasy, dominates the screen time in this book. Chapters 1-2 record how Israel failed to drive out the Canaanites from the Promised Land. Israel had intermingled with the Canaanites and adopted their culture and religious practices as their own (Judges 2:1-15). Yahweh's character is so unfamiliar to some of Israel, that its leadership sacrifices their children as offerings to God, and sleeps with prostitutes (Jephthah ch.11; Samson ch.16), and the people are engaged in religious, social and moral apostacy (see chs.17-21, Idol worship, sexual abuse, rape, murder, civil war etc.). Therefore, Yahweh had to act. Being faithful to his covenant means he must also discipline and correct his children. Their failure to obey Yahweh was linked directly to their covenant violations and becoming like the Canaanites (2:10-21). When Israel would sin and forsake him, God would allow them to be conquered by their enemies (Deut.29-34; Josh. 23-24). As Konrad Schmid states,

> after Joshua a new generation arose that "knew nothing of Yahweh or the deeds he had performed for Israel (Judg. 2:10), just as Israel's original deliverance began with "a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exod. 1:8). In Judges, Israel has taken the place of the forgetful Pharaoh, and so is oppressed because of guilt, not helplessness.

Judges is a long exposition on how sin decays human beings, communities, and entire nations. However, God's is still shown to be faithful despite Israel's grotesque sin and failure (Judges 2:1). The book as a whole, points out the need for God's grace and his sending a king who will rescue his people (Judges 21:25).

Salvation

In the biblical storyline, Exodus 14 introduced us to the word "salvation" (yasha). It has its origin and context rooted in and defined by the Exodus event. This same word is essential to the book of Judges as it is used over 20 times. Further, it is applied to almost every single judge: Othniel, 3:9; Ehud 3:15; Shamgar 3:31; Gideon 6:14; Tola 10:1; Jephthah 12:2; and Samson 13:5 (Mackie, 2). The book of Judges explores how each generation faced its own experience of sin that led to oppression, which resulted in judgment, and eventually salvation by the hand of God through the judges. In spite of their character defects, God temporarily empowers these individuals by his Spirit to perform great acts of deliverance (mini salvations) {chs. 6:34; 11:29;13:25}. The book of Judges also fascinatingly portrays Yahweh's acts of deliverance involving "the right and left" hands (Ehud 3:21; Jael 5:26; Gideon 7:20; Samson, 16:29). This echoes the safe crossing of the Red Sea and how the walls "on the right and left" (Exod. 14:22, 29) were held back by God, and how his "right hand" saved Israel (Exod. 15:6, 12) {Mackie, 2).

The Need for a King

In chapter one Israel calls on the Lord and asks, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" And God said, "***Judah*** shall go up. I hereby give the land into his hand" (Judges1:1-2). In the final section, there is a key repeated phrase, "In those days ***there was no king in Israel***; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6; see also 18:1;19:1;21:25). The author highlights Israel's need for a good and just king and inserts hope for the future (see Gen.3 and 38; Deut.33:4-5). This phrase at the end of Judges is a perfect segway into the books of Ruth-Kings. The book of Judges sets the stage for the Davidic Dynasty that is soon to come, it sets the reader up for the rise of the kings who are supposed to lead Israel back to covenant faithfulness.

Implications for Today

The book of Judges is a tragic story of self-destruction and how Israel ruined their own lives when they had everything to help them succeed. When we read this book, we're watching a story where people have turned off all of their moral sensitivities and the correct response is to hate the things one reads in this book (sexual promiscuity, arrogance, rape, murder, idolatry etc.). The point is, don't go through this yourself, watch what someone else has already gone through and let it stand as a warning to you of what it looked like when people "did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). All humanity replays the fall narrative from Genesis 3 in their own lives and in their own way, choosing to define good and evil for themselves, and the book of Judges teaches us just that, but showing us how each generation repeated the same cycle as the ones before them. Leadership and laity

alike, as a nation and individually. The big story, is also the story of each generation, therefore; it's large-scale, but it's also about the individual stories. Each person is responsible for their own actions as part of the bigger storyline of redemptive history.

The period of the judges is a transitional period between inheriting the land of promise and losing the land (exile). Israel was to obey the commands of the Torah, and in doing so show the other nations what Yahweh was like, but they fail miserably. They have so forgotten Yahweh's character that when they do worship him, it is often as if he is a Canaanite God! In a post-modern era, western culture, relativity is king. Do what feels right and worship your god (which is often the god self) however you want to. I wonder if we don't find ourselves in the same place as the people in the book of judges as we try to navigate this space of the "already not yet". As Christians we have received salvation, but await the coming of the Messiah again and for the consummation of all things. In our "between time" will we be faithful to Yahweh our God, or will we perpetuate the "judges cycle" in our own lives and communities?

This book is difficult to read. It should make you angry, sad, and disgusted. However, it should also make us evaluate our own lives. If I'm honest, I see myself at times in such characters as Gideon and Samson, and not just in their heroic or "good" moments, but in their struggles with sin as well. They remind me of what/who I become when I don't live as a redeemed child of God, but oh how sweet is our salvation in Jesus Christ, who has rescued us from our self-destruction. Praise God for the king from the line of Judah who has done for us what we could not do for ourselves, and who has brought us back into right relationship with our heavenly father.

Study Questions

1. What do the first two chapters of Judges teach us about how the story is going to go throughout the rest of the narrative? What is happening here that leads you to that conclusion (s)?
2. Explain briefly what the "Judges Cycle" is.
3. How are the "Judges Cycle (s)" similar to the narrative arc of the Exodus story?
4. Read Judges chapter 2:1. Why does Yahweh remain faithful to his covenant with Israel despite their continued sin and rebellion?
5. Read Judges 2:10-21. Why does Israel's failure to obey Yahweh lead to oppression by the other nations?
6. When I say the character of Samson represents the story of Israel as a whole, in the book of Judges, what do I mean? How does his character reflect that of the nation of Israel as a whole?
7. What does the final section of Judges teach us? Summarize the main point (s) in a couple of sentences.
8. Has there been a situation in the past week (or recently) in which you did, "what was right in your own eyes" even though you knew it was wrong. Take a moment to examine your heart and see if there is any unconfessed sin or if you need to repent of something.
9. How did reading the final few chapters of Judges make you feel? Why do you think these stories are in the Bible?
10. What characters (judges, Israelites, Canaanites, etc.) did you find yourself relating most to in reading through this book? Why?
11. Despite all of the violence, sexual abuse, selfishness, evil, and sin found in this book, what hope does it offer? How can you offer hope to the broken and needy this week?

12. If you are comfortable, share a time when God showed you great mercy even though you didn't deserve it. How has God shown himself faithful to you?

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The Book of Samuel

Structure

1 Sam. 1-7 Samuel's Rise and Leadership	Chapters 1-3: Samuel's Rise to Power Chapters 4-7: Israel's Struggle w/Philistines
1 Sam. 8-15 The Rise of the Monarchy: Saul's Rise	Chapter 8: Israel Requests a King Chapters 9-12: Saul Appointed King Chapters 13-15: Saul's Failure
1 Sam. 16-31 The Decline of Saul and the Rise of David	Chapter 16: David Anointed King Chapters 17-20: David begins Surpassing Saul Chapters 21-27: Saul seeks to Destroy David Chapters 28-31: Saul's Last Days
2 Sam. 1-4 David's Rise to Power	
2 Sam. 5-10 David's Reign in Obedience	Chapters 5-6: David Makes Jerusalem the Capitol Chapter 7: The Davidic Covenant Chapters 8-10: David's Victories as King
2 Sam. 11-20 David's Reign in Disobedience	Chapter 11-12: David sins with Bathsheba Chapters 13-18: David's Family deteriorates and Absalom's Revolt Chapters 19-21: David Restored to Power
2 Sam. 21-24 David's Final Days	Chapter 21: Saul's Bleak Legacy Chapters 22-23: David's Songs Chapter 24: David's Bleak Legacy

(Mackie, 1)

Main Idea: The books of 1 and 2 Samuel are about the origins of the Israelite monarchy, particularly the rise (through humility and faith) and the fall (through pride, arrogance, and sin) of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David; and how God will carry out his covenant promises to Abraham through David's lineage.

Main Idea Explained

In the book of Judges, we learn that Israel has failed at its task to be a light to the other nations showing them what Yahweh is like, and thus exposes the dire need for good and just leaders. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel, which are actually one book that tell a unified story, explore the origins and rise of the monarchy in Israel as an answer to this problem posed at the end of the book of Judges.

Chapters 1-7 of 1 Samuel highlight the man, Samuel's, rise to leadership over Israel as a judge and prophet. The book begins with a story about Samuel's mother, Hannah, who was barren (like Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel were), but miraculously conceives him, a gift from the Lord. A humiliated and oppressed woman cries out to Yahweh with a pure heart, and he answers her prayer, exalting the humble. Hannah dedicates Samuel to the service of the Lord in response to her womb being opened, so the boy goes to live with Eli, the priest.

In chapter two we receive Hannah's song of praise, which introduces the major themes for the rest of the book, namely, that God opposes the proud, but exalts the humble, that he's at work amidst the sin and evil, and the future hope of the Messiah. Verse ten introduces for the first time in the biblical narrative the "Anointed one" (Messiah) who is also described in this verse as the Lord's king (Mackie, Lecture). Hannah is taking her own experience and seeing it as a paradigm for how God works in the world. Those who think highly of themselves are going to be brought down, and those who are humble are going to be exalted. These themes are immediately depicted in the story about Eli's wicked and corrupt sons in contrast to Samuel (2:12-3:21) and again in a much larger venue in the story about Israel arrogantly attempting to use the ark of the covenant as a sort of magical trophy to win their battles against the Philistines, rather than praying to Yahweh and humbly trusting in him (chs. 4-7). In the five chapters that follow Hannah's song, Eli's sons are brought low, Israel is brought low, and the Philistines are brought low because of arrogance and pride. This is contrasted with the characters of Hannah and Samuel, who are exalted because of their faith and humility. All of this is priming for what we are likely to encounter in the following stories.

1 Samuel chapters 8-15 record the rise of the monarchy and Saul's rise to power. In chapter eight the people of Israel ask for a king so that they may be, "like all the nations" (v.5; See also Deut.17:14-18), but if we recall, Israel is supposed to be holy and distinct from the other nations (Exod. 19:6; the Book of Leviticus!). This displeases Samuel, but God says he is to listen to them and to give them what the want, for they are not rejecting Samuel, but Yahweh (1 Sam. 8:7-9; Exod. 15:18). They want a concrete, physical person, but their asking for a king, becomes their rejection of God's reign, and kingship over them as he connects this request to idolatry. Samuel warns Israel (also see 12:1-18) about all the negative aspects of having a king, which echoes with language from the warnings of Moses (Deut. 30-32) and Joshua (Josh. 23-24). As chapter eight comes to a close, the reader must ask, "So who is going to be king?"

Chapter nine introduces the character of Saul, Israel's first king. Saul is introduced very positively. He's a mighty warrior, handsome, tall, strong, and he initially wins some great battles

against Israel's enemies, but his golden days are short lived. 1 Sam 13-15 records Saul's failure, and highlights his downfall as being linked primarily to his inability to truly listen (to Samuel and Yahweh) and his own self-deception (he thinks he's doing God's will). Chapters 13-15 show how Saul had his own plans and ways of doing things, rather than to sit under the authority of God and his prophet, thus disqualifying himself as Israel's king. Samuel tells Saul that his kingdom won't endure and that God will raise up somebody else who will be after Yahweh's own heart (David though not mentioned yet). Israel wanting a king is a rejection of God. Their king, Saul, in his refusal to listen to God, rejects his word and guidance, so God rejects Saul from being king. Saul becomes the embodiment of the people's rejection of Yahweh.

1 Samuel 16-31 records the stories of the decline of Saul and the rise of David. David is anointed king by Samuel and his ascent to fame expresses the themes of Hannah's poem from chapter two, especially so in his humble beginnings as a shepherd boy, and his encounter with Goliath. The exaltation of the humble and the fall of the proud are seen profoundly in this epic story. The story isn't that one can overcome the giants in their lives, but rather those who are humble, who have radical faith and patience, are the ones whom God will exalt in his timing, whereas the arrogant and proud are brought low. David is said to be empowered by God's Spirit, while Saul is abandoned to his own evil (16:14-23). Chapters 18- 2 Sam. 2:1 go on to record Saul's demise and attempts to destroy David. 18:1-9 His hatred for David's victories results in an obsession to do David harm (chs. 18:1-9; 21-22;28 and 31). However, David refuses to lift a finger against Saul, and patiently waits for Yahweh to exalt him. Twice, David spares Saul's life (chs. 24 and 26), and is shown to have a completely different character than his predecessor. David even mourns Saul's death in 2 Samuel 1.

2 Samuel 1-4 describes David's more official rise to kingship, but chapters 5-7 really focus on David's being now publicly recognized as Israel's king. Samuel anointed David in private, now all Israel recognizes him as king. David establishes Jerusalem as the nation's capital, and the tribes are united under his reign. In chapter seven we read of God's covenant with David. These are David's golden years. The covenant passage can be broken up into two main categories of promise: those that find realization during David's lifetime (2 Sam 7:8-11a) and those that find fulfillment after his death (2 Sam 7:11b-16). The terms of the original Abrahamic Covenant have now been revealed further and permanently attached to the house of David. In addition, a future kingdom is coming where the son of David, the messiah, will reign without interruption for all eternity. That being said, any individual king after David may disqualify themselves from covenant blessing if they disobey (7:14-15, just like previous covenant warnings), but God says his covenant promise is eternal. This sets the stage for David's downfall in 2 Sam 11-20 and the book of 1-2 Kings (Mackie, 3).

Chapters 11-20 record David's downfall beginning with his sin with Bathsheba (narrated with language that eerily echoes Genesis 3, see Sam 11:2-4), and ultimately end in the deterioration of his family (Amnon rapes his sister Tamar and Absalom tries to overthrow his father and his killed). David had a rise and fall just like Saul had, but their responses to their sin and owning up to their actions are shown to be different. David truly repents and is grieved by his sin. What is also highlighted is God's faithfulness and justice. He does not cancel his covenant with David, for it is eternal, but David does suffer the consequences of his lust, lack of sefl-control, adultery, and murder.

The final chapters of 2 Samuel (chs.21-24) highlight two things: the major themes of exaltation for the humble, and the orchestrating of the downfall of the proud, and future hope. Chapters 21 and 24 form an inclusio around the poems of David in chapters 22-23, and tell stories of David and Saul's

bleaker days, showing us that David was human like the rest of us, not a demi-god. The poems of David, however, point forward to a future seed to come who will be like David at his best. David becomes a type that points forward to someone greater. As Dr. Tim Mackie explains, "The poems that frame the book (1 Sam 2, 2 Sam 1, and 2 Sam 22-23) reframe David's story of the past as a depiction of the future hope for the messianic kingdom. David is a narrative embodiment of the future messianic king" (4).

The Purpose of the Book

I believe the purpose of Samuel is to show how God operates in the world we live in, and how humanity is incapable of faithfully governing themselves. Humans cannot fix their sin, and the monarchy experiment begins to show its inadequacies as an answer to the question posed at the end of the book of Judges.

As we learn from Hannah's poem in chapter two and examining up close the lives of the first two kings of Israel in the characters and events surrounding David and Saul throughout this book; God exalts the faithful, patient, and humble (according to his perfect timing), and he brings low the arrogant, proud, and disobedient. In the good days and in the dark nights, God is at work despite the evil in the world and the chaos it brings, to accomplish his redemptive purposes and give hope for the future.

Key Themes

The Humble Exalted, the Proud Brought Low

This theme is pervasive throughout Samuel. It is one of the main purposes of the book, and it is a paradigm for how God works in the world. It is also a theme that speaks to his sovereignty. Many of the characters and events in Samuel are portrayed in contrasting ways and placed together to make this point. Hannah's song introduces this theme in chapter two, but really, we see this being portrayed first narratively in the prior chapter between Peninnah and Hannah. In chapter three, Samuel, from humble origins, is exalted as Israel's prophet. In chapters 4-7 both Israel and the Philistines are humbled because of their pride. Saul starts out promising and is elevated to the throne, but because of his inability to listen and through self-deception, is brought low and disqualifies himself from being king (1 Sam. 13-15). Immediately after these stories, humble and faithful David defeats an arrogant and prideful Goliath in chapter 16. Even when hunted by Saul in his murderous rampage, and with opportunities to take his life, David is shown to be humble, patient, and radically faithful to Yahweh. Saul and David's character and personhood are contrasted throughout the narrative (1 Sam. 16- 2 Sam.2:1), and both men have a rise to prominence and a fall narrative (Saul: 1 Sam. 13-15; David: 2 Sam. 11-18). God will oppose the proud and exalt the humble (1 Sam. 2:1-10).

The Davidic Covenant

This is one of the most important passages in all of the Hebrew Bible. The Davidic Covenant takes place roughly 500 years after the covenant at Sinai, when Israel has finally entered into a time of peace in the Promised Land, with David as their King. 2 Samuel 7:8-16 delineates God's Covenant with David. The word *covenant* does not appear in this passage, but the familiar covenant language is used here such as, "…I will make your name great" (v.9) and "I will provide a place for my people" (v.10). This passage can be broken up into two main categories of promise: those that find realization

during David's lifetime (2 Sam 7:8-11a) and those that find fulfillment after his death (2 Sam 7:11b-16). Just as the Lord promised to make Abraham's name great (Gen. 12:2), thus he does with David as well (2 Sam. 7:9). God is the one who took David from the fields of shepherds, to the frontlines of battle, and finally to be king over Israel (2 Sam. 7:8). God also promised Abraham a place, Israel was now a unified people under one king in one place.

2 Sam. 7:11b-16 speaks of fulfillment after David's death, and uses the Abrahamic language of house, seed, and kingdom. The "house" mentioned in verses 11-13 consists of two aspects. It would later be built by David's son Solomon, the first temple (1 Kings 6), and it refers to the permanent dynasty of David and his lineage. The "seed" (v.12) refers to Solomon, to future Davidic offspring, and ultimately to the Messiah. Verse thirteen speaks of a kingdom which many passages in the Old Testament anticipated, that Israel would one day have a king (Gen 17:6, 16; 35:11;48; Deut. 17:14-20) and constitute a kingdom (Num. 24:7, 19). The statement by God in verses 13 and 16 makes this kingdom eternal, therefore the house of David extends beyond Solomon, and anticipates the "New" David that is to come one day, the Messiah.

There is also the imagery of son-ship taking place (v.14). It is as Yahweh's son that David and his offspring will enjoy the provisions of this covenant. 2 Sam. 7:8-16 does teach that the line of David will be disciplined and that they could lose certain provisions (1 Kgs. 2:4; 8:25; 6:12-13; 9:4, 6-7; Psa. 89:29-32; 132:12), but not forever, because God has made the line of David everlasting. This understanding provides hope that Yahweh would one day raise up a steadfast son who would satisfy his demands for perfect covenant faithfulness, he would look like David in this golden days (that's the point being made in the Songs of David in 2 Sam. 22-23). Further, In the prophets, God compares the inevitability of the Davidic Covenant to the fixed cycle of day and night (Jer. 33:19-21). Just as night and day cannot cease to exist, neither can God break his covenants.

The terms of the original Abrahamic Covenant have now been revealed further and permanently attached to the house of David. In addition, a future kingdom is coming where the son of David, the messiah, will reign without interruption for all eternity. The Old Testament anticipated, that Israel would one day have a king (Gen 17:6, 16; 35:11;48; Deut. 17:14-20) and constitute a kingdom (Num. 24:7, 19). That has come to fruition in this narrative.

The Kings

As we come to the end of the book of Judges, the need for a king is on the forefront of our minds, and that is where Samuel comes on to the scene. This book, in perhaps an expression of over simplification, is about the rise and fall of two kings. The literary design of Samuel (and the book of Kings) displays multiple overlapping narrative arcs of the rise and fall of Israel's kings. 1 and 2 Samuel focus in on Israel's first two kings, Saul and David.

There is something important to be said of how the biblical authors view the kings of Israel as not merely historical persons (which they do), but also as symbols, as types, and as representatives. As Terrence Collins says it, "Each of these kings in varying ways is presented as embodying in his own life-story the story of the whole nation of Israel" (22-23). As the king goes, so the people go and vies versa. They share the experiences together of both rise and fall, victory and defeat, humiliation and exaltation. Again Collins explains the kingship as a metaphor for Israel as a whole,

> The story of one is the story of the other: chosen by God's mysterious design from obscure and lowly origins; designated for greatness; guided and protected by God from the hostility from enemies who seek to destroy; exalted to a privileged position, crowned with victory and given divine instructions which will guarantee success and blessing; responding initially with fidelity in God's service; enjoying happiness

> and security in the gift of the kingdom; falling from grace through foolish disobedience in spite of warnings from prophetic messengers, until divine patience is finally exhausted; and punished by diminution, division, and eventual loss of the kingdom. (22-23).

The king in his personal life embodies the story of Israel, which ultimately is a continual retelling and living out of the story of humanity in the garden of Eden (Gen. 1-3). Israel's kings not only speak to their people and culture, but transcend their own times speaking a message of warning and hope for all future generations.

The Poems and the Messiah

The Davidic Covenant (chs.6-7) and Hannah's song (ch.2) speak of the coming Messiah, and are important for our understanding the category for God's coming savior, which has been briefly discussed above. However, I want to focus briefly here on a literary feature that makes this point as well, the poems we find in Samuel. The literary design of Samuel contains several strategically placed poems that appear at the opening (1 Sam 2), middle (2 Sam 1), and conclusion of the book (2 Sam 22-23). Each poem presents David's life as a narrative "type" of the future hope of the messianic kingdom (Mackie,1). In a way, the character David is lifted out of his own particular placement in history and held up as a portrait for the "seed" of David for the future. Further, 2 Samuel 22:51 shows how the salvation(s) that God accomplished for David is not locked in the past, but will continue to be a source of salvation for his king and his king's offspring or "seed" to come (2 Sam. 7). As we read chapter 23 we come to the conclusion that, "This is what happens when a really righteous good king reigns!" So, we eagerly await a coming Davidic descendent who will look like David at his best, the "New" David, the son of David, the Messiah.

Implications for Today

The book of Samuel has massive implication for today. The themes, issues, and questions it brings to the table will always be pertinent, for they are timeless. Unfortunately, I think often times we take the stories of the Bible like the one found here, and use them merely for trying to teach moral conformity, "Do this, or not that, be like David not like Saul etc." We make super-heroes and demi-gods out of characters who are deeply flawed like the rest of us, ripping characters and events out of their contexts. Often times miss the theological points being made. Eventually people will start to wonder, "Which Abraham should I be like? The one who had great faith, or the one who gave his wife to other men? Which Moses should I be like? The one who killed an Egyptian or the one delivered the people of Israel? Which David should I be like? The one who was humble, patient, and faithful to Yahweh, or the one who slept with Bathsheba and assassinated her husband?" Now, what we do absolutely matters to God (read the Laws in Exod-Lev.), I'm not saying it doesn't, however, being moral is not the main emphasis of these stories. What we see is that God works in and through sinful humans to accomplish his redemptive purposes, working evil for good and always being true and faithful to his covenant promises. He never gives up on his children, exalting the humble and bringing low the proud. The book of Samuel shows how God operates in the world, and it serves as a warning to future generations, but also generates hope for the future.

We are introduced to the "official" mentioning of the Messiah in Samuel, and it is a theme that is pervasive throughout the prophets (major and minor) as well, the concept of a divine messianic shepherd king (Dan. 7; Hos. 1, 3; Amos 9; Obadiah; Mic. 5; Hag. 2; Zech. 3-4,12-13; Isa. 11; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23). They fill out in great detail what the Messiah will look like and how he will accomplish

this task. The prophets know it is going to take a figure who will represent them, that embodies all of these things spoken of, and does on behalf of Israel what she cannot do for herself (Isa. 7-9, 11; 49:8-13). The future hope is in this "New David"; the hope of the world rests on his shoulders.

When we come to the gospels we learn that Jesus of Nazareth comes from the line of Abraham and David (Mat.1; Mk. 1) and it is, "…He who shall save His people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). Mark portrays Jesus as Israel's (and the nations') shepherd, and Daniel's son of man (Dan. 7; Hos. 1, 3 Amos 9; Obadiah; Mic. 5; Hag. 2; Zech. 3-4,12-13; Isa. 11; Jer. 23:5, 30:9; Ezek. 34:23, ch.37; Mk.6:34), the suffering servant of Isaiah (ch.42,53 in particular), a new Adam, and a new Israel (1:13; Gen. 2:19-20; Isa. 11), and greater than the law and the prophets (9:1-13). Further, the people who do recognize Jesus for who he is frequently do so, because he looks like David and he talks like David and he sounds like David and he acts like David. Jesus compares himself to David when he's on the run from Saul, when arguing with the Pharisees (Matt 12:1-7). Just like David, who was anointed king, but not recognized as king, so was Jesus this way to the people of Israel. Jesus' trials and execution are packed with irony. His death and resurrection are the paradoxical way the suffering servant king is exalted over the nations as Jesus ironically becomes Israel's king, in the event of the cross. Jesus' own story highlights profoundly, to the utmost, the main theme of the book of Samuel: Yahweh exalts the humble and brings low the proud (1 Sam. 2:1-10).

> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:5-11)

Study Questions

1. What are the key themes that we find in Hannah's song in 1 Samuel chapter 2?
2. What is the purpose of the Book?
3. What are some examples of how Israel's kings in Samuel, embody the story of the people as a whole?
4. The Bible rarely describes a person's physical appearance, but in Samuel, these descriptions are frequent. What is the significance of this and how does it add to the narrative?
5. Explain the theme of the humble being exalted and the prideful being brought low, giving a few examples from the text.
6. The Davidic Covenant is of massive importance to the Biblical storyline. Why is it so significant? How does it relate to the Abrahamic Covenant?
7. How do David and Saul respond to their sin? What are the similarities and differences you see?
8. Seeing this masterful display of how God works in the world through the books of Samuel, how does that bring hope to you today?
9. The character of Saul forces us to deal with our dark side and reflect on our flaws. When is the last time you did just that? Is there anything you need to repent of or sin you're trying put to death in your life?
10. Saul and David were plagued by such things as self-deception, arrogance, pride, lack of self-control, lust, murder, self-justification, blame shifting etc. Do these struggles sound familiar? How is this challenging and encouraging to us today?

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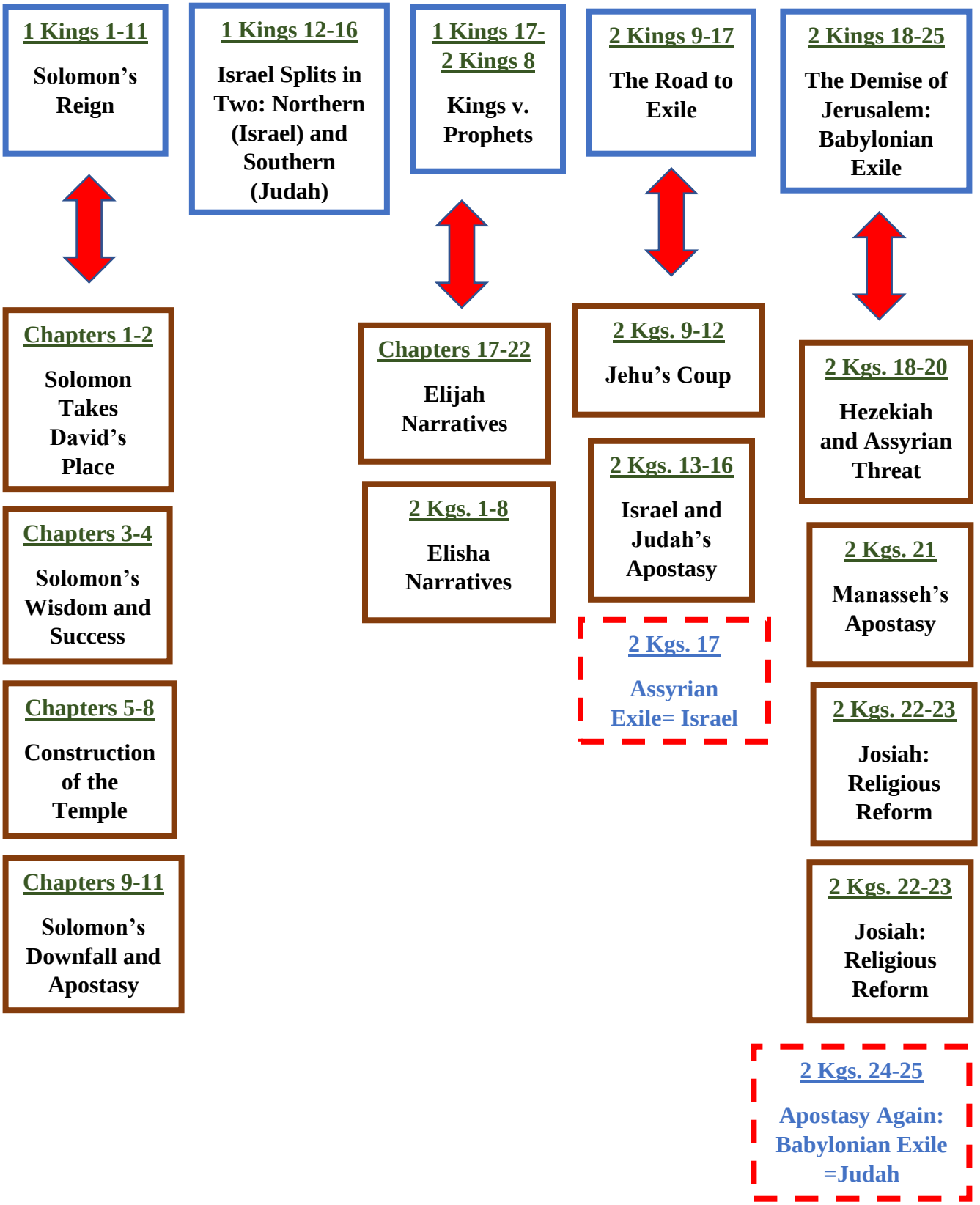
The Book of Kings

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Kings records the slew of kings who came after David, and their continued failure to live up to the covenant, running the nation of Israel into the ground, eventually resulting in expulsion from the land, and life lived in the captivity of the Assyrians and Babylonians.

Main Idea Explained

It is important and helpful to remember when approaching Kings that this book, though a historical narrative, is written from the perspective of a prophet, after the exile has already taken place. Therefore, the focus is very much theological, explaining what led to the downfall of God's chosen people. The books of 1 and 2 Kings are actually one book in the Hebrew Bible, telling one unified story that carries the narrative from the books of Samuel forward. The tribes of Israel have become one unified kingdom under David, and in God's covenant with David he promised him that from his seed would come a Messianic king who would rule over the nations and fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant. The book of Kings picks up the story from the books of Samuel with David's son Solomon.

1 Kings 1-11 actually begins very hopeful. These chapters record Solomon's rise to power, his reign, and eventual downfall. In chapters one and two assumes the throne of his aging father David. He is given two commands by his father: stay faithful to Yahweh and execute David's hitlist. The later seems strange, coming from David, but these are his wishes, and it results in Solomon's reign being established through a series of political assassinations.

Chapters 3-10 really turn up the volume on Solomon's wisdom and how he becomes a "type" pointing forward to the ideal Messiah. Solomon at his best becomes an image for the future kingdom of God. He asks for "wisdom to discern between good and evil" (1 Kgs. 3:9 = knowledge of good and evil from Genesis 2-3), which results in success, wealth, and justice in the land (Mackie, 1). In chapter three we see a king who wants to rule by trusting God and his wisdom (Gen. 1-2). Solomon is being depicted as wanting to recapture the original calling of humanity and the image of God. No one in the narrative so far has asked for anything like this. Therefore, the abundance, extravagance, and peace of Solomon's reign becomes a paradigm for the later prophets when speaking of the Messianic age: (1 Kgs. 4:20-34 is echoed in Psa.72, Jer. 23:6, Mic. 4:4, Isa. 11) {Mackie, 1}. Further, the queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon (1 Kgs 10:1-13), "… becomes an icon of the future pilgrimage of the nations to the new Jerusalem in the messianic age (see Psa. 72:8-11 and Isa. 60:1-3, 6-7 (see this motif at work in Matt. 2:1-12)" {Mackie, 2}.

Chapters 5-8 describe the building of the Temple (think back to 2 Sam. 6-7), with language that resembles that of the tabernacle blueprints from the book of Exodus. The building adopts the garden symbolism and architecture of the tabernacle, but takes it to the next level as everything is even more extravagant. It's like the tabernacle on steroids. At its completion, the divine presence comes to dwell in the temple (8:10-12) as it did in the tabernacle (Exodus 40:35-38). However, this story depicts Solomon's temple not merely as a physical place, but also as the symbolic place where heaven comes down to earth, and the place from which God reigns over the nations, which can be seen in Solomon's prayer of dedication. He acknowledges that the temple points to something greater (1 Kgs. 8:27-30; Isa. 66:1 and 11:9, Hab.2:14).

Most everything seems fantastic and amazing up until this point, but there is a dark side to Solomon that slowly leads to his downfall. The narrative also highlights how Solomon fails to measure up to the Torah's standards for Israel's kings laid out in Deuteronomy 17:14–20 (1Kgs. 5, 9-10).

Because of Solomon's pride, greed, and harsh leadership, he becomes the first "failed" son of David in a slew of failed kings to follow (for a time period of about 400 years). He shows himself to not be the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to David (2 Sam. 7) and as a result of his sin and failure (repeating the cycle of Saul and David before him), Israel splits into two kingdoms: northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) {1 Kgs. 11:26-12:33; chs.12-16}.

Chapter 13 introduces us to the monumental role the prophets will play in the rest of the narrative. For every generation of kings there will be prophets calling those kings out on their sin and apostasy, and pleading with them to come back to the covenant. The pattern becomes the prophets warning the kings, and those warnings later coming true. It may seem like the kings are in charge of history, but the real controller of history is Yahweh. This is displayed in his words spoken through the prophets, and the fact that the author of Kings includes as much material about prophets challenging kings, as the activities of those individual kings (Mackie, 3). The kings are not judged by their military success, or other accomplishments, but by whether or not they tried to eradicate idolatry, or if they sponsored it (1 Kgs. 15:1-5; 15:9-14). The story slows down and highlights the role the prophets played in Israel through two prophets, Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs. 17-2 Kgs 8). This duo fills the typological shoes of the "New" Moses and "New" Joshua portraits. The stories and events that take place around these characters that display this connection is explicit in this section. Both men fiercely call Israel back to covenant faithfulness through signs and wonders. The way in which Israel and Judah respond to the prophetic word is going to determine whether they receive blessing, or curses.

The narrative tragically recounts the slow process of deterioration and neglect of the temple and worship of Yahweh. The temple is plundered multiple times both by foreign powers, but also by Israel's own kings (1 Kgs. 12,14, 15; 2 Kgs.16,18,24-25), Jeroboam makes alternate temples in Northern Israel, and makes two golden calves to represent Yahweh (1 Kgs. 12; Exod. 32), and Manasseh even builds altars to Canaanite gods in the temple (2 Kgs 21:1-7). Israel was warned through the prophets to keep covenant, but they didn't listen, they didn't trust, or have faith in God, but instead rejected Yahweh, and followed other gods bringing upon themselves the covenant curses (Lev. 26; Deut. 28-29). In chapter 17 Israel is exiled into Assyrian captivity. This chapter reflects on what led to this moment of evictions from the Promised Land: idolatry, injustice, and covenant infidelity. Chapters 18-25 show how the same things came for the southern kingdom of Judah, leading to their exile to Babylon.

At this point the reader is left wondering, "What happens now? What about God's promises to David and Abraham, how is he going to work those out?" The exile means a collapse of everything important to Israelite temple-centered faith. They have been expelled from their land, their kingdoms are no more, the sacrificial system is gone, the priesthood has dissolved, and the monarchy has failed. What hope do they have? There is, but a glimmer of hope, yet it is still there. At the close of the book we see that, even in exile, the royal lineage is preserved (2 Kgs 25:27-30). The promise of a future messianic king is being kept alive, and Yahweh shows himself again to be faithful to his promises despite human sin and evil, generating hope into the future.

The Purpose of the Book

The book of Kings serves to show the deterioration of the Israelite monarchy due to habitual covenant infidelity, injustice, and idolatry, but in spite of this, God is still faithful to his covenant. In the book of Samuel, Israel asking for a king, becomes their rejection of God's reign, and kingship over

them, and God connects this request explicitly to idolatry (1 Sam. 8). The book of Kings shows that this is exactly what happened with nearly all of Israel's kings after David, leading eventually to exile from the land (2 Kings 17; 24-25). Israel is incapable of keeping the covenant. However, God is still preserving the "seed" in exile (2 Kgs. 25:37-30). The author of Kings gives us more of a bird's-eye view of the nation as a whole, whereas Samuel focused in detail on just a few individuals. Leaders and commoners alike had all failed to be faithful to Yahweh, but nothing will keep him from accomplishing his redemptive purposes in the world.

Key Themes

The Temple and Zion Theology

Israel was a people who lived life centered around the tabernacle/temple. Under a unified kingdom with Jerusalem as its capitol, now Solomon would build a permanent house for the Lord (1 Kgs.5-8; see also 2 Sam. 2:7). The Temple was essentially a mini representation of the entire universe, where God's space and human space overlapped and became one again. The temple recreates the imagery of the Garden of Eden (chs. 6-7, Gen. 1-2), and just like with the Tabernacle, the divine presence comes to dwell there (1 Kgs. 8:10-12; Exod. 40:35-38). However, this book depicts Solomon's temple not merely as a physical place, but also as the symbolic place where heaven comes down to earth, and the place from which God reigns over the nations. This can be seen in Solomon's prayer of dedication in which he acknowledges that the temple points to something greater (1 Kgs. 8:27-30; see also Isa. 66:1 and 11:9, Hab.2:14). It is true that it pointed back to the Garden of Eden, but it was also pointing forward to the New Creation.

Remember, the exile meant a collapse of everything important to the Israelites' temple-centered faith. They had been expelled from their land, their kingdoms are no more, the sacrificial system is gone, the priesthood has dissolved, and the monarchy has failed. Where were they to place their hope? This theme (Zion Theology) is picked up in the Psalms and later prophets in particular to describe the coming Messianic Kingdom (Psa. 46,48,65,76; Joel 3:17-18; Isa.65:17-25; Ezek. 47; Zech. 14:8). As Dr. Mackie states, "After Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed, the prophets look for a 'New Jerusalem' that will become the epicenter of God's salvation for all of creation … This is the basis of the New Testament hope of a 'new creation/Jerusalem' in Revelation 22"' (3).

Davidic Covenant, the Kings, and the coming Messiah

After reading the book of Kings, the reader is forced to ask questions like, "What about God's promises to Abraham? Is the covenant with David nullified? What about Yahweh's plan to redeem all creation?" These are legitimate and concerning questions. In the beginning Solomon looks like he might be the ideal leader and king, the Messiah. However, as discussed early, Solomon's reign is not the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to David (2 Sam. 7), but rather, Solomon as a king and the good things about his rule, become an image and "types" of the messianic king and kingdom (see Psa. 72 and Isa. 60). The narrative shows even Solomon in all his greatness fails to measure up to the Torah's standards for Israel's kings laid out in Deuteronomy 17:14–20 (1Kgs. 5, 9-10). The Messiah will be like Solomon, but greater still, so "the" Messiah gets pitched further out into the future, as the kings (for the most part, save a couple) further the descent downward into more idolatry and covenant unfaithfulness, leading to exile in Assyria and Babylon (2 Kgs. 17; 24-25).

The book of Kings, just as in the book of Samuel, views the kings of Israel as not merely historical persons (which they do), but also as symbols, as types, and as representatives. As Terrence Collins says it, "Each of these kings in varying ways is presented as embodying in his own life-story the story of the whole nation of Israel" (22-23). As the king goes, so the people go and vice versa. They share the experiences together of both rise and fall, victory and defeat, humiliation and exaltation. The king in his personal life embodies the story of Israel, which ultimately is a continual retelling and living out of the story of humanity in the garden of Eden (Gen. 1-3). Israel's kings not only speak to their people and culture, but transcend their own times speaking a message of warning and hope for all future generations.

There is, but a glimmer of hope, yet it is still there. At the close of the book we see that, even in exile, the royal lineage is preserved (2 Kgs 25:27-30). The promise of a future messianic king is being kept alive, and Yahweh shows himself again to be faithful to his promises despite human sin and evil, generating hope into the future.

"The Word of the Lord" and His Prophets

When reading this narrative, it may seem like the kings are in charge of history, but the real controller of history is Yahweh. This is displayed in his words spoken through the prophets, and the fact that the author of Kings includes as much material about prophets challenging kings, as the activities of those individual kings (Mackie, 3). The kings are not judged by their military success, or other accomplishments, but by whether or not they tried to eradicate idolatry, or if they endorsed it (1 Kgs. 15:1-5; 15:9-14). Israel's kings were subject to the authority invested in the prophets by God. However, Israel's prophets were not God on earth either, but were also subject to the authority of the prophetic words they mediated from Yahweh to his people. We see this relationship displayed in the story found in 1 Kgs.13. Israel's prophets were to speak on God's behalf to the people as his covenant watchdogs calling out sin, pleading with them to repent, and encouraging them to follow the Torah.

The goal of the author of Kings isn't to write a history book, as much as it is to record a history of the prophetic word and the responses to it. The repetition of phrases like "the scroll of the accounts of the days of the kings", pushing the reader to secondary sources rather than giving detailed accounts of the kings, makes it clear we are reading Israel's history through a lens that focuses primarily on the role of Yahweh's word spoken through the prophets (Mackie, 4). Also, worth noting, Yahweh's words are documented numerous times as being fulfilled (1 Kgs 13:26; 14:18; 15:29; 16:12; 16:34; 17:1; 17:16; 22:38; 2Kgs 1:17; 2:22; 7:17-18; 9:26; 9:36; 10:10; 10:17; 14:25; 17; 23:16; 24:2; 24:13). This is significant. Because the prophets were right about their predictions of exile (and other things), their predictions of hope are vindicated and held up as sure to be, which becomes an anchor for the repentant and faithful remnant living in exile in Babylon.

Implications for Today

Most of the book of Kings is quite tragic. At the end we are left with the depressing conclusion that disaster was inevitable, as no one (including no king) is sinless (1 Kgs. 8:46). David, as the architype for the "good" king, was not perfect (2 Sam. 11;1 Kgs. 15:5). If the architype fell short, what hope could there be for anyone else? After reading the book of Kings, the reader is forced to further ask, "What about God's promises to Abraham? Is the covenant with David nullified? What about Yahweh's plan to redeem all creation?" These are legitimate and concerning questions, especially

when we consider the fact that the book of Kings sets out to display how God devastated his own people and sent them into exile because of their sin and idolatry. The book of Kings serves to offer up a case justifying God's decision by showing that the kings of Israel and Judah, along with the people, virtually without exception, were hopelessly flawed and corrupt. Just as the book of Judges ended with a failed institution, so in Kings the monarchy fails as well. No human institution can fix the human condition (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:10 and 23).

Yahweh is shown to be intimately involved in Israel's political life as well, using both the good and bad choices people make, and using both to accomplish his purposes. God works out his purposes in the arena of history in the good and the evil, and he does so by means of and in spite of sinful human beings, for that is what it means for him to be sovereign over the entire cosmos. Nothing is outside of his grasp and beyond his reach to use in accomplishing his plan of redemption. What this meant for Israel and what it means for us today is this: It is not the behavior of kings (political leaders) which shapes history, but the sovereign will of God.

The punishment of exile was inevitable, but because Yahweh is the controller of history, that means there is also hope. The biblical narrative so far shows how humans have failed at every turn to live up to God's standard. They are not able to not sin. Hope exists because, as the author reminds the exiles (and readers today), if God's people repent and pursue him, he will forgive them and show them mercy (1 Kgs.8:46–51; Jer. 36; Ezek. 33; Acts 3:19). As a Christian we may read this book and see the Davidic dynasty finally restored in Jesus, the "New" David, but it's important to remember that this hope is not expressed in the book of Kings. We have to keep reading in the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and into the gospels to see that. We absolutely should be thinking "Jesus", however we should try and sit in the reality the exiles did first before we jump too far ahead. Try and feel the devastation they must have felt as their world was turned upside down. The exile meant a collapse of everything important to the Israelites' temple-centered faith. They had been expelled from their land, their kingdoms are no more, the sacrificial system is gone, the priesthood has dissolved, and the monarchy has failed. There is hope in the book of Kings for the line of David even after and amidst the exile (2 Kgs. 25:27-30), but this book speaks even louder words of warning to be faithful to the covenant and to repent of idolatry and injustice, or suffer the consequences of your choice to define good and evil for yourself. What one does matters to God, for our actions showcase the condition of our heart. The stories in Judges-Kings vividly showcase Yahweh's character as he described himself to Moses in Exodus,

> "*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.*" (Exod. 34:6-7).

God wants what is best for his children, which is life lived according to his revealed will. The book of Kings is a sobering read that shows us what happens when we forsake Yahweh and chase after other gods to our own demise.

Study Questions

1. What is the purpose of the book of Kings?
2. Name a few key themes from the book of Kings.
3. How is Solomon portrayed as a "type" of the future Messianic king/kingdom?

4. Read Deuteronomy 17:14-20. How does this speak to what led to Solomon's downfall?
5. What role do prophets play in the life of Israel?
6. Read 2 Kings 17. What does the author's sermon say about what led to Israel being exiled by Assyria? What about Judah in 2 Kings 18-25?
7. How do you think those being led into captivity in Assyria and Babylon felt? What are some things that would have been going through your mind if you were in their place?
8. How is knowing God is sovereign even over human institution bring comfort to you?
9. As a New Covenant believer, how does this narrative bring you to a place of sorrow over your sin? How does it lead you to repentance, gratitude and thanksgiving?
10. How would you explain/justify God's treatment of his people (sending them into exile) to a friend who is a believer? How about to an unbeliever who is curious?
11. How has reading the Book of Kings changed or enhanced your knowledge of God's character? What has this book taught you about Yahweh?
12. Where are you placing your hope right now? Where does the book of Kings plead for you to place your hope?

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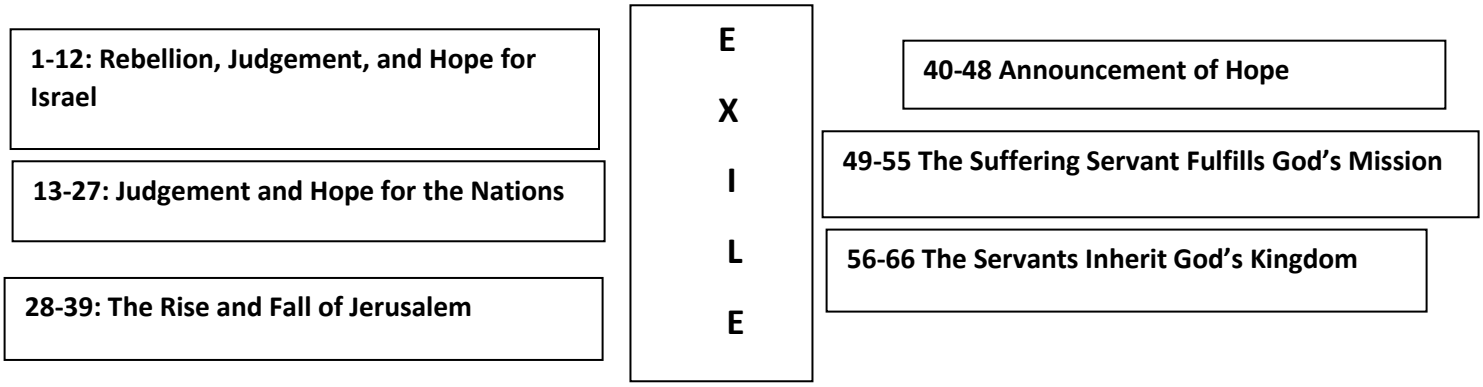
The Book of Isaiah

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Isaiah is about the judgment that is to fall upon Israel, because of her rebellion against God and infidelity to the covenants, while at the same time offering a message of hope because of God's faithfulness in holding up his end of the deal no matter what.

Chapters 1-12: Rebellion, Judgement, and Hope for Israel

The book of Isaiah begins by giving us landmarks in which to find our place in redemptive history. It is the time of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, the kings of Judah (2 Kings 15, 16, 18-20) prior to be forced into exile at the hand of the Assyrians. Chapter one is unique in that it is really a summary of the whole message and book of Isaiah. God rightfully accuses the people of Judah of covenant infidelity, of failing to live out the Abrahamic (Gen. 12,15,17) and Mosaic (Exod.19-24) covenants in doing justice and righteousness (1:2-31), and has instead lived a rebellious life, practiced hypocritical worship, and covenant unfaithfulness. Therefore Yahweh is coming in judgement, depicted as a purifying fire (exile) that will both purge the evil, and restore His people into a New Jerusalem. The rest of the book of Isaiah after chapters one and two, gets repeated over and over, but not in the same way, and with different metaphors and variations. It's like jazz music, chapters one and two are the melody and subsequent chapters then add more and more riffs.

In chapter six we get the famous vison of Isaiah's commissioning. It is a wild scene that portrays Isaiah being in the holy of holies with strange and familiar images and magnificent creatures. Isaiah encounters Yahweh, which exposes his sin and uncleanliness (6:4). Being a prophet, he knows that no one can see Yahweh and live (Exodus 33:20). However, as the seraphim flies towards him, instead of being annihilated, Isaiah is cleansed and his sins atoned for (6:7)! What Isaiah goes through the nation of Israel must go through; that is a judgment that leads to restoration. Isaiah 6:11-13, "creates a mental map for the storyline of judgment and restoration that the reader discovers in the rest of the book" (Mackie, 8).

Chapters seven through twelve are all about the future of the Davidic dynasty. Amidst civil war, King Ahaz is faced with a decision to trust in the promises of Yahweh (7:7-9; 2 Sam. 7 i.e. Davidic Covenant) or to try and solve the situation on his own. He fails to trust, and buys protection from the Assyrians; and even adds an Assyrian altar in the temple at Jerusalem (2 Kings 16) putting the

Davidic Dynasty at stake. In response, God will fend off Judah's enemies with Assyria as his tool, but Assyria too will ravage the land. God gives him a sign (which Ahaz rejects earlier), the Immanuel ("God with us") child (7:14) who will be Ahaz's replacement. In chapter 8 Isaiah realizes that they are at the point of no return, so he takes and seals up all of his sermons and poetry and gives it to his disciples.

After the age of judgement the messianic king will come and defeat the oppressors (8:23-9:7). This figure is announced as the son of royalty connecting him back to the Immanuel child in the previous chapters (7:13-15 and 8:8-10). Chapter 11:1-16: depicts a New David who will bring salvation, new creation, and restoration of the exiles, the righteous remnant. This New David to come is yet another riff in the melody adding to, and further describing the Immanuel child, and the king from chapters seven and nine. Israel is awaiting this type of deliverer.

Isaiah 1-12 illustrates God's judgement of Israel's sins through the Assyrian empire, but also Yahweh's promise of a messianic kingdom which will rule over all the nations (2:1-4; 9:1-7; 11:1-10) and redeem the righteous remnant from among Israel (1:27-28; 4:2-6; 11:10-16).

Chapters 13-27: Judgement and Hope for the Nations

These chapters were fashioned in a way to show the reader that after the Assyrian oppression there would be even greater foes (like Babylon and Persia). All of the poems in chapters 13-27 describe God's coming judgment and salvation on the nations surrounding Israel, both fluctuating between the present time (on the events taking place in Isaiah's time), and a future judgement and salvation yet to come.

In chapters 24-27 we read about the final day of the Lord in which justice and salvation will be brought to all nations. It is told by the tale of two cities, the lofty city and the strong city. The lofty city is depicted as the architype of evil and of rebellious humanity. It is destined for destruction. However, the strong city is identified as the messianic kingdom we read about earlier (2, 4,9,11). This metaphor graphically shows the fate of both cities and God's destructions of rebellion and overthrow of evil. Chapters 24:1-13, 17-23 ; 25:10-12; 27:1, 10-11 show God's judgment on those belonging to the lofty city while 24.23; 25.6-10; 27:2-6, 7-13 showcase the redemption for those belonging to the strong city. Eradication of evil and renewal of creation are what's primarily in view in chapters 13-27. Just as Israel must go through the purifying fire, so do the other nations.

Chapters 28-39: The Rise and Fall of Jerusalem

In these chapters we are treated with more of the same from previous chapters as the cycle of judgment, salvation, and restoration are repeated. Israel seeks aid from foreign nations rather than running to God in repentance, and thus suffers the consequence of their actions. In chapters 36-37 we see that Isaiah's predictions of foreign invasion (1-12 and 28-33) come to pass. Assyria invades, but is held off by King Hezekiah who has faith in Yahweh, and very much resembles the Immanuel child, the New David that Isaiah has been speaking of up unto this point (7-9, 36-38). However, in chapter 39 we read of the downfall of King Hezekiah, and his failure to trust the Lord, resulting in the now coming days when his descendants will be taken into Babylonian captivity (39:5-8). Israel's messiah figure is pushed even further into the future. Immanuel will come and he will look like the figure in chapter 11.

Chapters 40-48: Announcement of Hope

Chapter 40 transports us 150 years after the death of Isaiah into the end of Babylonian captivity. The world of judgment has passed, and now is the time of comfort. There is a recommissioning, a new word of restoration that parallels the commissioning of Isaiah himself in chapter 6. The plural "you" in verse 1-2 points to multiple people being commissioned by God, likely the disciples of Isaiah, the faithful remnant from chapter eight. However, even amidst a hope-filled message there are many doubters (v.27). Imagine how your confidence in God's providence would be shattered after living in exile for so many years. Verse 27 also clues us in to the fact that the exile didn't fully cure the problem. Chapters 42, 48 show us that Israel is still a blind and deaf servant; they didn't get what the exile was all about (42:18 same as pre-exiles in chapter 6). The bitter get angrier the more they hear the good news.

In the middle of all of this we are introduced to the Servant of Yahweh poems (42,49,50,53). The role of the servant is describe as an ideal, which is not true of Israel; currently they don't fit this bill. Israel is not qualified for this job posting. As these poems progress we begin to see a stark contrast between the nation of Israel and the Servant of the Lord.

Chapters 49-55: The Suffering Servant Fulfills God's Mission

What Israel cannot do for herself, what she is incapable of performing, the Servant of the Lord will do on her behalf (explored further in themes section). Chapter 49:1-7 describes the commissioning of the servant. Even in this, Israel is still complaining of being abandoned by God (49-14-50:3). In chapter 52:13-53:12 we receive perhaps one of the most well-known passages from Isaiah. In these verses the suffering servant dies, and is vindicated on behalf of Israel and the nations, which has rich atonement theology running through its veins. Ultimate victory will be when the mighty arm of God doesn't crush evil, but allows evil to crush and kill him, that many may be declared righteous (53:11). Chapter 55 describes God's offer of forgiveness for Israel if she repents, but also extends the Davidic Covenant to the servants of Yahweh, not just ethnic Israel. The invitation is ultimately to come to the New Jerusalem where Yahweh reigns as king.

Chapters 56-66 The Servants Inherit God's Kingdom

This collection of poems is all about what the servants of Yahweh are to do amidst an apostate Israel. The servants of the Lord are to take up the same occupation as THE servant of the Lord from the servant poems. Chapter 56:1-8 speaks of Gentiles being included into the covenant family, followed by nearly two chapters contrasting the servants of Yahweh with the wicked. The servants respond by humbly repenting of their sin while the wicked resist and reject the message and its messenger. In chapter 59 the servants ask God for forgiveness for the nation, in which God responds, making it painfully obvious that salvation is from him alone. Redemption is granted to the repentant. Chapters 60-62 describe the promise of a restored temple and Yahweh reigning over all nations to the faithful remnant, or seed of the servant. The rest of the book of Isaiah repeats familiar scenes and themes culminating the blessed hope and truth that the servants of the Lord do one day receive the privilege and joy of their inheritance, the New Jerusalem, the new creation.

Key Themes

Judgement, Restoration, and the Sovereignty of God

One of the most profound themes throughout the book of Isaiah is judgment that brings restoration. Yahweh judges Israel for her sins; there is no doubt about that. However, he does not do so

to completely crush them or dominate them. He does not do it just to flex his muscles. He is only doing what he warned Israel he would do if they forsook the covenant (Deut. 28-30, 32). There is purpose to what he does. The aim is so that, coming out the other side, he may restore his people. God rightfully accuses the people of Judah of covenant infidelity, of failing to live out the Abrahamic (Gen. 12,15,17) and Mosaic (Exod.19-24) covenants in doing justice and righteousness (Isa. 1:2-31), and has instead lived a rebellious life, practiced hypocritical worship, and covenant unfaithfulness. Therefore Yahweh is coming in judgement, depicted as a purifying fire (exile) that will both purge the evil, and restore His people into a New Jerusalem.

It is not only Israel though who is offered hope. In the oracles to the nations in chapters 13-27 there is a hope of a savior for non-Israelites. The book of Isaiah shows us over and over again that it is not just Israel who repents, and Gentiles are included in the covenant family (Isa. 56:1-8). Redemptive hope is spoken of for the nations, after pronouncement of judgement, even to the enemies of God! (14:32, 16:5, 17:7-8, 18:7, 19:16-25,23:15-18).

The way that Yahweh is depicted in Isaiah as moving human history according to his plan is astounding (chpt.40-48). God is said to be the one who raises up and cuts down Assyria, then Babylon, then Persia. He uses evil human beings, institutions, and nations to judge evil and bring about his redemptive purposes. Said another way, "It is by means of humanity's evil that Yahweh will conquer evil itself among the nations" (Mackie, 18).

Immanuel, Shoot of Jesse, and the Suffering Servant King

This is perhaps one of the most prolific and important themes, not only in the book of Isaiah, but in Scripture as a whole. In chapter seven, God offers King Ahaz a sign to show his commitment to the House of David (2 Sam. 7). Ahaz rejects God's offer (he has already cut a deal with Assyria 2 Kings 16:10-18, who God uses to judge them). God gives him a sign anyway, a child born of a virgin, Immanuel (God with us), that will eventually be Ahaz's replacement.

Isaiah 9:1-7 speaks of a time after the age of judgment and darkness, when "a great light" will appear. This is the messianic king "a child born to us" (v.6, connects us back to the Immanuel child (7:13-15;8:8-10) who will come and defeat the oppressors of God's people. Astounding claims are made about his child. He will be a greater Gideon (v. 4; Jdge. 7-8), breaking the yoke of oppression, shattering the abusive rod, and reestablishing the throne of David forever. This king is explicitly called "Mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace" (v.6) which is language used only of Yahweh himself. Verse seven says he will reign in justice and righteousness, that which Israel has failed to do (Isa. 1). In other words he will fully embodying and fulfilling the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants.

In chapter 11 we are introduced to "a shoot from the stump of Jesse." This recalls the stump metaphor from chapter 6:12-13 which a "holy seed" was to grow out of. The holy seed is now revealed to us here. It is a son of Jesse, but, "…this is not just a new king from David's line (not "from the stump of David"), but rather a New David! (see the title "David" for the messianic king in Hosea 3:4; Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23)" (Mackie, 14). This New David will be empowered by the Spirit of God, like Moses, and Joshua were (Num. 11; Deut. 34:9), bring true justice, righteousness, and peace. Israel is to look for this person who is yet to come.

In chapters 36-37 we see that Isaiah's predictions of foreign invasion (1-12 and 28-33) come to pass. Assyria invades, but is held off by King Hezekiah who has faith in Yahweh, and very much resembles the Immanuel child and the New David that Isaiah has been speaking of up unto this point (7-9, 36-38). However, in chapter 39 we read of the downfall of King Hezekiah, and his failure to trust the Lord resulting in the now coming days when his descendants will be taken into Babylonian captivity (39:5-8). Israel's messiah figure is pushed even further into the future. Immanuel will come and he will look like the figure in chapter 11, but he isn't here yet.

In Isaiah 42:1-9 we read of the commission of the Servant of the Lord. The language used here connects this servant with the New David from chapter 11. In verse six Yahweh says he gives this servant as "a covenant for the people, a light for the nations." This kingly servant will fulfill the covenants, and be a beacon for the nations. No longer will the nations look to a place or people (Jerusalem or Israel), for deliverance, but a person (Isa. 62:10).

Chapter 49 says similar things about this servant, but adds that the servant will be a representative for his people to do what they cannot, but will be rejected by his own people in the process. This servant will fulfill the role of Israel to be a light, and the role of God to bring about a restored humanity. So now the servant is identified as being from among Israel (shoot of Jesse), royal (Isa. 7-9,11), and divine (49:8-13) doing what only Yahweh can!

In chapter 50 there is something very interesting added to the understanding of the servant. We see that the servant trusts in Yahweh for vindication, and that he forms a group of followers (disciples, like Isaiah in chapter eight).

In the final servant poem in Isaiah 53 we see that the servant suffers and dies, on behalf of the many, as guilt offering (Leviticus 5:14-6:7; 7:1-6). The servant dies for the sins of others on their behalf, but will live again! This is rich with atonement theology (Gen. 22; Lev. 16; Rom. 4:25, 5:8; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4, 3:13). As the whole picture comes together and we gain more insights into who this Immanuel, Shoot of Jesse, suffering, divine, and servant king is. Only God himself can fill this bill, and this is who Israel is to put her hope in. The whole book of Isaiah and its meaning communicate that the Immanuel child is yet to come, and the further we read along, the further he gets pitched out into the future. The whole point of the stories is to say that Immanuel is yet to come.

The Arm of the Lord

In chapters 40-66 we get this great imagery, an anthropomorphism, "the arm of the Lord." It is by his arm that salvation is brought to humanity, and that is exactly what these texts play out in various ways. One can hardly walk away from reading the book of Isaiah without seeing how emphatic God is about demonstrating that salvation comes from him alone. It also links his actions together back in the storyline of scripture in earlier accounts of his intervention and rescue of his people (Exod. 6:6; Deut. 4:4). It speaks of his might and power.

The Hope of a Renewed Creation: New Heavens and New Earth

Perhaps two of the most profound and beautiful passages expressing this theme of the restoration of all of creation are Isaiah 11:6-9; and 65:17-25 (which quotes Isaiah 11 and Gen. 3:15). We get these images of Genesis one and two like things. Such as a lion laying down with a calf, a leopard with a goat, and the lion will eat straw like an ox. It's a reversal of the effects of the Fall in Genesis three. God says he creates Jerusalem to be a joy (65:18), there will be no weeping, no death,

no more laboring in vain, no more having your vineyards robbed, and the unfettered presence of God will be there.

Seed, Servants, Remnant

Throughout the entire book of Isaiah from beginning to end there is the theme of a righteous remnant among the people. Chapters 56-66 show who the true seed is. The remnant are those who through the judgement realize their sin, repent, and turn to God for salvation and restoration. Opposite the remnant, the wicked much like Pharaoh in Exodus, are hardened by the events, and they don't trust God. We have already explored earlier that the "seed" includes Gentiles (66:18-24). Chapters 56:9-58:14 show the contrast between the two seeds: the servants and the wicked. The servants are the ones who adopt a lifestyle like that of the suffering servant, and seek to do things like he does (61:1-11). They are disciples of the Servant of the Lord. It is these people who will participate in the eternal covenant promises of Yahweh. It is the remnant who inherit the eternal kingdom of God (60-62).

Implication for Today

Isaiah is roughly 2500 years old, yet its themes ring so true for Christians today. In Isaiah we discover how wicked the human heart can become. We are a people in desperate need of a savior. We learn of a God who providentially moves history in a certain direction. We learn about a God who does not possess everlasting patience, and will judge sin and evil in the world. We learn of a love that pours through this judgment, as it is always a sentence bent on producing repentance and restoration. It is the humble and repentant who are counted among the remnant, the "seed" who will inhabit the New Jerusalem.

Secondly, the gospel message is dripping from the Isaiah scroll. In graphic poetic ways we today, as Israel was in the time of Isaiah and his disciples, are forced to face the reality that we too have failed to uphold God's righteous standards, to keep his commandments and live in covenant fidelity. As the apostle Paul said, no one is righteous, not even one, and all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:10.23). We as Israel was, are incapable of doing what we ought to, and are not able not to sin! We need a savior. But unlike those of Isaiah's time who were awaiting such a figure, we know who the suffering servant is, the messiah, the new David, Jesus Christ our Lord! Moreover, the New Testament authors speak of Jesus being this suffering servant numerous times (Matt. 8:14-17; Jn. 12:37-41; Lk. 22:35-38; 1 Pet. 2:19-25; Acts 8:26-35; Rom. 10:11-21). As those saved by the suffering servant we are also saved to something, saved to do things. We are called to do righteousness and justice just like Abraham and his descendants, and just like the righteous remnant in Isaiah, because we are a part of the righteous remnant, we are Abraham's offspring (Gal. 3:29). This means we are to emulate our savior in word, attitude, and action, sacrificially loving and living for the benefit of others and the glory of Yahweh.

Study Questions:

1. From Isaiah chapter one, what is it that we learn God can no longer endure? What comforting promise does God offer regarding their sins?
2. How did God use evil empires such as Assyria and Babylon to judge the evil of the world?
3. Who are the righteous remnant described throughout Isaiah? How does one become part the covenant community of Yahweh?
4. What is the significance of the statement "A shoot from Jesse"?

5. How does understanding the "suffering servant poems" shape your view of Jesus' purpose, goals, life, ministry, death and resurrection?
6. In the Book of Isaiah, after the exile we read of Israelites rejecting God's message of hope. Why would they do that? Would you struggle like they did to believe the promises of God on the other side of exile?
7. Has there ever been a time that God used evil for good, or to bring about something good in your life? If so, what?
8. What are some practical steps you can take to learn how to trust God even when he seems far way, or in times of doubt?
9. In what ways do you see the hand of God working in your life right now?
10. How can you be a beacon of light in your work place and in your relationships this week?

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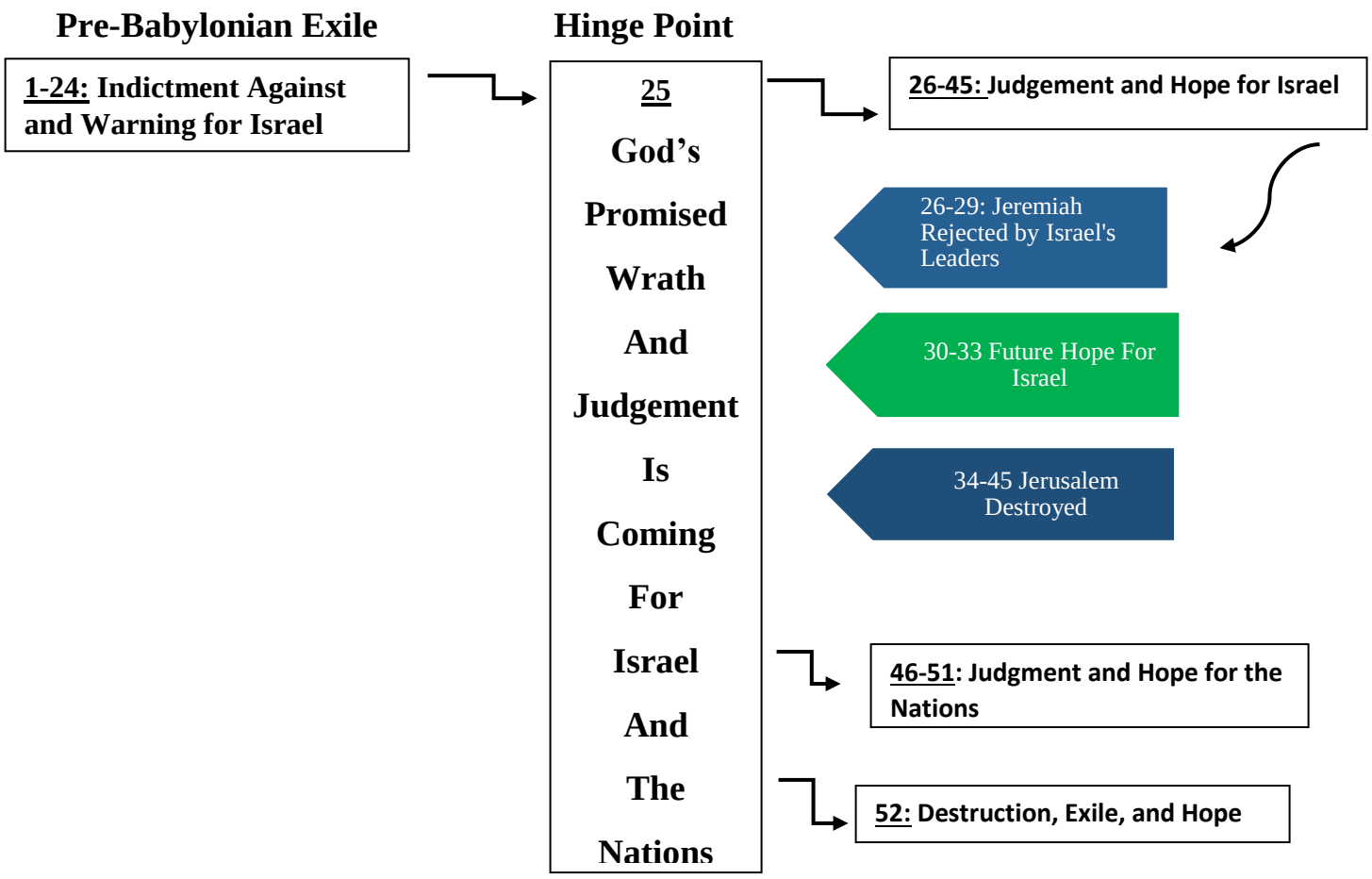
The Book of Jeremiah

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Jeremiah is primarily about God's just wrathful anger and punishment of Israel for breaking the covenant, and his grace in bringing about salvation through judgement, in keeping his steadfast love and faithfulness to his people.

Chapters 1-24: Indictment Against and Warning for Israel

The book of Jeremiah begins by giving us landmarks in which to find our place in redemptive history. Chapter one tells us that Jeremiah was a priest during the final few decades of the kingdom of Judah. From King Josiah to the exile, Jeremiah prophesied and was rejected by his people for 40 years. This is the beginning of the development of Jeremiah as a Moses-like figure (Mackie, 2).

Chapter one summarizes what chapters 1-24 are all about and introduces key themes that immerge throughout the rest of the entire book. Israel has broken her covenant with the Lord and has forsaken him; therefore, they will reap what they have sown (1:11-17). Judgement is coming upon

Israel for all of their evil and idolatry (v.16). Jeremiah is called as God's mouthpiece to Israel and the nations (v.4-19).

In verses 4-19 Jeremiah is painted as a fusion of multiple key Old Testament figures (Mackie, 3). In verse five the phrase "before I formed you in the womb I knew you…appointed you a prophet to the nations" should make us think of similar things said by Yahweh to Moses (Exod. 33:12, 17) and about the suffering servant in Isaiah (Isa. 44:2, 49:1 and 5-6). In verse six Jeremiah responds to God's commissioning him by saying he doesn't know how to speak, and besides that he's only a young man. Two things are happening here: Moses also said he didn't know how to speak (Exod. 4:10) and the prophet Samuel had the same hesitations as Jeremiah due to his youth (1 Sam. 2:21, 3:1). Jeremiah is being portrayed as a type of Moses again and now also as one like the prophet Samuel before him (Mackie, 4). This is made explicit in chapter 15:1, and is a key theme throughout the entire book. In verse seven the phrase "I have put my words in your mouth" echoes back again to Moses (Deut. 18:18), the suffering servant (Isa. 59:21), and the Prophets Isaiah's own calling (Isa. 6). Jeremiah also receives two dreams (like Joseph did in Genesis 37), that play a part in his family turning on him much like Jeremiah's message evokes (Jer. 12). All of this is to say, "Here is Jeremiah, he's like all these other guys before him."

In verses nine and ten the famous words given to Jeremiah capture the purpose of his message and mission, "to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant." His message will be one of judgement and destruction, but also of restoration on the other side of God's judgement. This language is repeated throughout the book (chpt. 12, 18, 24, 29, 30, 31, 33, 40, 42, 45). Because of his message and calling, we are told that Jeremiah will personally suffer, face hostility from his own people, and be rejected by them.

Chapter 7 is a great summary and defense for the rationale behind God bringing his just judgement upon his people for who and what they have become. It also further develops Jeremiah as the prior Old Testament figures spoken of above. Jeremiah is told to go to is work place (The house of the Lord) to proclaim the words of Yahweh to his people.

His proclamation in the temple starts out calling the people to repentance, to amend their ways and deeds, to be just and walk in righteousness, and God would dwell with them. However it quickly moves to God's condemnation on who they have become. In verses 1-11 Jeremiah calls the people to be faithful to the law and covenant through shunning evil and idolatry, and protecting and providing for the vulnerable and needy, much like Moses in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Verse nine is virtually a copy-paste of the Ten Commandments, and in connection with verse ten tells us Israel is guilty of breaking all of these commands! They do not keep the Torah, they neglect the needy, and they practice abominations against the Lord, offering sacrifice to Baal and other gods, and then come into his house and say, "we are delivered" (v.10). They don't believe God would destroy his own house. Yahweh declares that his house has become a "den of robbers" (v.11). His house is full of predators, there is rampant social injustice, and covenant infidelity. Verse seventeen, shows us that it wasn't only the leaders who were practicing injustice. It was so bad, in fact that they were offering their children as sacrifices to foreign deities (30-32). And this is totally appalling to God's that they could think this would be his will. God states earlier that his will originally wasn't for sacrifices at all! (v.22-23), but rather the simple command, "…Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you" (v.23; Exod. 15:26; Deut. 4, 40 5:33, 6:3; Lev. 26:12).

In verses 12-15 the destruction of Jerusalem is spoken of in the same terms as the destruction of the sanctuary in Shiloh from 1 Samuel 3:10-14, again drawing a connection between Samuel and Jeremiah (Mackie class notes p. 6). What God did at Shiloh he is about to do to Jerusalem. Jeremiah is to his generation as Moses was to the wilderness generation, and Samuel was to his generation.

In verse sixteen we receive a shocking word to Jeremiah from Yahweh. He specifically commands Jeremiah not to pray or make intercession for the people on their behalf (a very defining role of a priest and prophet!). Jeremiah is not allowed to practice this role, but why? Moses and Samuel both prayed to Yahweh on behalf of the people (Num. 21:7; Deut. 9:20.26; 1 Sam. 7:5,8:6,12:19,12:23), shouldn't the "New Moses/Samuel" do the same? What we learn from reading these passages is that intercession by the prophets often lead to preventing judgement. God is taking the one thing away from Jeremiah that can make him stop/ influence God's actions. This is profound and repeated with greater intensity throughout the book of Jeremiah (chpt. 11, 14, 15). This also means that Jeremiah must go through the judgement alongside his people, becoming a suffering representative for them. Because of these things spoken of above, God will judge and punish his people for their sins.

Chapters 11-20 further develops Jeremiah in the mold of those before him (Moses, Samuel, suffering servant, Joseph), but adds a couple of key concepts. Jeremiah is depicted as the suffering prophet in connection again to the suffering servant of Isaiah, but the portrait begins to become more filled out as we are told that people are plotting his destruction. Jeremiah begins to wonder why those who are committing treachery are prospering. Jeremiah's suffering is making him question God's justice and so he expresses his emotions in laments to God (Jer. 8, 11, 15, 20, 28 42) (also think the character of Job here who didn't suffer for his own wrong doing either) (Mackie, 10-11). So what we have here is another dimension being added to the servant portrait from Isaiah (Isa. 40-55). In Isaiah the servant didn't question God's justice. But here Jeremiah does. He doesn't want God's calling for him, but he knows it is inevitable (Jer. 20). Jeremiah and Job give us a fuller understanding of the suffering servant. We see this played out later through Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt.26). Just because one accepts a calling, doesn't mean that they don't have emotions. Jeremiah was human, Jesus was fully human too. It's completely legitimate to vent our emotions to God, and this text shows us that.

Chapter 25: God's Promised Wrath and Judgement is Coming for Israel and the Nations

Jeremiah has persistently spoken to the people about the judgment that is to come upon them if they do not repent, but they have not listened to him, just like God had said they wouldn't listen. Therefore, God is sending Babylon as his instrument of judgement against his people and the nations. King Nebuchadnezzar is said by God himself to be, "my servant" (v. 9). Yahweh will use Babylon as his tool for 70 years, then he will judge them for their inequity (v.12). The failure of Israel to respond to all the prophets God had sent them has led to their inevitable destruction and exile. It is not just Israel that will be destroyed in Babylon's wake, but "all the nations to whom I send you (Jeremiah)," will drink the cup of God's wrath.

Chapters 26-45: Judgement and Hope for Israel

Chapters 26-29 are about Jeremiah's showdown with the other prophets and being rejected by them. The conflict forces the reader to decide who really speaks for Yahweh. Is it Jeremiah the lone-wolf, or the esteemed prophets of the king's court?

Chapters 30-33 are in the middle of the book of Jeremiah, and not by accident. They speak of the future hope for Israel. It is in chapter 30 that we finally hear of the promised hope from chapter one. It breaks up the rejection of Jeremiah by his peers (chpt. 26-29) and the destruction and siege of Jerusalem (chpt.34-45). It is the only good news in the entire book. It is here that God speaks of the future restoration of Israel. The days are coming when judgment will be over and it will be time for building and planting again (picking up the images from chapter one). It culminates in the New Covenant passage of chapter 31:23-40. God says here that he will give his people a new heart (think chapter 4:3-4, Deut. 30:6 circumcision of the heart) that has the Torah written on it, and he will forgive the sins of his people. This new heart will be a heart with God's will an initiatives written on it. Chapter 33:1-26 speaks further restoration and the continuation of the Davidic Covenant and Levitical priesthood. It tells of a healed people and land, the return of joyful sounds, and the promise of a righteous king from the line of David.

Chapters 34-45 speak of the destruction and siege of Jerusalem, and events leading up to it. These are Jeremiah's final days in Jerusalem. He is asked on two separate occasions to intercede, first on behalf of the royal house and then on behalf of the remnant (Mackie, 19). They both reject his counsel and both times Jeremiah ends up being thrown into a pit (think Joseph portrait again). Jeremiah is eventually taken into captivity to Egypt. This is meant to be seen as an "anti-Exodus" and Jeremiah as being a rejected Moses and Joseph figure (Mackie, 19).

Chapters 46-51: Judgment and Hope for the Nations

In chapters 46-51 we see God's previous promise of using Babylon as his tool of destruction in the judgment of the nation's surrounding Israel come to fruition. After he has done so, his judgment will fall upon Babylon. God uses evil kingdoms to punish the evil that is in the world, but will not leave them unpunished for their sins either, because his is fundamentally against arrogant, prideful, idolatrous nations. He has been opposed to Babylon and its purposes from the beginning (Gen. 11).

Chapter 52: Destruction, Exile, and Hope

Chapter 52 is a quick summary of the two major aspects of Jeremiah's message, judgement and hope. Jerusalem is destroyed, showing Jeremiah to be a true prophet, and God to be faithful to his word in executing judgement. There is also this strange story taken from 2 Kings 25 about King Jehoiachin being exalted in exile by the king of Babylon. The language used in chapter 52 sounds much like the language used in Genesis 40 an 41 to speak of Joseph, thus portraying Jehoiachin as a "New-Joseph" (Mackie class notes, p. 20) It seems random and odd, especially as a close to the book. However, Jehoiachin is from the royal line of David. Thus this seemingly strange story is here to tell us that the promise of a future messianic king from the line of David (Jer. 23:5–6; 33:15–16) is being kept, even in exile (Mackie, 23).

Key Themes:

Covenant Infidelity

At its core, what occasioned the writing of Jeremiah was the fact that Israel had broken the Mosaic covenant. Israel had become a place marked by rampant social injustice and idolatry (chpt. 2–3, 5, 7, 10). As discussed early, it had become so evil that some were even sacrificing their children as offerings to other gods (Jer. 7), and verse nine is nearly a copy-paste of the Ten Commandments, which Israel, in the same breath, is accused of breaking entirely. To express how God felt about it, the book of Jeremiah uses the powerful and evocative metaphors of adultery, marital unfaithfulness, and prostitution (2:20; 3:1-3,6,8-9;4:30;5:7;7:9;13:27;22:20,22; 23:14; 29:23;30:14) to describe how sin and selfishness destroy relationships with others and especially with God. Idolatry in Jeremiah is often described using these metaphors.

Sin as Self-destruction

An important theme that arises particularly in chapters seven, twenty-five, and forty-four, is that of Israel's sins and actions leading to her own self-destruction. In her desire to do her own will and chase after other lovers (Jer. 3, 4, 22, 30), Israel has done so to her own demise. God does not punish arbitrarily, but justly and for a purpose (Deut. 28-30). In these chapters in Jeremiah, it is by the "works of your (Israel's) hands", "to your (Israel's) own harm" that Israel has pursued other gods, and provoked the Lord to anger by not staying faithful to the covenant. The things they desire in place of and apart from Yahweh lead to their inevitable destruction. When she does not obey Yahweh, Israel only harms herself.

Jeremiah as Suffering Prophet

See the above section on chapters 1-24, specifically the paragraph on chapters 11-20 where this theme is developed.

Future Restoration

There is a massive amount of sadness, anger, despair, evil, and judgment in the book of Jeremiah. It is graphic and intense. However, we must not lose sight of God's purpose in judgement, and Jeremiah's message as consisting of two parts: judgment ***and hope.*** God is good, he's just, he's holy, he's jealous for his glory, so he has to punish the sin and evil of Israel and the nations. However, his purpose in doing so is not merely to crush, but to restore and to build up. For it is in and through judgement that a faithful remnant will come out the other side responding in repentance and faith in Yahweh (29:10-14). In Jeremiah, God explicitly promises restoration after exile (30:3, 18; 31:23; 33:6–9). Perhaps the most astonishing future promise and message of hope is the New Covenant (31:31–34; 32:37–41), where God will give his people a new heart with the Torah written on it, and forgives their sin and iniquity, remembering it no more. This is harkening back to the circumcision of the heart spoken of in chapter four and in Deuteronomy 30. What an astonishing promise and message of hope offered to people who sacrifice their children to other Gods, neglect the lowly in society, and abuse their relationships with others. What love Yahweh has for sinners like us, and radical faithfulness to his promises.

Davidic King

See the above section on chapter 52 where this theme is explained.

Call for Repentance

Throughout the entire book, Yahweh calls Israel to repent. The words, repent, return, and turn from, appear all over the pages of this book (Jer. 3,4,8, 14,15,18,22,24,31,33,46,50). God's desire is for heart transformation (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:3-4) for there is no other way in which Israel can walk in the ways of the Lord. It is precisely this that is promised in the restoration and New Covenant text (31:31–34; 32:37–41). This is important to remember. God wanted his people to turn from their sin and evil, to repent, and come back to him, but they refused. They refused, "to be ashamed" (3:3), refused, "to take correction" and, "to repent" (5:3), refused, "to be healed" (15:18), refused "to know me (Yahweh)" (9:6), and they refused, "to listen" (16:12). God's repeated pleas to Israel to repent were met with these responses. God says explicitly multiple times that he has "persistently" sent his servants and prophets day after day to call Israel to turn from evil and repent, but they refused (7:25; 29:11; 35:15; 44:4). That's why they need a new heart. They are incapable of not sinning.

Implications for Today

The book of Jeremiah is a major gut-check. In it we see just how evil and wicked humanity is in its pursuit of things outside of God's will. What one thinks is good, pleasurable, and will lead to happiness, apart from God, will always lead to destruction. What we want apart from God's will, will lead to disaster, heartache, and pain. Lest we think society is better or worse now than it was then, Jeremiah forces us to see that the world is still much the same. Perhaps no one in North America sacrifices their children to foreign deities (Jer. 7), but how many children are thrown out, murdered, or never born in the name of the god of autonomous-self, personal freedom, pro-choice, or women's rights? Perhaps we should take a look in the mirror before we point a finger. Israel's leaders where accused of breaking all of the Ten Commandments (7:8), which was leading to rampant social injustice and grotesque idolatry. Is there social injustice in our world still? Do people serve other gods besides Yahweh? Yes! How do we treat the social outcast, the poor, the homeless, the refugee, and the widow? Do we treat the "other" as "us" or do we just see those in need as "them" as irrelevant, leeches, of no benefit to us our society? In Jeremiah, God is upset because they are sinning against him and serving other gods to their own destruction, but he is also very angry with how Israel is treating their fellow countrymen and image bearers of Yahweh in general. We can forget that sometimes. God cares about how we treat each other, and that we take care of one another. When we fail to do so we fail to reflect his nature and character accurately to the world. In Jeremiah, we get this picture that God can't allow his image to be anymore marred and mangled than it has become in his people, so he steps in, and in judgment punishes his people. He does so though, with future restoration in mind. He judges for the purpose of cleansing, that repentance and restoration may take place.

Living in the times we do today, we have the fortunate vantage point of looking back through the Old Testament with New Testament glasses. In the passages in Jeremiah that link to the suffering servant of Isaiah (Spoken of above) to Jeremiah and Job, it's like we receive the emotional side of Jesus in this portrait. Whereas Isaiah sketched the servant as suffering physical pain and rejection, the connections made from Jeremiah show us the raw human emotions that the suffering servant would exhibit in the future. This should draw our eyes to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26).

Jesus knows what has to be done, and he doesn't want to do it! Does he submit to the will of the father? Yes, but that doesn't mean, as fully God and fully man he doesn't feel any emotions toward his calling (just like Jeremiah in his laments, and Job in his suffering). When Jesus says, "if it be possible,

let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39) it seems to me that he is talking about the same cup he mentioned to the disciples earlier in Matthew 20:22 when he said, "are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" (In context, who will sit next to him in his kingdom). What is the cup he is referring to? Remember the cup from chapter 25 of Jeremiah? The cup is the image representing God's wrath against Israel and the nations. It is full of wine, and Jeremiah is told to take it to Israel and all of the nations the Lord tells him to, and make them drink, and get drunk on it. Jeremiah is to Jerusalem what Jesus is to Jerusalem, except that Jesus won't hand the cup to the nations like Jeremiah, rather Jesus takes the cup and drinks it himself, and it kills him (Mackie, Lecture). He dies in our place, for our sins, on our behalf so that we may be forgiven, justified before God, through repentance and faith, and given a new Torah- inscribed heart.

These are but just a few examples of how the prophet Jeremiah still speaks so true to us today.

Study Questions:

1. What are some of the metaphors used to describe Israel's sin in relation to God in the book of Jeremiah?
2. What is the significance of Jeremiah being portrayed as a type of or like other OT characters such as Moses, Samuel, Job, and Joseph?
3. At the end of Jeremiah we get this strange story about King Jehoiachin being exalted in Babylon. Why is this story here? What is the big deal?
4. Giving examples from the text, tell me why God is so angry with Israel. Why is he about to punish his people? Be specific.
5. If God's wrath, anger, and judgement against Israel and the nations is not arbitrary, what purposes do you see it serving in Jeremiah?
6. Jeremiah emotionally vents to God in very raw, intense, and personal ways. Is this a legitimate thing for a child of God to do? Where else in scripture do we see this taking place?
7. What does it mean as a Christian to have a "a new heart"? How would you explain that to a friend or co-corker?
8. What hope is offered in Jeremiah to a nation with a rampant sin problem? Connect this hope in light of the coming of Christ (his life, death, and resurrection).
9. What are some things in your life that God is calling you to repent of? Be honest with yourself. What are some practical ways in which you can "return to Yahweh?"
10. If you feel comfortable, share with someone in the group (or the whole group) a time where God restored or healed you from your sin. This could be your testimony, deliverance from addiction, a restored relationship, offering forgiveness, or letting go of bitterness etc.

Bibliography

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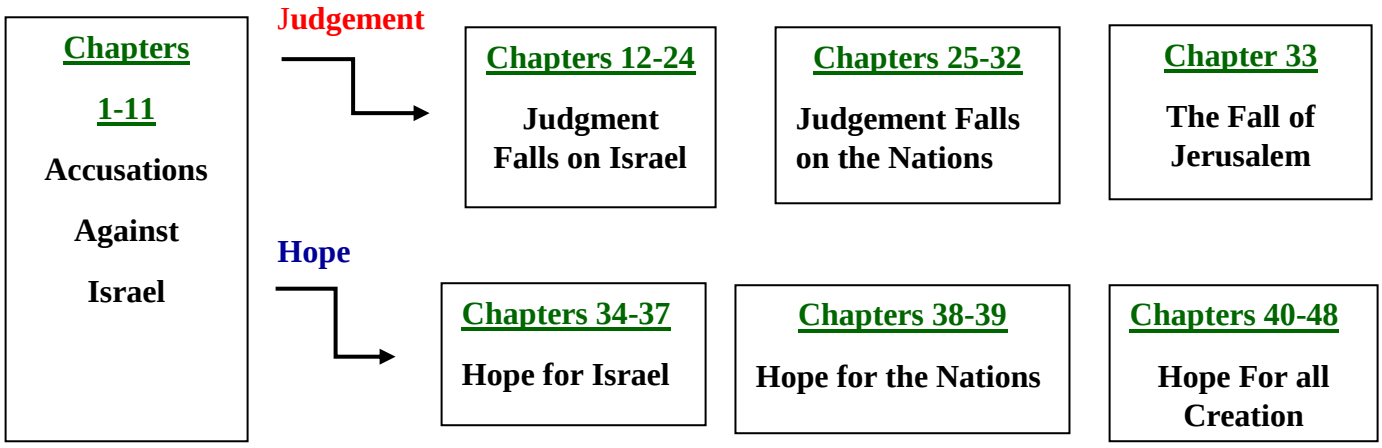
The Book of Ezekiel

Structure



Main Idea: The purpose of the book of Ezekiel is to expose the human condition, display why God must judge sin and the marring of his name among his people Israel and the nations, but also show how even in his wrath, God will not leave his creation without hope for the future, because of his steadfast love and covenant faithfulness.

Chapters 1-11: Accusations Against Israel

The first three verse of chapter one are background information, and commentary to add clarification and landmarks for the context of the story before the beginning of Ezekiel's vision in verse four. Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah, and was brought into Babylonian captivity after the first attack on Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 598 (Mackie, 2). He was among those taken in the first wave of exiles to go to Babylon (2Kings 24:1-17). Therefore, Ezekiel's audience is exiles in Babylon, and Jerusalem is still standing at this point. Verse one says it was the "thirtieth year" most likely referring to Ezekiel's birthday which is significant because this would have been the year he would have been installed as a priest (Num. 4:3,35) in Jerusalem (Mackie, 3). Verse two of chapter one further helps us grasp where we are in redemptive history by placing Ezekiel's vision approximately five years into exile. Ezekiel's vision begins in verse four.

In chapters one through three, Ezekiel is commissioned as a prophet to Israel to confront and accuse them of their grotesque sin, and warn them of the coming sure destruction that will befall them and is given this crazy vision. The vision Ezekiel receives is wrapped up in two primary images: a storm (v.4) and God's throne (v.26-28). These two themes are pulling on prior themes in Israel's history which denote the presence of God. The storm should spark in the reader's mind Yahweh appearing in a storm and cloud on Sinai (Exod. 19-20; Ps 18:7-14; Ps 29), while the throne should remind us of Yahweh's presence in the tabernacle/temple (Exod. 25:17-22; 40:34-48, Lev 9:23-24, Isa. 6; Ps 99:1) with striking resemblance to the linguistics used in Ezekiel here (Mackie, 3).

In chapter 1:4-14 we read of the storm and the four living creatures. These creatures are described as having human, ox, eagle, and lion-like features, and other spectacular imagery. They are

later identified as cherubim in 10:20 (see also Gen. 3:24 Isa.6). They are servants of God, operating in unparalleled closeness to the presence of the almighty, as his throne bearers. In chapter 1:15-21 we learn that there are wheels attached to the living creatures, and that these wheels have eyes (v.18) and can move in any direction (v.16), describing its mobility. Verse 20 says "the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels." Not just the creatures, but even the wheels, because they are in such close proximity to God, are animated by him! (Mackie, 4). In the next several verses, 22-27, we learn of a platform and throne that is above the living creatures which is described with imagery conveying the message of Yahweh as the king over all of the universe (Exod. 24:9-10, Exod. 25:22; Ps 99:1; Isa 6; Dan. 7:9-10; Rev. 1:12-16). In verse 28 Ezekiel realizes what he is seeing, "this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh" (Exod. 33:18-23; 40:34-35; Lev 9:23-24). He hears this and falls on his face. This should make us wonder, "What is the glory of Yahweh doing in Babylon, and how did it get here?"

After Ezekiel realizes what he has seen, the Lord speaks to him and gives him his marching orders (2:1-3:9). In verse two we learn that the Spirit enters Ezekiel, the same Spirit that animated the creatures (1:12, 20-21). Ezekiel is told the Israelites will be resistant, rebellious, and will not listen to him (2:3-7, 3:5-11), because the exile did not change their hearts. In fact, they are participating in the same covenant violations as their fathers, for they are stubborn and have hard hearts (2:4, 3:7, Exod. 32:9). God tells Ezekiel not to be afraid of the people (2:6, 3:9) just as he said to Jeremiah (Jer. 1:8), because it is Yahweh who is commissioning.

In chapter 2:8-3:3 Ezekiel is commanded by the Lord to take and eat a scroll that has words of lamentation, mourning, and woe (2:10), for he is to take the Lord's message of accusation, warning, and judgement to his fellow countrymen in exile. Isaiah's lips get touched (Isa.6), Jeremiah had the words of God put in his mouth (Jer. 15:16), and Ezekiel eats a scroll (see also Psa.19:10, 119:103; Rev.10:10). After internalizing, and finishing eating the scroll of judgment, fully taking in the warranted judgement for Israel's covenant infidelity, it becomes like honey (v.3:3). Ezekiel is to be a suffering prophet like Jeremiah (Jer. 11-20) and the suffering servant of Isaiah (Isa. 40-55). However, judgement will bring about something sweet on the other side.

In chapter 3:10-15 Ezekiel is transported back home and he is really upset. He sits by the river for seven days angry, reluctant, and distressed about his calling. The picture of Ezekiel's calling is similar and different to that of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah says, "Send me" (Isa.6), Jeremiah is hesitant (Jer.1), but Ezekiel is angry. Dr. Tim Mackie describes Ezekiel's state this way, "Ezekiel sits stunned for seven days (3:14-15), exactly the number of days his ordination into the priesthood would have lasted (Exod 29:35). Instead he is ordained for a very different kind of commission, one that disturbs him deeply" (4).

Chapters 3:16-5:17 describe Ezekiel's prophetic sign acts. Jeremiah performed sign acts too (Jer. 13 for example). They were a mode of communication, symbolic street theater, in which the prophet did bizarre acts that were meant to make people ask questions. They prefigured things that were to take place. But first we are given some information that sets the stage for these strange acts. Ezekiel is posted as Israel's watchman (3:17-21; chpt.18, 33:7-9). The image is of a person atop a city's walls scanning the horizons for enemy activity. The ironic thing about his image is that the enemy in this context is Yahweh himself; Babylon is merely his tool (Mackie, 5). Additionally, what enemy would warn the city it is about to overtake? God is pictured here as both enemy, and guardian of his people. He will both judge apostasy and save through his wrath.

In chapter 3:16,22-27 we begin to learn about just how difficult Ezekiel's calling was. Ezekiel is bound in his house with cords, and he's made mute! For the next seven years he is not allowed to speak (chapter 33, after the destructions of Jerusalem happens) unless he is speaking an oracle from the Lord (Mackie, 5). Dr. Mackie explains, "This entire scene sets the stage for Ezekiel's sign-acts in 4:1-5:17: a mute, bound man shut up in his house, burning with emotion, acting out these strange symbolic stories to his fellow refugees" (5).

The first sign-act appears in chapter 4:1-3 in which Ezekiel is told to make a model of Jerusalem out of a brick, and stage a siege against it, and put an iron skillet between himself and the city. This was to depict the sack of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar 2 Kings 24-25, and the separation of God from his people.

The second sign-act appears in chapter 4:4-8 in which Ezekiel is told to lay on his side for long periods of time (hundreds of days), a day for each year of Israel and Judah's punishment. Here Ezekiel is told by God that he is placing upon his side the punishment of the house of Israel. The symbol here is that of Ezekiel taking on the role of the scapegoat from the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:21-22). That is, he is to bear the collective sin of Israel's breach of covenant.

Ezekiel does other sign-acts such as chopping off his beard and hair (5:1-4) which was prohibited for a priest to do (Lev 21:5; Ezek. 44:20) and indicated a sign of mourning (Isa .15:2-3; Jer. 16:6-7). Ezekiel also made and ate unclean bread (4:9-17) further demonstrating his intentional defilement of the priesthood to make a point.

Chapter five is a total shaming of Israel for failing at her mission to be a light to the nations (Gen 12:1-3; Exod. 19:4-6; Ps 72). Ezekiel describes how Israel has failed to keep the covenant, has violated the Torah, and is going to reap the consequences of their idolatry (Deut. 28. Lev. 26). Ezekiel says that horrible things such as cannibalism, famine, shame, and exile will befall Israel as a result of the covenant curses she has brought upon herself.

Chapters eight through eleven comprise Ezekiel's temple vision. This vision draws Ezekiel back to Jerusalem and shows him the abominations taking place in the temple (8:6). Remember Ezekiel's first vision, the glory of Yahweh was where it "shouldn't" be, in Babylon. Now God is taking him to where it "should" be, Jerusalem. In chapter 8:3-17 God shows Ezekiel that the elders and priests are setting up idols and worshiping other god's in his temple! Verse twelve says they believed Yahweh had abandoned them so they worshipped other god's, and as a result, social injustice and violence are rampant (8:17). Chapter nine speaks of the "executioners" of the city. These seven angelic beings bring God's justice upon Jerusalem. The faithful remnant is marked and spared, while the idolaters are killed (9:4). Verse six should remind us of the Passover event in Exodus twelve, where those who have the "mark" are spared. Ezekiel also notices in this vision that the glory of the Lord is beginning to move from the holy of holies (9:3, 10:18-19, 11:22-23).

In chapter 11 we see two significant developments: the presence of Yahweh leaves the temple, and a message of hope is offered for the future. Those who are in Jerusalem are thinking of those in exile, "those guys got judged, we're good, the city is ours now." But what God is clearly saying and demonstrating in this vision is the exact opposite. His presence and glory is packing and leaving to be with the faithful remnant in exile, in Babylon. The people of Israel have driven Yahweh out of his own house with their abominations. There is no call to repentance here. It is too late. However, there is the promise of a new, unified heart and spirit that will be given to the people of God, that will rid them of

their idols, and empower them to truly follow and obey Him, because of this new transformed heart (11:14-21). These promises point forward to the messianic, new covenant hope in chapters34-37, but chapters 12-33 explore the immediate future judgment on Jerusalem and the nations (Mackie, 10).

Chapters 12-24: Judgment Falls on Israel

These chapters are overwhelmingly about bad news for Jerusalem, as the ensuring judgement is irrevocable. Outside of chapters eighteen and twenty, which do offer a future hope, the rest of the literature is bleak. Two sign-acts bookend these chapters (12 and 24), and interwoven are case studies (14,18, 20), allegories (15,16,19,23), parables (15-17,19,21-24) and oracles (18-22).

Chapter twelve describes Ezekiel's sign-act that symbolizes Judah's coming captivity (Jer. 39:1-7), while chapters thirteen and fourteen pit Ezekiel against the false prophets, showing him to be a true prophet and condemning them for their idolatry and other sin. Jerusalem is doomed for destruction, and the remnant that does come out the other side will have nothing to boast in, but the grace of God.

Ezekiel uses strong language and images, pushing the boundaries of acceptability more than perhaps any other prophet. This is especially so in the parables and allegories that depict what Israel has become. To demonstrate just a couple, in chapter 15, the shortest chapter in the book, Ezekiel essentially calls Israel a burnt useless stick. He uses the imagery of Israel being a vine planted by Yahweh (Isa 5:1-7; Ps 80:9-20), but twists it showing what it truly has become (Mackie, 13). In chapter sixteen the next parable is taken up a notch comparing Israel to a prostitute. This is the longest oracle among the prophets (Mackie, 13). Ezekiel picks up this metaphor used by others before and during his time to describe Israel's covenant infidelity (Exod.34:15-16; Deut. 31:16; Hos.1-3; Jer. 2:20-25). In this graphic chapter, the reader comes away seeing Israel's entire history being that of a promiscuous, unfaithful bride.

In chapter eighteen Ezekiel takes on the common idea and belief of ancestral or generational guilt and innocence in a case-study style of writing. This was a huge issue for the exiles, and Ezekiel takes it head on. Verse 2 reads, "The parents eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" it is a well know common parable in Israel (see also Jer. 31:29). The parable is essentially saying that it's the children who pay for their parents' mistakes. This is what the exiles think is happening to them. They are paying for the mistakes of their parents in Babylon, but are innocent. It is blame shifting. It is a fatalistic mindset that one's own destiny is decided by someone else's actions. But Ezekiel rejects this claim, and in speaking the words of the Lord, declares that nobody's fate is simply based on others' decisions. Every person is responsible for their own actions and how they respond to their circumstances and situations. Our moral decisions matter and everyone receives judgment based on their own sin and their own choices (18:4). Ezekiel goes on to explain this further in a case study/story (18:5-19). Ezekiel's point is that there is not merited or transferred guilt or innocence passed down from generation to generation, but each individual must choose to follow Yahweh or not. But even more than that, ones own past virtue doesn't save them from anything if they are sinning presently (18:24). Israel thinks this is unjust (18:25,29). In verse thirty we get one of the only calls for repentance in this section of the book. And it is given in the same breath as the command to make for "yourself" a new heart and a new spirit (v.30). So in chapter 11 this new heart and new spirit were said to be given by God, but here is the command to get it for oneself. The chapter ends with a note of hope that forces people to make a decision.

Chapter 20 is another chapter in this section of Ezekiel that ends with hope forcing people to make a choice. The leaders of the exiled community come to Ezekiel to seek Yahweh as if everything is okay, and he lets them have it, in similar fashion to Isaiah 1:10-17. The name of God has been marred by Israel's decisions throughout history. Ezekiel gives a revisionist view of Israel's history, in which he rereads it from his point of view in redemptive history. This causes him to see each stage of Israel's history as just another step further down the descent in to apostasy and idolatry, snowballing with ever-increasing speed into exile. The anger of the Lord culminates in verse thirty-one, where Yahweh brings up the fact Israel had so profaned his name that they sacrificed their children to other gods (Jer. 7:30-32). God is essentially saying to them, "You don't get to inquire of me." That is profound.

In verse 32-44 we see a glimpse of God's plan for the future of Israel. He will not allow his people to serve other gods (v.32) and Israel is about to go on a reverse Exodus adventure in which they are being taken from their land into the wilderness of Babylon (v.35, book of Numbers). Exile will purify Israel's disobedient ones (20:35-39), and bring them back into the land where they will offer acceptable worship in a restored temple in Jerusalem (20:40-41), and so restore Yahweh's reputation among the nations (20:41-42) (Mackie, 18). Yahweh is pictured as a stern shepherd who will restore Israel for his glory and his holy name (20:9, 14, 22, and 44).

This section ends with chapter 24, and perhaps the most horrifying of sign-acts in the book. In chapter 24:15-27 Ezekiel is informed that his wife is going to die the next day, and he will not be allowed to mourn her death. Dr. Tim Mackie describes this final sign-act, "The loss of the 'delight of his eyes' (24:16) is to become his last sign-act (24:14) to the exiles that the 'pride of your power, the delight of your eyes,' i.e. Jerusalem and the temple and their children, are going to be destroyed (24:21)" (20). Ezekiel is then told that soon he will be able to speak again, after the destruction of Jerusalem (chapter 33) from which point Ezekiel becomes a messenger of hope.

Chapters 25-32: Judgement Falls on the Nations

These oracles consist of the judgment that is to befall the nations surrounding Israel. Chapter 28 ties together several major themes in the book of Ezekiel, namely how God will restore his people and vindicate his name among the nations. This chapter is an oracle against the king of Tyre. The king is depicted in the same language as the story of Adam. The king of Tyre has made himself "God". The prophets look out at history and they see the same Genesis 3-11 pattern (humans who exalt themselves) playing out over and over again (See also Isa. 14). Therefore, just like Adam's rise and fall, so too will the king of Tyre's life be played out. Ezekiel's point in these chapters about God's judgement upon the nations, is that what is true of Tyre, is true of any rebellious evil nation. They all play out the Genesis 3-11 story in their own ways, and God responds accordingly. Babylon in Genesis 11 becomes the architype for all other rebellious nations that come after whether it be Tyre, Egypt, Moab etc. (Mackie, Lecture).

Verses 24-26 are the hinge point in which we discover that the Judgement on the nations equals restoration for Israel. God says the nations won't be a pestilence anymore, he's going to give them back the land of Jacob where they will dwell in safety under his protecting presence, and His name will be vindicated (Num. 33:55; Josh. 23:13; Jer. 23:6,32:37).

Chapter 33: The Fall of Jerusalem

This chapter serves as a transitional section from Ezekiel's message of judgment (chpt.1-32) to his message of hope (chpt. 34-48). This chapter shows Ezekiel to be a true prophet, because what he said would happen did indeed take place. Verses one through nine repeat Ezekiel's role as watchman, from chapter 3:17-21. However, now it is made public, that is, what the Lord said in private to Ezekiel about his role as a watchman, is now what Ezekiel is saying he's been trying to do for the past seven years (Mackie, 29).

Verses 10-20 draw from chapter eighteen heavily, describing God's will for the righteous and wicked. There is hope in this message, as one can repent and have a change of heart and God will except them again. In vases 21-22 the promised messenger arrives (from chapter 24), with news of the destruction of Jerusalem. Ezekiel is her freed from his inability to speak (3:26-27), which marks the beginning of a new prophetic ministry for the prophet, a message of hope (Mackie, 29). The final verses of the chapter tell us that Ezekiel has become the talk of the town, and is warned about flattery, and reminded to be faithful to his call (v.30-33) as he enters into the second phase of his prophetic ministry.

Chapters 34-37: Hope for Israel

In this section the big picture is, that everything that died in exile is being reborn. Chapter 34 is about the judgment of Israel's bad and evil shepherds, and the promise of a new, better one, the messianic shepherd-king (Mackie, 31). Ezekiel uses the key metaphor of Israel's leaders, kings, and God himself as shepherds (2 Sam. 5 and 7; Hos. 4:16; Micah 7:14). Jeremiah also accused Israel's shepherds in like manner (Jer. 23:1-6). Israel's leaders have failed, they have abused their office, and now Yahweh will come and remove them and take their place (v.1-16). In verses 23-24 God says he will set over his people one shepherd, His servant David. The title "David" is also used for the messianic king in Isaiah 11, Hosea 3:4, and Jer.30:9 who will be empowered by the Spirit of God, like Moses and Joshua were (Num. 11; Deut. 34:9), bringing true justice, righteousness, and peace. The activity of this "New David" and God himself are nearly identical in this passage (see v.12,14,23-24). The rest of the chapter speaks of a renewed covenant, using the language of convent blessings from Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Chapter 36 speaks further on the theme of a new heart given to God's, people, but it doesn't start there. It actually starts with a recounting of Israel's descent into exile, and how it damaged God's reputation amongst the nations (v.20-21). Dr. Mackie asserts that, "the fate of nations was popularly linked to the fate of their national deity (see the same logic from the lips of an Assyrian commander in 2 Kings 18:33-35). Israel's exile meant Yahweh was perceived as merely a tribal god who lost to Marduk and couldn't defend his people (remember Moses' appeal to the same logic in Exod. 32:12; Num. 14:16)." (32). God will restore Israel for his name's sake that they may know him as he truly is, the creator and sustainer of the universe and its redeemer. God's will has been profaned and he will vindicate his holiness (v.23). This background informs the purpose of the "new heart" promise in the subsequent verses.

Verse 25 speaks of "sprinkling clean water" on Israel as a nation, a sort of ceremonial cleansing of their moral impurity (Num. 19; Isa. 4:4; Jer. 33:8) (Mackie, 33). Verse 26 is verbatim the language used earlier in chapter eleven. Yahweh promised to give a new heart, one of flesh and not of stone, and a new spirit, and cause his people to walk in obedience to his ways (v.27). This last bit (v.27) is new information. Now we learn about this new heart, that it is given for the purpose of being able to do the

Shema, (Deut. 6; Jer. 31). The rest of the chapter goes on to speak of future covenant blessings for the purpose of restoring His name amongst the nations.

In chapter 37 we receive the famous valley of dry bones vision. This is symbolic of the resurrection of Israel and the creating anew linked to the previous chapter. It speaks of what Yahweh is going to do to his people. In verses one and two Ezekiel finds himself transported into a valley covered in dry bones. He is a priest, so this would disqualify him purification-wise, as they were not allowed to come into contact with dead bodies. In verse three he is asked if these bones can live, to which Ezekiel replies, "God you know." Verses 4-10 recount the Lord's command for Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones, and what happens to them. This passage drips with Genesis 2:7 language. The resurrection of these bones will be a new creation powered by God's spirit (his animating breath). Verse 11-14 interpret this vision for us. Despair, and hopelessness in exile has set in, but God gives them hope for the future, that is in the giving of new life in and placing his new creation in the Promised Land once again. Yahweh will redeem his people from their sin and death. The remaining verses pick up on all the images of hope from the chapters in this section (such as purification of idolatry (36:25), messianic king (34:23-24), regathering (11, 20,28,34), Torah obedience (36:27) etc. and teaches us that there is only one future hope and one renewed covenant for God's people (Mackie, 34).

Chapters 38-39: Hope for the Nations

There is a lot of conjecture around these chapters, and there is notoriously difficult imagery to interpret, however the emphasis of these chapters and the themes within are easily understandable. These chapters pick up the earlier theme from chapter 28:25-26 describing Israel's security in the land as coming about because of God's dealing with the evil of the surrounding nations. He does this so that they may know that he is the Lord. Essentially "Gog" is a symbolic figure who personifies and embodies all the features of Israel's past enemies, and comes to represent all humanity in rebellion against God (Mackie, 36). Ezekiel pulls images he used earlier to describe Egypt, Tyre, Assyria, and Babylon, and combines them in "Gog" creating a super mega bad guy, as well as images found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, the flood narrative, and the ten plagues (Mackie, 34). Gog must be defeated before the restoration of all things may take place. These chapters are about how God deals finally with evil, so that the consummation of all things may become a reality. Ezekiel's view of the problem of sin and evil goes beyond Israel, including peoples and places not even on the horizon. This is connected to Yahweh making his name known to all nations (harkening back to Abraham Gen. 12). Bible commentator Christopher Wright helps us understand how to interpret these chapters, "The vision consists of deliberately exaggerated and caricatured language, not literal prediction. Comparable to political cartoons, the frames are not to be interpreted as prophetic literary photography, but as an impressionistic literary sketch" (321). The concluding verses of these chapters pick up early themes of hope from previous chapters, but with a few new details.

Chapters 40-48: Hope For all Creation

These final chapters describe Ezekiel's heavenly temple vision. This is the temple he was pointing forward to earlier in chapters 20:32-45 and 36:26-28. The day this vision appears to Ezekiel, seems to be significant as he goes out of his way to highlight that it is on the first day of the New Year,

and the 25th year of his exile. This is the Day of Atonement, and half way through the jubilee cycle (Lev. 25:8-13). Ezekiel's vision is for the future. These chapters are intentionally designed to make Ezekiel look like Moses, regarding the construction of the tabernacle in the Torah (Mackie, 40). However, Ezekiel's measurements and details are not a blue print for a new temple. Ezekiel in his place in redemptive history, is using images he and his readers will be able to understand to image a theological reality. We know this to be true for a few reasons. Ezra and Nehemiah don't use Ezekiel to rebuild the temple after return from Exile. Additionally, there is no basis in the New Testament for a restored temple in Jerusalem. The gospels portray Jesus as the true temple, the book of Acts and the epistles portray the "body of Christ" as the new temple, and John in Revelation says there is no temple in the New Jerusalem, because the presence of God is everywhere (Matt. 14; Mk. 2, 5; Jn. 2, 7:37-39; Acts 2:1-4; 1Cor. 3:16–17, 1 Pet. 2:4–10; Rev. 21:22) (Mackie, Lecuture). So, what is taking place here? The imagery is symbolic just like his earlier visions in chapter one and chapters eight through eleven.

The main purpose of his vison in chapters 40-48 is to show Israel how badly she had distorted the law and profaned the temple, and how God will make it right in the new temple, a place where everything is how it should be. Ezekiel was to show them their iniquity that they might be shamed and brought to repentance. Most of the tour Ezekiel is taken on is highlighting the terrible things that had happened in the temple in Israel's history from the book of Kings, and God is saying, "It won't be so in this temple." Ezekiel sees the divine presence reentering the temple in chapter 43-1:12, and it is shown to dwell permanently now, never to leave in chapter 44:1-3. The rest of the subsequent chapters up to chapter 47 describe the new temple and Yahweh's restoration of all aspects therein. Chapters 47-48 describe a new Garden of Eden (47:1-12; Isa. 41:17-20; 44:1-5; Joel 3:17-18; Zech. 14:8-9), a messianic kingdom where the Lord dwells with his people (including gentile believers (Ezek. 47:21-23; Isa 56:1-8).

Key Themes:

The Glory of Yahweh

A prevalent theme that runs throughout the book of Ezekiel is the glory of Yahweh. Perhaps the most profound things we learn from Ezekiel, is that God's presence is mobile, and it goes with his people where they are. He is in fact, not bound just to the temple. In chapters one through three we see the divine presence appearing to Ezekiel in Babylon which prepares us for the departure of Yahweh's presence from the temple and Jerusalem in chapter 11. Yahweh's presence in the temple is contingent on the people's covenant obedience (Exod. 32-34), they have failed miserably, and so now he leaves Jerusalem to be with the exiles in Babylon. This is astonishing. In the oracles against the nations (Ezek.25-32) we learn that God's purpose in judging them is twofold: to punish sin and evil, but even more so that they may know his name. It is stated 23 times in seven chapters (Wright, 233). Yahweh's utmost concern is for his own reputation and status among the nations (Ezek. 36:18-21) (Mackie, 22). Israel has so marred his name, he must take action.

Once Ezekiel shifts to his messages of hope for Israel (34-37) we see that God's plan for restoring his name and glory will involve giving his people a new heart and a new spirit that they will walk in his ways and obey him. They will be his people and he will be their God (36:28; Exod. 6:7; Jer.30:32). The hope for the nations in chapters 38 and 39 rest in God's desire to restore his glory and presence with his people back in the land, and to vindicate his tarnished reputation among the nations

other than Israel. In the final chapter (40-48) we see the presence of Yahweh return to a purified temple and a restoration of all things, in which the people of God are the center of this new creation. The book of Ezekiel shows how deeply God cares about his glory, he is not messing around, and his patience is not everlasting. However, it is because he is jealous for his glory, that we have the gift of newness of life. What a terrifying, yet beautiful theme.

Hard Heart

We are told that Ezekiel's original audience will not hear his message, in fact they will be hostile toward him, and the issue is their hard hearts (2:3-4; 3:7). Their hardheartedness is what gives birth to their rebellion. Their iniquity flows out of their heart of stone, and is what leads them eventually into exile in Babylon. In chapters 8-11 (Ezekiel's temple vision) he is shown by God that even after the first wave of exile, Israel's idolatry and injustice are as rampant as ever (See also Jer. chpt. 2–3, 5, 7, 10). God is so angry and upset that he's going to leave the temple to go be with the exiles in Babylon. Israel has effectively driven away the presence of Yahweh from his own home. Israel has brought the ensuing judgment of the Lord upon themselves. Chapters 12-24 speak of Israel's irreversible judgment; there is scarcely a call to repent. These chapters recall Israel's behavior throughout, like that of an adulterous wife and two promiscuous sisters (15 and 22), using graphic language to symbolize Israel's covenant infidelity (Idolatry in Jeremiah is often described using these metaphors). Their sin has become so sickening to God that they are at a place of no return, judgment is the verdict, and he will hold each generation accountable for its own covenant violations (8, 14:12-238; 33:10-20), using Babylon as his tool (Ezek. 21:23-29). Future restoration, though scarce in these chapters (Ezek.18,20), is related to being shamed and acknowledgment of sin (12:16) In chapters 25-32 God judges the surrounding nations for the same things he judges Israel for such as adultery and self-exaltation, in accordance with his plan to restore his glory and his people. In Chapters 34-37 the hope for Israel and their condition comes to the forefront of the conversation. How is God going to fix humanity's hard hearts?

New Heart and Restoration

If the problem with humanity is that our natural inclination is a hard heart like Pharaoh's in Exodus, then we need a soft heart, a fleshy heart rather than the stone one. Most of the time this promise of God to someday give his people a new heart, a new spirit that will bring about new desires and obedience, is only quoted from chapter 36 of Ezekiel. However, it first appears in the same passage in which the presence of Yahweh is leaving the temple in Jerusalem (Ezek.11) and appears again in chapter 18. What is interesting though, is that in chapter eleven and thirty-six it is Yahweh who is said to be the giver of this new heart and spirit, but in chapter eighteen Israel is told to "make yourselves a new heart and a new Spirit." So, is it something God does, or we do? The answer is yes. It is something freely given and something to be pursued with everything one has. The apostle Paul tries to explain this beautiful perplexing reality in 1 Corinthians 15:10. The idea is that the more we look like our creator, and our hearts, actions, and desires merge with his, we become more human, more what we ought to be and were created to be. Israel is incapable of keeping the covenant, so God must give her a new heart and a new spirit. Chapter 37, the valley of dry bones, shows further God's resurrection of Israel's spiritual deadness, resuscitating her back to life and creating her anew. The purpose of this is for Yahweh's glory, and that which brings him most glory is when he has faithful covenant partners who love and trust him. Chapters 40-48 showcase the hope for the restoration of all creation through Ezekiel's vison of a new temple, and a new Garden of Eden.

Providence

The theme of God's providence is seen throughout the entire book. However, it is probably most profound in the oracles against the nations. He is shown to be involved in the affairs not just of his people Israel, but of the other nations as well (Ezek. 29:17-20). God is also described as using the other nations to accomplish his judgement and plan for Israel (Ezek. 21:23-29).

A "New David"

In Chapter 34:23-24 God says he will set over his people one shepherd, His servant David. The title "David" is also used for the messianic king in Isaiah 11, Hosea 3:4, and Jer.30:9 who will be empowered by the Spirit of God, like Moses and Joshua were (Num. 11; Deut. 34:9), bringing true justice, righteousness, and peace. The activity of this "New David" and God himself are nearly identical in this passage (see v.12, 14, 23-24). Ezekiel along with the other prophets, realize that Israel needs a representative who can do what they cannot. Ezekiel picks up this key theme from the prophets and focuses on the shepherd, who is also a ruler, imagery, which is powerful (34:23-24; 37:24-25). The new David is also the prince/leader described in chapters 40-48 that fulfills the Davidic commission that the kings of times passed were incapable of doing.

Ezekiel as suffering Prophet

This theme is prevalent in Jeremiah (Jer. 11-20) and also connected to the suffering servant of Isaiah (40-55). This theme is probably seen most prominently in the sign-acts that Ezekiel had to perform (particularly chapters 3-7, 24). Perhaps the most explicit example is the second sign-act (4:4-8) in which Ezekiel is told to lay on his side for long periods of time (hundreds of days), a day for each year of Israel and Judah's punishment. Here Ezekiel is told by God that he is placing upon his side the punishment of the house of Israel. The symbol here is that of Ezekiel taking on the role of the scapegoat from the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:21-22). That is, he is to bear the collective sin of Israel's breach of covenant. Ezekiel did other things, to name a few: cook his food over excrement (4), cut his hair and beard off (5), be silent for years (3-33), and most horrific, the passing of his wife as symbol (24).

Implications for Today:

There are many implications of us today in the book of Ezekiel, it is actually quite pastoral. This book teaches us about the seriousness of our sin, and God's desire for his own glory. It teaches us about God's justice and how his punishment is always with a purpose, and with the aim of restoration. The book teaches us that we cannot fix ourselves, our problem is our heart. We need transformed by the living God if we are to be able to walk in his ways and execute righteousness and justice in all that we do. In God's pursuit to vindicate his name, his people are restored, made new, and his presence promised to be with them. This being said, I will to take just a few of the themes from Ezekiel and show how important they are for readers and servants of Yahweh today.

Does the mindset of the parable, "The parents eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge", a well know common parable in Israel (see also Jer. 31:29) from Ezekiel, not reflect the mindset of many still today? Do we blame shift? Do we avoid personal responsibility for our actions? The parable is saying that it's the children who pay for their parents' mistakes. This is what the exiles think is happening to them. They are paying for the mistakes of their parents in Babylon, but are innocent. It is blame shifting. It is a fatalistic mindset that one's own destiny is decided by someone

else's actions. But Ezekiel rejects this claim, and in speaking the words of the Lord declares that nobody's fate is simply based on others' decisions. Every person is responsible for their own actions and how they respond to their circumstances and situations. Our moral decisions matter, and everyone receives judgment, based on their own sin and their own choices (18:4). Additionally, one cannot say their past merits justify or make up for their current present sin (18:24). We could just read this chapter today and sit down. It is so relevant in our society.

In John chapter three Jesus is having a conversation with Nicodemus in which Jesus says,

> "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

If we follow Jesus' lead and go back and read his illusions to Ezekiel 36:25-27 and 37:9, we really see the significance in what Jesus is saying here, and interpret this passage more accurately. Jesus is referring to the new heart and new spirit passages in Ezekiel, and the valley of dry bones imagery. Jesus is saying one cannot enter the kingdom of God without receiving the things Ezekiel talked about. It seems to me, the "water" here is not a reference to the commonly held views of physical birth, but rather the sprinkling of clean water from Ezekiel 36 that symbolically cleanses, and purifies. It is an image of sins being forgiven, which is then followed by the giving of a new heart and a new spirit. "Born again" seems to be referring to the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. Jesus is showing Nicodemus things he should already know as Israel's teacher, and he's showing us how to read and understand our Bibles, and even more importantly his purpose in becoming incarnate.

In John 10:10 Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd." He is pulling this imagery from Ezekiel 34-37 36 (as well as Isa. 40 and Zech. 13:7). In Chapter 34:23-24 God says he will set over his people one shepherd, His servant David (the title used for the messianic king in Isaiah 11, Hosea 3:4, and Jer.30:9) who will be empowered by the Spirit of God, like Moses and Joshua were (Num. 11; Deut. 34:9), bringing true justice, righteousness, and peace. Jesus is claiming in John that he is the messianic-sphered-king from Ezekiel. He is intentionally choosing this metaphor to express who he is and what he is from the prophets.

Study Questions:

1. What does Ezekiel see in his first vision in chapter one? What is he describing?
2. What is the significance of seeing the glory of Yahweh in Babylon? Where does that mean his presence is not?
3. Why did God have to leave his temple? What was going on there?
4. What was the purpose of the sign-acts that Ezekiel performed? Name some of them.
5. What does the parable about the sour grapes mean? Does this mindset still circulate among us today?
6. Ezekiel 11, 18, and 36 speak the "new heart" and a "new spirit." Why is there a need for a new heart? What does it enable one to do?
7. What are some of the characteristics a person with a new heart possesses?
8. What are some spiritual disciplines you have developed to pursue (chapter 18) more of this new heart?

9. How can you bring a message of hope to your sphere of influence amidst all the chaos in the world? Name some practical steps you can take to engage those around you more.
10. The book of Ezekiel shows us how serious sin is in God's sight. Take a moment and think of a sin that has recently become a problem for you that you need to stop. How do you plan on putting this to death in your life?

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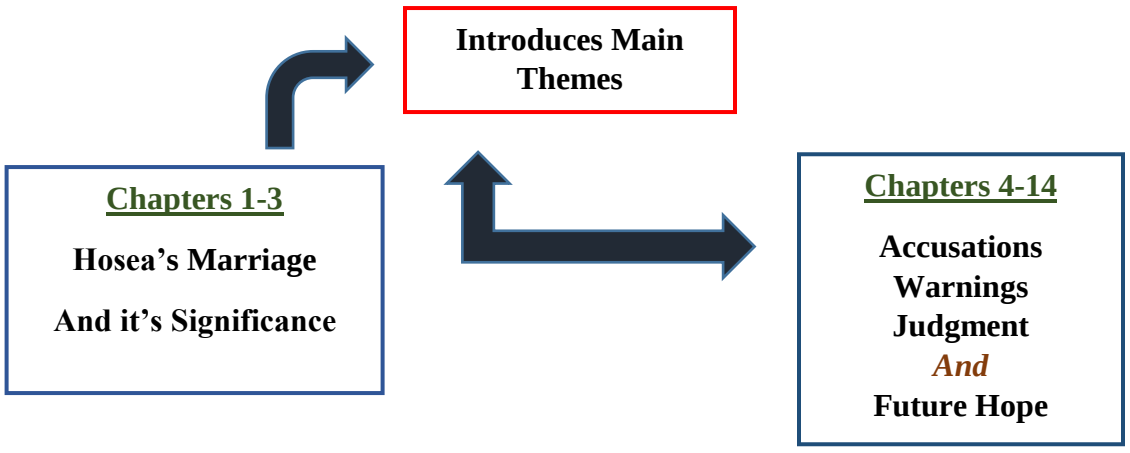
The Book of the 12

Introduction

The Book of the 12 prophets comprises a unity in which, as individuals, they contribute to the whole of the message from different vantage points, angles, emphasis, theme developments, and theological issues. They focus on the whole history and hope of Israel. Reading them as a unity is much like going to a museum exhibit. For example, once you begin in the "Hosea room", look around for a while at the artifacts, and finish there, you enter the "Joel room" and so forth. It is a literary masterpiece linked together in sometimes surprising, and other times obvious ways, with powerful and relevant messages for its readers today.

The Book of Hosea

Structure



Main Idea: The Book of Hosea exposes Israel's rebellion and continual covenant infidelity, and God's passion, and compassion to restore his people and the covenant, even though he has no reason to. In doing so, he demonstrates his heart for those who have turned their backs on him.

Chapters 1- 3: Hosea's Marriage And its Significance

Verse one of the first chapter gives us the historical context in which Hosea prophesied, that is the narratives of 2 Kings 14-17). Hosea watched the parade of one bad Israelite king after another, which led to the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C., resulting in the destruction and exile of the northern tribes (Mackie, 4). It is into these circumstances that Hosea speaks the words of Yahweh to his countrymen. The first three chapters introduce the themes that are explored in greater detail in chapters four through twelve.

Chapters one through three tell of Hosea's symbolic marriage to an adulterous woman named Gomer. Each chapter tells the same trajectory of the story of this marriage: betrayal leading to judgement which then leads to restoration (Mackie, 4). Hosea's wife and children become metaphors for the broken covenant between God and Israel. The prevalent theme and metaphor, throughout the book, of covenant infidelity as adultery begins to take shape here (Isa. 1:21;Jer. 3:8-9,5:7,7:9,13:27, 23:14, 29:23, Ezek. 16:38,23:37,43). Hosea is commanded by God to marry a woman who has slept

around, and to have children with her (1:2-6). This is a sign act, just like those performed by other prophets like Jeremiah (ch. 13) and Ezekiel (chs. 3-5, 24). Their children's names are significant and important for understanding Hosea's message. Hosea names them: Jezreel (God sows seed), Lo-ruhama (no compassion/mercy), and Lo-ammi (not my people). The broken covenant is symbolized by the names of Hosea's children. God is going to punish the house of Israel, with strong language such as "you are not my people, and I am not your God" (v.8), "put an end to the kingdom" (v.4), break "Israel's bow" (v.5), and have "no mercy" on Israel (v.6). However, for the time being, God will spare Judah (v.6-7).

The mood shifts in the final verses (10-2:1) to that of hope. Verse ten is soaked with language from the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17), and Hosea's children's names take their reverse meaning. They speak of the South and North (the two kingdoms of Israel), being united again and under "one head." The "one head" we learn later in Chapter 3:5 is, "David" (a title given to the messianic king that is to come: Isa. 11; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23).

Chapter two is a poem about the disciplining of Israel, the unfaithful wife (v.2-13) countered by God's wooing back his unfaithful bride (v. 14-23). God says Israel is, "not my wife and I am not her husband" (v.2 see also Isa. 50:1; Ezek. 16:25). There is very strong betrayal language in this poem. The bulk of the poem describes the shame of Israel and the exile. Wilderness imagery (the wandering in the book of Numbers) is used to describe Yahweh leading Israel out into judgement. However, in the hope section of the passage (v. 14-23) the wilderness imagery changes meaning (like Hosea's children in chapter one). No longer is the wilderness a picture of judgement for sin, but a portrait of a new marriage with language like the early beginnings in Exodus. The imagery is that of Yahweh wooing Israel back and restoring her, giving her blessings that sound like Noahic, Abrahamic, and New Covenant passages in Genesis (6,9,12,15,17) Jeremiah (31-32) and Ezekiel (11,36-37,40-48) and Isaiah (2:4,9:5). The poem ends just like chapter one with the same "you are my people, and I am your" language from Leviticus 26:12.

In chapter 3:1-3 we receive another rendition, this time back in narrative form, of the symbolic marriage. The covenant is violated, Hosea's wife has run off, and now he must buy her back. This is a picture of God and Israel (v.4-5), and the imagery draws on the Exodus story once again (see also Hosea 11). So he buys back his wife, but abstains from having normal marital relations (another sign-act) and this represents Israel's exile and how they will be without king or temple for a time (v.4). After this takes place, one day they will seek Yahweh again, and "David their king" (v.5, ch.1; Isa. 11; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23).

Chapters 4-14: Accusations, Warnings, Judgment, and Future Hope

Chapters 4-10 are full of accusations and warnings that expound upon the themes from the first three chapters. The metaphor of Israel as an adulterous, imagery representing their idolatry, receives a lot of air time (4:10-15; 5:3-4; 9:1-2). Hosea points this out further when he speaks out against their altars to others gods (4:15-17; 8:5-6; 10:5; 10:15). Hosea accuses Israel of not knowing Yahweh (4:1, 6, 11, 14, 5:4; 8:2), and he uses as examples their morally corrupt leaders (4:5-9; 6:8-10; 7:1-4) and social injustice (4:1-2; 8:1-3, 12; 9:15) to prove his point (Mackie, 5). Moreover, Israel has put its trust in foreign aid, in Egypt and Assyria, rather than Yahweh, which will lead to their downfall and destruction (7:11, 8:7–14; 11:5–11; 11:12–12:1). These passages are bleak, however, there is a message of hope (5:14-6:3, connecting back to 3:4-5), if Israel repents. Hosea describes their

repentance being met with healing and resurrection on God's part (Ezek. 36-37). This is Israel's hope on the other side of exile, should they choose to repent.

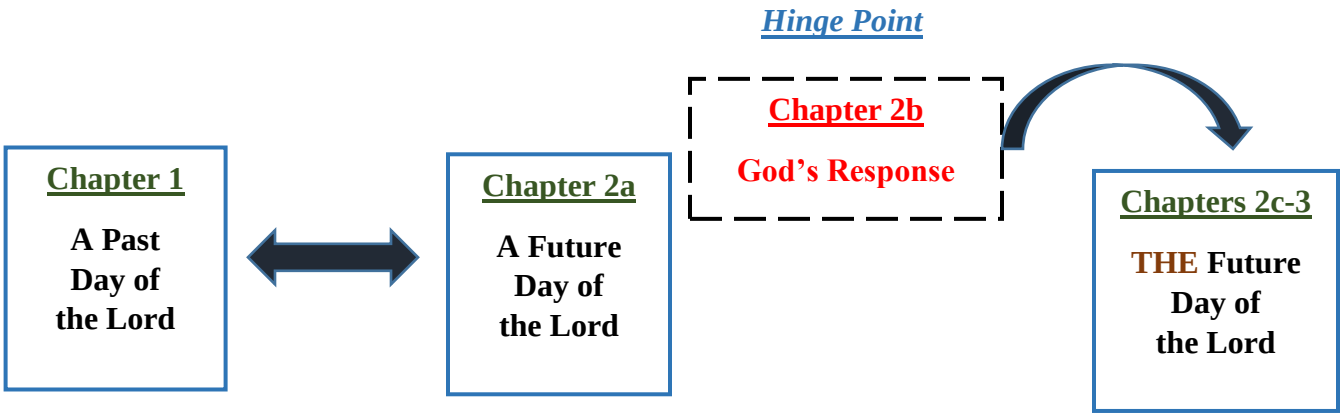
Chapter 11 shows us perhaps one of the rawest, emotional portraits of God in the Hebrew Bible. God is shown to be emotionally torn in this chapter. Yahweh is shown to be a loving father, and Israel, a rebellious son. God doesn't want to give up his firstborn son to destruction; it grieves him. He knows what he has to do, but he doesn't want to (much like Jesus in the Garden, Matt.26). The anger, wrath, compassion, love, and faithfulness of God are displayed in this short chapter that actually becomes a sign of hope, because Israel's destiny is in the hands of a God who cares infinitely for his people, with an unrivaled zeal.

In chapters 12-13 Hosea gives his readers a history lesson from Genesis to Samuel, highlighting Israel's habitual unfaithfulness to Yahweh through key stories like Jacob's deceitfulness (Gen. chs. 25-27), the wilderness wandering (Num. 12-20), and choosing Saul as a king (1 Sam. 8) (Mackie, 6).

Chapter 14 is a message of hope (3:4-5, 5:14-6:3). There is a call to repent in verse one, and healing language similar to earlier passages and writings from the other prophets in verse four (Isa. 53:5; Jer. 31; Ezek. 36). God is spoken of as having turned his anger away, and lavishing his love upon his people. This chapter is a call to repentance and a promise of restoration. There is an interesting piece to the end of this chapter. The final verse (v.9) stands outside of the poem of verse one through eight. It provides a wisdom reflection on the entire book, much like Moses' invitation to see Israel's history as a demonstration of Yahweh's character in Deuteronomy 32:4 (see also Psa.107:42-43; Jer.9:11) (Mackie, 6).

The Book of Joel

Structure



Main Idea: The Book of Joel is a Biblical theology, or a meditation on the "Day of the Lord" and how genuine repentance will bring about the restoration hoped for in all the other prophetic writings in the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 1 and 2a: A Past Day of the Lord and A Future Day of the Lord

It is as if the author of Joel couldn't care less about letting his reader know what time period he is speaking into. The author could have told us, but it is intentionally unclear. Clues in the book seem to place the writing after the exile to Babylon (Joel 1:9, 13; 2:17, 3:1–3; 6). The placement of Joel is not about chronology, but its contents, design, and theology. Joel fills in a gap that Hosea had, the "Day of the Lord" (DOTL) gap. Hosea talked about destruction and ruin, but not with the DOTL language that is found throughout the prophets (Isa.13; Jer. 46; Ezek.13, 30; Amos 5; Obed. 15; Zeph.1; Mal.4), and is Joel's burden to write about in particular. Dr. Tim Mackie explains the DOTL,

> …will address injustice and rebellion: this refers to historical events that God will use to judge evil and vindicate the righteous, all leading up to the great future day when God will do this for all creation—a cosmic 'house-cleaning.' The twofold nature of the Day of Yahweh--punishment of the wicked and blessing upon the righteous--leads to a tension between optimism and pessimism about the future. The latter prophets (Isa., Jer. Ezek., the Twelve ["minor prophets"]) fluctuate back and forth between primarily optimism (eg, Isa. 40-66, Hosea, Micah, Haggai, Zechariah) and primarily pessimism (eg, Jer., Amos, Obad., Nah., Hab., Mal.). (Mackie, *Reading the Prophets*, pp.4)

In chapters 1:2-2:17 Joel announces a past DOTL and a coming, imminent DOTL. These two announcements share the same development and linear trajectory. In the first announcement (1:2-20) Joel speaks of a past DOTL that befalls Judah with locust plague imagery (v.2-7), which is followed by a call to repentance (v.8-14), and the people's response to the call: lamentation and repentance (v.15-20). Joel's second announcement (2:1-17) about the soon coming DOTL is nearly identical. There is a proclamation about imminent judgement on Jerusalem (v.1-11), a call to repentance (v.12-17, language from Exod. 34:6), and the lamentation and repentance of Israel's priests and leaders (v.17).

Joel uses a plethora of images to describe both DOTL, such as famine (v.1: 10-11, 16-18), not being able to sacrifice (v.1:8-9, 13), fire (v.1: 19-20; 2:3, 5), darkness and gloom (2:2), an invading army (2:4-11, but it's Yahweh's army, not an enemy! {See Isa. 13}), and most prominently locusts (chs. 1-2). The motif of locusts as a sign of God's judgment is prevalent throughout the Old Testament, and Joel's use of it here shows how saturated Joel was in the Scriptures. Locusts were a plague of divine justice on Egypt (Exod. 10), part of the covenant curses (Deut. 28), and depicted enemy armies in the prophets (Nahum 2-3; Amos 6,7; Jer. 51; Ezek. 38-39) (Mackie, 9-11).

Joel's portrait of what it means to repent is significant to highlight here (1:13-14; 2:12-17). Repentance is supposed to be genuine and not a show (2:12-13), or an attempt to try and manipulate God into doing something he doesn't want to do, but rather a trusting in his nature and character as merciful and compassionate (Exod. 34:6) (Mackie, 12).

Chapter 2b: **God's Response**

Chapter 2:18-27 functions as the hinge point of the story, in which God accepts the pleas of the repentant, and reverses judgement into restoration (Mackie, 8). There are three important promises made in these verses: defeat of enemies (v.20), a restored land (v.22-26), and the restored presence of God with his people in the land (v.27). It is beautiful poetry describing God's reversal of his judgement.

Chapters 2c-3: THE Future Day of the Lord

The final verses of chapter two (v.28-23) sound very much like the New Covenant language found in Isaiah 32:15;44:3, Ezekiel 36:23-28, and Jeremiah 31:31-34, where the repentant receive a new heart and a new spirit (Moses' dream come true! {see Numbers 11}). The same thing is happening here; the repentant find salvation and renewal in and from Yahweh.

Chapter 3:1-17 showcase God's protective arm over his people in defending them against the enemy nations in his final justice that is to be brought upon them. The imagery is linked to locust from chapter two as well as from Isaiah 10 ,13, and 28, Amos 1 the Gog oracles in Ezekiel 38-39, the defeat of Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51, the final battle scenes in Zechariah 14, and the battle of Jehoshaphat with the nations in 2 Chronicles 20, (Mackie, 12). The end of chapter three (v.17-21) speaks further of the renewal of creation and a new temple with imagery from earlier in the book (2:19, 24), and from Isaiah 35, Ezekiel 47, and Zechariah 14. A new Eden is created.

The Book of Amos

Structure

Chapters 1-2	Chapters 3-6	Chapters 7-9
Accusations Against Israel and the Nations	**A Message for Israel and its Leaders**	**Amos' Vision**

Main Idea: The book of Amos explores the relationship between God's justice and mercy through exposing Israel's covenant unfaithfulness and how they have failed to maintain justice and righteousness, resulting in Yahweh's judgment which will bring restoration to the repentant.

Chapters 1-2: Accusations Against Israel and the Nations

Amos is the oldest prophet among the prophets with books named after them in the Old Testament. The historical context of Amos can be found in 2 Kings 14-16. He prophesied during the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah (1:1). Jeroboam II ruled during the peak of the Northern tribes' wealth, power, and prosperity (see 3:12-15; 4:1; 2 Kings 14:23-29), but also a time of great violence, and moral corruption (Mackie, 14). Amos is an interesting character in that he wasn't a priest or prophet already when God commissioned him (like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel). He was a fig farmer and a shepherded/herdsman (1:1; 7:14), which gives insight into the poetry he employs in this book (for example: 2:13; 3:3–6, 12; 5:19 6:12; 9:9).

Joel 3:16 and 18 are virtually word-for-word the same as the beginning and ending of Amos (1:2, 9:13). They pick up the themes of judgement and hope. Chapters one and two contain Amos' accusations, first against the nations surrounding Israel and Judah, and then upon both Israel and Judah (1:3-2:16). Dr. Mackie points out that, "Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab all form a perfect circle around … Judah and Israel!" (14). It's as if Amos is making the Northern and Southern kingdoms the bullseye of God's wrath. This is made clear in that Israel's judgment is given three-times longer than any other nation. The representative list is much longer than any other nations'. The surrounding nations will be judged, but Israel and Judah, particularly Israel, is the focus. This should make sense to the reader, because Israel knew better. More is required from those whom have been given more (Lk. 12:48). Israel's special status because of the covenants, means they are extra responsible for their sins (3:2).

Chapter 2:4-16 speak of the judgement to befall God's people because they have, "rejected the law" (Lev. 26:14, 15; Neh. 1:7; Ezek. 20:13, 16, 24; Dan. 9:11), been led astray by lies (Jer. 16:19, 20; Rom. 1:25), ignore the poor, treat them like cattle, and enslave them (Amos 4:1-3; 5:7-13; 5:21-26; 8:3-6; Lev. 25:39; 2 Kgs. 4:1), reject the prophets (2:10-12; 3:7-8; 7:10-17), and profane God's name with their sexual practices (v.7; Ezek. 22:11). Later, Amos accuses Israel of apathy due to their current military success and wealth (6:1-70 as well as the worship of other gods (3:14-15; 4:4-5; 5:21-27).

Yahweh is angry because of their social injustices and idolatry, because he is the one who gave them everything they have, and he was their redeemer from the beginning (v.10-11 Exodus language {Exod. 12}).

Chapters 3-6: A Message for Israel and its Leaders

Chapter 3:2 reads, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." This is an illusion to Genesis 12 and the Abrahamic covenant, the origin of the call for God's people to be a blessing to all nations. There are major consequences for Israel's failing to live up to their calling. It is important to remember as we learned from chapters one and two, God is completely justified in exercising his wrath. Verses six and seven portray Amos as a Moses and Jeremiah type of figure (Exod. 32-34 Jer. 23:18), a prophet/servant to a rebellious people (Mackie, 15).

In chapter four the general accusations become more particular (mentioned above). God chastises Israel for having religion without repentance. God has already brought the curses of the covenant upon Israel (Deut. 28. Lev. 26), but no one has paid attention and they don't care (4:6-12). Even in this, verses six through eleven show God's heart in judgment. It is for repentance, that his children would return to him. What Amos is telling the reader here is that everything Yahweh does is to bring his people close to himself. However, Israel has rejected her maker and must now prepare to meet him…in judgement (v.12-13).

In chapter five Amos is portrayed further as a type of Moses, laying before his people the decision of life or death (Deut. 30:19; Amos 4:12-12; 5:4-5,14; 2 Chr. 15:2; Isa. 55:6; Zeph. 2:3). The time has come, and they must make a decision. Just like Joel, Amos speaks of the DOTL (5:18-20). God is going to bring a foreign nation to conquer Israel (2:13; 3:11, 14-15; 4:2; 5:1-3), and carry her into exile (5:5, 27, 6:1–7, 14; 7:10–17). The nations is never mentioned, but we learn in 2 Kings 17 that forty years after Amos' prophecies, it is the nation of Assyria (Mackie, 15). Verses 21-24 lie nearly in the center of the book and are the heart of Amos' message,

> I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

This passage shares language and ideology especially from Isaiah, and Jeremiah (Isa. 1, 5; Jer. 6, Psa. 51). True worship of God requires doing justice and righteousness in all relationships (2:6; 5:7,12, 15, 24; 6:12) harkening back to God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12,15,17; Matt.22:34-40).

Chapters 7-9: Amos' Vision

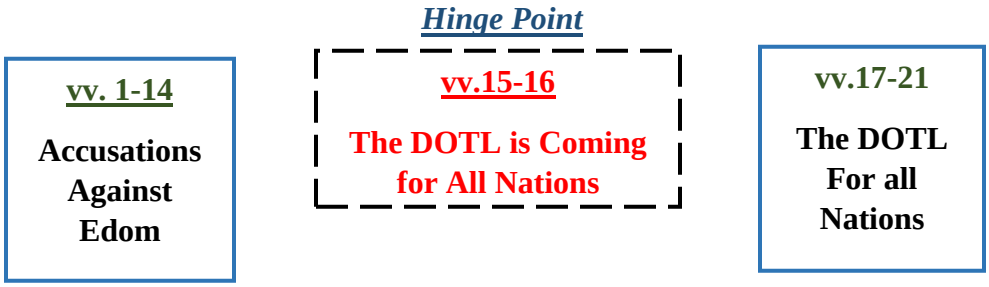
The final chapters of Amos symbolically depict the DOTL, and future hope on the other side. In verses two through six Amos again looks like Moses, interceding on behalf of the people to Yahweh. Here the connection is to the golden calf story in Exodus 34:9 and 32:14 (Mackie, 15). This is significant, because when prophets intercede, God relents from his Judgements (shown here as well as Jeremiah's inability to intercede leading to judgement {Jer. 7,11,14-15; Num. 21:7; Deut. 9:20.26; 1 Sam. 7:5,8:6,12:19,12:23). However, after he's shown how crooked Israel is, he no longer intercedes for them.

Verses 14-15 feature Davidic Covenant language (2 Sam. 7), and in chapter 9:11-15 Amos speaks of the future of the house of David, and the messianic kingdom (Hos. 3:5; Isa. 11; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23). Amos does offer hope that despite God's judgment on Israel (9:7-10 { images of Joel's locust swarm, scorching fire, and overripe fruit depicting DOTL), there will be hope on the other side for Yahweh is faithful to his covenant promises (9:11-15). Israel will be gathered in a Garden of Eden-like land (Joel 3:18).

Important for linking Amos to the next room in the museum (Obadiah), chapter 9:11-12 states that, "The messianic kingdom will include all nations. 'Edom' אֱדֹם is a wordplay/image on 'humanity' 'adam' אָדָם; (see the Septuagint translation and Acts 15:16)" (Mackie, 16). The book of Obadiah is about God's judgment on Edom ("adam"/"humanity") and their downfall to Babylon. It shares much in common with the final chapter of Amos as Dr. Mackie asserts, "The entire rhetorical flow of Obadiah has been designed according to the model of Amos 9, the directly preceding chapter. Point by point the two poetic compositions read similarly" (19).

The Book of Obadiah

Structure



Main Idea: The Book of Obadiah is about God's judgment on the nation of Edom for its pride and mistreatment of God's people, which become a symbol of the downfall of all evil and prideful nations, and the restoration of Israel, because of God's covenant love for his people.

Historical Background

The historical context for the Book of Obadiah has a present (2 Kings 24-25: Babylonian exile of Judah) and a past (Gen.25-27: Jacob {nation of Israel} and Esau {nation of Edom}) piece to it. There is a deep history here built on deception, mistrust, and hatred. Dr. Mackie comments,

> Edom was unique among Israel's neighbors, in that there was an ancient ancestral connection (both nations emerged from the family of Isaac: Jacob and Esau (see Genesis 25). And while there was tension between the people groups at different times (see Num. 20:14-21 and 2Kgs 8:20-22; Chron. 28:17; Amos 1:6-92; Ezek. 25:12-14), there was a family bond that was acknowledged. (18)

2 Chronicles 28:17 and Ezekiel 25:12-14 tell of Edom's ultimate act of betrayal when they plundered their kinsmen after the Babylonian invasion (Mackie, 18). Obadiah is to Edom as Amos was to Israel. Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, but it is powerful, so much so that 100 years after this prophecy is proclaimed, Babylon would destroy Edom and they would never recover as a nation (v.18). It is a book packed full of language and concepts from many of the other prophets in the Hebrew Bible, that force the reader to remember their words as well, allowing Obadiah to be brief, but impactful.

vv. 1-14: Accusations Against Edom

As mentioned above, the structure of Obadiah as a whole, is identical to the last chapter of Amos (chapter 9). There's a vision (v.1), destruction of Edom (v.5), DOTL (v.8, 15), allusion to destruction of Jerusalem (v.16), restoration of Davidic Kingdom, cities, land, and the faithful remnant (v.17-21) (Nagasaki). This book is another portrait of the nations being purified by the DOTL. The first major section of this book describes Edom's treachery against Israel, and ultimately God. The language used to expose Edom's pride and betrayal is similar to Isaiah's accusations against Assyria (Isa 10:5-12) and Babylon (Obad. 2-4 = Isa 14:12-15), and Ezekiel's against Tyre (Ezek. 28:17-19) (Mackie, 18). Verses one through four speak of the arrogance and pride of Edom, "The pride of your heart has deceived you" (what God says about them) and "Who will bring me down to the ground" (what Edom says about itself). The imagery used in the first 15 verses is borrowed from Jeremiah

49:14-16 and Isaiah 14:13. God is about to humble the arrogant nation of Edom who thinks they have built themselves and made themselves great (like Babylon in the Book of Daniel). Embodied in Edom, is the universal human condition. They think they are safe, but in reality Yahweh is going to "destroy" (v.8) "slaughter" (v.9) Edom because of the violence done to Israel (v.10-14). On that day Edom will realize how small they are (v.2), and there will be no one to save them and no one will come to their aid (v.7).

Vv.15-16: The DOTL is Coming for All Nations

Verses 15-16 announce the imminent DOTL. They are the hinge point in the Book of Obadiah in which, "Yahweh's judgment on Edom (v.16 'you') is an image of the coming day of the Lord against all nations (v.15 'they').'Edom' (אֱדֹם) is spelled with the same letters as "humanity" ("Adam" אָדָם)" (Mackie, 18). Revisit the section on the Book of Amos above for further details. These verses read,

> For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head. For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually; they shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been.

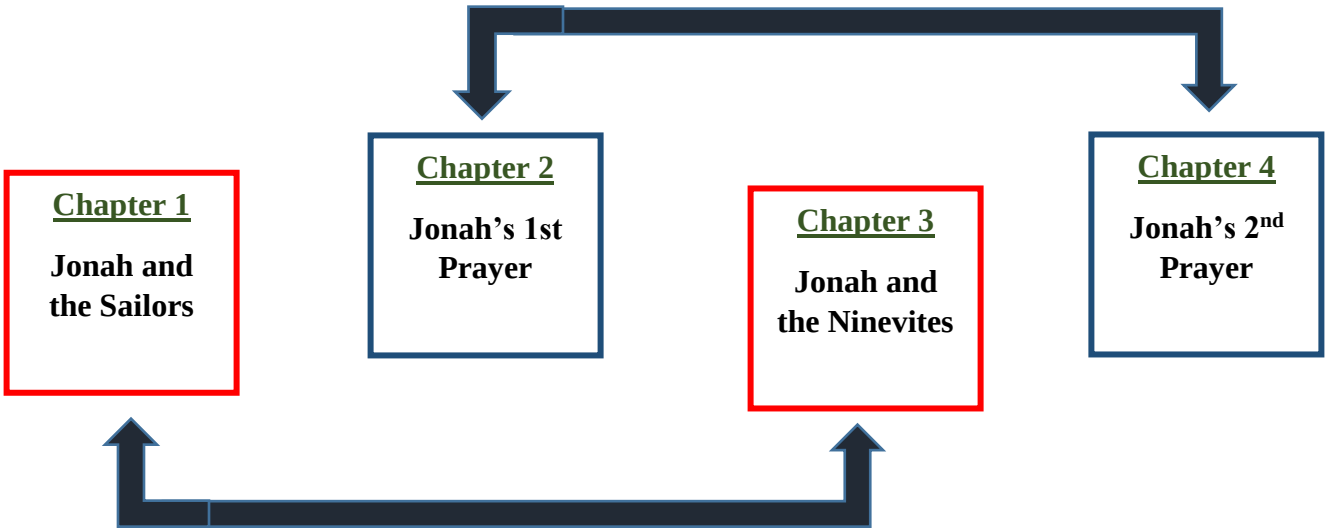
This is a terrifying statement, which draws its language and imagery from all over the prophets: Jeremiah 25:15-17 (cup of wrath imagery) and Isaiah 13:6 (DOTL, see also Joel 1:15). Retribution is a common theme in the prophets as well (v.15; Jer. 50:29; Ezek. 35:15; Hab. 2:8).

Vv.17-21: The DOTL For all Nations

The focus of the final verses of Obadiah are on what takes place after the DOTL. They speak of the restoration of God's kingdom over Jerusalem and all of the nations. Dr. Mackie points out that, "Obadiah 17-21 is a complex interweaving of hyperlinks from the Torah and the Prophets, all focused on the future messianic kingdom ruling over the nations" (p. 21). Gentile inclusion in the messianic kingdom is a key idea in the prophets (Isa. 11, 56; Jonah, Ezek. 47:21-23). The key themes of "seed" and a "remnant" are picked up here, as well as Davidic kingship (Gen. 24:60; Num.24:7, 17-19; Amos 9:11-12). God will restore Jerusalem and all who call on his name (v.18; Joel 2 and 3). The book of Obadiah demonstrates how the rise and fall of the nation of Edom is, "one aspect of the kingdom of God over all nations" (Mackie, 22).

The Book of Jonah

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Jonah serves the purpose of teaching us that God loves his enemies and includes the nations in his kingdom through the story of a rebellious Israelite prophet, and repentant gentile peoples.

Chapter 1: Jonah and the Sailors

The book of Jonah is interesting in that it isn't a book containing primarily the words of a prophet, like nearly all of the other prophetic books, but a book mostly about a prophet, the person of Jonah. The first chapter of Jonah tells of Jonah's disobedience, and running away from God's command to go to Nineveh and prophesy (v.2), and of pagan sailors' repentance when they encounter the living God (v.16). Verse one gives us some context for the time of Jonah in telling us who his father was (Amittai). Jonah is mentioned only one other time in Scripture (2 Kings 14:23-25). This places him in the time of King Jeroboam II, and a contemporary of Amos. However, Jonah and Amos had very different messages for King Jeroboam. Jonah spoke of God's favor upon the king (2 Kings 14:23-25), and Amos rebukes the king, and tells him God is against him! (Amos 6:13-15) (Mackie, Lecture). The Book of Jonah is disconnected from any hard-set period of time, but these are some clues as to a rough estimate.

The book as a whole is filled with irony and satire. Jonah flees his calling and "the presence of the Lord" (v.3), boarding a ship to Tarshish, the opposite direction of Nineveh. The person that should know Yahweh, trust, and follow him (Jonah), doesn't. While Israel's enemies repent (sailors 1:10, 14-16 and the Ninevites (3:6-10), Jonah is disobedient (v.3), complacent (v.5) and would rather die than perform his duties and follow Yahweh's calling (v.12). The sailors aboard the ship with Jonah on the other hand, respond, repent, and worship Yahweh after they see his power over the wind and the waves when they cast Jonah overboard (as Jonah commanded them to). Even in Jonah's disobedience, God is showing mercy and rescuing his enemies. The way the narrative is written, Jonah is not seen as

a hero and savior of the pagan sailors, God is. It seems that Jonah would rather die in the waves of the sea (throwing someone into the storm described here is a death sentence) than follow Yahweh (v.12), so it is rather humorous when a fish comes and swallows him and averts his get-away strategy (v.17). God graciously saves his rebellious prophet.

Chapter 2: Jonah's 1st Prayer

Chapter two records Jonah's prayer inside the belly of the fish. This chapter is full of quotations from the book of Psalms. Jonah is a prophet; he knows how to pray. As Dr. Mackie points out, his prayer, "is a hodge-podge of quotations from the Psalms, nothing original here" (23). Almost every verse is a quotation of a Psalm (v.1 = Ps. 120:1, Psa. 18:5-6; v.3=Psa. 42:7; v.4=Psa.5:7, 31:22; v.5=Psa. 69:2; v.6=103:4; v.7 = Psa.143:4-5, 77:3, and 88:3, v.8 =31:6, v. 9= Psa. 116:17-18 and 3:8) (Mackie, 24). What is interesting though, is that Jonah never technically repents, in this prayer. This can be seen not only in this prayer, but in Jonah's unchanged heart and attitude throuhout the rest of the book (ch.4). Nevertheless, Jonah does thank God for saving him, and promises to obey him. God's response is again humorous as the fish "...vomited Jonah out upon the dry land" (v. 10).

Chapter 3: Jonah and the Ninevites

God doesn't have time for small talk with Jonah, and gives him the same command from chapter one, except this time Jonah obeys (v.1-3). In verse four Jonah gives a half-hearted very short sermon, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" There is no mention of Yahweh, Nineveh's sins, or how the people are to respond! Yet, the enemy pagan believers of the capital city of Assyria, repent and believed God (v.3:5-9). This is remarkable. Even the animals are humorously marked out as being repentant (v.7). Even the cows of Nineveh repent, but not the prophet of Yahweh. The final verse (v.10), reads, "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it." Yahweh cares for and has compassion even on Israel's enemies.

Chapter 4: Jonah's 2nd Prayer

Chapter four recounts a conversation between God and Jonah. Jonah is angry and prays to Yahweh and throws God's compassion in his face (v.1-4). It is this compassion that kept the remnant alive (Joel), and that saved Jonah in chapter 2! Jonah is upset because this is the very reason why Jonah didn't want to come to Nineveh, because then the people there might be spared because of the nature and character of Yahweh (Exod. 34:6). Once again Jonah is shown as more willing to die than see God's compassion granted to gentiles (v.3, 8-10, speak of this three times!). This shows Jonah's true colors. And as if this were not enough, we receive this strange story about Jonah up on the hill waiting to see what happens to the city, and God providing him a shade tree to make him more comfortable (v. 5-10). However, God causes the plant to die by the next morning and Jonah is angry once again. Verse seven shows, for the only time, Jonah's care for something/someone other than himself (the plant!). God twice asks Jonah if his anger is justified (v.4 and 9), in which Jonah responds that it is, enough to die in fact (v.3, 8-10). Then God responds again saying, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle? (v.10-11). That's the end of the book. It ends with God's question to Jonah and asks the reader to look in the mirror and think about this question: Should

Yahweh not have compassion on those not like you? (4:11) (Mackie, 25). This book show's God's mercy on humanity, and his inclusion of all who call on his name and repent. The book of Jonah comes along as a, "In case you want to get stuck up about gentiles being included" object lesson. The author of Jonah wants to turn up the volume of Gentile inclusion, and so wonderfully crafts this story to show God's heart for the nations that are not Israel.

The Book of Micah

Structure

Chapters 1-2	Chapters 3-4a	Chapters 4b-5	Chapters 6-7
Justice and Restoration Cycle #1	**Justice and Restoration Cycle #2**	**Hope For Israel's Future Restoration**	**Justice and Restoration Cycle #3**

(Mackie, 26)

Main Idea: The book of Micah describes God's coming judgment upon Israel for her rebellion, but also offers a message of hope that in this he will reconcile a faithful remnant to himself, restore the land, defeat evil once and for all, and set as ruler over all the messianic king from the line of David.

Chapters 1-2: Justice and Restoration Cycle #1

The first two chapters begin a series of cycles in the book of Micah that portray God's justice as bringing about restoration. There has to be punishment for sin, but the purposes of God in his just wrath are for restoration and vindication of the faithful. Chapter 1:1 gives us the historical context markers for the book (see 2 Kings 17-20). Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and they play off of each other.

Chapter 1:2–2:11 speak of God's coming judgement and inevitable justice that is to be exacted on Israel's sin and covenant violations. In chapter 1:2-16 God is making a case against Israel and Judah (see also 6:1-4). Assyria is God's tool, and Samaria will be destroyed (v.2-7) and Judah is on the radar (v.8-16). The two oracles against the Northern and Southern kingdoms is steeped in imagery and language from the prophets (Isa. 20,22,26,47; Jer. 6; Hos. 5,13; Amos 3; Mal. 3). These verses vividly describe the destruction: it is from the Lord (v.2-4), he makes naked and ashamed (v.8), people are wounded (v.9), idols are crushed (v.7), and ultimately exile will take place (v.16) because of their iniquity (v.5, 13).

In chapter 2:1-11 Micah condemns those among Israel who are oppressing their neighbors, namely the wealthy land owners (v.1-5) and the false prophets (v.6-11). They are accused of greed and dealing harshly and unfairly with the lower classes (Isa. 5), and the prophets are depicted as being for hire, and reject Yahweh's true prophets (like Micah, see also 3:5-8). So, God is going to bring disaster upon them (v.3; Jer. 8:1; Amos 3:1). Israel is plagued by social injustice and corrupt leadership (chp.2-3). Chapter three picks up these issues again, but there is an interesting interlude first.

The last few verses of chapter two, shift the mood (v.12-13). The beautiful picture painted here is of Yahweh shepherding his people, regathering the scattered, the faithful remnant (see also 4:6-7; Jer. 31:10; Isa. 52:12).

Chapters 3-4a: Justice and Restoration Cycle #2

Chapter three is a repeat of chapter two. Israel's leaders are condemned for their injustice and violation of the Torah (Lev. 25:23; Ezek. 36:7). God says in chapter 3:1-2, "Is it not for you to know justice? — you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones." Verse nine and ten says it a different way, "…who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity (see also Ezek. 22:6, 27, 34:3; Jer. 5:5, 22:13; Hab.2:12). God has no choice but to step in, and as we see in verses ten through twelve, Jerusalem and its temple are going to be destroyed (a quote from Jer. 26:18).

Chapter four is a "copy-paste" of Isaiah two. Chapter 4:1-7 portray images of restoration like the end of chapter two (especially v.6-7), but expands on them. Dr. Mackie comments that the language and imagery show that, "Jerusalem's destruction will be reversed so that it becomes the rallying point for the nations to learn the Torah and come under Yahweh's kingdom" (Mackie, 27). We receive inclusion of the nation's language again here. In his kingdom God is going to teach his people his laws (v. 2), he'll be their judge (v.3), instruments of war will be turned into tools not made for death and slaughter, but for farming, for cultivating, and caring for the world (v.3), there will be freedom from fear, and relaxation (v.4), the lame and cast off will be brought near, and the Lord will be their king (v6-7). It's beautiful poetry describing restoration after exile, the messianic kingdom that is to come.

Chapters 4b-5: Hope For Israel's Future Restoration

Verse eight of chapter four speaks of God restoring Jerusalem back to her former glory, which glimpses forward to the restoration in chapter five after the imminent exiles to Assyria and Babylon (v.9-13). In the midst of this however, is hope, "There (in Babylon!) you shall be rescued; there the Lord will redeem you from the hand of your enemies." Oppressive nations will attack, but be defeated (4:11-5:1; Isa. 10:24-26, 14:24-27) . The purpose of exile is to purify and restore.

Chapter 5:1-5 speaks explicitly about the messianic kingdom, particularly of a ruler who is to be born from Bethlehem (v.2). Chapter four spoke of restored people and a restored place, now this section speaks of the restoration of the house of David. There is going to come forth a ruler, who is from "ancient days" (Psa. 90:2; Dan. 7; Jn. 1:1). The ruler will shepherd like God said he would do (v. 4). So is God the shepherd, or is the Davidic king the shepherd? The answer is yes (Isa. 7:14, 11:3-5; 40:11). This ruler is described with language here, and in the other prophetic books with language only used of God himself (which is seen clearly in the connection of the Davidic king and the suffering servant in Isaiah 49-55). Verse nine through fifteen speak again of God's restoration of Israel, but with a focus on them as being a beacon of justice once again to the nations (v.9). They also speak of God confronting evil including Israel (5:10-15 sorcery and idolatry pointed out here), and how that becomes the hope for restoration and participation in the kingdom of God.

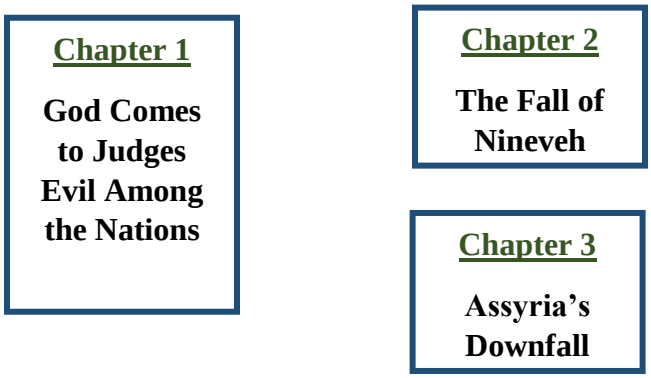
Chapters 6-7 Justice and Restoration Cycle #3

Chapter six replays the cycle of chapters 1-4 and can be summed up in this familiar verse, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah makes his statement here with borrowed language from Genesis 5:22 and Deuteronomy 10:12.

Chapter seven shows Israel personified as a suffering individual (v. 8-20) (Mackie, Lecture). We see this image of the one representing or suffering on behalf of others quite pervasively in the prophets (Isa. 40-55; Jer. 11-20; Ezek. 3-7, 24; Daniel's son of man in ch.7). Verses 14-20 speak of the forgiveness of sins and of covenant renewal. The future hope lies in God's character (v.18) and his covenant promises (v.20). God is faithful and he will do all these things.

The Book of Nahum

Structure



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Main Idea: The book of Nahum shows that God will confront and bring down evil human empires, and how this is good news for the faithful, humble, and repentant, by using the kingdom of Assyria as an image of how God deals with violent oppressors.

Chapter 1: God Comes to Judges Evil Among the Nations

Chapter one paints a portrait of what God is going to do among the nations at large when he comes in judgment, (DOTL) and how Nineveh fits into that larger picture. This book is about the DOTL on Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. The rough historical backdrop of this prophecy is 2 Kings 17 which gives an account of Assyria's destruction of Northern Israel and its tribes, and 2 Kings 18-20, where Assyria ravaged and did much damage to Judah (Mackie, 28). This prophesy should come somewhat as a surprise, because Nineveh just repented in the Book of Jonah (we just read about that a few pages ago!). It seems they have repented of their repentance.

Chapter 1:1-8 describe God's justice poured out on the nations. It sounds a lot like the first chapter of Micah. These first couple of verses are powerful, and perhaps surprising to read for some. God describes himself as "avenging" and "wrathful" (v.2). Verse three quotes Exodus 34:6, but in the context of Nahum's message, not clearing the guilty, and God's might and power are what it emphasized here, rather than his mercy (Joel 4:21). Dr. Mackie comments, "…1:2b-3a are an addition to the poem (they break the acrostic) and clearly allude to Exodus 34:6-7, and show that Nineveh's downfall is an act of justice performed by the God of Israel on behalf of his people" (28).

Verse four through six further express God's wrath coming upon the wicked, but this flow is interrupted by verse seven which states that God spares those who take refuge in him (which speaks to the fate of the faithful remnant). An important feature to not look over is who the addressees are throughout this section. The addressees in 1:2-2:3, '"…trade back and forth between Assyria and Judah to show how God's justice among the nations is part of how he delivers his people (to Assyria 1:9-11; to Judah 1:12-13; to Assyria 1:14; to Judah: 1:15; to Assyria 2:1-2) (Mackie, 29). In 1:7-9 Dr. Mackie points out that there are numerous allusions to the role of Assyria as Yahweh's instrument of judgment

from Isaiah in particular here (Isa 8:8; 10:22-27; 14:24-27; 28:18, 22) (28). This reveals, "... Assyria's double role as the instrument and recipient of God's judgment, an archetype that comes to include all nations (like Babylon in Isaiah and Habakkuk)" (Mackie, 29). Verses nine through fifteen address the fate of the nations. Nineveh is portrayed as an evil, brutal, and idolatrous, oppressor (1:9-11, 15; also 3:1-4, 18-19). Therefore God will judge Assyria, which means salvation for Judah. Verse 15 borrowing language from Isaiah 52:7 and 30:29 and Joel 3:17 reads, "Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off."

Chapter 2: The Fall of Nineveh

Much like the Book of Daniel did with the kingdom of Babylon, Nahum portrays Nineveh's downfall as an example of how God will not let evil, prideful, arrogant, and oppressive empires endure forever. The Final verse (v.13) sums up the poetic atmosphere of the entire chapter well, as it is a reflection on the downfall of the city, "Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard." Verses 3-12 fill in the details depicting the final battle in the streets, the city being plundered, and its inhabitants being taken into captivity, exiled.

Chapter 3: Assyria's Downfall

Chapter two depicted the downfall of the capital city, and now chapter three depicts the downfall of the nation as a whole. Verse one is an accusation against Assyria, "Woe to the bloody city, all full of lies and plunder— no end to the prey!" This leads to the announcement of the disaster that is to befall them (v.2-3), and yet another reason for their judgement (v.4 "prostitution/whorings"). Verses five through seven give us God's response to them, "I am against you." God uses nakedness and shame imagery to describe what is going to become of them (Jer. 13:22, 26; Isa. 3:17; 47:3; Mal. 2:9). Verse 8-17 compare Nineveh's fall to the Egyptian Pharaoh, Thebes' downfall (which was by Assyrian hands) and the locust army swarm from Joel 1:4 (Mackie, 29). The final two verses portray the King of Assyria as helpless and humbled. The final verse of Nahum reads, "There is no easing your hurt; your wound is grievous. All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?" Dr. Mackie sums up the book of Nahum well, "God's goodness and justice compel him to orchestrate the downfall of oppressive nations… Yahweh's judgment against Assyria is used here as *one specific example* of Yahweh's universal justice working itself out among all the nations" (30, Lecture).

The Book of Habakkuk

Structure

Chapters 1-2a	Chapter 2b	Chapter 3
Habakkuk and God Converse	5 Woes Against Babylon	Habakkuk's Prayer

Main Idea: The book of Habakkuk records for us the laments and prayers of a prophet who struggles to understand God's goodness amidst the chaos and evil he sees around him, and how God speaks into the situation offering hope in a future defeat of evil, and liberation for the oppressed.

Chapters 1-2: Habakkuk and God Converse and 5 Woes against Babylon

There is no explicit information giving the date and circumstances of the writing of Habakkuk. However, an interesting feature of the book is that the prophet never accuses Israel of anything. Rather it is a book showing lament and frustration-filled conversations between a prophet and God. The prophet brings his struggle to God, and looks very much like Jeremiah and Job (Jer. 2, 8, 11, 15, 20, 28 42; Lamentations, Job, lament Psalms 13,89 etc.). Dr. Mackie puts it this way, "Habakkuk doesn't proclaim God's word to Israel in the traditional sense. Rather, the book reflects his personal journey of coming to terms with God's providence and the tragic evils of history" (31). Habakkuk is a man who dares to question God and his management of creation.

This section of the book features two complaints from Habakkuk (1:2-4 and 1:12-2:1) that are each followed by a response from God (1:5-11 and 2:2-5). Habakkuk, in his first complaint, asks God when he's ever going to listen to him (v. 2), because the world is going to hell in a handbasket. This is evidenced by the neglect of the Torah, corrupt leadership, and large-scale injustice and violence in Judah (v.3-4). He's asking God to intervene. God responds to the prophet by saying he's raising up Babylon to come and judge the people of Judah, and they are, "…dreaded and fearsome… They gather captives like sand… They laugh at every fortress" and their horses and horsemen are "swifter than leopards, more fierce than evening wolves…they fly like an eagle swift to devour" (v.7-9). The images are terrifying.

This section shows that Habakkuk is torn between the injustice and evil he sees (1:2-4, 12-17), and what he knows to be true of God, namely that he is good and cares for his world (v.12-14). Habakkuk receives God's response and is dumbfounded. The medicine seems worse than the disease in Habakkuk's eyes and he explains why in his second complaint (1:12-2:1). In chapter 2:2-5 God responds a second time to Habakkuk. He receives a vision about an appointed time. God tells him to trust him and his word even though his timing seems delayed, "for the righteous shall live by faith"

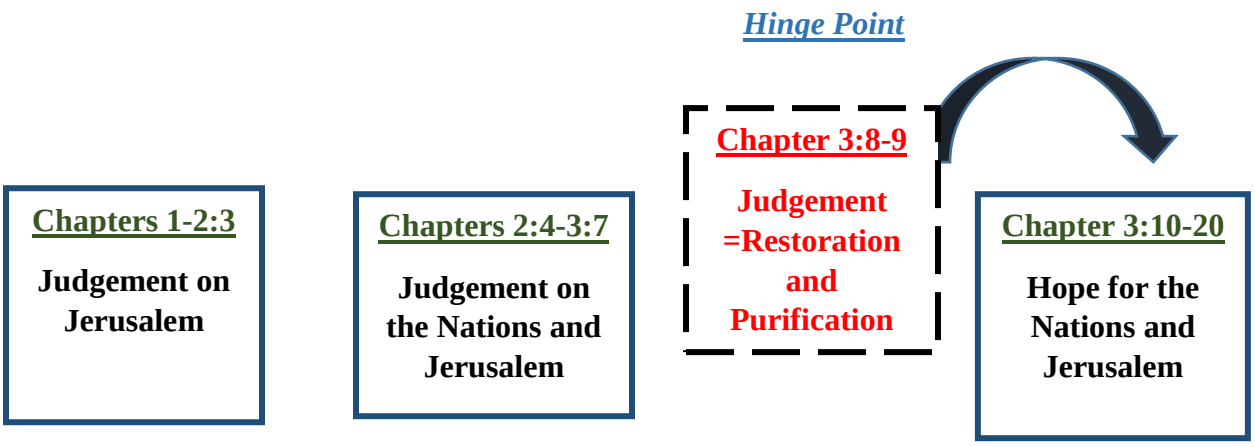
(v.2-4). God will bring about the downfall of Babylon and every evil empire like it (2:5-19). Habakkuk must trust that God is working out his purposes even in Babylon (Gen. 15:6).

Chapter 3: **Habakkuk's Prayer**

Chapter three is another DOTL poem. In the first two verses Habakkuk looks at God's past workings in Israel's history and asks him to do similar in his day. Chapter 3:3-7 show the glory of the power of God appearing in similar fashion in Micah 1, Nahum 1, and Exodus 19-20 (Mackie, 32). God will come, and he will eradicate evil. Verses eight through fifteen are full of the Exodus event "future Exodus" language showing God's victory of evil as a divine warrior (Exod. 15:1–18; Pss 24:7–10; 68; Isa. 34:1–15; 51:9–10). Verse 13 is especially significant. It reads, "You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck" (serpent crusher from Gen. 3:15). The final verses (v.16-19) show Habakkuk's decision to place his trust in Yahweh, even though he's terrified, and to find joy amidst the suffering and pain. Bible commentator Brevard Childs comments, "Habakkuk serves, through... the autobiographical style of a confession, as an example of a faithful response of one person living between the promise of restoration and its arrival" (455).

The Book of Zephaniah

Structure



Main Idea: The Book of Zephaniah is a warning to Judah and the surrounding nations that the DOTL is coming and it will destroy evil and sin through judgement, so that he may purify for himself a faithful remnant among all the nations, that they may one day be restored along with all of creation.

Chapters 1-2:3: Judgement on Jerusalem

This section of Zephaniah is about the DOTL coming upon Israel and Judah. Zephaniah lived in the reign of Judah's last good king, Josiah (v.1), who was a religious reformer in the right kind of way (2 Kings 21-23). However, as we read the narrative we discover that it's too late, Judah is too far gone and their punishment for breaking the covenant is sure. They will fall to Babylon in the near future.

Chapter 1:2-3 speak of Yahweh's universal judgement. The language God uses is that of de-creation, a reversal of Genesis 1 (Gen. 1:20-26), and language from the great flood narrative in Genesis 6:7 and 7:4-9 to describe a "new flood" that is coming (Mackie, 34). It's terrifying! This is the prelude to the following verses about the coming judgment upon Judah, this is what their ruin will look like. God will give them over to disorder and chaos.

Chapter 1:4-18 describe the catastrophe the DOTL will bring upon Jerusalem and Judah (2 Kings 23:4-15) . The world as they know it is going to end. Verse 15-16 read, "A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements." (see also Joel 1-2; Isa. 2:15; Jer. 4:19). This whole section carries this tone, including apocalyptic images describing an army. Zephaniah doesn't name this army in chapter one, because his focus is on what God is doing, and bringing, but we know from history and the other prophets that it is Babylon.

Chapter 2:1-3 takes a 180-degree turn in tone and content. In the middle of this judgment a faithful remnant is called out by God to repent, and be spared of the judgement. But wasn't Judah too

far gone? Dr. Mackie is helpful here, "While judgment is unavoidable for the nation, a remnant can show humility and be sheltered from the day of Yahweh (allusion to Amos 5:14-15)" (35).

Chapters 2:4-3:7: Judgement on the Nations and Jerusalem

Chapter 2:4-15 is Zephaniah's oracle against the nations. There is something very fascinating happening in this section. Zephaniah's oracles against the nations, "…are a thematic reversal of the founding of the lines of Japheth and Ham in Genesis 10" (Mackie, 35). God's judgment is systematic, thorough, and comes for all. Commentator James Nogalski explains, "…the message of Zephaniah 2:4-15 correlates the events of the 7th century with an experience of the day of Yahweh, that brought about a reversal of Genesis 10 and the founding of Assyria and its allies after the flood" (250). Chapter 3:1-7 explains, again (remember chapter one), how this judgment includes Judah. God's judgment of evil includes the evil among his people; they are not exempt.

Chapter 3:8-9: Judgement =Restoration and Purification

Chapter 3:8-9 function as the hinge point in the book, "Yahweh's justice will result in restoration and renewal for all nations. Yahweh's justice is a purification process (3:9) to unify the nations in worship of the one true God (cf. 2:11) as a reversal of Genesis 11" (Mackie, 35). This is amazing because it shows us God's aim in his judgement and wrath. He is holy and just therefore he must punish sin and evil, but Zephaniah is clear that God's consuming fire serves the purpose of purification, not destruction. He is going to pour out his wrath, there is no doubt about that, but it is not because he is blood thirsty, it is an expression of his love and what he must do to bring his people unto himself.

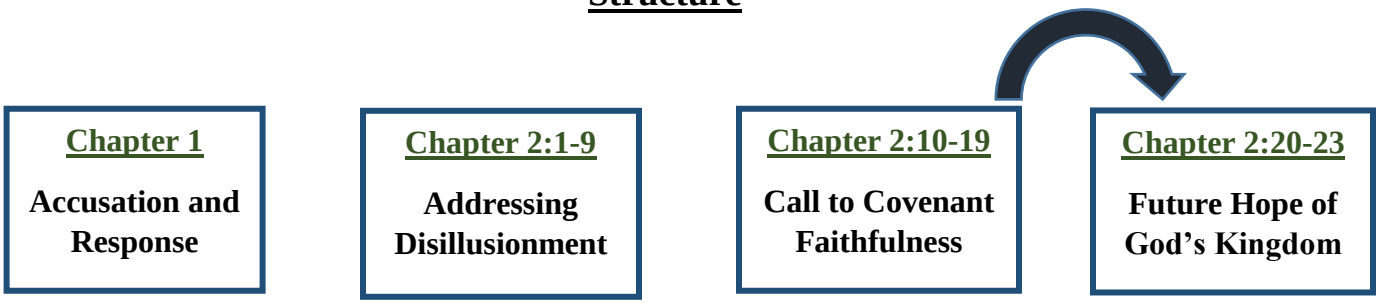
Chapter 3:10-20: Hope for the Nations and Jerusalem

Chapter 3:9-10 speak of the hope of restoration for the nations (a reversal of Genesis 11, also see ch.2:12; Joel 3:2; Isa. 11:11,60:4, 19:18; Ps. 68:31). Restoration for Jerusalem and its remnant are what the remainder of the book describes (3:10–20). These last few verses are a beautiful poem of renewal and restoration. Verse 17 expresses the mood well, "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing." This is the hope for the faithful remnant.

Interval: "Between Zephaniah and Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi the *exile has come and gone* (i.e. we've jumped from 600BC to 500BC). Haggai-Malachi all relate to the circumstances of the people *after* the exile, as they wait for the fulfillment of Yahweh's promises." (Mackie, 36)

The Book of Haggai

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Haggai is a call to remain faithful to Yahweh, despite disappointment and hardship, and to keep looking forward to the day when the kingdom of God will be fully realized.

Chapter 1: Accusation and Response

The First chapter is a call to repentance and a call to rebuild the temple. The background for Haggai (v.1) can be found in book of Ezra chapters 1-4, and he is actually mentioned in Ezra chapter 5:1. He is a prophet after the exile to Babylon when the Medes and Persians allied to overthrow Babylon in 539BC and Dr. Mackie illuminates,

> Some exiles returned and started rebuilding the temple around 538BC at the commission of Cyrus (see Ezra 3:1-9). The project was frustrated by opposition (Ezra 4:4-5), and the stood uncompleted for some 15yrs. In 522BC the work of rebuilding the temple was restarted (Ezra 5-6), and Haggai, Zerubbabel, and Joshua, played a key role in kick-starting the process (37).

The Lord is upset with his people for their misplaced priorities (1:2-10). The people have left the house of God in ruins, yet they build houses for themselves. This serves as an image of their spiritual state as well. Those who returned from exile have not been faithful to God, and have continued to suffer the consequences of covenant infidelity that their ancestors did, highlighted here especially in the form of famine and drought (1:2–11, 2:15–19; Deut. 28:23-24, 38-40). Verse six sums up their futility because of their neglect and covenant rebellion, "You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes." Verses 12-15 show that the leaders and faithful remnant repented, listened to Haggai, and began to work on the temple again. God responds to the people, "I am with you, declares the Lord."

Chapter 2:1-9: Addressing Disillusionment

In this section the disillusionment and unmet expectations of the rebuilding of the temple are addressed. Some people are looking back on the former temple built by Solomon, and the new temple looks like a shanty in comparison (Ezra 3:12-13). However, God reminds the people of the glory that is to come, but also that he is with them presently, "Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst" (v.4b-5; Exod. 29:45; Zech. 4 and 8). Verses six through nine speak of the pilgrimage of the nations to the future temple (Mackie, 37).

Chapter 2:10-19: Call to Covenant Faithfulness

In this section Haggai points out there is impurity among the people. The promises of the previous verses of a future glorious temple are contingent upon repentance and purity. The people are conducting their work in an impure way (2:15-17,; Deut. 28:22, 38-40; Leviticus; Amos 4:9. The way one does something matters to God, it's not just the doing, but the attitude, motivations, and care which one does things. Repentance involves a radical obedience to revelation.

Chapter 2:20-23: Future Hope of God's Kingdom

Taking Yahweh's words to heart will secure a future of covenant blessing (2:20) (Mackie, 37). This future blessing involves the glorification of the temple and regathering of the nation (v.2:21, 2:6-9), the downfall of evil nations (v.22; Haggai uses Exodus 14-15 language, see also Isa. 60:1), and the restoration of the Davidic, messianic kingship (v.23; Isa. 6, 11, Hos. 3:4; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23). This section is a densely-packed summary of the hope that is spoken of in all of the prophets, and it's three of the prominent aspects that comprise the theme of hope in the corpus of the prophets as a whole.

The Book of Zechariah

Structure

Chapter 1:1-6
Introduction

Chapter 1:7-6
Zechariah's Dreams/Visions

Chapters 7-8
Conclusion

Chapters 9-14
God's Judgement and Restoration

Visions

#1	#2	#3	#4
Chapter 1:7-17 **4 Horsemen**	**Chapter 1:18-21** **4 Horns** **4 Craftsmen**	**Chapter 2:1-13** **Jerusalem is Measured**	**Chapter 3:1-10** **Joshua the High Priest**
#8	#7	#6	#5
Chapter 6:1-15 **4 Chariots**	**Chapter 5:5-11** **Woman in a Basket**	**Chapter 5:1-4** **The Flying Scroll**	**Chapter 4:1-14** **Zerubbabel Davidic Heir**

Main Idea: The Book of Zechariah serves to motivate covenant faithfulness now, as the hope for ushering in the messianic kingdom that is to come, faithfulness motivated by hope for the future.

Chapter 1:1-6: Introduction

In verse one we get a glimpse into the time Zechariah was speaking. The historical context is nearly identical to that of the prophet Haggai (see the Book of Haggai section (ch.1) for more details). Zechariah is mentioned in Ezra 5:1, and the information given in verse one places the writing near the end of the temple construction (Mackie, 38).

Chapter 1:2-6 is very similar to the first chapter of Haggai. The current Israelite generation, the ones who have just come back from exile, need to repent. They are heading down the same road as their ancestors, but in verse six we are told that they listen, repent and return to the Lord. The next section **(**1:7-6: Zechariah's Dreams/Visions) explores the bizarre dreams Zechariah received concerning present and future events. This concept of God revealing himself in dreams is common in the Old Testament and has its beginnings in Genesis (chs. 28,37,41 for example).

Vision #1: Chapter 1:7-17: 4 Horsemen

The image used here is of a heavenly counsel (Job 1), and Zechariah is being invited in to a heavenly perspective of the current state of the world. The four housemen are patrolmen (v.10) sent by God to see the state of things on earth and report to the Lord saying, "All the earth remains at rest" (v.11) This is most likely referring to God giving Babylon over to the Persians. If all is at peace, "This prompts the question: is the 70 years of Israel's exile up?" (Mackie, 39). The Prophet Daniel wondered the same thing (Dan. 9), and as we learn from him it is rooted in the promise Jeremiah stated that exile would last 70 years (Jer. 25:11; 29:10; 33:14). God responds and says that he will begin to fulfill his promises by restoring Jerusalem and the temple (v.16-17) and judge the nations for carrying out his judgement too harshly (v.15).

Vision #2: Chapter 1:18-21 4 Horns and 4 Craftsmen

This vision is about God's judgment on the nation that destroyed Jerusalem. Horns are common symbols of power and strength, "…of God's power: Deut 33:17; 2 Sam 22:3; of kings: Daniel 7-8" (Mackie, 39). The symbolic metal horns seem to be an allusion to 1 Kings 22:11, which would make them the evil nations (of recent Assyria and Babylon), and the "craftsman" are sent to tear them down (v.20), the executers of God's justice (perhaps Persia is the human agency in mind here). The number "4" is used here and throughout the visions, (four winds, four horses, four chariots), and likely refers to, "the four directions of the compass, i.e. the nations of all the earth" (Mackie, 39). God uses the evil nations as his instruments of judgement for a time, but eventually he orchestrates their downfall (Isa. 10, Habakkuk).

Vision #3: Chapter 2:1-13 Jerusalem is Measured

This vision is about the rebuilding of Jerusalem, creating a new dwelling place where God can be with his people (v.2:1-5). It is a really neat dream. There is a man with a measuring line and he's measuring Jerusalem to get its dimensions when an angel tells another angel to go tell the one measuring that this is going to be a city without walls!? (v.4). There are going to be so many inhabitants in the city that there are no walls. For, "And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the Lord, and I will be the glory in her midst" (v.5; Exod. 13:21). It's an amazing picture. Verses six through thirteen summarize the themes of the first three visions (and from other prophets): regathering of the scattered (v.6-7), downfall of evil nations (v.8-9), and provision for gentiles as included with the remnant, the new covenant people of God (v.10-12).

Vision #4: Chapter 3:1-10: Joshua the High Priest

Joshua the high priest is pictured as being in the divine court (Job 1-2; also from Zechariah's first vision), and being accused by Satan. God defends him, and he is given new clothes to wear, which are"… a symbol of his renewed commitment to the people and a removal of their sin (3:4)" (Mackie,

40). Joshua is given a choice, he must obey the covenant, and if he does he will become a symbol of the people who are for "my servant, the branch." This is language from Isaiah six and eleven and Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15. It is used to speak of the future messianic-Davidic-king (see also Hosea 3:4-5; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23). Dr. Mackie points out something very note-worthy for this section,

> The stone described in 3:9 is most likely an elaboration on the jeweled, priestly head-piece described in Exod 28:36-38, which is worn in the rituals that provide atonement for the sin of the people. Joshua could wear this headpiece and atone for Israel's sin, that is, if he listens to the divine command. (40).

The fig tree and vine imagery in verse ten is a common symbol for restoration, rest, and renewal (Micah 4:6). However, this messianic kingdom will only come if the people are faithful.

Vision #5: Chapter 4:1-14 Zerubbabel Davidic Heir

This vision is challenging to read and understand. The focus is on how the building of the temple is part of God's plan to care for and take care of his people. The leaders (kings and priests) are pointed out in particular as divine gifts to the people. Their success will be determined by their obedience and dependence upon God's Spirit to accomplish their task (3:8, 4:6). The Rebuilding of the temple cannot be done without the Spirit. Chapter 4:1-6a tell of the vison's main symbols, the lampstand and trees (4:1-6a). Verses 10b-14 give the explanation of the symbols, and verses 6b-10a are an interruption (important though), an oracle about Zerubbabel. Dr. Mackie is helpful here in explaining the images,

> The lights are a symbol (4:10b) of the perpetual "eyes" of God watching the land (similar to the four horsemen who watch over the earth; cf. Job 1:7, 2:2)…The two olive trees are identified as two "sons of oil" (= "anointed ones") who serve God, i.e. the only two anointed individuals in Israelite culture were the priest (Lev 8:1-12) and the king (1 Sam 16; Psalms 2, 110). (40)

The interrupting oracle clarifies who the two trees are: Joshua the high priest, and Zerubbabel.

Vision #6: Chapter 5:1-4: The Flying Scroll

The main idea of this poem is God's justice on all who violate the covenant. This is a giant scroll! And we are told that it is a "curse" (v.3, Deut. 28 and 29:27 {covenant curses}), symbolizing the consequences of violating the covenant (v.3-4). God makes sure that all violators will be brought to justice.

Vision #7: Chapter 5:5-11: Woman in a Basket

This is very strange, but the meaning of the vision is tied to the previous vision and symbolizes God removing evil from among the returned exiles. The woman in the basket symbolizes "wickedness" (v.8), and the basket she's in "iniquity" (v.6). God is sending it to "shinar" which is, "…an ancient name for Babylon (Gen 10:10; 11:2; Isa 11:11; Dan 1:2) where a shrine is built for it" (Mackie, 41). The image is of God taking evil from among his people and sending it back to where it came from. The motif of God using, and then judging enemy nations is at play here again. God is purging the evil so the remnant may be made pure (Hag. 2:10-15)

Vision #8: Chapter 6:1-15: 4 Chariots

This vision recounts the four horsemen from the first vision (1:8-11). They are here again patrolling the land, coming from the "four winds" (6:5; 1:10-11). They bring a message of peace once again, even from the North (where Israel's enemies came from historically ({Isa. 14:31; Jer. 1:14-15; Ezek. 38:6; Zeph. 2:13}). The patrolmen find universal peace.

Verses nine through fifteen focus on the promise of a new temple and a "priest-king" figure that becomes another portrait of the messianic king (see also 3:8, Psa.110). A group of exiles are called to prepare "a crown" and place it upon Joshua the high priest, which is significant, because one would think that this would be done to the king not a priest. But this adds another color to the portrait of the messiah the prophets speak of throughout the Old Testament. This promise, however, is conditional and contingent upon obedience and repentance (v. 15; Deut. 28:1).

Chapters 7-8: Conclusion

This section picks up common themes from the previous chapters about repentance and covenant faithfulness. These chapters serve as a gut check to recently returned exiles. God asks if their religious piety is really for him (v.5; Isa. 1:10-18; Jer. 7). In verses 9-14 God reminds and warns the people of how their ancestors rejected the words of the prophets (Isa.1, Jer. 7).

The first seventeen verses of chapter eight are a summary of the first six chapters. That is the regathering a people (8:7-8 = 2:15; 8:4-5 = 1:17, 2:8), rebuilding the temple (8:9-13 = Hag 1:10, 2:18-19), Yahweh's personal presence (8:2-3 = 1:14, 16; 2:14). These things however, are dependent upon this generation's obedience and repentance. Chapter 8:16-19 tell what the people should do, and how they should respond to God's warnings and requests. They are to do Abrahamic Covenant things (Gen. 12, 15, 17). The last verses of chapter eight speak of how the people should rejoice in the new work that God is doing. The volume is turned up to eleven when the reader sees the hope of Isaiah 2:1-4 and Micah 4:1-4, in the language here, that all nations will be participants in the New Jerusalem, and come seeking Yahweh (see also Zech. 2:15 and 6:15).

Chapters 9-14: God's Judgement and Restoration

Chapter nine picks up the central themes of God confronting evil once for all, establishing his presence and the messianic king. Verse one through eight showcase God's defeating evil among the nations. Verses nine and ten speak of the promised king from the line of Judah coming to Zion in fulfillment of Genesis 49 (Jer. 23:5; Zeph. 3:14). Verses 11-17 are an invitation for Judah to come and find rest in Yahweh and in his protection and care. God will appear in great power (9:14; to Hab. 3) to defeat their enemies and rescue his remnant that they may flourish in his kingdom.

Chapter 10:1-11:3 is much like chapter nine. The most significant differences are the focus of Ephraim and Judah, and the bad shepherd imagery. Israel has bad shepherds, therefore God voices his anger using images from Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34 (Mackie, 43). This plays right into the next section (11:4-17) which is a sign-act about Israel's bad shepherds, not of past but presently (v.14).

Chapter 12 explores Zechariah's idea of what it will take for restoration to happen. The two themes that are explored here are God's dealing with evil in the world among the nations, and the rebellion of the house of David. In verse one God speaks and reminds us that he is the creator. He is the one who sovereignly rules over the universe. Verses two through six describe a battle scene where

all the nations are gathered against Zion, but are defeated. Judah is particularly highlighted in the battle, "On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot in the midst of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves. And they shall devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in its place, in Jerusalem" (v.6). This type of final battle scene and its imagery is common among the prophets (Isa. 10, 13-14, Mic. 5-6, Joel 3, Zeph. 3). Once the external threats have been dealt with, God turns to the internal threats, corrupt leadership within his people (v.7-8). Verse eight speaks of the reversal of status, weak becoming strong, "On that day the Lord will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David…" Verse 10 works as a hinge point in the story and is intriguing,

> "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

This is interesting. This verse draws upon imagery from Jeremiah 6:26,31:9,50:4 and Amos 8:10. The change from first to third person is significant, "…so that, when they look on *me*, on ***him*** whom they have pierced…" So the one being pierced is the one who is also the one who is looked upon (John quotes this in his Gospel (19:37) and in Revelation (1:7). It's similar to the language and concept of the Davidic- divine-shepherd-priest-king-messiah figure throughout the prophets being describe as Yahweh, but distinct from Yahweh, but doing only things Yahweh can do (Isa. 6,11, servant psalms Isa. 40-55; Ezek. 34-37). The rest of the chapter describes the mourning over what the people have done to the one they pierced (v.11-14).

Chapter thirteen speaks about the purification of the royal house (v.1). This chapter is all about correction of past sin and restoration. Verses two through six speak of God ridding the land of idolatry (Exod. 23:13), and calls the people to not put up with false prophets (Deut. 13:6-11). Verse seven through nine describe the purification of the Davidic household in past exile language and imagery. The remnant language is derived from Ezekiel 5:1-12, as God must once again produce a pure remnant for himself that may obey the covenant (13:9). The final line, "…contains an echo of Malachi 3:1 (testing metals) and Hosea 2:23 (covenant formula)" (Mackie, 45).

Chapter fourteen is a crazy scene describing the DOTL, but it does have certain movements throughout that work as sign posts: the final battle (v.1-5), recreation of the land (v.6-11), back to final battle (v.12-15), and emergent remnant after final battle. The events are quite linear, or in order. It's like the author can't help himself, he's so excited to get to the good news!

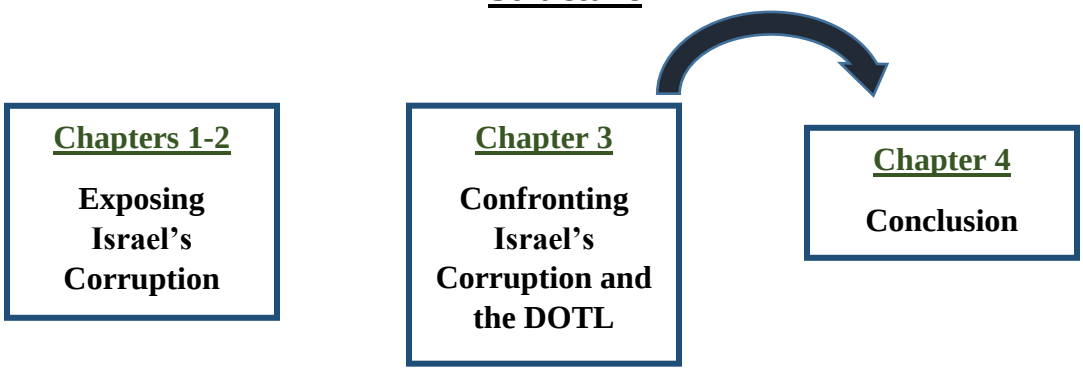
The final battle, like it was portrayed earlier in the book, draws its images from Joel three and Zephaniah three. God comes down (see also Mic. 1:2-7; Nah. 1:2-5), confronts evil head on, and saves his remnant. Verses 12-15 describe the destruction of the evil nation using plague imagery from the Exodus story (Exod. 9:14, 14:24). The nations will become like Egypt, defeated and plundered, while God's people are rescued.

In verses six through eleven we receive the beautiful depiction of God recreating. The New Jerusalem is a place of total peace. Winter is done away with along with darkness, which by contrast means it is always day and always summer (v.6-7; Gen.1:6; Isa. 60). There will be a big river (Joel 3:18; Ezek. 47:12; Gen 2:10-14) flowing from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea, flowing out of Jerusalem, and Yahweh will be the only king (Exod. 15:21 and Deut. 4:4-6) (Mackie, 46).

The final verses pick up on the theme in the prophets of gentile inclusion, as a remnant from among the nations joins the remnant of Israel! (v.16). There's a big celebration, the Feast of Booths (Exod. 23; Lev. 23; Deut. 16, 31). Dr. Mackie comments the final verses show how, "The entire city of Jerusalem becomes purified and as holy as the inner-parts of the temple. It's a similar vision to the conclusion of Ezekiel (chs. 47-48)" (46).

The Book of Malachi

Structure



Main Idea: The Book of Malachi exposes the truth that shortly after the return from exile, the people of God are just as corrupt and sinful as they were before the exile, so the DOTL is coming to purify them, to make them ready for His kingdom.

Chapters 1-2: Exposing Israel's Corruption

Malachi prophesied after the temple had been completed. The book is designed as a dialogue between God and his people, in which they are shown to be dense, defensive, disrespectful, and doubtful of God's love and care for them. Chapter 1:2-5 speak of God's love for his covenant people Israel. This is in spite of the fact the exile has not changed the people's hearts and they are still practicing idolatry, violating the Torah (divorce highlighted here 2:10-16), the leaders are corrupt (2:1-9), and the people offer bad offerings to the Lord (v.6-14). The people are not paying attention to the Law or the Prophets (they ignore Leviticus, and they place fast and loose with Moses' teachings), they are an unfaithful people, literally to their wives, which works doubly as an image also of their relationship with God (Neh.13).

Chapter 3: Confronting Israel's Corruption and the DOTL

Chapter three is an announcement of another judgment that is coming for Israel (v.1-4) and a call to repentance (v.6-7) that God may purify for himself a faithful remnant among the people (v.16-17). Malachi sounds much like Zechariah here. The exile has not produced the long-term effects that it should have, on the people's hearts. God lets them know that it is not he who has changed (v.6; Ps. 102:27; Num. 23:19) he has been the same from the beginning. The chapter goes into further detail about the types of corruption and offense against God (specifically robbing god of the tithe). In its outworkings it's really damaging to all social relationships. Malachi is very clear that it is those who fear Yahweh that are saved (v.16-18). You either fear God or you don't, there is no middle ground in the prophets.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Dr. Mackie points out that, "The book ends with an appendix that weaves the themes of the prophets into the entire TaNaK" (48). Malachi shows that the standard of faith and allegiance to God is still the Law of Moses (v.4, Josh.1:1-8), for God's people. The mentioning of the prophet Elijah is

connected to Joel 3:4 (coming with the DOTL) and like Moses, he too called the people to faithfulness (Deut. 34:10-12; 1 Kings 18 and 19). He will make clear who the wicked and righteous are (v.18; Psa.1). His mission will additionally be to, "return the hearts", "… of the people (= repentance, see Deut 4:39 and 30:1-2; and 1 Kings 18:28-32) and bears a resemblance to the vocation of Isaiah's servant (Isa 49:1-2)'" (Mackie, 48).

Key Themes in the Book of the 12:

Davidic King

Pervasive throughout the prophets (major and minor) is the concept of a divine messianic shepherd king (Dan. 7; Hos. 1, 3; Amos 9; Obadiah; Mic. 5; Hag. 2; Zech. 3-4,12-13; Isa. 11; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23). Each prophet picks up similar language, but also at times adds to the portrait new aspects of the messiah. A few examples: Isaiah gives us the "suffering servant" portrait, Jeremiah adds the emotional piece to that (obedience despite not wanting to endure the pain), Ezekiel really plays into the shepherd aspect, and Zechariah adds the priestly language to the messiah job description. They are all powerful images of what Israel's leaders should be at their best. The prophets know it is going to take a figure who will represent them, that embodies all of these things and does on behalf of Israel what she cannot do for herself (Isa. 7-9, 11; 49:8-13). The future hope is in this "New David" the hope of the world rests on his shoulders.

Covenant Infidelity

Covenant infidelity is a major theme among the prophets; it purposes most of their writing. They either talk about the covenant being broken, renewal of the covenant, or both. The emphasis in the prophets is to show that Israel is incapable of keeping God's commandments and loving him, apart from him intervening, rescuing, and cleansing them. This is usually spoken of in two ways: an imminent judgement that will work as a purifying fire and produce a faithful remnant that will love and serve him, and also a future final day of justice and renewal. Everyone is responsible for how they respond to Yahweh. They either respond in repentance that leads to obedience, or they continue in their sin unchanged.

Day of the Lord/ Remnant/Restoration

This theme is linked to the one above, in fact it flows out of it. The Day of the Lord is a common theme among the prophets, and speaks of God coming to judge evil and bring renewal and restoration on the other side of justice. There are many historical past DOTL, and THE DOTL (yet to take place). Yahweh always judges with a purpose and never arbitrarily. The two aspects of the DOTL push the prophets (Isa., Jer. Ezek., the Twelve) to be both pessimistic and optimistic about the future. The DOTL is both an eradication of evil and a blessing for the righteous as they are vindicated, renewed, and restored. Judgement will work as a purifying fire to purge evil and produce a faithful remnant that will love and serve Yahweh (remnant language saturated the prophetic texts showing that God is faithful to his covenant promises {Gen. 12, 15, 17; 2 Sam. 7} even when we are not). It's a terrifying day, for some, and a relief and answer to prayer for the righteous and faithful. God will one day judge evil once and for all, and fully vindicate his people, give them a new heart and spirit (Deut. 30; Ezek. 36-37; Jer.31), dwell with them in a fully realized and consummated New Heavens and New Earth (Isa.65). He will be their God and they will be his people (Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:1; Jer. 30:22; Ezek. 14:11).

Gentile Inclusion

One of the more remarkable things the prophets speak of is gentile inclusion. Some books like Jonah, Obadiah, and Zechariah turn up the volume on this theme louder than others, but it is a common theme amongst the prophets (Isa.56:1-8, 66:18-24; Ezek. 47:21-23). God's coming kingdom will include peoples from all nations who repent, believe, and follow his ways. The fire of God's judgment will work on them, like it does Israel, producing a faithful remnant that realizes they have offended the holy God of the universe, and they turn to him.

Implication for Today:

The Book of the Twelve put simply is about covenant failure and future hope. It showcases the power and might of God, but also his fatherly heart that loves his people so much he can't let their sin slide, but he won't totally destroy them. I find it interesting that the book which perhaps showcases the emotions of God more than any other Old Testament book, opens these writings, though it is not chronologically the first of the writings (i.e. Hosea). It shows us how God feels about what he must do and his purposes in doing so. I think that so often we condemn or judge others without first establishing a relationship (which God does with Israel), offering our love, getting to know them, expressing our care and concern etc. Often our hearts aren't made known, and so our actions are seen as divisive, uncaring, or hurtful more than they are seen as restorative and helpful.

What we do matters to God. The Book of the Twelve (each individual book in its own way) shows us our need for a savior and relationship with God, but it does not divorce grace and obedience like many in the church do today. In fact, when God's grace invades, it demands radical obedience. This concept is all over the Book of the Twelve, not just in the New Testament. That is why the people of God need a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 36-37; Jer. 31). That is why we need a "New David" (Dan. 7; Hos. 1, 3 Amos 9; Obadiah; Mic. 5; Hag. 2; Zech. 3-4,12-13; Isa. 11; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23) to do the things we cannot do for ourselves, that we may be reconciled to God. The Book of the 12 shows us the human condition at its worst exposing our inadequacies, prejudice, pride, racism, hatred, and sin. But it also offers an amazing promise of hope in the messiah and the coming kingdom of God. The prophets show us that we have no hope at all if we hope in anything else.

Study Questions for the Book of the 12:

1. What are the driving themes of the Book of the 12? Name a few.
2. What gets added to the portrait of the Davidic king in the Book of the Twelve that is different from the "Three"? What are some similarities?
3. What is God's purpose in judgement or the DOTL? Remember it is twofold.
4. It seems like God holds Israel's leaders to a higher standard than the rest of the people, because they are singled out much of the time. Do you think this is the case?
5. How do the nations/gentiles fit in to God's scheme of salvation, restoration, and renewal in the Book of the 12?
6. Is your goal in confronting people, situations, or circumstance that need addressed (perhaps because of sin or injustice) to restorative and loving? Do you struggle to operate in such a way?
7. How do you explain God's grace in relation to obeying his law?
8. Write down something in your personal life, marriage, work etc., that you need to repent of that God is convicting you of right now, or that you see you struggle with after reading these books.

9. Is your hope based on what the prophets spoke of in these books, or is it placed in something else? What are some "idols" in your life, things that hinder you from pursuing God with all of your heart? If you feel comfortable sharing, please do.
10. Share a couple of things that have helped you stay faithful to God, or persevere in a chaotic and evil world. How has God worked through those things to shape you into looking more like Jesus?

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The Book Psalms

Structure

Main Idea: The Psalms give words for prayer, and a voice to pain, sorrow, and frustration, but also express, praise, thankfulness, and gratitude as the people of God strive to be faithful to the covenant while they wait for the Messianic kingdom.

Main Idea Explained

The book of Psalms is a collection of Hebrew, poems, songs and prayers written by different people throughout Israel's history. It's far more than simply a hymn book, rather it is a literary masterpiece that is meant to be read from beginning to end. Neither are the Psalms haphazardly

thrown together, rather they are thoughtfully ordered, down to each chapter. The entire collection is separated into five main books (like the five books of the Torah) with each book carrying a specific theme complete with its own introduction, key points, and conclusions. Each of the first four books have strikingly similar endings (see Psa. 41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48) and book five ends with five poems of praise (Psa. 146-150) that are linked to the theme at the end of the other four books, thus the five-part conclusion corresponds to the five-part shape of the entire book (Mackie, 1). This being said, if there is a conclusion there most certainly is an introduction as well.

Psalms one and two stand outside of book one, which can be easily discerned by the fact that they are the only Psalms in Book One that do not contain the superscription "of David". Psalms one and two seem to be an introduction to the entire book and are united by key vocabulary and themes. These Psalms tell the reader that the rest of the book will be primarily about the Torah and the Messiah. Those who meditate on the Torah and take refuge in the Messiah will be blessed, but the wicked who oppose the Messiah and God's way will be destroyed and perish. The Scriptures are where God meets with his people, and they form a counter-culture way of life in the believer. The world is in rebellion against Yahweh and his redemptive purposes to restore creation through the Messiah from the line of David, therefore humanity's eternal destiny rests on their response to the Messiah. As Dr. Mackie points out, "Psalms 1-2 set up a narrative-plot for the Psalms scroll: Will this Messianic promise overcome opposition? How will the righteous cope with such hostility and keep their hope in God's promise?" (2). The Psalms teach us where to ground our faith, how to trust, how to wrestle with God, how to lament, how worship, how to rejoice, and how to pray.

Book One of the Psalms consists of Psalms 3-41, which contains four distinct sections. The first of these sections is Psalms 3-14 which focus on connecting the reader with David from the past, being persecuted by his enemies (Psa. 3 and 7) and calling out to God to bring vindication and salvation. They are an invitation for God's people to find themselves in David, and they teach the language of prayer, how we respond when our circumstances don't match what we know to be true about God and his ways. A persecuted David also becomes an image of the persecuted and suffering messianic king to come. The epicenter of God's salvation is said to be the temple in Zion (as in Psalm 2; 3:4; 5:7; 9:11; 11:3; 14:6) {Mackie, 3}. The second section, Psalms 15-24 is designed with a chiasmic (symmetrical) structure (Mackie,4). This section is framed by two poems (Psa. 15 and 24) that describe what kind of person can go up to the temple and live in God's presence (they sound like the Psalm 1 person), which surround two sections focused on the future deliverance of the suffering and persecuted messianic king (Psa.16-18 and 20-23), and lying at the center is a poem about the Torah (Psa. 19). The third and fourth sections (Psa. 25-34 and 35-41) are connected by the acrostic poems (Psa. 25,34, and 37), and contain poems of David's lament (Psa.26-33, 35-36, 38-41), appeals for deliverance and vindication before his enemies (Psa.28:6-9), his desire to be in God's temple presence (Psa. 26:3-7; 27:1-5; 28:1-2), and how David's own life journey and experience of forgiveness and restoration (32-33) becomes a model for future generations (Mackie, 4).

Books Two and three consist of Psalms 42-72 and 73-89, respectfully. They are intimately connected as, "The entire composition is arranged as a symmetry with a 'David' section at its center and as its conclusion" (Mackie,4). Psalms 42-49 and 84-89 record the Psalms of Korah. They encourage hope in God's promises, and obedience to the Torah despite the feeling of Yahweh's absence. These poems record lament over sin and human nature, longing for the divine temple presence to return, and celebrations of God's power, and the messianic hope. Framed by the Korah

poems, are the Psalms of Asaph (Psa. 50 and 73-83). These poems highlight the crisis brought about by the exile, and spur on hope in God's coming kingdom. The David section in the middle (Psa. 51-72) takes up the themes of exile and the future Messianic hope in light of that catastrophe, with a lot of emotional venting and grappling with Yahweh.

Book four (Psa. 90-106) is designed to respond to the crisis of exile spelled out at the end of book three. The opening poem draws us back to Mt. Sinai with a prayer, with the intercession of Moses calling upon Yahweh to show mercy and to remember his covenant like he did after the Golden Calf debacle in Exodus 32-34 (Psa. 90-92). Moses teaches us that any experience of God's justice or wrath isn't because God acts arbitrarily, or has broken his covenant; he's actually fulfilling his promises to bring justice on human sin. The exile was Israel's sins finally catching up with them, but Moses pleads for mercy by asking God to let Israel see him fulfill his promises, and to not let exile be the last word, but rather just as Yahweh brought exile upon Israel, now let him bring deliverance. In Psalms 91-92 God pronounces vindication for those who remain faithful to him. Additionally, Psalms 93-100 the "Yahweh Reigns" psalms respond to the exile crisis (Psa. 89) by reaffirming the claim made in the "Song of the Sea" (Exodus 15:18) that God is king, shepherd and judge of the nations (Mackie, 6). Psalms 101-103 contain another set of "David" poems, which focus on repentance and recommitment, in response to the previous psalms. Israel's only hope is in the covenant faithfulness and mercy of Yahweh their God. The closing psalms (104-106) cap off this collection by showing how Yahweh's work in creation showcases his universal rule over it, and despite Israel's continual infidelity, there is hope because God's promises rely on his character, not their behavior, and he will remain committed to his people.

Book five (Psa.107-145) is primarily about the establishment of God's kingdom and the Messiah's victory over evil, in a beautiful symmetry. Psalms 107-110 encourages the reader that Yahweh does hear the prayers of his people, and he will send the Messiah and establish his kingdom forever. Psalms 113-118 (The Hallel {highlight Exodus themes}) and 120-136 (The Songs of Accent {highlight return from exile and Zion Theology}) are parallel sections that both contain poems near their ending about the future messianic kingdom, offering hope for a future exodus, a future redemption. Psalm 119 highlights the Torah theme from Psalm 1, in a lengthy alphabet poem about the importance and beauty of God's word. Psalms 138-145 contain the final "David" collection that climaxes in a meditation of the hope of the Davidic Covenant (Mackie, 8). The praise Yahweh Psalms (146-150) form the conclusion to not only book five, but to the larger corpus of the entire book of Psalms. The center poem (Psa.148) summons all of creation to praise God for who he is, and for raising up a "horn". The word "horn" should take the reader back to Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2. The word "horn" is used as a metaphor in the Hebrew Bible for the promised king from the line of David, (1 Sam 2:1, 10; 2 Sam 22:3; Psalm 132:17). As the Psalms conclude, they lead God's people to what their final response to Yahweh should be: trust in his promises and worship.

Purpose of the Book

The book of Psalms was composed as a literary masterpiece that gives God's people words for their prayers as they strive to be faithful covenant partners, and await his coming kingdom (Psa. 1-2). Therefore, the faith of God's people is to be grounded on God's word (Psa. 1;119), and his deliverer, the coming Messiah (Psa. 2; 148). The Psalms teach us how to acknowledge our suffering, and wrestle with Yahweh about the difficulties, hardships, and persecution we face in this world (Psa.

3–7, 73, 89). We learn that it's okay to pray for vindication in the midst of persecution and suffering (Psa. 58, 109, 137), as we wait and trust in the promises of God and worship him for who he is, what he has done, and what he will one day do.

Key Themes

Messiah: Faith and Hope

The nations are in rebellion against God's purposes to rule over them through the Messiah from the line of David, and Israel has found herself in exile. In his rich mercy and grace and despite Israel's failure, we learn that God's covenant promises rely solely upon his own character and faithfulness.

Perhaps the most dominant theme running throughout the book of Psalms is that of a future deliverer, the Messiah. Israel's hope lies solely in this coming Messianic king from the line of David who will defeat evil and rule over the nations with righteousness and justice (Psa. 2). Psalm two is a poetic reflection on 2 Samuel 7 (the Davidic Covenant) and shows how God will bring about his covenant promises in this future deliverer that is to come. Further, the "Royal Psalms" (2, 20–23, 72, 89 107, 110, 118, 132, 148) anticipate this coming deliverer who will fulfill God's covenant promises to Abraham. The Psalms "of David" and "of Solomon" (See this theme below) key into this theme heavily, connecting this figure to the Davidic lineage, and the one to establish the kingdom of God. Psalm 72 and 89 particularly highlight how God is going to restore his blessing to the nations, through the Messianic king from the line of David. All of the hopes in the Torah and prophets come together here in these Psalms. Additionally, the "Zion" psalms (45-48 and 84-87) foster messianic hope in the reader. The prophet writers know it is going to take a figure who will represent them, that embodies all of these things Moses, David, and Solomon did at their best, and who will do on behalf of Israel what she cannot do for herself (Isa. 7-9, 11; 49:8-13). The future hope is in this "New David", the Messiah. The hope of the world rests on his shoulders. This is who Israel is to place her faith and hope in.

Torah and Covenant Faithfulness

Psalms one and two introduce the entire book and are united by key vocabulary and themes which are: Torah and Messiah. These Psalms tell the reader what the rest of the book will be about, as the poems that follow riff off of these themes adding color to the outlined sketch of these first two psalms. Psalm one tells us that those who meditate on the Torah and take refuge in the Messiah will be blessed, but the wicked who oppose the Messiah and God's way will be destroyed and perish. The Scriptures are where God meets with his people, and they form a counter-culture way of life in the believer. Poems like Psalm 19 and 119 focus on the gift and beauty of Yahweh's word to his people, and others retell the story of the Torah and the significance of that (Psa. 78, 105-106). Others still, call God's people to his covenant standards (Psa.1,15,19,24;119). What God's people do matters to him, not because he is an angry dictator, but because he loves his children and wants what is best for them, which is primarily revealed in this written word. However, Israel is shown to be a mixed-bag of faithfulness (Psa. 105) and total failure (Psa.106), mostly the latter. This is highlighted in Moses' acknowledgement of Israel's sin, and prayer of intercession (Psalm 90-92). However, Psalms 104-106 lean in and they show us that there is hope because God's promises rely on his character not their behavior, and he will remain committed to his people and his covenant made with them. As Psalm one

states, the blessed person is the one who meditates on the Torah. Those who obey God's revealed will evidence their salvation and love for Yahweh by their proper response to his grace shown them.

"Of David"

David is mentioned in the superscription of 73 psalms, 13 of which contain some kind of reference to stories about David in 1 and 2 Samuel (Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142) {Mackie, 2}. David was well known for his musical and songwriting abilities even from his youth (1 Sam. 16:14-23). His compositions were remembered and sung by Israel's priestly choirs (Ezra 12:45-46; 1 Chron. 25; Amos 6:5). However, as Dr. Mackie points out, the titles that mention specific individuals are not simply indicating historical authorship, but are meant to recall the narrative significance of the person within the literary design of the Hebrew Bible (2). The Psalms refer to historical David as an archetype of the future king and prophet figure anticipated in Deuteronomy 34:10-12 and Malachi 4:4-6 9 (Mackie, 2). Pervasive throughout the prophets (major and minor) is the concept of a divine messianic shepherd king, and the name "David" is actually used as a title for this king (Dan. 7; Hos. 1, 3; Amos 9; Obadiah; Mic. 5; Hag. 2; Zech. 3-4,12-13; Isa. 11; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23). We see this same thing happening in the psalms, though to a lesser degree, with the characters of Solomon and Moses. This makes sense when we consider the fact that the book of Psalms was explicitly shaped in the period after the exile (Psalms 106:47; 137; 147:2) {Mackie, 3). The David of the Psalms therefore refers to historical David, but the part of his glory-days (2 Sam. 5-8) that stands outside of time as the image of the future Messianic king (Jer. 30:9; similar to Solomon as a "type" in 1 Kgs. 1-8). This is how Jesus and the apostle's understood the David of the psalms as well (Mk. 12:35-37; Matt. 26:38, 27:46; Acts 2:29-35; Rom. 15:3-4; Heb. 4:7).

Lament and Praise

The Psalms teach us how to acknowledge our suffering, and wrestle with Yahweh about the difficulties, hardships, and persecution we face in this world (Psa. 3–7, 73, 89). We learn that it's okay to pray for vindication in the midst of persecution and suffering (Psa. 58, 109, 137), as we wait and trust in the promises of God and worship him for who he is, what he has done, and what he will one day do.

As a broad and oversimplification, the book of Psalms is primarily composed of either lament or praise Psalms. The former dominates the beginning of the book, while the latter begins to take center stage toward the later portions of the book. Intuitively, we understand this, because it is what makes up the human life. Life is a wrestling match between these two important and vital emotions and states of being. The Bible doesn't say one is good and the other is bad or wrong or sinful. Rather, laments are good and proper responses of prayer to the pain, confusion, evil and sin in the world. The prayer doesn't hide their feelings or emotions, neither should they manufacture false piety, but they come honestly as they are and ask God to do something about their circumstance, because it hurts and they need help. On the flipside, "Praise Psalms" celebrate and rejoice in what's good in the world recounting God's faithfulness, mercy, and grace. God's people are not asked to ignore the pain, injustice, and evil they see and experience in the world, but Christian faith is always forward looking placing its hope in the future, in the Messianic kingdom.

Implications for Today

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of reading through the book of Psalms is that forces us to be honest with ourselves and to be honest before our God, that is if we allow them to. They teach us where to place our hope, how to deal with pain, and call us to covenant faithfulness. Typically though, the average reader will thumb through the psalms for something that fits their mood, or that is quotable and perhaps will make a good post on social media, rather than recognizing how its structure speaks volumes to its theological message. We probably skip over the imprecatory Psalms (you know the ones that ask God to destroy our enemies) and find the authors to be bipolar in many instances. However, the Psalms brilliantly portrays the struggle of human life. It explores the deep, rich joys of all the good things life has to offer, and it never ignores the pain and confusion.

We understand the joyous praise and worship we find in the Psalms, but the laments often throw us for a loop, if we're honest. In my experience, lament is something I have rarely heard mentioned in a Bible study, and even more scarcely from a pulpit. I think we in the Western church, in our pastoral care, have largely tried to get people to move on from their grief to hope, without actually letting them express their feelings and emotions, or sitting with them in their pain. Even worse in actions or words we tell them they shouldn't feel that way, or the sooner they move on the better. God forgive us; we have often damned people who have tried to do just what the authors of the Psalms, Lamentations, and Job do. Some may ask, "Can we say such things to God? Isn't it blasphemous?" Books like Lamentation, Jeremiah, Job, and Psalms would say, "Yes, you can vent to God!" These books explore the back-and-forth of faith and despair as God's people wait on his promises. Reading the Laments of Scripture helps us today to understand that communicating our suffering to God about our experiences, circumstances, and what's wrong in our lives is actually an appropriate response to the evil, pain, and sin in the world. Rather than keeping it bottled up inside, God invites us to fully vent our emotions to him. God is not threatened by my or your protest, rather our voicing our concerns, frustration, hurts, anger, pain, etc. This creates a place in which we can push off from and move forward without glossing over the pain and suffering.

As Pastors, mentors, and friends we should learn how to show people more Biblical and healthy ways to express grief and suffering. In summary, I think Bible commentator Kathleen O'Connor states the message and application of laments beautifully,

> Lamentation names what is wrong, what is out of order in God's world, what keeps human beings from thriving in all their creative potential. Simple acts of lament expose these conditions, name them, open them to grief and anger, and make them visible for remedy. In its complaint, anger and grief, lamentation protests conditions that prevent human thriving and this resistance may finally prepare the way for healing." (1011-76).

The psalms should make us more honest in our prayers. God wants us to be humble and honest before him. He is not interested in us "being strong" and pretending we feel differently than we do. He gave us the Psalms to teach us how to pray when we are in the valley and on the mountain top and everything in between. Genuine Christian faith doesn't ignore pain, it faces it head on with a forward-looking perspective in the future hope of the Messianic kingdom.

Study Questions

1. How does reading the Psalms from an exilic view point shape your understanding of the Psalms?
2. What key themes do the first two psalms introduce?
3. What is the purpose of the Book of Psalms?
4. How does this book add to our portrait of the promised Messiah and the future hope of the kingdom of God?
5. How does the book of Psalms portray the historical David with nuances that look forward to the "New" David that is to come?
6. How do the Psalms view the Torah?
7. How would you explain to someone that the book of Psalms is not simply an old Hebrew hymnal? How does knowing this book's design and structure aide you in this discussion?
8. How would you explain the imprecatory Psalms to a friend who is a believer, but is confused or wondering how to reconcile it with their Christian faith? What about a non-believer?
9. How does seeing how God's people have prayed for thousands of years affect how you view prayer? Is it okay to talk to God like this today, to vent our emotions and frustrations?
10. Take a few moments to think … how did you learn how to pray? Was it from scripture, perhaps from the Psalms, from your parents, a teacher or pastor, or on your own? Do your prayers sound like the ones we find in Psalms? What about across Scripture as a whole?
11. How are you teaching our children or others to pray? What habits have you formed in your life thus far to foster a life of prayer? In what ways can you grow in prayer?
12. How has reading this book strengthened your hope in/for the future and consummation of all things.

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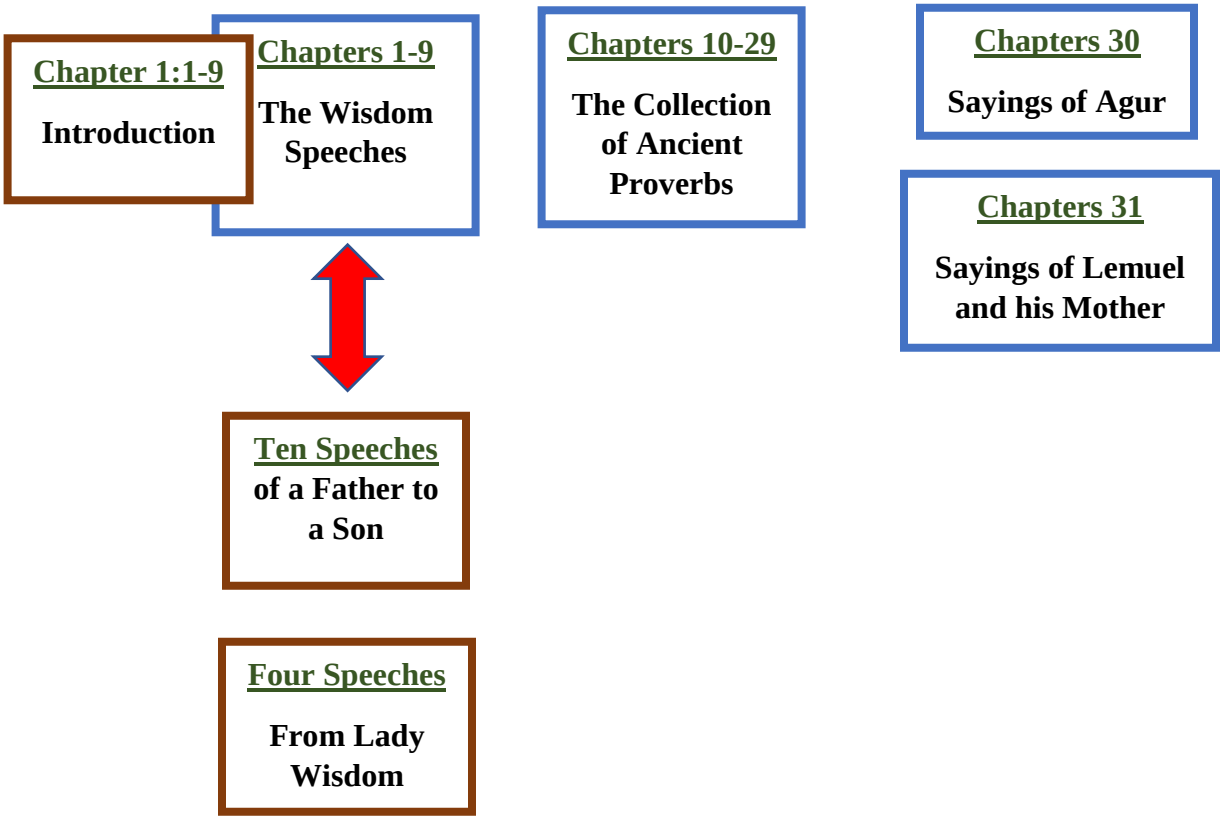
The Book of Proverbs

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Proverbs shows people what it means to fear Yahweh, and how to live and act wisely in the world he created.

Main Idea Explained

The book of Proverbs is one of four books that make up what is known as the "Wisdom Literature" (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs) in the Bible. The Wisdom literature offers divine guidance on how to live life wisely, through the collective counsel of God-fearing people from generations past (Prov.26:17). In this it is unique, for many of the themes found in the Torah and the Prophets are absent (though not all). The focus is not so much on how Yahweh is working in and through history and the people of Israel as a nation, but rather on how on the individual level, one is to live a faithful life to Yahweh no matter where they are (physically, historically, geographically, spiritually, etc.) or what circumstances they find themselves in. The Wisdom Literature records discussions about Yahweh's justice, human responsibility, and wise living (Mackie, 1). Each book offers a different perspective on life reflecting the complexity of living in a post fall world. As Bible scholar David Hubbard states it matter-of-factly, "The book of Proverbs seems to say, 'These are the rules for life; try them and find that they will work.' Job and Ecclesiastes say, 'We did, and they don't.'" (6). The Wisdom Books are relevant to all people across all places and times, and Proverbs invites us to learn wisdom from those who have come before us.

Chapters one through nine record the wisdom speeches of the book of Proverbs. The first nine verses fittingly contain the introduction to the book. These first few verses tell the reader exactly what the rest of the book is going to be about, primarily three things: wisdom, instruction, and fear of the Lord (1:2-7). The word "wisdom" refers not merely to cognitive ability, but also to applied knowledge or skill (Exod. 31:1-3. Wisdom is knowing what to do with what one knows in their mind; it involves acting rightly. The "fear of the Lord", is having a healthy respect and reverence for Yahweh and how he has designed the universe to be, resulting in trusting in this authority and rule. Primarily, it is connected with the moral decisions one does or doesn't make. It recognizes that God has placed real moral boundary lines in the world, and if I violate those lines there are consequences to trotting down the road of folly (Prov. 8:13; 15:33). Therefore, the fear of the Lord is most often understood to encompass reverence for God, a moral mindset, and a humble heart (Mackie, Lecture). The book of Proverbs teaches us how to fear Yahweh, which is true wisdom (1:7, 9:10, 14:26–27, 19:23). The rest of the book expounds on these key themes.

Following the introduction, chapters one through nine all play into the themes of wisdom and the fear of the Lord through the wisdom speeches. Recorded are 10 speeches from a father to a son (1:8-19; ch.2; 3:1-12 and 21-35; chs. 4-5; 6:20-35; ch.7) and four speeches from "Lady Wisdom" (1:20-33; 3:13-20; 8:1-36; 9:1-18). The "father speeches" all contain the same structure and ordering: an exhortation, a lesson, and a conclusion (Mackie, 1). They teach us the moral logic of the proverbs that are to come, to explain how the world generally works (Mackie, Lecture). Lady Wisdom is a literary image used to bring wisdom and the Torah to life. She is the personification of God's perfect wisdom, and expresses that we live in a moral universe, therefore one does well to seek her out that they may find what is good and beautiful in life. Dr. Mackie points out that, "These two sets of speeches have been woven together to elevate the parents' instruction to the level of divine revelation and transcendent wisdom … The instruction given to the children is 'Torah' from the father (3:1; 4:2; 7:2) and mother (1:8; 6:20). The wisdom instruction is framed as a 'personalized family Torah"' (1-2). In other words, divine inspiration and guidance offered through the conduit of the wise counsel of God-fearing people (Particularly highlighted in the roles of the father and mother). To be wise is to design one's life around the way God wired the universe to be, to fear him and to seek him. Chapters 1-9 give us the mindset to accept the proverbs that follow in chapters 10-29.

In chapters 10-29 nearly every aspect of life is taken under consideration and filtered through the two most predominant themes of wisdom and fear of the Lord. The book derives its name from this section. This worldview is taken up in hundreds of proverbs to offer wisdom in such areas as: marriage, sex, family, relationships, alcohol, debt, work, forgiveness, character, generosity, poverty, fear of Yahweh, etc. The scope of what they cover is extensive. There are a few things to keep in mind when reading through Proverbs that will help us to understand them more accurately. Proverbs are the result of wise godly people seeing patterns and relationships in God's moral universe. The fact that it's in the Bible doesn't mean that it's prophecy, prediction, or promise. It's not the book of promises, it's the book of Proverbs, which means these things are likely, but not sure to be. The proverbs are about general rules, not the exceptions; they are about probabilities. As Dr. Mackie states accurately, "They are reflections on how life usually works out . . . but not always. The Proverbs require the other wisdom books to gain a holistic perspective" (5).

The final two chapters (chs. 30-31) resemble the style of the first nine chapters, much more "speech" like than a proverb proper like we find in the previous section (chs. 10-29). Chapter 30

records the sayings of Agur, and his speech in the first six verses is crucial to the theology of the book as a whole. Agur exemplifies the model reader of this book, because he comes to its wisdom humbly, and longs to know true wisdom. He does not in and of himself understand how to get wisdom; he is limited by his own humanity and sin. What we learn is that as one reads the Scriptures they discover that wisdom is given in the Scriptures, and when people listens to them they'll gain wisdom and fear of the Lord. The answer to Agur's crushed spirit, because of his inability to find wisdom and the knowledge of God is this: God has already made himself known truthfully in the written Scriptures that we might find him and so find wisdom to live life faithfully toward him and our neighbors. Commentator Brevard Childs helpfully adds, "This passage registers the point that the proverbs which originally derived from human experience in the world has become understood as a divine word to humanity that functioned as sacred Scripture along with the rest of Israel's received traditions" (556).

Chapter 31 closes the book of Proverbs with the teaching of a mother. Just like chapter 1-9 contained the teachings of a father to a son, now we receive wisdom from a mother to a son. This is fitting given what the proverbs are and in light of chapter 1:8, "Hear, my son, your ***father's*** instruction, and forsake not your ***mother's*** teaching". It's a chapter that holds wisdom from a mother to her son about sex, power, and money (31:1-9), and then proceeds to describe in an alphabet poem the "Woman of Noble Character" (31:10-31). She is portrayed as someone who lives everyday life in wisdom and in the fear of the Lord. She is a narrative example embodying all that the Proverbs teach us of what divine wisdom looks like even in the mundane day-to-day tasks that make up our existence.

The Purpose of the Book

The book of Proverbs invites us into finding wisdom through the fear of the Lord, that we may live well in God's world. The book itself is an accumulation of godly wisdom passed down from previous generations, teaching God's people how to operate in his moral universe. The wisdom and the fear of Yahweh worldview that we gain from reading the first nine chapters gives us the categories to understand the actual proverbs proper that we receive in chapters 10-29. The final two chapters show us how to approach gaining wisdom and the fear of the Lord, and then what it looks like practically lived out (chs. 30-31).

Key Themes

Fear of Yahweh, Wisdom, and "Lady Wisdom"

This theme is crucial to the theology of the book as a whole. The word "wisdom" refers not merely to cognitive ability, but also to applied knowledge or skill (Exod. 31:1-3). Wisdom is knowing what to do with what one knows in their mind; it involves acting rightly. We are told in Proverbs that true wisdom is rooted in the fear of Yahweh (1:7, 9:10, 14:26–27, 19:23). The "fear of the Lord", is having a healthy respect and reverence for Yahweh and how he has designed the universe to be, resulting in trusting in his authority and rule. Primarily, it is connected with the moral decisions one does or doesn't make. It recognizes that God has placed real moral boundary lines in the world, and if I violate those lines there are consequences to trotting down the road of folly (Prov. 8:13; 15:33). We are told the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge and that fools despise wisdom and instruction (1:7). The fear of the Yahweh is further nuanced in that to fear God is to hate evil, pride, and arrogance (8:13). The knowledge of God marks those who have true understanding (9:5-9), and humility before God comes before honor (15:33). In chapter eight Lady Wisdom teaches us that if we try and find

wisdom outside of the fear of the Lord, we may be smart, but not wise, smart, but ultimately lacking true wisdom and understanding. Therefore, the fear of the Lord is most often understood to encompass reverence for God, a moral mindset, and a humble heart (Mackie, Lecture). Living in the fear of Yahweh and wisdom involves recognizing my limitations and submitting to his authority and how the universe was created. In doing this we begin to live in true wisdom along with the grain of God's created world.

Worth noting in regard to wisdom and fear of the Lord is "Lady Wisdom". Lady Wisdom is a literary image used to bring both wisdom and the Torah to life. She is the personification of God's perfect wisdom. She teaches us that we live in a moral universe; therefore one does well to seek her out that they may find what is good and beautiful in life. To be wise is to design one's life around the way God wired the universe to be, to fear him and to seek him.

Proverbs

This may not be a theme in the formal or technical sense, but given that the majority of the book is made up of "Proverbs", it would be beneficial to define what proverbs are and what they are not, so that we can more accurately understand how to apply them to our lives. Proverbs are the result of someone living awhile on earth and making connections between the choices they made, and have wisdom to offer. They are one and two-line, short, pithy statements that are easily relatable, and generally true (and ultimately will be realized at the consummation of all things). However, the book of Proverbs at its core focuses on general rules, and not so much the exceptions to those rules. That's why we have the other wisdom books (Ecclesiastes and Job) to balance out what is revealed in Proverbs. We need the other wisdom books to help us understand and navigate through our experiences in this life, because not everything works out how it should. We live in a broken world fractured and infected with sin. Therefore, their applications are always situational (see Prov. 26:4-5). They reflect how life usually works, but not always (Mackie, 5). They are not promises, predictions, or guarantees. They teach us how to live life wisely, what it looks like to fear God, and how that generally leads to blessing (especially chs. 1-9), but life is not a formula; it's messy. However, generally speaking, Proverbs teaches that the kind of character I cultivate has a direct connection to the quality of life I experience. The proverbs as Dr. Mackie puts it are a "…personalizing of Israel's covenant consequences" (p.4-5; see Deut.28). The "Righteous" or "Wise" person is one who lives in harmony with God, neighbor, and beast. The "Wicked" or "Foolish" are those who sabotage that harmonious relationship between God and his creatures (Prov. chs. 1-212:10,26;14:2).

Authority/Revelation

It is interesting that in the Law and the Prophets, in regard to the basis for authority, the formula is typically something like, "Thus said the Lord…", "The Lord Spoke through the Prophet…", or, "God spoke/said…". But in Proverbs and the other wisdom books it is different, " Hear, my son, your ***father's*** instruction, and forsake not your ***mother's*** teaching" (1:8). It is every bit as much the divine and inspired word of God, just through the collective insight of generations of wise, god-fearing people (Mackie, 2). Just as the book opened with teachings from a father to a son (chs.1-9), it closes with the wise teaching of a mother to her son (ch.31). The instruction given to children in Proverbs is, "Torah" from the father (3:1; 4:2; 7:2) and mother (1:8; 6:20). The wisdom instruction is framed as a 'personalized family Torah"' (Mackie,1-2). Further, as Brevard Childs states this concept, "… registers the point that the proverbs which originally derived from human experience in the world have become

understood as a divine word to humanity that functioned as sacred Scripture along with the rest of Israel's received traditions" (556). The wisdom literature is unique in the area of authority in that it offers divine guidance through the wise counsel of generations of Yahweh fearers.

Implications for Today

One of the things I have grown to appreciate about the proverbs is their ability to be easily memorized because they are so relatable and stand outside of time as true. Though some can be difficult due to cultural barriers, most can understand and get the point fairly easily. It makes me wonder if we complicate things too much at times, and fail to realize the lessons we could be learning from the simple, straightforward, and day-to-day. The proverbs should make us respect those who have walked before us and who have been willing to share their experiences often wrought with pain, disappointment, and regret so that others might not repeat their mistakes. This book should encourage us to seek out mentors and to be mentoring others. It is a vital aspect to becoming wise. Wisdom does not come in isolation, but in wise counsel and from many voices.

The theme of fear of the Lord is such a crucial aspect of this book, yet our 21st century American mind and the English language can complicate this understanding. We need not fear Yahweh like we fear drowning, or spiders, but respect his holiness and authority over our lives as the creator of this moral universe we find ourselves in. He is the author of wisdom. We should fear the consequences of life lived apart from him and outside of the boundary lines from which he has given. A healthy respect (fear) of God leads to wisdom and life. It is such a gift that as we read chapters 10-29 we see what fearing God looks like in almost every imaginable area of life. This book is God's gift inviting his children into how they can live wisely in his world in such practical ways. Our prayer should be that we be humble like Agur (ch. 30) and prudent like the woman of noble character (ch.31). It is more than knowing right from wrong, though it most certainly includes this. Life involves intentionality and a seriousness about how we go about doing things and how we treat people we encounter. There is no one person who could be all of these things we find in this book except for our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, the "greater than Solomon" who embodied all of this wisdom (Matt. 12:42). People label Jesus frequently under the offices of prophet, priest, and king, but seldom is "sage" used to describe him, but how fitting it is of him. He was Yahweh's truth and wisdom walking in the flesh, the ultimate example of what it means to fear the Lord. May the timeless wisdom of the proverbs push us to grow, mature us, and give us greater love and fear of Yahweh.

Study Questions

1. What are the primary themes we encounter in Proverbs?
2. Read the introduction in chapter 1:1-9. What do these verses tell you the rest of the book is going to be about?
3. How do the speeches in chapters 1-9 prime your mind for the proverbs that follow in chapters 10-29?
4. What is the moral logic of the proverbs?
5. Who is "Lady Wisdom"? What does she represent? How does she function in Proverbs?
6. In chapter 30 we receive the sayings of Agur. What does this chapter teach us about the theology of proverbs as a whole?
7. Why do you think Proverbs ends like it does? Who is the woman of noble character?
8. How would you describe a proverb to someone? What makes up a proverb?

9. Why do we need the other wisdom books to supplement what we find in the book of Proverbs?
10. How have you used this book in your life? Think about such areas as parenting, money management, sexual integrity, relationships, etc.
11. How has this book changed, or enhanced your view of God and his wisdom?
12. When is the last time you asked God for his wisdom to live this life? How has he answered your prayers for wisdom in the past?

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The Book of Ecclesiastes

Structure

Chapter 1:1	Chapter 1:2	Chapters 1:3-12:7	Chapter 12:8	Chapter 12:9-14
Introduction	Summary	The Teacher's Wisdom and Observations	Summary	Conclusion

Main Idea: The book of Ecclesiastes forces us to confront the realities of life lived under the sun, that sometimes things don't work out how they should, bad things happen to good people, and death comes for us all, yet the Fear of the Lord is still vital and the only thing that brings true meaning and purpose to one's life.

Main Idea Explained

It's important to remember that Ecclesiastes is just one volume in the wisdom books, but it is vitally important to their message as a whole. A neat and unique feature of this book is the interplay between the two speaking voices: that of the "Teacher" and that of the "author" (Mackie, 1). The Teacher dominates the scene (1:3-12:7), but the author speaks the first and final words (1:1 and 12:9-4). This is important for the message of the book, as we shall see. Ecclesiastes essentially seeks to explore the exceptions to the hard cause and effect relationship of the previous book, the book of Proverbs. Ecclesiastes records the Teacher responding to the misreading of the book of Proverbs as the book of "promises" (Mackie, Lecture). The whole book is a big thought experiment delving deeply into how the wisdom of the proverbs only works sometimes. It makes you question why you live by the fear of Yahweh if things like death, tragedy, broken relationship, and sickness can happen to you anyway? Living in the fear of the Lord and wisdom won't always lead to positive results, and the teacher is here to rub that in our faces in this book.

Chapter 1:2 and 12:8 form an inclusio around the Teacher's exposition of the dark things in life, with mirrored summary statements of what is explored between them, "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless!"' (NIV). Life under the sun (life as we experience it in a fallen world {note: this phrase is used 28 times}) is said to be הֶבֶל ("Hevel") {BDB}. This word is translated typically as vapor or breath across the Hebrew Bible, but most modern English translations have either "meaningless" or "vanity" where "Hevel" is used (BDB). Hevel is used nearly forty times in this book, while only eight other occurrences appear in the rest of the Hebrew Bible (BDB). However one interprets it, it is vital to the message of the book. The Teacher uses it as a metaphor throughout his sayings to convey primarily two truths about life: it's temporary or fleeting (11:8-10), and it's an enigma or paradox (6:1;8:14). {Mackie, Lecture}. What you thought was there and real and sure to be, all of the sudden vanishes before your eyes into nothing, like your breath on a bitter cold day. If you try to grasp it you can't, and you find that nothing is there. It's not that life is without meaning necessarily, though it can feel that way, but rather you can't understand it and you can't control it. You don't get what you expected. As commentator David Hubbard states it, "The book

of Proverbs seems to say, 'These are the rules for life; try them and find that they will work.' Job and Ecclesiastes say, 'We did, and they don't.'" (6).

Chapters 1:3-12:7 explore why the Teacher believes life is "hevel", through three dominating themes: time, chance, and death. He shows how they threaten our attempts at finding true meaning in life (Mackie, 1). These themes are explored all throughout this large section, taking up nearly everything imaginable, "under the sun". The theme of "time" is particularly highlighted in chapter 1:3-11 and 3:1-11. Here we're forced to confront the reality that eventually time will erase the memory of us and what we have accomplished on this earth in just a couple of generations. In chapters 2:18-23 and 9:11 we learn how frustrating "chance" can be. In chapter nine the Teacher kicks the legs out from under the table of direct cause and effect relationships, and what people base their lives on, rendering them all meaningless and futile. Time and chance come for all, "I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all" (9:11).

Death is also a theme that is prevalent throughout the Teacher's exposition, but is particularly highlighted as the great equalizer in chapters 3:18, 9:2-3, and 11:7-12:7. The Teacher explains,

> All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not...The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. (9:2-3)

If all one had to go off of was life "under the sun" this would most certainly be the conclusion. Nothing under the sun can give you ultimate meaning in life. If you think it can you're setting yourself up for a failure. The Teacher crushes false hopes of fulfillment in this life through all the means of what we think gives life meaning. What it points us to is something outside of ourselves. Meaning and purpose in life cannot be generated by us, but must be given to us as a gift from something/someone outside of us and greater than us (Mackie, Lecture). Alongside the three primary themes runs the only positive and hopeful lines in the entire sayings of the Teacher, in the theme of, "The Gift of God" (3:12-13; 5:15-19; 8:14-15). These are instances when the Teacher shows how there is meaning to our lives. Further, in such a beautiful way he demonstrates that us not being able to figure life out actually makes us more able to enjoy the good things in life, to take life in all its seasons. It allows us to receive life as it comes to us, not as we think it ought to be. Robert Short, summarizes the "Teacher" well,

> Within the larger context of the Bible, the teacher in Ecclesiastes is essentially a kind of negative theologian, asking questions that can be answered only by a future revelation of God, and clearing the road for this revelation by smashing any and all false hopes to pieces.... Ecclesiastes is the Bible's "night before Christmas."... He shows us human self-sufficiency stretched to its absolute limit and found sadly wanting. (106).

In chapters 12:9-14 the author comes back and gives perspective to the book. In this section he fully endorses the Teacher's sayings as true and important. The Teacher is poking us with a sharp stick. What he is saying to us is not fun, the words hurt, but they are trying to push us in the right direction. It's good for us to listen to and ponder what he is saying, but we can take his line of thought too far. The Teacher isn't trying to get you to be a hardened skeptic or an atheist, but to see the world the way it really is. Not everything will make sense all of the time in this life. Our meaning and purpose is often jumbled and confusing, we even have doubts. However, it does still matter how we live, but living rightly, fearing Yahweh, and seeking to walk in wisdom doesn't mean that everything will

always work out well for us. Ecclesiastes humbles us because of what we read in proverbs, but it still encourages us to be wise, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil" (12:13-14).

The Purpose of the Book

Ecclesiastes forces us to confront the things we don't like about life, the difficult and painful aspects of it. This book humbles us, and pushes us to not be naive after reading the book Proverbs. In futility we all try to build our lives on things that we think will have lasting significance, but apart from God true meaning and fulfillment will always escape us. There are no guarantees in a fallen and fractured world, and the Teacher shows us exactly this through the deconstruction of all the things that we think bring meaning and purpose to our lives apart from God (Mackie, Lecture; see 1:3-12:7). Contentment comes from accepting life for what it truly is, by fearing Yahweh, and keeping his commandments (12:13-14).

Key Themes

"Hevel": Vapor, Meaningless, Vanity

Life under the sun, life as we experience it in a fallen world, (this phrase is used 28 times) is said to be הֶבֶל ("Hevel") {BDB}. This word is translated typically as vapor or breath across the Hebrew Bible, but most modern English translations have either "meaningless" or "vanity" where "Hevel" is used (BDB). Hevel is used nearly forty times in this book, while only eight other occurrences appear in the rest of the Hebrew Bible (BDB). However one interprets it, it is vital to the message of the book.

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> God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is "hevel" (6:1)…There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is "hevel" (8:14).

Life is unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Time, Chance, and Death

These are the three major themes that receive the most air time in the sayings of the Teacher (1:3-12:7). They encompass what comes for every creature under the sun. These themes come as a gut punch, a reality check. These themes are explored all throughout the Teachers musings, taking up nearly everything imaginable, "under the sun" and filtering them through these realities. The theme of "time" is particularly highlighted in chapter 1:3-11 and 3:1-11. Here we are forced to confront the reality that eventually time will erase the memory of us and what we have accomplished on this earth in just a couple of generations. In chapters 2:18-23 and 9:11 we learn how frustrating "chance" can be. In chapter nine the Teacher kicks the legs out from under the table of direct cause and effect relationships, and what people base their lives on, rendering them all meaningless and futile. Time and chance come for all, "I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all" (9:11). Discussions about death are also prevalent throughout the Teacher's exposition, but are particularly highlighted as the great equalizer in chapters 3:18, 9:2-3, and 11:7-12:7. The Teacher explains,

> All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not...The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. (9:2-3)

The Gift of God

Although most of the book is dark and disturbing, there are rare moments of encouragement. The Teacher acknowledges that Wisdom and the fear of Yahweh have practical benefit, that wisdom makes for a better quality of life (7:11–12;8:11-13; 9:13–18). The author encourages us to be wise because what we do matters, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil" (12:13-14). Life is difficult, and the book's tone is mostly depressing. However, the lack of understanding and control we have over life, is actually shown to be the key to embracing the simple joys of day-to-day life. (Mackie, 3). This is "the gift of God" (2:24-26, 3:12–13; 4:4-6, 5:18–20, 8:14–15, 9:9–10; 11:7-12:1). Meaning and purpose in life cannot be generated by us, but must be given to us as a gift from someone outside of us and greater than us (Mackie, Lecture). Alongside the three primary themes runs the only positive and hopeful lines in the entire sayings of the Teacher, in the theme of, "The Gift of God". These passages display instances when the Teacher shows how there is meaning to our lives. Further, in such a beautiful way he demonstrates that us not being able to figure life out actually makes us more able to enjoy the good things in life, to take life in all its seasons. It allows us to receive life as it comes to us, not as we think it ought to be.

Implications for Today

I would venture to say that for many of us we seldom think of death. We dislike thinking that what we are doing is futile and meaningless, but frequently we feel as though life is this way, that we are stuck on the hamster wheel. We work so we can pay our debts, and if we're lucky we get one to two days off a week, but most of us will just spend them watching TV or taking our kids to a sporting event, or activity. Occasionally we'll get to go on a vacation, but all we can do is think about how much money it's going to cost, and what awaits when we return. Some respond by becoming

disengaged and lazy. They say, “What is the point of all of this? I can never get ahead!”. Others accumulate wealth and success by grabbing the bull by the horns, but seldom get to enjoy the fruits of their labor and can’t remember the last time they were happy or not stressed out. Twenty-five years pass by and they can’t believe they have a child in college and two others just a few years behind, and have missed most of their lives, but this is the American dream right? Collect, consume, climb the ladder, become somebody people will envy. Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless (Eccl. 1:2;12:8). No matter what we do, time, chance, and death are realities that we must face in a fallen and broken world. Bad things happen to good people, and the wicked have success while the righteous struggle. This is true, but it is not the whole truth.

Ecclesiastes was not meant to be read in a vacuum, the book itself admits that one can take the Teacher’s musings too far (12:12). Ecclesiastes speaks primarily to the exceptions in life, balancing out the wisdom and perspective on life that we find in the book of Proverbs. God does not lie (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18). He wants us to have a full picture of the human experience. Life is not a formula, or an equation that we can figure out. In fact, not being able to figure life out actually makes us more able to enjoy the good things in life, to take life in all its seasons. It allows us to receive life as it comes to us, not as we think it ought to be. Our lack of understanding and control of life’s circumstances is actually shown to be the key to embracing the simple joys of day-to-day life, and the Teacher says this as “the gift of God” (2:24-26, 3:12–13;4:4-6, 5:18–20, 8:14–15, 9:9–10; 11:7-12:1) {Mackie, 3.}. When we learn to live life with an open hand and in the fear of the Lord, that is when we learn what true contentment is. The book of Proverbs teaches us how to fear the Lord, while Ecclesiastes shows us how this doesn’t equal health, wealth, and property, yet it is the only way to finding true meaning in life lived under the sun. Once we accept this, then we can truly enjoy the good things in life as gifts, like getting married, the birth of a child, a promotion at work, a much-needed vacation, laughter and good company at a BBQ, the colors of fall, you name it. The Teacher in Ecclesiastes isn’t trying to get you to become a hardened skeptic or an atheist, but to see the world the way it really is, which involves not just his wisdom, but all of Scripture as the word breathed out by God and, “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Study Questions

1. What are the two primarily ways in which the Teacher uses the word “Hevel”? What is he trying to convey?
2. What is the teacher referring to when he mentions “Life under the sun”?
3. Name the key themes in Ecclesiastes. What do they teach us about life under the sun?
4. What is the author’s purpose in leading us to explore the mind of the Teacher?
5. What does the Teacher say is the “gift of God”?
6. How does Ecclesiastes challenge a naïve reading of the book of Proverbs?
7. Did this book’s honesty bother you? If so, why?
8. What does this book teach us about God’s graces in a fallen world?
9. Have you ever felt like the Teacher? How has God shown his faithfulness to you in the midst of life’s difficulties. How have you learned to accept the frustration and pain that life brings?
10. When is the last time you thought about death? Does the idea scare you? Why/why not? How do you talk about his with your children or friends?
11. How does Christ redeem life under the sun and give us hope in this life?

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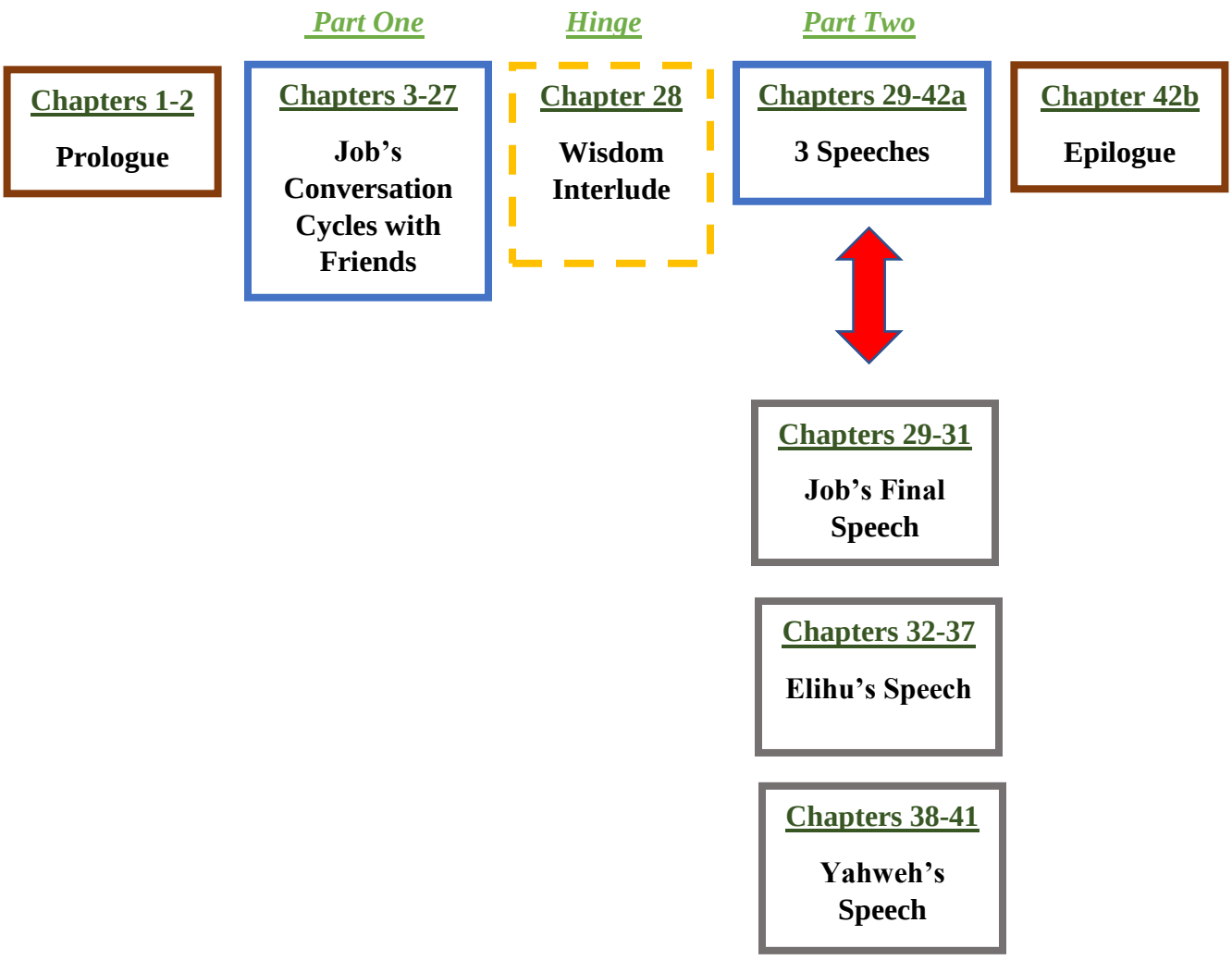
The Book of Job

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Job forces us to examine and rethink how we view God's relationship to human suffering, and summons us to trust in his wisdom and character.

Main Idea Explained

The book of Job is the last installment of the three wisdom books. The author is anonymous, the time in which it was written is ambiguous, its setting is in a land far away in the Middle east, and its main characters are non-Israelite. The book's aim is to explore the key theological ideas it presents, more than to describe God's acting in history (like the Torah and Prophets). This story tells us that the point is the theological and philosophical questions being asked. The reader in a certain way checks-out of the covenant story of Israel to explore an important issue, but the theological questions posed are important to the covenant story.

Chapters one and two make up the prologue to the book. The first few verses make Job out to be one of the most wealthy and important people in the Middle East. He looks like the perfect example

of what it looks like to live the book of Proverbs out to the fullest; he embodies the proverbs. Within the first twelve verses of the book the narrator tells us Job is righteous, his actions show us as much, and Yahweh tells us this too. We should be thinking, "Man, I've never met a man that's as righteous as Job!". Verses six through twelve record the heavenly scene, the "divine council" which depicts God as a king in his throne-room, surrounded by his angelic counsel (see also 1 Kings 22:19-23; Psa. 89:5-8, 103:20-21; Dan. 7:9-10). Now there is one council member who is called the adversary (the Satan), and in his conversation with Yahweh he states that Job is righteous, because God has done the book of Proverbs to him, and he has blessed him immensely for living uprightly. The adversary claims that Job only fears Yahweh because he receives rewards for doing so. Take that away and Job will curse God, so the adversary thinks. The conversation between God and the accuser zooms in on God's policies in running his moral universe (Mackie, 2). Commentator John Walton illuminates,

> The Satan challenges God's policy of rewarding the righteous by suggesting that it corrupts their motives and proves them to be less righteous. This accusation gives the book an interesting twist, for while we might be inclined (along with Job and his friends) to spend time asking why righteous people suffer, the satan turns the question upside down and asks why they should prosper. In this way, the book gives us the answers we need to a question we rarely think to ask, rather than the answers we thought we wanted.

God allows the accuser to inflict suffering upon Job, and he loses everything (1:13-2:7). The narrative makes it clear that Job is innocent though, and that his suffering is without merit (2:3). Why Job suffers remains mysterious to the reader and to Job. Additionally, it falls outside of the just recompense system of the book of Proverbs. The prologue is making the claim that there is suffering in the world that remains a total mystery, but all we know is that it wasn't because of Job's sin (2:9). This forces us to ask the questions then, "How does God actually run the world if he doesn't always operate within the system of just reward and recompense?" The prologue offers no answers, but only sets up the thought experiment that gets developed throughout the rest of the book. Dr. Mackie points out that although chapters one and two offer the reader information that none of the characters ever receive, creating tension in that we have more knowledge than Job and his friends, in reality we are just as clueless as they are about why Job is suffering (2).

Chapters 3-27 record the "Dialogue Cycles" between Job and his three friends (Mackie, 3). There are three cycles (chs.3-14, chs.15-21, and chs.22-27), and they all share the same pattern. Job will speak or one of his friends will speak, then Job will respond, then another friend will speak and Job will respond again, and so forth. In all of their conversations they explore three ideas, in which only two can be true at the same time: God is just and good, the retribution principle, and Job is innocent (Mackie, 3). The assumptions are that since God is good and just he always runs the world according to his justice for the good of his people, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, yet Job knows he's innocent, so how does one reconcile this situation? These chapters record the long conversations of Job disagreeing with his friends about why he is suffering. His friends' theology leads them to wrongly apply Proverbs and Deuteronomy, and it works like this: Suffering is always the result of sin, and blessing is always the result of obedience (Eliphaz in Chs. 4:1–21, Bildad in 8:1–7) and Job is suffering therefore Job must have sinned (Zophar in 11:1–20; Eliphaz 22:1-11) {Mackie, 4}. The glitch in their thinking is that we know as the readers from the prologue (chs.1-2) that Job's suffering was undeserved.

In response to his friends, Job defends his innocence, rejects their conclusions, and accuses God. At this point the emotional veneer has worn off and Job begins to come unglued fully expressing

his pain and emotions. Like the lament Psalms, the book of Job creates lots of space for confusion in the suffering we experience. He wrestles with the concept of God's justice given his circumstances, and even explores the question, "Does God cause suffering?" (9:14–35). Job is on an emotional rollercoaster so that, as Dr. Mackie states,

> He wants to conclude from his story that God is not just (19:1-7; 24:1-12), and he does believe that he has been denied justice (27:2), but in the end he cannot stomach that idea, and affirms the Retribution Principle, despite the contradiction in his own mind (24:13-24; 27:13-23). Unable to resolve the contradiction, he simply demands an answer from God – a court hearing: (13:13–23; 19:23-27; 23:1-7; 31:35-37) {4}

Chapter 28 functions as the interlude, or hinge piece in the story, offering a commentary on the dialogue cycles that just took place in chapters 3-27. This chapter is interesting in that it has an entirely different topic and theme than Job's speeches before (chs.26-27) and after (chs.29-31) this chapter and it doesn't track with the arguments any of his friends make either. The first half of the poem is about what humans are capable of. Humans can do the nearly the impossible, but humans can't do one thing: find wisdom. One thing they're not capable of is possessing divine wisdom to sort out the greatest mysteries of suffering and why bad things happen to good people (Mackie, Lecture). How one responds to this reality comes in verse twenty-eight, the final verse, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding". Job and his friends think they know how God runs the universe assuming they have a divine vantage point, that really only Yahweh possesses. They are saying, "God this is how you do it, or this is how you ought to do it", but God has a perspective that humans are unable to fathom. What Yahweh asks is not for you to try and understand, but rather he says, "Trust me". That is wisdom. What Job and his friends aren't doing is trusting. When we don't understand things, we are to trust God; that's how we are to respond. God operates by wisdom, not only justice, so we have to trust that there is wisdom at work that we cannot see or understand. That is part of what it means to fear Yahweh. Dr. Mackie adds, "The fear of God means God has not only power, but also wisdom, and should therefore be trusted in the face of life's contradictions" (5).

Chapters 29-42:6 record three speeches: Job's final words (29-31), Elihu's speech (32-37), and Yahweh's responses to Job (38-41). Job lets the reader know once again that he doesn't deserve what he is getting, and demands that Yahweh come in person and answer him(13:13–23; 19:23-27; 23:1-7; 31:35-37). One would expect that's what would happen in the subsequent chapter, but that's not the case, for six chapters Elihu speaks instead. He accuses Job of being self-righteous and disrespectful to God, and adds to the voice of the friends a thought: perhaps Job is suffering not because he did anything wrong, but rather suffering can be God's tool to educate and mature people to avoid future sin or character flaws (Mackie, 5; see Job 33:12-30). The remaining chapters in this section record Yahweh's responses to Job.

In chapters 38 and 39 God convincingly displays how Job played no role in the creation or sustaining of the cosmos, nor can he even comprehend Yahweh's vantage point from which he rules, and therefore has no right to accuse God of ineptitude. God is intimately involved in every facet of his creation and operates in it according to his perfect wisdom. He is not asleep at the wheel or uninvolved, and the reader feels the weight of that in these chapters. In chapters 40-41 we encounter the speeches about the Behemoth and the Leviathan. They are images of the most dangerous raw parts of God's world, Chaos. They are not evil, they're dangerous, but good and part of God's good world, yet they will annihilate you if you touch them. God's world isn't designed to prevent suffering, and

suffering doesn't always have a direct observable reason why. We can't always see the purpose, but it doesn't mean there isn't one, we just don't know because we don't have the capacity to. The world isn't perfect, sometimes you run into "Leviathan" or "Behemoth". The book of Job doesn't teach us why good people suffer, it teaches us how to suffer when we can't explain what's happening (Mackie, Lecture). God does not get upset with Job's emotions, grief, or confusion. Where he gets upset is in Job's accusations about his justice when he doesn't even come close to understanding the divine perspective. God invites Job to simply trust him, not that he understands what is taking place.

In the final verses (42:7-17) Job is restored by God to even greater prominence and with exceeding riches, as a gracious gift from God. Restoration isn't a reward, but a gift. Job is also intentionally shown throughout the narrative to be a type of innocent "righteous sufferer" who intercedes for gentiles (his friends in the narrative), which is exactly the same type of idea being worked out in Jeremiah and Isaiah for the Messianic king (Isa. 53; Jeremiah embodies this in his own life). The story ends with the righteous being blessed. Job lost everything, but not because of punishment. Suffering brought him to his knees before God, and recognizing God's plan, he yields to Yahweh's wisdom and power allowing him to be the suffering servant able to intercede on the behalf of others (Mackie, 7).

Purpose of the Book

The book of Job is primarily concerned with exploring the theological idea of human suffering in light of God's justice and goodness. Job does not explain why we suffer, but it does give us an example of how we can relate to God in the midst of suffering that we cannot explain (Mackie, 6). How one responds to this reality comes in Chapter 28:28, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding". We live in a world that is far too complex for our finite minds, and God asks us to trust him, his character and wisdom, and that he knows what he's doing, that he wants what is best for us.

Key Themes

Suffering and Divine Wisdom

I think most people when reading the book of Job, wonder the entire time, "When are we going to find out why Job is suffering? Is God going to answer his cries and questions?" We know that Job is suffering by no fault of his own (2:3), so what is going on here? Rather than explain to Job why he's suffering, or even suggesting that he could understand his situation, Yahweh goes a different direction. God's answer to Job does not explain why righteous people suffer, because the world is not designed to prevent righteous people from suffering (Mackie, 6). God answers Job and Job's friends in chapters 38-41 revealing to us that humans simply can't understand the complexities of this universe. God governs the cosmos by his perfect wisdom, not by a strict cause-and-effect system. He never asks us to understand, or even to seek to understand our suffering, but rather invites us to trust him. The book of Job doesn't teach us why good people suffer, it teaches us how to suffer when we can't explain what's happening (Mackie, Lecture). God does not get upset with Job's emotions, grief, or confusion. Where he gets upset, is in Job's accusations about his justice when he doesn't even come close to understanding the divine perspective. God invites Job to simply trust him, not that he come to an understanding of why these things are taking place. In chapter 28 (the commentary on the discourse cycles) Job and his friends think they know how God runs the universe assuming they have a divine

vantage point, that really only Yahweh possesses. They are saying, "God this is how you do it, or this is how you ought to do it", but God has a perspective that humans are unable fathom. What Yahweh asks for is trust. That is true wisdom. God operates by wisdom, not only justice, so we have to trust that there is wisdom at work that we cannot see or understand. That is part of what it means to fear Yahweh. To fear Yahweh means not only that he has power, but also wisdom, and should therefore be trusted in the face of life's contradictions (Mackie, 5).

The Theology of Job and His Friends

Chapters 3-27 record the "Dialogue Cycles" between Job and his three friends. In all of their conversations they explore three ideas, in which only two can be true at the same time: God is just and good, the retribution principle, and Job is innocent (Mackie, 3). The assumptions are that since God is good and just he always runs the world according to his justice for the good of his people, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, yet Job knows he's innocent, so how does one reconcile this situation? His friends' theology leads them to wrongly apply Proverbs and Deuteronomy, and it works like this: Suffering is always the result of sin, and blessing is always the result of obedience (Eliphaz in Chs. 4:1–21, Bildad in 8:1–7) and Job is suffering, therefore Job must have sinned (Zophar in 11:1–20; Eliphaz 22:1-11) {Mackie, 4}. The glitch in their thinking is that we know as the readers from the prologue (chs.1-2) that Job's suffering was undeserved. Chapter 28 adds corrective commentary that is much needed, essentially stating that humans are truly resourceful and creative at exploring the things of this world (28:1-11), but one thing completely eludes them, divine wisdom and understanding (28:12-19) {Mackie, 4}. Further, when God speaks (chs. 38-41) we see how arrogant all claims to understand how God operates in his universe are, especially when it comes to suffering. We don't have to understand something for it to be true or to trust in it. Additionally, if God only operated with justice, none of Job's friends, or Job for that matter would be left standing. Do they really want Yahweh to only exercise justice? I appreciate how John Walton states it,

> This poem claims that there is no foundational principle that runs the cosmos. Rather the cosmos runs by God's continuous and ongoing activity and his decisions are made according to wisdom. The universe is a dynamic and relational place because God is dynamic and relational, and so he acts according to circumstance and not by a rigid set of strictures. This assessment stands in contrast to what Job and his friends expected.

Job as a "Righteous Sufferer"

Perhaps this theme isn't one we would expect to find in the book of Job, but it has been intentionally placed in this story by the author. In the prologue and epilogue (chs. 1-2, 42) Job resembles the prophet Eli (1 Sam. 1-4) , but is shown to be superior to him (Mackie, 2). Eli's failure to correct his sons led to their deaths and to the "exile" of the ark (1 Sam 1-4), but he successfully intercedes for his sons and is shown in the final chapter to be a righteous sufferer who is able to intercede on behalf of the nations and save them from divine justice (ch.42). Further the ailments that befall Job are some of the covenant curses from Deuteronomy (Job 2:7= Deut. 28:35). Job is also being portrayed as a type of "righteous exile" (Mackie, 2). This can be seen even further in Job's restoration in chapter 42. His restoration is described with a key phrase used about restoration from exile, "Yahweh restored the fortunes of Job…and increased all he had twofold" {v.10} (Mackie, 2). Dr. Mackie explains,

> "restore fortunes/captivity" (שב שבות) occurs 28x in the HB, always in this phrase, referring to the restoration of Israel after defeat by foreign nations and/or exile: see Deut 30:3; Jer 30:3, 18; 31:23; 33:11;

> Ezek 39:25; Amos 9:14; Zeph 3:20; Ps 14:7. Job 42:10 is the only occurrence of this phrase referring to an individual. (2)

It is important to remember that just as Job's suffering wasn't for anything he had done neither is his restoration a reward, but a gift. Job is intentionally shown throughout the narrative to be a type of innocent "righteous sufferer" who intercedes for gentiles (his friends in the narrative), which is exactly the same type of idea being worked out in Jeremiah and Isaiah for the suffering Messianic king (Isa. 53; Jeremiah embodies this in his own life because of his call; see Jer.chs.7; 11-20). The story ends with the righteous being blessed. Job lost everything, but not because of punishment. Suffering brought him to his knees before God, and recognizing God's plan, he yields to Yahweh's wisdom and power allowing him to be the suffering servant able to intercede on the behalf of others (Mackie, 7).

Implications for Today

I think the questions that Job makes his readers ponder will always be ones in which man will seek answers that they cannot find this side of heaven. That frustrates us to our core. Though we may not say it out loud, we all at times wish we served a God that we could understand and fully comprehend. However, ultimately, we would be making God into our image rather than he shaping and molding us into his (Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10). What God asks of us in the book of Job is not to try and understand, but to trust him. Sometimes we suffer because of our sin, and other times we just simply run into "Behemoth" or "Leviathan" (Job. 40-41). The book of Job invites us to trust God's wisdom when we encounter suffering, especially when we don't understand, rather than attempting to discern the "reason" for having to endure it. It's defective theology to, "infer God's character traits from observing the operations of the cosmos; nor would we want God to micromanage the world by his justice, as it would involve him getting rid of us" (Mackie, 6). Our finite minds cannot comprehend divine wisdom and rule (Job 38-41). When we try to demand a reason why, we do one of two things we either simplify God and insult him (Job's friends), or offend God by accusing him (Job) {Mackie, 6). The alternative, is to humble ourselves and acknowledge that we don't have enough information to draw a conclusion about our situation and circumstance, and that God is good and just, and can therefore be trusted (Mackie, 6).

This being said, it is vital to latch on to another truth. Yahweh does not ask his people to suppress their pain and emotions in times of suffering and confusion. He can handle whatever we throw at him. I think we in the Western church, in our pastoral care, have largely tried to get people to move on from their grief to hope, without actually letting them express their feelings and emotions, or sitting with them in their pain. Even worse in actions or words we tell them they shouldn't feel that way, or the sooner they move on the better. This wasn't how "righteous" Job handled his pain. Job's suffering was an emotional rollercoaster. His story teaches us how we can relate to God in the midst of suffering. His progression looks something like this: "**Patient Job:** who trusts and waits on God (the prologue), **Protest Job:** who argues, yells, and wrestles with God (the dialogues), and **Humble Job** who acknowledges his arrogance and limited perspective (the epilogue)" (Mackie, 6).

God forgive us; we have often damned people who have tried to do just what the authors of the Psalms, Lamentations, and Job do. Some may ask, "Can we say such things to God as these people did? Isn't it blasphemous?" Books like Lamentation, Jeremiah, Job, and Psalms would say, "Yes, you can vent to God!" These books explore the back-and-forth of faith and despair as God's people wait on his promises. Reading the Laments of Scripture helps us today to understand that communicating our

suffering to God about our experiences, circumstances, and what's wrong in our lives is actually an appropriate response to the evil, pain, and sin in the world. Rather than keeping it bottled up inside, God invites us to fully vent our emotions to him. God is not threatened by my or your protest, rather our voicing our concerns, frustration, hurts, anger, pain, etc., creates a place in which we can push off from and move forward without glossing over the pain and suffering. In our pain we must also trust Yahweh and in his goodness, for this is also how we learn to fear him and thus walk closer to him.

Study Questions

1. How is the character of Job described in the prologue? What Kind of man is he?
2. Why do Job's friends think he is suffering? Why does Job think he is suffering?
3. What is the conversation pattern between Job and his friends?
4. How does chapter 28 function as a hinge piece in the story? What marks it out as standing outside the of poetry of Job's speech?
5. Elihu's speech is long and sounds similar to the speeches from Job's other friends, but he does add a new piece to the conversation. What is it that he adds to the conversation?
6. In Yahweh's speeches he doesn't actually answer Job's questions. What is he trying to get Job to understand?
7. What does the Leviathan and the Behemoth represent?
8. How is Job like the suffering servant from Isaiah and Jeremiah?
9. How does Job teach us how we are to suffer?
10. In your times of suffering, have you mimicked Job's posture toward God?
11. Is it okay to emotionally vent to God like Job did? Is this how you handle your emotional outbreaks, or does it become gossip, slander, or a bad witness against God?
12. How could this book be used to comfort someone in their suffering? Are you preparing your heart right now for times of suffering, before they come?
13. How does this book point us to Jesus?

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The Song of Songs

Structure

Chapters 1:1-7

Introduction

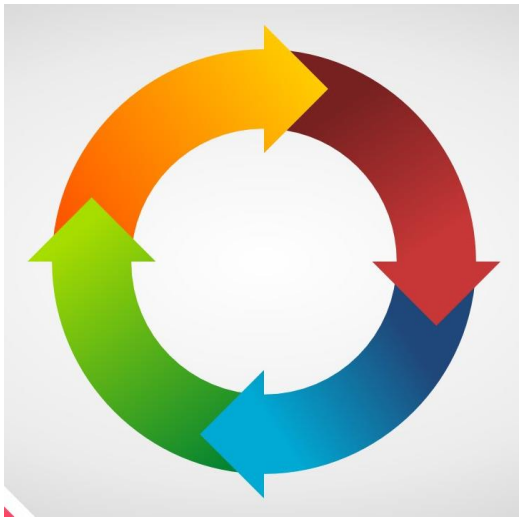
Chapters 1:8-8:5

Anthology of Love Poems:

Symphonic and cyclical, not linear and sequential

Chapters 8:6-14

Conclusion



Main Idea: The Song of Songs explores and celebrates, through poetry, the beauty of God's gift of love and sexual desire given to humanity.

Main Idea Explained

The Song of Songs belongs to a couple of genre groups within the Hebrew Bible. It is both poetry and wisdom literature, like the book of Ecclesiastes in that way, yet it lacks the driving themes of the "fear of the Lord" and "wisdom" (proper) in its content (Pro, 3:7; Eccl. 12:13; Job 28:28). However, it offers much wisdom in the areas of love, attraction, sex, and the right pursuit of such things. It is a unique book in the Bible, and it is very significant and important that of the 66 books inspired by the Holy Spirit, there is a whole book dedicated to this subject matter. It does not have a

linear or sequential order, but rather is collection of poems that explore the same ideas over and over again. Therefore, explaining the main idea involves a little bit more background information and painting the picture with broader strokes, than a more intimate look at specific verses or chapter sections, in a survey such as this.

There have been three primary interpretations of the Song throughout history: An allegory of Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel (primarily Jewish), an allegory of Christ's relationship to the Church (primarily Christian), and lastly, an ancient Israelite wisdom reflection and celebration of the gift of love, sex, and marital intimacy (Mackie, 2). The Jewish tradition sees the Song as an expression of God's love for Israel, while the Christian tradition interprets the Song similarly, but replaces God with Christ, and Israel with the church, grounding its view in Paul's metaphor of the church as the bride of Jesus (Ephesians 5:23-33). However, the third interpretation, which seems most accurate to me, interprets the Song as wisdom for all of humanity, offering these poems as meditation literature on the beauty and goodness of human sexuality as a gift from God (Mackie, 2). I like how Brevard Childs summarizes the Song, "Israel's sages sought to understand through reflection the nature of the world and human experience in relation to the Creator… The Song is wisdom's reflection on the joyful and mysterious nature of love between a man and a woman within marriage" (IOT). This song is ancient Israelite love poetry (see also Prov.5; 30:18-19), using a God-centered world view to express the joys these things in life bring. We must fight the temptation to make it be what we think it ought to be, but rather allow it to be what it is. We are to let it come to us as it is. It's not that the other interpretations are 100% wrong or unwarranted, but it seems to me that they are not the primary focus or application of this book for one's life.

The Superscription in chapter 1:1 causes authorial debate, "The Song of Songs, which ***is for/by/related*** to Solomon" (Mackie, 1). Many take this to mean that Solomon is the author of this love poem, which certainly is possible, but seems unlikely when read closely from beginning to end. For starters, Solomon had a harem of 700 wives (1 Kings 11:1-3), and these poems celebrate the love of a monogamous couple. Further, the poems are never spoken in the mouth of Solomon. When he's mentioned by name, which is only a few times, it's clear he is not the "lover" (1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12) {Mackie, 1}. As in the book of Proverbs (1:1) we see that the book is associated with Solomon, but he is not necessarily "the" sole author. Another example is the "of David" psalms in the book of Psalms. Brevard Childs helps illuminate this idea,

> The [Song of Songs], along with the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, is related to Solomon as the source of Israel's wisdom literature. As Moses is the source [though not the only author] of the Torah, and David is the source [though not the author] of the book of Psalms, so is Solomon the father of the wisdom tradition in Israel… The connection of the Song of Songs to Solomon in the Hebrew Bible sets these writings within the context of wisdom literature."

It seems to me that the superscription is telling us that the context in which the Song of Songs is to be read, is as a part of Israel's wisdom literature in the tradition that derives its heritage from Solomon (1 Kings 4:29-34).

The title "Song of Songs" means the ultimate song, much like the expressions throughout the Bible like, "kings of kings", "lord of lords", or "holy of holies". Essentially, its saying, "This is the best poem you're ever going to read in your life!". The Wisdom literature is about living the good life; living in the wisdom and fear of Yahweh. Some of the most wonderful things in life are love, desire, relationships, and the transcendent feelings they cause us to experience, and this is what the book

explores. There is a recognizable introduction (1:1-7) and conclusion (8:6-14), but everything in between, as Dr. Mackie states, doesn't have a "discernible plot-line (i.e. introduction to characters, tension, climax, resolution). While there is a literary structure and flow to the poems, it is symphonic and cyclical, not linear and sequential" (3). The themes being explored in the bulk of the Song deal with the things that surround romantic relationships, such as attraction, desire, pursuit, seeking and finding, commitment, self-control, anticipation, etc. As an anthology of love poetry this song, "celebrates and explores the powerful mystery of love and sexual desire… The poet expresses these reflections through the literary creation of a male and female persona, who are placed in different 'scenes' and voice the joy and wonder of love" (Longman and Fox).

The center section of the book contains many repeated words, phrases, and scenes, with some marking transition points, or repeating key themes. Phrases like "daughters of Jerusalem…" (1:7; 3:4; 5:8; 8:4) or "look he comes…" (1:8; 3:5; 8:5), appear at transition points in the poems and phrases like "I am my beloved's…" (2:16; 6:3; 7:11), "How beautiful you are" (1:16; 7:7), and the 'beauty lists' about the woman (4:1-5; 6:4-7; 7:1-5) and the man (5:10-16) share vocabulary, metaphors, and highlight certain themes found throughout the song (Mackie, 3). Additionally, the woman's search for her lover at night (3:1-4; 5:2-8) and the duo's embrace, that always dramatically gets cut short when it starts to become racy (2:3-7; 3:4-5; 8:1-4) are repeated scenes that revive significant air time in the poems. Michael Fox Summarizes this central section well,

> The Song is like a meandering river, flowing continuously through twists and turns at irregular intervals. From beginning to end, the lovers go from seeking each other to finding each other. But this action does not move in a straight line from separation to union: it leaps, in impulsions of voiced desire, from anticipated joy to actualized joy, and back again. Any part of the Song may discover itself anywhere on the circle of seeking and finding. (SSELP)

Though the bulk of the book records the cyclical love poems, the introduction and conclusion to the book offer a very profound statement to the Song as a whole. The woman opens the Song with the simple expression of her love for a man, and her family's hinderance of her desire (Mackie, 3). The introduction also highlights the primary and related themes of the book: love, desire, and the longing for love and affection. The conclusion (8:6-12) is also a summary statement of the book's main themes, but this time the woman's family consents to her marriage to the man. However, if one reads closely they will begin to see that the book begins and ends nearly the same. The book ends with the same looking or searching for each other that the book began with! What is going on? The fact that you end where you begin is a statement about love itself. Even two people who are deeply in love and committed themselves to each other for all of their lives, are committing also to an endless exploration of each other and that relationship. In chapter 8:6-7 the voices of the lovers cease and there is just a poetic statement about love,

> Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.

The "grave" and "death" are unavoidable. This is a powerful metaphor for love. You won't live as a human without experiencing desire, attraction, and love. It is woven into our existence, and is one of the most powerful things that moves our lives. The "fire" of love mentioned is yet another powerful metaphor for love used in this passage. Fire is life-giving in many ways, yet also potentially destructive

and dangerous. It can save you and keep you warm, but if it is not treated appropriately it can destroy you! It's a powerful statement about operating in romantic relationships according to God's design. Thirdly, one can't buy love. Love is invaluable and it makes everything else in life feel unimportant. The book ends with these powerful thoughts.

The Purpose of the Book

The Song of Songs highlights the human experience of seeking and finding love and everything in between viewed through a God-centered perspective of the beauty that love and sexual desire bring to life in his world. The Song teaches us the correct application of this gift from God, and how he designed the intimate relationship between a man and a woman to be enjoyed. Though the application is primarily about love between a man and a woman, God's love for his people lies behind it all. In this Song we see love as he designed it to be in the Garden. What better way to express the power and mystery of love than in poetry?

Key Themes:

Committed Monogamous Lovers

The whole song celebrates the devoted love of a couple to one another. This packs a powerful message to an Israelite people who always seemed to struggle throughout the Old Testament with taking more than one wife. Even some of the Patriarchs (Abraham and Jacob) and Israel's best kings (Solomon and David) had multiple wives. Married love is to be exclusive (4:12). In terms of physical love, each partner must remain as a "locked garden" and a "sealed fountain" as each person is to be a "private vineyard" for the other (8:12). Neither is on the open market so to speak, but rather is a secluded oasis for their lover to experience and continually enjoy (2:16; 6:3; 7:11).

Seeking and Finding

This theme runs rich and deep through the song, from the introduction (1:1-7) to the conclusion 8:6-14). The book ends with the same looking or searching for each other that the book began with. The fact that you end where you begin, is a statement about love itself. Even two people who are deeply in love, who have committed themselves to each other for all of their lives, are continually committing also to an endless exploration of each other and that relationship. Love has no end, there is always more to be pursued in the other person. There is always growth to be had. We never reach a climactic point, but rather are to continually enter the romantic dance of intimacy with our husband or wife through the ups and downs and everything in between. Love always pursues.

Sexual Desire and Physical Attraction as a Gift: The Right Timing and God's Ideal

This theme is prevalent throughout the book. God created sexual desire as a gift, and it is a good and beautiful thing that humans are to free to enjoy, according to God's design. The couple in the song is shown to apply God's gift correctly. They are thrilled with the prospect of their soon-to-be sexual union, and their desires always end in expectation, not fulfillment (1:12-2:7, 3:1-5, 7:9b-8:4). The woman reminds the reader several times not to, "awaken" love until it is time (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Yet, they are not afraid to express their physical attraction to one another (4:1-7, 5:10-16, 6:4-7, 7:1-9). Although the imagery may seem odd to us, remember that we live in a different culture, and the metaphors and images are not primarily visual, but more about what those images represent. Every

human being longs to completely know someone and be known by that person in return. The Song provides divine wisdom about handling the fiery passions of sexual desire that we experience, and we are to express them in a way that honors our maker who has given us such an amazing gift.

In chapter 8:6-7 the voices of the lovers cease and there is a poetic statement about love,

> Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.

This passage is filled with rich metaphors. The "grave" and "death" are unavoidable. This is a powerful metaphor for love. You won't live as a human without experiencing desire, attraction, and love. It is woven into our existence, and is one of the most powerful things that moves and motivates our lives. The "fire" of love mentioned is yet another deep metaphor for love. Fire is life-giving in many ways, yet is also potentially destructive and dangerous. It can save you and keep you warm, but if it is not treated appropriately it can destroy you! It's a powerful statement about operating in romantic relationships according to God's design. Thirdly, one can't buy love. Love is invaluable and it makes everything else in life feel unimportant.

Garden Imagery

If one reads through these love poems a few times, they will start to see garden imagery that echoes that of the Garden of Eden in Genesis one and two. Dr. Mackie points out how the, "garden imagery recalls the 'naked and no shame' intimacy between the man and woman, which depicts the same kind of oneness (Genesis 2:24-25) that Jesus and Paul believed was an image of the loving heart of God (Ephesians 5:31-32)" (4). The man and the woman are vulnerable in their nakedness yet, unashamed because in their unity they are safe. The image is of a relationship untainted by sin, God's ideal from the beginning. Though we cannot attain perfection or be rid of sin completely on this earth our goal should be to reach for this ideal in our marriages and intimacy with our spouses.

Implications for Today

God created humanity as sexual beings. At creation, the gift of sex was among those things God declared to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31). God intends sex to be a source of satisfaction, joy, and honor, to those who enjoy it within the parameters and boundaries he has established. Men and women who honor these please Him and themselves (1 Cor. 6:18:20). Sex that respects God's guiding principles and ethics is pleasurable and gratifying. As architect, God drafted sexual activity to be intoxicating, physically enjoyable, emotionally nourishing, psychologically fulfilling, and spiritually meaningful. He delights in our enjoyment of his gifts to us (Song. 4). The sexual human relationship in particular is significant as it brings together a man and a woman who reflect the shared image of God (Gen. 1:27). Because humankind is created in the image of God, we are called to be holy as God himself is holy (Lev.11:44, 45; 19:2), and this includes our sexuality (Eph. 1:4; 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3-7; 1 Pet. 1:14-16). Sex is not only good as its own gift to us, but it serves other purposes as it generates "fruit" (Gen. 1:28), brings about relational unification (Gen. 2:24), and it reflects the spiritual relationship redeemed humanity will one day have with God (Rev. 19:7-9). God's plan for sexual intimacy is exclusively within the context of marriage between one husband (one man) and one wife

(one woman). God cares how we think about sexual matters, and how we behave sexually, therefore, sexual morality applies to everyone.

Although sex by design is meant to be enjoyable, not all sexual pleasures are ethical. We are all sexually broken in one way or another, because the Fall (Gen. 3) touches all of human life until the second coming of Christ. That is why we must be grounded in the Scriptures when it comes to sexual ethics, because assuredly those sinning sexually enjoy what they are doing and find satisfaction in what they are doing, even though what they are doing offends the Lord. God's word gives fervent warnings against appealing to human reasoning, passion, or lust as the foundation for our definition of what constitutes moral sex (Rom. 1:24-26; 13:13-14; 1 Thess. 4:5; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 John 2:15-17; Jude 18). Only when we abide by the guidelines God has given in regards to sex, do we honor him with our sex lives. Sex is only moral within his boundaries, and within these borders sex is fun, fulfilling, and blessed. The Song of Songs gives us an amazing and beautiful depiction of a couple who takes seriously God's criteria, and enjoys to the fullest his gift of relational and sexual intimacy. The Song of Songs, is a celebration of God's gifts of physical attraction, sexual desire, and love, so let us read it as such and rejoice in our great God and his blessings. I appreciate Tremper Longman's summary of this great piece of Scripture,

> What is a book like the Song of Songs doing in the Bible? Without the Song we would be left with only spare and often negative words about a reality that is crucial to the human experience: love and sex. God in his wisdom has spoken through the poet of the Song to both encourage and warn us about the unquenchable power of love and desire. The Song celebrates the joy of physical touch, the exhilaration of exotic scent, the sweet sound of a lover's voice, and the taste of another's lips. The Song is a divine affirmation of love and an acknowledgement of the pain that often accompanies it. (*Song of Songs*)

Study Questions

1. Who do you think the author is? Why, what support is there for your view?
2. What have been the three primary interpretations of the Song of Solomon throughout history?
3. What is the purpose of the Song of Songs?
4. Name some of the primary themes in the song.
5. What do these poems teach us about love?
6. What do these poems teach us about God's desire for sexual relationship?
7. What profound statement do the introduction and conclusion both make about love?
8. Have you been viewing love as a constant pursuit, a continual seeking and finding of your spouse?
9. In what ways have you shown pursuit of your spouse this week? How about your pursuit of God?
10. If someone were to ask you what the Song of Songs is about what would you say?
11. It what areas do you feel encouraged by this text? What has been convicting about reading these poems?
12. When is the last time you prayed over your spouse and for your intimacy together to be blessed by God?

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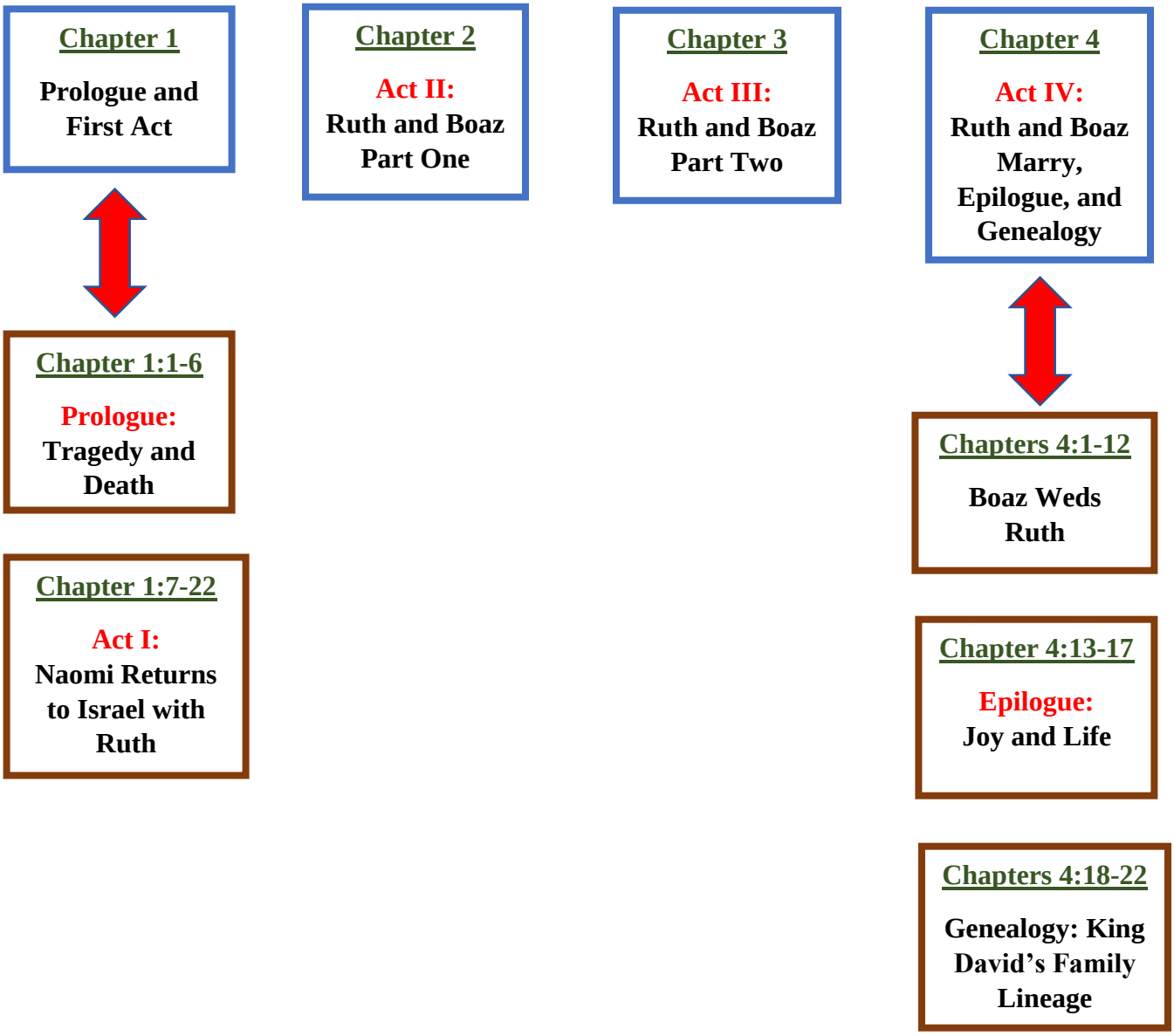
The Book of Ruth

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Ruth is a story about how God works in and through the mundane and ordinary things in our lives, and how he restores those who trust and put their hope in him.

Main Idea Explained

The book of Ruth makes us reflect on how God is involved in the day-to-day joys and hardships of our lives. It zeros in on a personal story of a handful of Israelites from Bethlehem and one particular Moabite woman, Ruth. This book is a prime example of the "short story". It is a story that reads much like a screen play. There are four acts beginning with a prologue and ending with an epilogue. Verse one reads, "In the days when the judges ruled…" alerting the reader to recall the tragedy of the book of Judges, which spoke to Israel's failure in the Promised Land as they become

increasingly corrupt perpetuating the cycle of apostasy and oppression, despite Yahweh's grace shown in raising up deliverers. In the same vein as the book of Judges, God is shown to be faithful to his covenant, yet contrary to the book of Judges, the book of Ruth shows through the main characters of the story what faithful covenant partners look like.

In the prologue (1:1-6) we read about an Israelite family who is forced to leave their home and sojourn in the territory of Moab because of a severe famine. The wife's name is Naomi, and she has two sons. Tragically, Naomi's husband dies, and shortly after marrying two Moabite women, both of her sons die as well. Now there are just three widows and no husbands or children, in a foreign land.

Act I (1:7-22) records Naomi returning to Israel, and contains Ruth's famous statement of loyalty to Naomi, despite her mother-in-law's pleas for her to go back to her own people, "For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you" (vv.16-17).

Act II (chapter 2) begins with barley that is fresh for harvest, and two widows now in Israel and in need of food. Ruth and Naomi work together to figure out their predicament, so Ruth goes to glean from the fields. It just so happens that Ruth finds herself in the field of a man named Boaz who is said to be, "a man of noble character" (2:1). He just so happens to be a family member of Naomi's late husband. He shows great generosity and kindness to Ruth, showing himself to not only be a man who observes the Torah (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19), but takes it even a step further, and blesses her beyond what is required of him. Ruth goes home at the end of the day and tells Naomi all that has happened, and she is thrilled, for though Ruth has no idea who Boaz is, Naomi does. He is "kinsman redeemer", the one who can protect their family lineage (2:20, see also Deut. 25:5-10).

Act III (chapter 3) begins with Naomi and Ruth's plan to get Boaz to recognize Ruth, so she trades her clothes that symbolize that she is in mourning, for ones that will show she is available for marriage. Ruth appears to Boaz on the threshing floor, in secret, and at night, and approaches Boaz asking him to redeem her and Naomi's family. Boaz being a man of character, agrees, blesses Ruth, and decides to settle matters legally in the morning.

Act IV (chapter 4a) shows how the entire story comes together as we see a reversal of all the bad that took place in chapter one. In the place of tragedy there is joy and in the place of death, life. In the beginning, Naomi thinks God is punishing her, but really, he's working to restore her and her family, through Ruth and Boaz. As Ruth was loyal to Naomi, now also Boaz proves his loyalty to Ruth and Naomi. The interplay with God's purposes and will with that of human decisions is highlighted throughout the narrative as God weaves the faithful obedience of his people together to bring about his redemptive purposes in the world, even in the mundane and ordinary things of life (famine or economic and social struggles, death of a loved one, marriage, etc.). Just as we have seen from the beginning in Genesis, God works good out of evil, he works good out of and through pain, death, and uncertainty.

The epilogue (chapter 4b) serves to show King David's lineage, through whom the Messiah would come, carrying the theme from the book of Judges about the need for a king to restore covenant faithfulness. As Ruth comes to a close, we see how this seemingly insignificant gentile woman, plays

such a huge role because of her character and faithfulness to Yahweh and his people, in being a part of the family line of David (his great grandma!), and eventually of Jesus Christ the Messiah (Matt. 1).

The Purpose of the Book

The purpose of the book of Ruth is to show God's faithfulness to his covenant promises, but through the lens of his working in the day-to-day activities of average people. The book of Ruth demonstrates, with hardly ever mentioning God and never from the narrator's own voice, how Yahweh weaves the painful, the joyous, the seemingly insignificant, the minute, the exciting, the boring, the tragic, and the triumphant all together to accomplish his redemptive purposes for his glory and our good.

Key Themes

Providence and Sovereignty

This is by far the largest theme in Ruth, and it can be seen working in and through all of the other themes. The book of Ruth shows how God works through the seemingly insignificant stories of everyday people, and how that is intermingled and intimately connected with God's large-scale plan of redemption for all of humanity. The author shows this by connecting this short story to the larger Old Testament storyline at the beginning and end of this book, "In the days when the judges ruled… Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David" (see chs. 1:1 and 4:21). The quilt of the "big" story is stitched together by the little ones.

All of the characters face life's normalcies and challenges such as the death of loved ones, moving, lack of economic means, stress, family responsibilities, love and marriage etc. It is in these things that we find God, though scarlessly mentioned, is shaping with his hands (in the book of Ruth, behind the scenes) a story of redemption out of all the details, even the mundane. The book started out a tragedy filled with death, emptiness and sorrow (1:1-6), but it ended in joy, fullness, and life (ch.4) as Yahweh restores his faithful covenant partners. God is working good out of evil. Perhaps this is most profoundly seen at the book's close. Boaz and Ruth are wed and they give birth to a son, Obed, who becomes King David's grandpa, which is hugely significant, not in the least because Jesus' lineage comes from the line of David (Matt.1). Therefore, in Ruth we see the God's ultimate plan of redemption being funneled through and made possible by the faithfulness of an Israelite farmer and a Moabites widow (Mackie, 3).

The Characters and Covenant Faithfulness: Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz

The characters in the book of Ruth show how God works in and through everyday events in the lives of his people, and what faithful human covenant patterns look like. In the character of Naomi and the events that surround her life, we see that even the tragedies that overwhelm her do not surprise the God of Israel or fall outside of his plan and or ability to work good through her painful circumstances. Naomi's dark night of the soul becomes part of the story of God bringing a king to Israel (Mackie, 1). Ruth is a gentile (she's a Moabite), yet because of her loyalty and faithfulness, God honors her character, and through her offspring and family line come David and Jesus. Boaz is a man of "noble character" (2:1), generous to the poor, Torah observant, and fulfills his duties and obligations to the "T". Yahweh works through the integrity, faithfulness, and generosity of Boaz to save Naomi and her family, and in doing so finds himself as an ancestor of the Messiah (Mackie, 2).

Ruth and Boaz are particularly highlighted as being cut from the same cloth. They are both examples of humans who are faithful to the covenant. Ruth puts her faith in Yahweh and commits herself to him, his people, and his ways (1:16-18), and is shown to be a narrative example of the Proverbs 31 woman of "noble character" (Mackie, 2). Boaz is a man of "noble character" highlighted by his faithfulness to the Torah expressed through his generosity and care for the poor, redeeming and preserving Naomi's family, and marrying Ruth (see Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19 and 25:5-10). These characters show us the interplay between God's will and providential hand working in and through human wills and decisions to accomplish his redemptive purposes in the world.

The Genealogies and Blessings

Most of us probably just skim over genealogies in our reading, if we read them at all. However, that is a sad mistake, because they are almost always immensely profound and telling, for it is in these that we learn how the book of Ruth fits into the overall covenant storyline of the Bible thus far, and how it moves the story forward, projecting hope into the future. The concluding remarks of this book are actually blessings (from the elders {4:11-12} and the "women of Bethlehem" {4:14-15}). These blessings interlace the story of the main characters (Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz) into the theme of the promised messianic seed from Genesis (see Gen.3:15-16, chs.30 and 38, 49:8-10). Thus, enters the genealogies to show how God is being faithful to preserve and bring forth the promised seed that will crush the head of the serpent (Gen.3:15-16).

The short genealogy in 4:17 makes the longer one in 4:18-22 seem like an odd placement. Why the repetition, it seems unnecessary to the story? When biblical authors repeat things, it is significant and always with purpose. The longer genealogy is strategically placed here in effort to demonstrate how Ruth's story fits into the narrative arc set forth in Genesis, and how it ties into the future hope of the prophets (Mackie, 3). I think Zvi Ron helpfully summarizes the purpose of this second genealogy of Ruth well,

> The list of ancestors in Ruth was written as a ten-generation list to evoke the earlier lists in Genesis and also to indicate that here a new epoch was beginning; the epoch of the Davidic monarchy. Just as Noah began the post-flood world and Abraham the Israelite people in a new world divided into nations, David began the dynasty that will ultimately lead to messianic times under the new son of David. (86)

Implications for Today

The book of Ruth is so powerful, because still to this day, 3000+ years later this story of two widows, one Israelite and one Moabite, and a no-nonsense farmer, encourages us to view our day-to-day lives as part of God's bigger plan in our lives, but also for the entire world. All of the characters face life's normalcies and challenges such as the death of loved ones, moving, lack of economic means, stress, family responsibilities, love and marriage, etc. It is in these things that we find God, though scarlessly mentioned (and never by the narrator), is shaping with his hands, behind the scenes, a story of redemption out of all the details, the pains, the joys, the mundane, and the exciting. Yahweh proves himself trustworthy and faithful, steady and unchanging, through the chaos and turbulence (the book of Judges), and through the average (the book of Ruth).

In this book the author reminds us that the experiences we go through, that make up our lives, are not without purpose and meaning. This doesn't mean that we will always understand the things that we go through, or feel like the pain and loss has meaningful significance. What it does mean is that

God is with his people through their difficulties, and he works to bring his children out the other side of suffering into greater understanding and sometimes joy, than they ever had before. If we allow it, tragedy, pain, and suffering will be used by God to make us more like him, and more able to be a comfort to others in their trials (2 Cor. 1:3-10; Jam. 1:2-18; Rom. 5:3-5).

Ruth does not teach us that faithfulness to Yahweh will keep us from facing trials in this life. Faithfulness is not a shield that protects us from the suffering and pain that life brings our way. However, what the book of Ruth does teach is how God is faithful in redeeming every situation, every hardship, in the lives of those who love him. He works good for those who are his, restoring them more and more into his image, for their good and for his glory. Just as God took out of the disorder and chaos, and created the earth and all the living things in Genesis 1, so in Ruth, "In the days when the judges ruled" (Ruth 1:1), he takes the chaos and brings something beautiful and good into the deep fractures of our planet by turning death into life and tragedy into joy and hope for the future. Yahweh is a God who refuses to give up on his people. He is faithful to his promises. Ruth's placement, in the protestant ordering, after the book of Judges, embeds that nail deep into the heart of the reader, or it least it should.

Study Questions

1. What do we learn about the context of this story from the prologue? What can be anticipated in the chapters to come?
2. What is the purpose of this book? What is its purpose in the entire canon of Scripture as a whole?
3. What is the significance of Yahweh's lack of screen time in the book of Ruth?
4. How does God work good out of the tragedies and death in chapter one to bring joy and life in chapter four?
5. What strikes you the most about the characters in this story, after reading the book of Judges that comes immediately before it?
6. How does God show his faithfulness to Naomi and her family in the book of Ruth?
7. How does this story encourage you to view your day-to-day life as part of God's bigger plan in your life, the life of your church and community, and world?
8. Think of how God has worked through the ordinary circumstances and situations of your life to bless you. Write them down, and share a few examples.
9. Does reading this story help you feel like even the normal, typical things in life have meaning and purpose? In what ways?
10. What has the book of Ruth taught you about the character of God?
11. How does the honestly, patience, and faithfulness of main characters bolster your own after reading this book?
12. How does this narrative point us to Christ?

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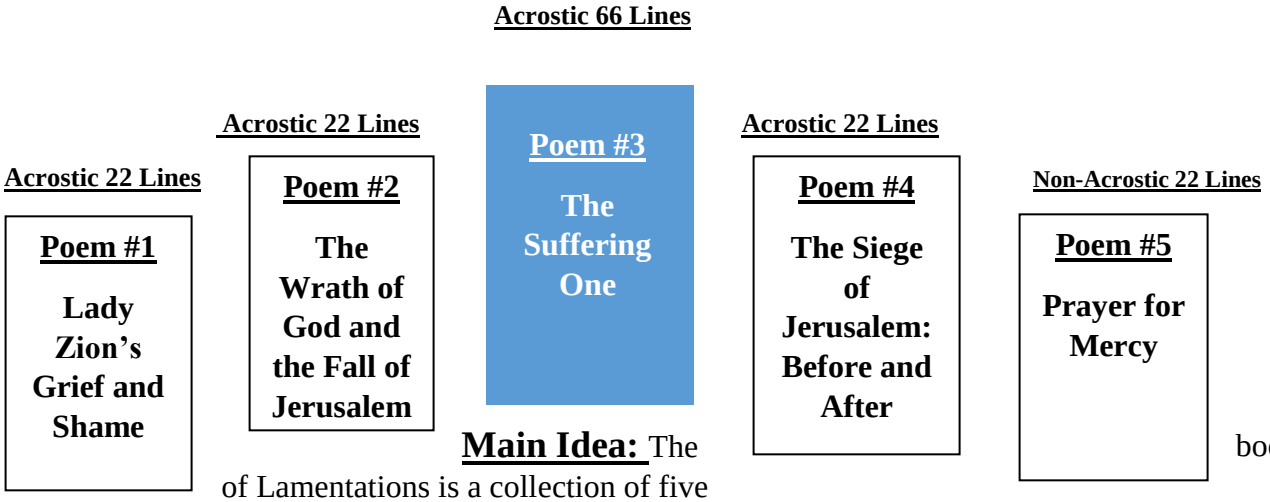
The Book of Lamentations

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Lamentations is a collection of five lament poems which reflect upon the siege of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon, that help us to understand the expression of grief, pain, suffering, and despair as an important aspect in our relationship with God.

Background and Introduction

The author of Lamentations is reflecting upon the destruction that fell upon Jerusalem in the attacks on the city by Babylon during the twenty-year period of 600-580 BC (Mackie, 1). In 586, Jerusalem was decimated, the temple destroyed, and many taken into Babylonian captivity (2 Kings 24-25). This was the biggest catastrophe in Israelite history, in which pain and confusion overtook the people of God as the promises made to Abraham (Gen. 12,15,17) and David (2 Sam.7) seemed to be coming unraveled.

To better understand the book of Lamentations it is helpful to know a little bit about the type of Hebrew poetry that is being employed by the author, and why it is significant. Poems of lament are common in the Psalms (10, 63, 69, 74, 79). They are a way God's people protest, process emotions, and give a voice to their pain, grief, suffering, etc. The first four poems in Lamentations are acrostic poems, meaning they are alphabet poems, where every line or verse begins with the subsequent letter of the alphabet. Dr. Tim Mackie explains, "Lamentations 1-4 are all alphabet poems spelling out Israel's suffering from A to Z. The concluding poem's lack of order seems to emphasize the dismay and confusion that the grief has brought" (1). The style and structure of this poetry is intentionally designed to help the reader better understand the content of its message. The ordered structure in chapters one through four is in stark contrast to what the people were actually experiencing, and chapter five captures the chaos in breaking that structure.

Poem #1 Lady Zion's Grief and Shame

This first poem focuses on the despair and pain felt after the destruction of Jerusalem, through the personification of the city as a grieving woman. The author explains the state of Lady Zion in such terms as, "lonely" and "a widow" (v.1; Jer. 7:4, 15:8) as well as a mother who has lost her children

(1:6, 15; 2:1, 11). She "weeps bitterly", and has been deserted by friends that have now become enemies (v.2; Ezek.23:22-26). She has no resting place and she has lost all her majesty (v.6). The widow imagery in particular is a strong portrait that embodies the tone of the whole book, namely, this destruction that has befallen Israel is like the death of a loved one.

In the first seven verses, which describe Jerusalem's suffering, we learn that the people know why all of this is happening to them and who is responsible for it. Verse five in particular makes this very clear. The phrase, "Her foes have become the head…" is the result of breaking the covenant (Deut. 28; Jer. 13:21). Later in verse five it says "the Lord has afflicted." They know who is in control of the situation. Yahweh is punishing her for, "the multitude of her transgressions" (v.5, 18). Israel realizes that it is the Lord who is afflicting, but it is because of her sin and covenant infidelity that he does so (v.18). She has done this ruin to herself, for she has self-admittedly "sinned grievously" (v.8). It is within this context that Israel pours out her pain and frustration to the Lord.

Chapters 1:8-17 speak mainly to the wrath and anger of the Lord, and how the ensuing events have made Israel feel. Such words as "filthy", "naked", "unclean", "despised", "hungry", "abandoned", "sorrow", "rejected", and "none to comfort" her (1:8-17). Even in all of this pain there is the recognition that Israel knows this is God's righteous judgement (v.8, 18). The beginning of verse 14 reads, "My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by his hand they were fastened together..." This is exactly what God said he would do in Deuteronomy 28:48. There is this tension between knowing why she is suffering, but also expressing the real pain and anguish, even confusion, as to where God is, how long it will last, and if he will heal again.

In chapter 1:18-22 we read of the tension described previously. Verse 18 reads, "The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word, but hear, all you peoples, and see my suffering…" In these verses Lady Zion appeals to the Lord regarding her suffering. She admits that her "other lovers" (v. 19) have deceived her, and she grieves and feels remorse over her rebellion. She also appeals to Yahweh to bring upon her oppressors what he has brought upon her (v.22). Lady Zion is asking God to be just and fair, "You have brought the day you announced; now let them be as I am" (v.21).

Poem #2 The Wrath of God and the Fall of Jerusalem

The second poem depicts the moment of the destruction of Jerusalem, and God's wrath upon his people for their covenant violations. An important aspect to grasp from this is the fact that though Israel's covenant betrayal explains her suffering, it does not take away the right to lament over the grief and confusion (2:1-13) (Mackie, 1). God does not condemn Israel's venting and expression of emotions to him. This is important to remember because this poem (and the others) are raw. Yahweh is described in this poem as, "angry" and "without mercy" (v.1-2), and a consuming fire (v.3-4). The Lord is said to have, "bent his bow" against his people, and to have become "like an enemy" to them (v.4-5). His "right hand" has been withdrawn from them (v.3), but more than that now it is set against them (v.4). This is significant, because the right hand of God is a motif for his omnipotence.

The Lord is said to have "scorned" his own altar and "disowned" his sanctuary (v.7), made up his mind to lay to ruins the city (v.8), delivered it into enemy hands (v.7; Deut. 32:30) and "slaughtered without pity" (v.2,17,21). As the prophet Ezekiel describes this wrath of Yahweh, "Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and the yearning of your soul, and your sons and your daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword" (24:21). Perhaps the gravest description of the destruction of the city comes in verse 20, "Look, O Lord, and see! With

whom have you dealt thus? Should women eat the fruit of their womb, the children of their tender care?" Israel asks God if he has ever dealt with someone in such a way. The situation is so bad, the destruction too terrible, that people are eating their own children! (v.20, 4:10; Jer. 19:19). The last line of the poem says, "those whom I held and raised my enemy destroyed." Once again, the grief and pain, like the first poem, is described in terms of the loss of loved ones, because it literally happened, and because it evokes the strongest of emotions in describing the depth of the pain. The heartbreaking question of this poem is, "God, when have you ever dealt with anyone else like this?" Israel questions the goodness and justice of their Lord, but he never condemns them for it.

Poem #3 The Suffering One

This third poem is three times as long as the other four poems. The imagery switches from being a corporate suffering of a nation, to a lone individual, a man. This is in contrast to the personification of the nation as a woman in the other four poems. The Poem opens, "I am the man" (v.1). The focus of this first-person poem is of a lone "suffering one's" struggle with God that serves to represent the entire struggle of the people. The language used in this poem describing the lonely man as the representative of people, is steeped in language from Job chapter three, the Psalms (particularly Psalm 1,2,22, and 69), the suffering servant psalms from Isaiah (especially Isaiah 53), and the laments of Jeremiah the suffering prophet (Jer. 8, 11, 15, 20, 28, 42). Nearly every verse of this poem corresponds in some fashion, direct quote or similar language, to the passages and concepts within them. Whoever this "suffering one" is, he embodies all of these portraits combined here in this poem, and is portrayed as suffering on behalf of the many.

In the middle of the middle poem in the book, we receive the only message of hope in the entire collection of funeral poems (3:22-33, 40-42), with perhaps the greatest expression, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him"' (3:22-24). The suffering one reminds us that there is hope in the future because of God's character (Exod. 34:6-7; Psalm36:5; Mal. 3:6). If God is consistent in justice, he will be in his covenant promises too (Deut. 7:9). Though there are these moments of hope, the emphasis of this poem and the book in general is on venting emotions.

Poem #4 The Siege of Jerusalem: Before and After

The fourth poem is primarily constructed to compare and contrast life before and after the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. It speaks of a dehumanized people. It reiterates from precious poems the recognition that Israel has brought this upon herself, and explores the depths of her suffering by remembering how things used to be. Images such as shattered pottery (v.2, Jer. 19:11) and children begging for food (v.4, 2:11), the eating of their children again (4:10) is castrated with luxuries and abundance in material possessions before the siege, as well as dignity and respect (v.1-22). Verse six goes as far as to say, "For the chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, and no hands were wrung for her" (see Gen. 19:25; Matt. 10:15, Lk. 10:12; 2 Pet; 2:6).That's quite a statement, but it's how the siege has made the people of God feel, so they express those emotions to Him. This makes sense as we read later in verse 11 where it says God gave "full vent" to his wrath and "poured out his hot anger." In verse 13 the author says it is because of the sins of the prophets and priests, which sounds like blame shifting. It

very well could be, but similar language and concepts from Jeremiah 5:31; 23:21, implicates all people, as well, for loving "to have it be so." Everyone is responsible for their part in this predicament and in bringing God's wrath upon themselves.

Poem #5 Prayer for Mercy

In this final poem, the neat systematic structure of the poem is broken. It is a desperate communal prayer of mercy, in which the exiled people plead with Yahweh not to abandon them. Verse one calls upon God to remember them, and to see their disgrace. The poem then goes on to describe Israel's situation. Their inheritance has been given to strangers (v.2), they are fatherless orphans and widows (v.3), they have to pay for everything and get no rest (v.4-5,7), suffer for their fathers' sins (v.7), women are raped and men are disrespected and abused (v.11-13), they can't play music anymore, and dancing has turned to mourning (13-15).

Verse sixteen is the hinge point of the poem, "The crown has fallen from our head;
woe to us, for we have sinned!" Here is the recognition again of their sin, what got them here in the first place, which verses17-18 explain further. The final verses (19-22) really show the schizophrenia of the experience of suffering,

"But you, O Lord, reign forever;
your throne endures to all generations.
20 Why do you forget us forever,
why do you forsake us for so many days?
21 Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored!
Renew our days as of old—
22 unless you have utterly rejected us,
and you remain exceedingly angry with us."

The words speak for themselves. This is not a neat, tidy ending to a book, just like our own experiences of suffering. It's a battle between what we know to be true of God, and our struggle to interpret our situation and circumstances in light of His character and our intense emotions and confusion. This final poem exhibits this par excellence.

Key Themes:

Covenant Infidelity and Wrath of God

The fact that the exile was brought about by Israel's sin is not lost upon the author of Lamentations (1:5, 18; 2:14; 4:6, 13; 5:7, 16). It is because of covenant betrayal that Israel has found herself in exile. She invited these things to happen to her, because of her disobedience. The imagery used, which has been briefly explored above, to describe living conditions, relationships, and the mental and spiritual state of people is raw, graphic, and horrifying. This is exactly what the reader is supposed to feel, and the poems are trying to evoke. Sin is ugly and it destroys everything in its wake. It's also important to remember that God's wrath in Scripture is never arbitrary anger, but an expression of his justice.

Personification of Zion as a Woman

The structure of Lamentations is designed in such a way as to draw most attention to the third poem about the suffering one, "the man" (3:1), but the writer surrounded the central piece with woman imagery in poems 1,2,4 and 5. The personification of the city as a grieving woman provokes strong emotions. The author explains the state of Lady Zion in such terms as, "lonely" and "a widow" (v.1; Jer. 7:4, 15:8) as well as a mother who has lost her children (1:6, 15; 2:1, 11). The author is trying to get the reader to sense the depth of the pain, and suffering, by using these sorrowful images. The term "daughter of Zion" or "young daughter of Zion" is used 20 times throughout the book and thus a driving figure of speech for expressing grief in the book of Lamentations (Mackie, 1).

The Suffering One/Man

See comments above under poem three, where this theme is developed

Hope

In the middle of the middle poem in the book, we receive the only message of hope in the entire collection of funeral poems (3:22-33, 40-42), with perhaps the greatest expression, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him"' (3:22-24). Future hope is built upon God's character (Exod. 34:6-7; Psalm36:5; Mal. 3:6). If God is consistent in justice, he will be in his covenant promises too (Deut. 7:9). Chapter 4:21-22 speaks of the cup of God's wrath eventually passing, but only after he has uncovered and punished their sins (Isa. 40:2; Jer. 25:15-16). Though the journey to restoration is brutal, there is hope on the horizon, faint as it may have been.

Lament as an Acceptable Practice

Lament plays a crucial piece in dealing with grief, and the book of Lamentations shows that it is an acceptable form of expressing emotions towards God. In questioning his character and righteousness, God does not condemn his people. Dr. Tim Mackie puts it this way, "The poems are entirely human speech to God, which become God's word to his people in Scripture. God is here showing that grief, lament, anger and dismay are all appropriate ways of dealing with hardship and suffering" (1). Lamenting is a God-ordained, healthy way to express emotion and confusion to God about the things that don't make sense, and hurt. Suffering in silence is not what this book is about! Through personifications, potent imagery, and other literary devices, the author creates in the mind of the reader the profound idea that there is a sacred dignity to human suffering (Bible Project).

Implications for Today:

There are multiple lessons to be learned from the Book of Lamentations, but I want to focus on the most important and prominent one, as it has been lacking in the church for a very long time. In all of my discipleship, upbringing, and church life, no one has ever introduced me to the book of Lamentations. I have rarely heard it mentioned in a Bible study, and even more scarcely from a pulpit. I think we in the Western church, in our pastoral care, have largely tried to get people to move on from their grief to hope, without actually letting them express their feelings and emotions, or sitting with them in their pain. God forgive us, we have often damned people who have tried to do just what the author of Lamentations does. Some may ask, "Can we say such things to God? Isn't it blasphemous?"

Books like Lamentation, Jeremiah, Job, and Psalms would say, "Yes, you can vent to God!" Lamentations, in particular, explores the back-and-forth of faith and despair as God's people wait on his promises (Mackie, 1)

Reading the Laments of Scripture helps us today to understand that communicating our suffering to God about our experiences, circumstances, and what's wrong in our lives is actually an appropriate response to the evil, pain, and sin in the world. Rather than keeping it bottled up inside, God invites us to fully vent our emotions to him. God is not threatened by mine or your protest, rather our voicing our concerns, frustration, hurts, anger, pain, etc. This creates a place in which we can push off from and move forward without glossing over the pain and suffering.

As Pastors, mentors, and friends we should learn how to show people more Biblical and healthy ways to express grief and suffering. In summary, I think Bible commentator Kathleen O'Connor states the message and application of Lamentations beautifully, "

> Lamentation names what is wrong, what is out of order in God's world, what keeps human beings from thriving in all their creative potential. Simple acts of lament expose these conditions, name them, open them to grief and anger, and make them visible for remedy. In its complaint, anger and grief, lamentation protests conditions that prevent human thriving and this resistance may finally prepare the way for healing. (1011-76).

Study Questions:

1. How does the author personify Jerusalem in the first poem? What are some significant features of this literary device?
2. What is the significance in the imagery of the "Lone suffering man" vs. the daughter of Zion? What are some similarities and differences?
3. The wrath of God is a major theme in Lamentation. What brought about the wrath of God? Why was he so angry?
4. If the wrath of God is not arbitrary, or fitful rage, like we see in Greek mythology in the pantheon of gods, for examples, what is God's wrath an expression of?
5. Who is the suffering one in the third poem supposed to remind us of?
6. Do you think it is okay to emotionally vent to God like the author of Lamentations? Has anyone every encouraged you to do so?
7. How do you express your emotions, frustration, pain, suffering, etc.? Do you do so toward or with God? Why or why not?
8. Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt deep emotions and grief as expressed in Lamentations? If so, what were some of the most beneficial things that aided in your healing?
9. Think for a moment…have you ever just sat with someone in their suffering without saying something like, "it's going to be okay, you're going to be fine, God's got a plan" too soon? What would it look like for you to do this with your children or spouse?
10. Throughout some ideas that you think would be helpful in helping someone express their emotions and frustrations to God?

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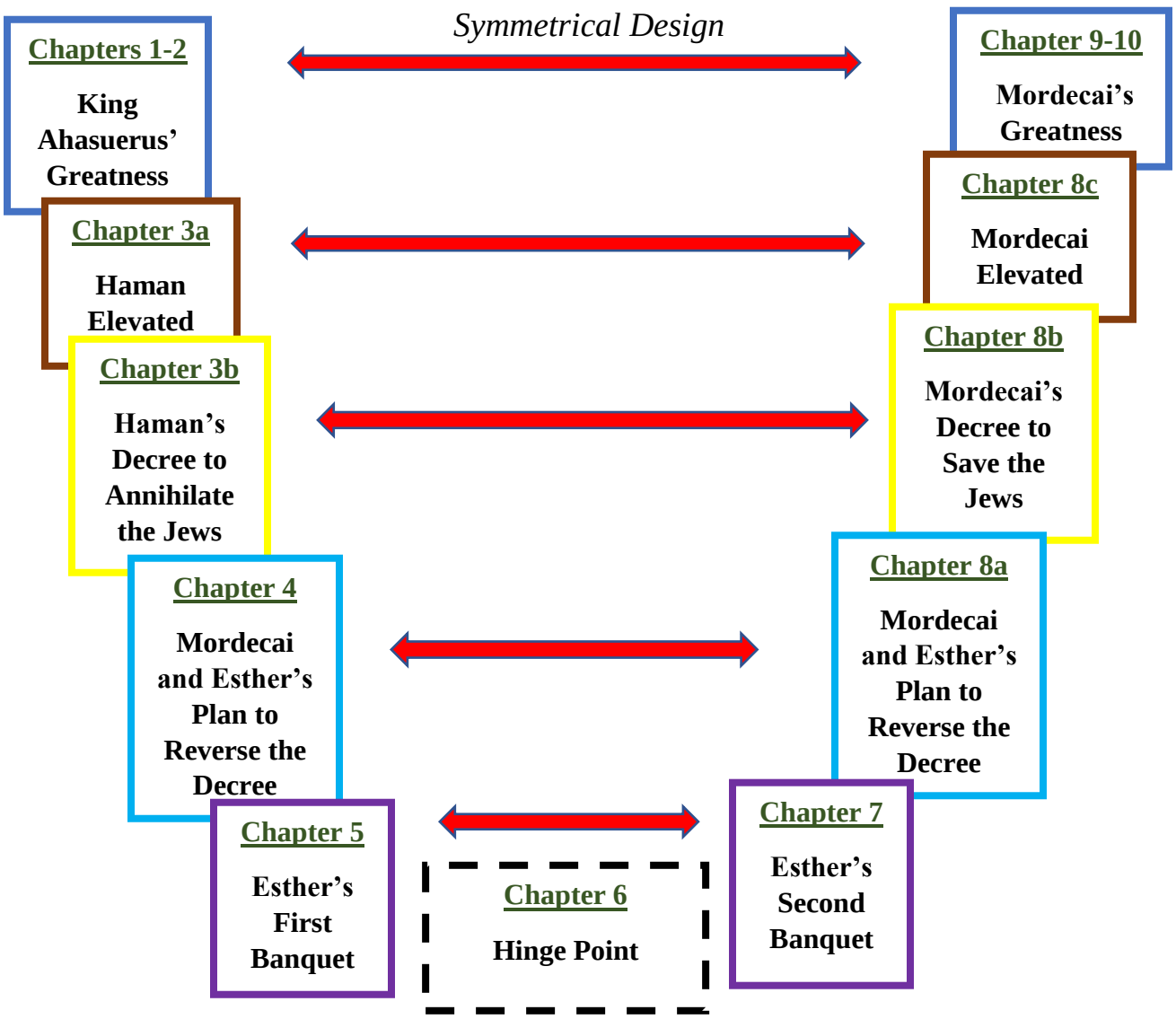
The Book of Esther

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Esther demonstrates how Yahweh is providentially governing behind the scenes, to save his people and to work his plan of redemption as they live in a foreign land.

Main Idea Explained

Esther, like Ezra and Nehemiah, lived during the period when the Persians dominated the world scene. It is written approximately 100 years after the exile to Babylon and takes place in the capital city of the Persian empire, Susa, meaning the Jews who lived here had not gone back to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah and their crews. It features only a few characters: Esther (Hadassa), Mordechai, Hegai, Haman, and King Ahasuerus (Xerxes). The main actors are portrayed as narrative illustrations of key figures in the book of Proverbs: Ahasuerus =*The Foolish Immature King* (Prov.

31:2-4; 20:2), Haman and Mordechai = *The rash, proud, arrogant, wicked villain vs. The righteous, wise, humble hero* (11:2;13:22;14:29;18:2) {Mackie, 6}. Additionally, the book of Proverbs' cause-and-effect perspective is tapped into, that is people reap what they sow, the righteous are rewarded and blessed, and the wicked pay for their error.

A couple other interesting features in the book of Esther are its symmetrical design with a hinge point in chapter six, and that it never mentions God, not even once! This is unique in all of Scripture. In the omission of the name of God, the author (who is anonymous) is trying to get the reader to probe deeply to find how God is working behind the scene, guiding history with his providential hand. It is with this background and perspective the reader is then thrust into the story.

The first three chapters serve to introduce all of the main actors in the narrative. Chapters one and two highlight the greatness and splendor of King Ahasuerus. Chapter 1:1-10 highlight how extravagant one of his feasts was, lasting 180 days plus one week! The remainder of chapter one records how his queen (Vashti) refused to be paraded around as a trophy before the king's guests, and landed herself expelled from his presence, losing her queenship. The story is filled with ironic twists and reversals of fortune. The first one comes in chapter 1:20-22 when the king commands that every man should be ruler over his household. This is funny since the king just lost his queen and he gets pushed around by Esther to a certain extent in the story as well. Chapter two begins with Ahasuerus on the prowl for a new queen, appointing officials to gather young virgins to be brought to Susa, given beauty treatments, and presented for him to choose from among them Vashti's replacement. Verses five trough eleven introduce us to Mordecai (a Benjamite) and his niece (Esther), who just so happened to be a young beautiful virgin, and so was taken with the other women to Susa to be presented before the King. Three times Esther is said to have found or won favor in this chapter alone (2:9,15, 17). The latter, being the favor of the king, who, "...loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti" (Est. 2:17). A feast was thrown for Esther in celebration. There is once again a "no-name" character exalted to a high place (Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel etc.), The final verses of chapter two transition to a mini-story about Mordecai discovering a plot by some to kill the king, so he tells Esther, and the men were hanged, winning Mordecai a spot in the Persian "Chronicles" (v.23).

In chapter three we are introduced to the villain in this story, Haman (an "Agagite"= Canaanite), who is elevated to prominence over much of Ahasuerus' kingdom. Verse two says, "And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage." This infuriated Haman, and his hatred and anger against Mordecai fanned to flame his desire not only to harm Esther's uncle, but to destroy all his people, the Jews, throughout all of the kingdom (3:5-11). The remainder of chapter three records the details of Haman's successful persuasion of the king to let Haman send out a decree to kill the Jews, and their two-man drinking party to celebrate it.

Chapter four tells of Mordecai and Esther's plan to reverse Haman's decree. It is in this chapter that we receive perhaps the most famous line in the entire book, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (4:13-14), highlighting the largest underlying theme of the entire book (divine providence). In response Esther tells her uncle, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not

eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." (4:16). She accepts the challenge.

Esther proceeds to plan and prepare a banquet (her first in the story) and asked the king to invite Haman. Immediately after her request, Haman goes from happy to furious because he sees Mordecai, and then plans to hang him having giant gallows made just for Mordecai (3:9-14). The tension is rising in the reader at this point.

As we come to chapter six, the story pivots. King Ahasuerus can't sleep one night and so like the rest of us he has some good bed-time stories read to him, "the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles" (6:1). It just so happens he has read to him Mordecai's saving his life (remember ch.2), and it comes to his attention that he never did anything to honor the man, but had forgotten the matter. And it just so happened that Haman was walking around in the courtyard and was coming to tell the king about his plan to have Mordecai hanged (v. 6:4). Verses six and seven say, "So Haman came in, and the king said to him, 'What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?' And Haman said to himself, 'Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?"' In the following verses Haman describes everything he would want to have done to himself, like wearing royal robes, riding the kings horse, wear a royal crown, etc. In a turn of events, "the king said to Haman, 'Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned. 'So, Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor"' (6:10-11). It is at this point that Haman begins to fall and Mordecai begins to rise. Commentator Jon Levenson adds,

> "Our identification of chapter 6 as the pivot offers another angle of vision on the structure of the book of Esther. It uncovers a larger pattern of symmetry where the scenes before the pivot all correspond to the scenes on the other side… It is beyond doubt that the book displays a bilateral chiastic structure in which the events of the first half (A-F) consistently have a negative, forboding cast, whereas those in the second half (F'-A') are uniformly positive and correct the deficiencies of their counterparts… This feature of the book is best summed up in the narrator's comment about Purim in 9:1 "the tables were turned" (Heb. nahpok hu' = "the reverse took place", see 9:1). The very structure of Esther suggests the transformation "from a time of grief to one of joy, and from an occasion of mourning to a holiday" (9:22), which is the book's great theme." (OTL)

Chapters seven through ten record the narrative in such a way that everything that took place with Haman, takes place with Mordecai, but in reverse. Chapter seven records Esther's second banquet in which she reveals to King Ahasuerus Haman's evil plan to wipe out the Jews (7:1- 6), and Haman being hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai (7:7-10; see also ch. 5). In chapter eight Mordecai and Esther plan to reverse the decree, but they can't. However, a new issue is decreed in which the Jews are allowed to defend themselves against those who seek to fulfill the previous decree against them, and Mordecai is elevated to prominence.

Chapter nine tells of the Israelites' success against their enemies and the institution of the feast of Purim. Haman and Ahasuerus "cast lots" (Purim= dice), to decide when his decree will actually be enacted, so the festival is named commemorating the Jewish victory over their enemies (Mackie, Lecture). Chapter ten, in its three short verses, focuses entirely on Mordecai's exaltation to second command over all of the Persian empire, looking much like Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 37-50).

The Purpose of the Book

Esther shows us that despite the circumstances of living in a foreign land, even after exile, and Yahweh's seeming absence, he is still at work being faithful to his promises to bring salvation to his people so that they may be a light to the nations once again (Gen.12; Exod. 19:6; Isa. 49) Though God is never mentioned, nor his activity, divine providence is thick in the atmosphere of this amazing and suspenseful narrative.

Key Themes

Divine Providence

This is the primary theme under which almost all other themes could be placed. The purpose of the book is to display this truth powerfully through this epic historical narrative. As Dr. Mackie points out, this often happens through means of seeming "coincidences" and "happen chances", that are often displayed through satire and irony (Mackie, Lecture). The story is filled with twists and reversals. The first one comes in chapter 1:20-22 when the king commands that every man should be ruler over his household (even though he just lost Queen Vashti, and he gets pushed around by Esther later in the narrative). In chapter two Mordecai *happens* to find out about the assassination plot and saves the king's life, but is forgotten about until one night the king *happens* to have insomnia, and the account of Mordecai's prior deed *happens* to be read to him that very night, and Haman (who hates and wants to kill Mordecai) *happens* to be walking around at the same time, headed to tell the king he wants to hang Mordecai from his massive gallows he just built, but finds out now he has to parade Mordecai around town instead of receiving the honor he thought he was due. Dr. Mackie adds,

> "Haman plots to kill Mordecai and the Jews, but ends up begging for his life from Esther the Jew. Mordecai refuses to honor Haman, but Haman is forced to honor Mordecai. Haman builds the stake to hang Mordecai, but ends up being impaled on it himself. The Jews end up "winning" a battle without an army, king, etc. (2)

Let us also not forget perhaps the most famous line in the entire book, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (4:13-14), highlighting the largest underlying theme of the entire book (divine providence). In chapters seven through ten the narrative is written in such a way that everything that took place with Haman, takes place with Mordecai, but in reverse. Mordecai starts lowly and is exalted, having no fall narrative in this book. Chapter ten, in its three short verses, focuses entirely on Mordecai's exaltation to second command over all of the Persian empire, looking much like Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 37-50). This theme can be traced from beginning to end from Vashti being banished and Esther so *happening* to win the beauty pageant (chs. 1-2) to righteous Mordecai being exalted (ch. 10).

Mordecai and Past Biblical Architypes

In the narrative Mordecai is portrayed as being "like" some heavy Hebrew hitters such as these four figures Joseph, Saul, David, and Daniel, a couple of whom become types of the messiah who was to come and contribute to the Hebrew Bible's mosaic depiction of the future messianic king (Mackie, 3). The narrative of Mordecai's life shares much in common with Daniel and Joseph (Gen. 39,41; Dan. 2,5; Esther 2,6,8,10). Dr. Mackie adds,

> "Joseph by means of narrative analogy and intertextual allusion, Joseph's story becomes an image of the future king from the line of Judah. Daniel is from the line of Judah, and portrayed as a Joseph figure, but his persecutors are Babylonian, not Israelite. Daniel 7 links this portrait of the 'exalted' Daniel to the 'suffering Son of Man' figure who is exalted only after being trampled by the beasts of the nations." (5)

Perhaps even more significant, the conflict between Mordecai and Haman should revive in the mind of the reader the ancient battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites that began in Exodus 17:8-16 and remained unfinished in the battle between Saul and Agag in 1 Samuel 15 (see also Deut. 25:17-19) {Mackie, 5). In 1 Samuel 9:1 Saul is, "son of Kish, of Benjamin" which is precisely the language to describe Mordecai's lineage, "son of Kish, of Benjamin" (Esther 2:5). Haman is called an Agagite (Esther 3:1), which is the king Saul failed to put to death and let his soldiers rummage through the plunder (not okay!) in 1 Sam. 15:7-8. The book of Esther is replaying this ancient struggle with Haman and Mordechai except Mordechai did exactly what Saul failed to do (Mackie, Lecture). He overcame Haman by letting the Lord orchestrate his downfall, and three times in chapter nine the Israelites are pointed out as not touching the spoil of the plunder. If Mordecai is the "better than" Saul, then he is also pictured as being like David. Agag was a close people group to the Amalekites and David killed them (2 Sam. 1). In Numbers 24:7 (part of the Balaam prophecies), the "seed" coming from Israel exalted over Agag is mentioned, and Mordechai in Esther 10:2-3 sees this fulfilled in and through his life. In chapter 10:3 the phrase "speaks peace to his nation" is language found in Zechariah 9: 9-10 which refers to the future messianic king in Jerusalem (Mackie, Lecture). Mordecai is being presented as a "New David" speaking peace just like the Messiah would speak peace one day. Even Haman's wife recognizes this whether she knows it or not when she speaks of Mordecai, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of ***the seed of יְהוּדִים (those belonging to Judah= Judahites***, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him" (Esther 6:13). Therefore, the Prophetic hope is carried forth in the book of Esther, just in more subtle ways perhaps than in other narratives.

Proverbs Perspective

The main actors are portrayed as narrative illustrations of key figures in the book of Proverbs: Ahasuerus =*The Foolish Immature King* (Prov. 31:2-4; 20:2), Haman and Mordechai = *The rash, proud, arrogant, wicked villain vs. The righteous, wise, humble hero* (11:2;13:22;14:29;18:2) {Mackie, 6}. Additionally, the book of Proverbs' cause-and-effect perspective is tapped into, that is, people reap what they sow, the righteous are rewarded and blessed while the wicked pay for their error.

Implications for Today

Reading the book of Esther is a unique experience when reading scripture. Most of the narrative portions of the Bible are very long and often times stretch the boundary lines of multiple books. What we encounter in the book of Esther is a compact suspenseful story packed into ten short chapters. The book is meant to be read in one sitting. That is the best way to interpret and understand its meaning. When we do this, we can start to recognize the pattern of divine providence that is working behind the curtain, driving redemptive history forward. We receive a picture of Yahweh, though he is never mentioned by name, as carrying deeply for his people, bringing low the wicked and the proud, and exalting the humble and righteous. He is intimately involved in human affairs, even when we feel that he is absent. We must never let our feelings trump what we know is true about God.

It's not that feelings are bad, they are a gift from God, but they must not dictate what we believe about the nature and character of Yahweh. He does not change like our momentary feelings and temporary circumstances we find ourselves in. We should find great comfort in this. We should be encouraged by this fact. Even when God's people found themselves living in a foreign land, under foreign rule, in a foreign culture, he was there with them. He was not confined to the temple, like a Jeannie in a bottle, waiting for Israel to return to the promised land to let him out. Yahweh is far too powerful for that to be true. Yahweh is irrevocably committed to the promises he made to his people. As Christians reading this story today, that is what we should see. When we look at the world, do we pay attention enough, slowing down just a little bit to see how God is working in and through our lives and the lives of others? The God portrayed in Esther, though veiled, is the same today as he was then. Do we believe that? Does it embolden us, and motivate us to be all that he created us to be? The world needs to know that there is a God who is in control of everything, and his working in the world to make good out of the evil and to redeem humanity for his glory and our good. Let us be beckons of this hope.

Study Questions

1. In what time period is Esther written? How does this affect how we read the book?
2. What is this book about? What is the main idea and its purpose?
3. How does the book's symmetrical design influence how you read the book? What does it tell you about the characters, plot, conflict, resolution, etc.
4. Who are the main actors and what roles do they play?
5. How does Esther end up becoming queen, and how does Mordecai save the king's life?
6. What is the main conflict in the book? There is much more than meets the eye going on between Mordecai and Haman. What do I mean by this?
7. Why is chapter six so significant?
8. What biblical architypes does Mordechai fit into? How does this give us a picture of the prophetic hope offered in Scripture?
9. Do you feel like you live in a foreign land sometimes? Has God ever felt distant, or maybe even absent? How does this book offer hope when you feel this way?
10. Have you ever looked back on your life to see where God has providentially orchestrated events in your life? Do you believe he does this today?
11. How could you use the Book of Esther to comfort someone? How about to teach them about divine providence?
12. What has been particularly moving to you reading through Esther? Where has it challenged or encouraged you in your walk with God?

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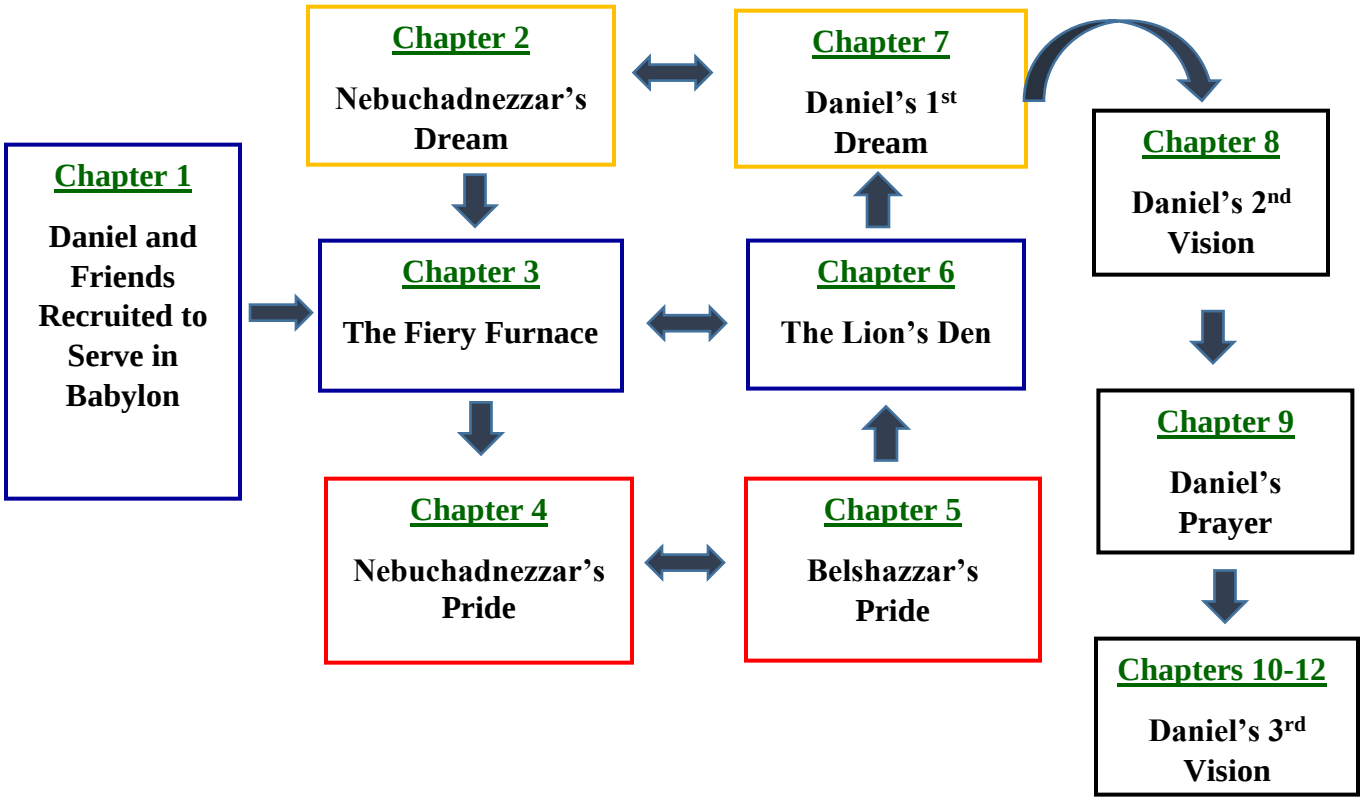
The Book of Daniel

Structure



Main Idea: The book of Daniel is primarily about two things: living faithfully in a foreign land under opposition, and hope in the promise that God will one day bring his kingdom and defeat evil for all of time.

Chapter 1: Daniel and Friends Recruited to Serve in Babylon

Chapter one sets up the story of Daniel by placing him and his three friends among the first wave of the exiles taken to Babylon after the attack on Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24). In verses two and three we learn that Daniel (sometimes referred to as Beleteshazzar) and his friends, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) (v.7), belong to "the seed of the kingship" (Dan 1:3). The author wants us to be thinking about the fate of the "seed" (Gen. 3:15; chpt.12, 15, 17, 2 Sam. 7) in Babylon, in the heart of the beast (Mackie, Lecture), and how God is going to be faithful to his covenant promises.

The author goes out of the way to show how wise, good-looking, and capable these men were, which is why they are recruited to serve in king's palace (v.4). The text says they are to be given the king's food and drink, and taught the language and culture for three years in preparation to serve the king. There is a problem, however. To eat what the king does would violate the kosher laws of the Torah (Lev. 3:17). Daniel and his friends are faced with a decision, give up their Jewish identity and conform, or be faithful to Yahweh not knowing what will become of them. They choose to be faithful, to not defile themselves with the unclean food, and actually are shown to be in better shape and

condition than those that had eaten the unclean food, and so they are exalted in a foreign land. Food becomes a symbol of faithfulness. Verse 17 says God gave them learning and skill in wisdom and literature, and to Daniel in particular, the ability to understand dreams and visions (important for the rest of the book!). Daniel and his friends are said to be found "ten times better" than all the other "magicians" and "enchanters" in all of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom (v. 20). This story should remind us of other stories in the Bible about God's people being exalted in foreign lands, like Joseph (Ge, 37-50), Moses (Exod. 2), and Esther. The narrative of chapter one sets up the pattern for the rest of the book. Dr. Mackie explains this pattern:

> (1) *The faithfulness of the remnant is tested* ➞ (2) *They are persecuted by imperial powers* ➞ (3) *The remnant trusts God and is vindicated* ➞ (4) *The salvation of the remnant compels the powers to acknowledge Israel's God.* Chapters 2-7 weave together all these themes in a symmetrical design. (Mackie, 1).

Chapter 2-7 Introduction

It will be helpful in understanding this section of the book of Daniel, to briefly interpret the structure graphic above. Chapters two and seven reveal how God will vindicate his people by confronting and destroying evil human kingdoms head on. Chapters three and six are stories that depict the struggle of God's people to remain faithful amidst persecution, and Yahweh's vindication of his servants because of their faithfulness in the trials that befall them. Chapters four and five are stories that compare and contrast how nations can respond to God's rule, in repentance or defiance, and the outcome of their choices.

Chapter 2: Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Chapter two is a Joseph-like story where no one else can interpret the king's, except for God's chosen instrument, one of his faithful servants, Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar is shown to be a maniac in this passage (2:1-12). The king is ready to kill all of his counsel, because no one can interpret his dream. Daniel hears of this and requests to go before the king, and prays with his friends that God may reveal to him the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, for the purpose the lives may be spared (v. 2:17-18). God reveals the interpretation of the dream to Daniel (v.19) and Daniel praises Yahweh (v.20-23). In verses 24-30 Daniel appears before the king and makes a couple of things very clear: there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he (Daniel) is not wiser than all men, but rather God desires for Nebuchadnezzar to know what his dream means.

In verses 31-45 Daniel gives the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The king's dream is of a giant statue made of four metals (gold, silver, iron, and bronze) which symbolize a sequence of kingdoms that will appear after Babylon, culminating the coming kingdom of God, which will put an end to all evil, and stand forever. There are two primary views as to the referents to these kingdoms as follows: (1) Babylon (1:1, 2:39) > Media (5:30-31, 9:1)> Persians (6:28, 10:1)> Greece (8:21, 10:21) (2) Babylon > Medo-Persia (two kingdoms combined 8:20-21) > Greece > Rome (11:30) (Mackie, 2). The first view interprets the events surrounding Antiochus IV in the 160s B.C. as the first primary referent of the visions in chapters 7-12, whereas the second view interprets the conquest of Rome over Greece and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman emperor in 70 A.D. as the primary referent of chapters 7-12 (Mackie, 2). Whichever view ones takes, the point is that every evil kingdom comes to an end, and will be humbled before the mighty God, and subjugated to him.

Chapter 3 and 6: The Fiery Furnace and the Lions' Den

In this chapter we receive another testing story like that of chapter one, and another to follow in chapter six. In chapter one the test was whether or not Daniel and his friends would give up their Jewish identity by forsaking the kosher laws, or remain faithful to Yahweh (Lev. 3:17; Dan. 1). Later in chapter six, Daniel alone will be tested by having to choose between worshiping the one true God (Exod. 20:1-7), or worship the king as a god. Here in chapter three, Daniel's friends (absent Daniel) will have their faith tested when confronted with the decision to worship the empire or remain faithful to God. Chapters one, three, and six are linked together in that there is a testing of faith, God's servants are shown to be faithful and trust in him, then they are exalted, then those in authority praise Yahweh (1:19-21; 3:26-30; 6:23-28).

In chapter three the image from Nebuchadnezzar's dream becomes a reality. Apparently, the dream fueled his ingenuity for a real-life version of what he had seen in the dream world. It is striking how much resemblance this chapter bears to Genesis chapter eleven in regard to the arrogance of Babylon. The king wants everyone to bow down to his statue. The difference however, is this time it is not a nation exalting itself per se, but an individual, Nebuchadnezzar. The king wants all of the world to bow down to the statue he has made. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego however refuse, and this infuriates the king. He becomes so furious (v.13) in fact, that he has them thrown into a fiery furnace that is so hot (seven times hotter than usual v.19) it kills the guards who open the doors to throw them into it (v.22). Daniel's friends fall into the furnace, but soon the king is astonished for there are not three men amidst the flames, but four (v.24-25), and one looks like a "son of the gods" (v. 25). The king orders the three men to step outside of the flames and they do so completely unharmed (v.26-27). This leads to Nebuchadnezzar praising Yahweh, and exalting Daniel's friends in Babylon (v.28-30, 4:1-3). It is yet another example of the pattern set forth in chapter one, God exalting the faithful.

Chapter 6:1-5 Daniel's peers are searching for any dirt they can get on him that would somehow make him lose favor with the king, but they can't. They conspire that the only way they can possibly get Daniel in trouble with the king (Darius now) is if it is somehow connected to Daniel's god. Here the reader should be thinking of other stories they have heard about the faithful remnant being conspired against (the book of Esther for example). Daniel's peers devise a plan in which they play the kings ego against him and get him to sign a decree in which for 30 days no one is to make a petition or praise anyone but King Darius, or they would be thrown into the lions' den (v. 6-9). This did not stop Daniel from praying to Yahweh three times a day and carrying on as usual (v.10). Daniel's peers catch him in the act, repot him. This distressed the king and he labored to find a way to save Daniel, but the conspirators had the law of the land on their side, and King Darius' hands were tied in this matter (v. 10-14). Therefore, Darius was forced to reluctantly throw Daniel to the lions (v. 16-18). The next morning Darius rushed to the lions' den to see if Daniel was still alive, and we learn that angels had shut the mouths of the lions. Daniel had been spared because he trusted in God (v. 19-23). This led Darius to do a few things: throw the conspirators and their families to the lions, exalt Daniel, and praise Yahweh (v. 24-28). Just like Daniel's friends were vindicated in chapter three, so Daniel is vindicated in chapter six. Some of the imagery from the lions' den is used later in Daniel's visons in chapters 7-12.

Chapters 4 and 5: Nebuchadnezzar's Pride and Belshazzar's Pride

Chapters four and five are stories that compare and contrast how nations can respond to God's rule, in either repentance or defiance, and the outcome of their choices. In chapter four we receive the account of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream (4:4-18), the interpretation of his dream (4:19-27), the humiliation of King Nebuchadnezzar (4:28-33), and his restoration (4:34-37).

In chapter four Daniel is shown again to be the only one who can interpret the king's dream (v. 4-8). In verses 9-13 Nebuchadnezzar explains this nice pleasant dream, with this beautiful healthy tree and wildlife that takes refuge in it. However, in verses 13-15 it takes a turn for the worst. A holy one from heaven (v.13) commands that the tree be butchered, the fruit and animals scattered, and only a stump remain. This stump is referred to as "him", and this "him" is to have his mind changed from that of a man, to a beast, and his food from that of a king to that of a grazing animal for seven periods of time (v.15-16). The king then begs Daniel to interpret his dream (v.17-18).

In verses 19-23 Daniel is alarmed by the dream, but the king tells him to say what he sees anyway and so Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that he, (Nebuchadnezzar) is the tree in the dream. The king has grown a strong kingdom, been successful, and built an empire, but he has done it apart from God, in ignorance, and arrogance, so Yahweh is going to show him who his really in charge and in control of the affairs of the world (v. 24-26). Nebuchadnezzar is going to be made to be like a beast of the field, and once he repents and acknowledges that Yahweh rules the kingdoms of men and gives them to whom he so chooses, he will restore Nebuchadnezzar(v.26-27).

Verses 28-31 state that these things fell upon Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, in the middle of his speech about how great he had made Babylon, and how great he was, a voice from heaven speaks and tells him that he, "…shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." God humbles the arrogant king (v.33). Verses 34-36 recount Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgement of Yahweh as king of the universe, and in humbling himself, the king is restored as ruler over Babylon again.

Chapter five is a story about Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar. He is faced with the same proposition as his father was in chapter four, but his choices lead to a different outcome. Verses 1-4 describe a great party that is taking place, where there is a lot of drinking and worshipping of other gods besides Yahweh. In verse five we read of the famous "writing on the wall' story. A finger from a hand appears and writes on the wall, and it frightens the king, obviously (v.6-7). Once again no one could interpret the dream, so Daniel is commissioned to interpret the events (v. 8-12). In verses 13-30 Daniel interprets the hand writing.

In chapter 5:13-21 the king's predicament is explained to Daniel, and he agrees to interpret the handwriting. Daniel actually begins by recounting for the king the story about his father from chapter four, and how even though Belshazzar knew this, he has not humbled himself, but is against Yahweh and chases other gods (v.22-23). Because of this, Yahweh has sent this "writing on the wall" to Belshazzar. The writing said, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin" (v. 25). Daniel explains what his means, "Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the

Medes and Persians" (v.26-28). Verses 29-30 tell us that Daniel's interpretation was correct and Belshazzar was killed that very night, and Darius the Mede received the kingdom.

So what does all of this mean? Why are these stories here? We see first, God's response to a repentant humble heart (Nebuchadnezzar) and an unrepentant arrogant heart (Belshazzar). Second, we see that kings who don't recognize their authority is derived from Yahweh, become beasts (Mackie, Lecture). When humans forget they are under God's authority they don't rule beasts, they become them. When one wants to become God, in reality they become beasts, what they weren't created to be. Genesis 1-2, and other passages like Psalm 8 show us what humanity was created to be. As people created in the image of God we are to rule and reign over all other creation. However, when humanity rebels they no longer rule over the beasts, they become beasts. Babylon and its kings were a corrupted version of God's kingdom (Mackie, 3). Ezekiel's symbolic beast imagery and metaphors become a reality in Daniel (Ezek. 29:3).

Chapters 7-12 Introduction

Dr. Tim Mackie points out that these chapters,

> … are all visions pointing forward to the great devastation brought about by Antiochus IV in the 160s B.C., which becomes an *archetype* of the future conflict between all human kingdoms and God's kingdom…Antiochus' defilement of the temple in the 160s B.C., his persecution of the faithful, and arrogant opposition to the God of Israel are swept up into the archetype of the rebellious, self-deifying ruler from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. These visions adopt Isaiah's language about Assyria and Babylon. Antiochus becomes yet one more example of the arrogant human kingdoms" (4).

A vast majority of the language and imagery used in these chapters is taken from the first six chapter of the book, Ezekiel 7-11(Israel's Idolatry and defilement of the temple), and Isaiah 1-12, 36-39 (describing Assyria).

Chapter 7: Daniel's 1st Dream

In chapter seven, Daniel receives as dream of his own, the first of many. The four metals from King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two, become animals, beasts, in Daniel's vision in chapter seven. The beasts symbolize the kings and kingdoms that are to come after Babylon. Remember, the king of Babylon became a beast when he exalted himself as a god in chapter four. Daniel's vison picks up on this. The sequence of four kingdoms, just like the kings dream in chapter two, leads up to major confrontation between evil human empires and the coming kingdom of God (Mackie, 4). Bible commentator Morna Hooker explains further this idea of evil human kingdoms and rulers as beasts,

> The idea that man by his self-glorification and rebellion against God's dominion reduces himself to the level of an animal is fundamental… It is when Nebuchadnezzar forgets that his kingdom and glory are God-given that he loses his dominion, not only over men, but over birds and beasts, and is reduced to the level of the beasts. (16)

In his vision in verses 1-14 Daniel applies the beast imagery to all of the kingdoms that are to come before the kingdom of God. Babylon, Media, Persia, Greece, and Rome, they are all going to be beasts who do not acknowledge the living God, and defy Yahweh's authority over them. In the Old Testament, the beast imagery is deeply profound and multifaceted. The Psalms, Job, and the Prophets in particular, use beast imagery to describe base sinful human nature (their own included), and to describe their enemies (Psa. 49:21, 57:4,68:30, 73:21-22). In the prophets, God's divinely ordained

enemies that he uses to judge his people are depicted as beast (Isa. 5:26, 29; Hos. 13:6-8; Dan. 7:4-7). Dr. Mackie observes a couple of other dimensions,

> "In Daniel 7, this "divinely ordained enemy = beast" motif has been combined with ancient mytho-poetic symbols of Yahweh's victory over the chaos monsters that the biblical authors adopted from their Canaanite literary heritage (Job 9:8, 26:12; Psa.89:9-10; Isa.51:9)" *and* "For the biblical authors ancient Canaanite images became symbols of the greater spiritual evil driving human empires to oppress through violence." (6)

The Biblical authors do not excuse the sin of evil kings and kingdoms. However, they realize the truth that there is also a power pulling strings behind the curtain as well.

In Daniel's vision he is particularly concerned about the fourth beast who is unlike the others (7:7-8). The interpretation of Daniel's vision comes in verses 14-28. This fourth kingdom produces a king who persecutes God's people and destroys the earth (v.19-25). God allows this for a time, but then he comes in judgement (7:9-14; 25-28; imagery from Isa.6; Ezek.1), confronts, and destroys the evil king and gives the kingdom to his servants. Once again, testing ends in vindication for the faithful.

In verses 9-12 the "Ancient of Days" (another name for God {Psa.90:2}) is shown in powerful imagery to be the one who is in ultimate authority, seated on his throne, and destroys and kills the mega beast. It is after this that we receive a passage about the "Son of Man" (v.13-14). The son of man is identified later as "the holy ones of the most high" (7:21-22) and "the people of the most high" (7:27). Dr. Mackie comments, "This figure is a symbolic image of God's faithful people who are persecuted, but will eventually be vindicated in God's kingdom. The shape of the book portrays Daniel and the friends as the narrative embodiment (chs. 1-6) of the son of man (ch.7)" (7). This makes sense when we think back to chapter one. Daniel and the friends are taken from the "royal seed" (1:3) and are "sons of Judah" (1:6). This is likely, "… the author's way of merging the 'son of man' as an image for the corporate people of God ('holy ones of the most high') represented by the "seed of David" (= the messiah)" (Mackie, 8). In Daniel this imagery goes back and forth from being "the many" to the one representative of the many. It's not either/or, but rather both/and. Additionally, the imagery used for the "son of man" section is language and imagery used for Yahweh, it's enthronement language.

Chapter 8: Daniel's 2nd Vision

Chapters 8-12 further fill in the details of the plotline from Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two and Daniel's dream in chapter seven (Mackie, Lecture). Verses 1-14 tell of Daniel's second vision of the Ram and the Goat, and verses 15-27 give the interpretation of his vision. The ram and the goat symbolize the last three kingdoms: Media, Persia, and Greece (8:20-21). These kingdoms usher in the final king (8:23-25) who will "…defile the Jerusalem temple and persecute God's people… The details all seem to focus on the actions of Antiochus IV in the 160s B.C." (Mackie, 9). However, God will not allow the beast to trample his holy ones forever (v.10) and will destroy and break the beast (v.25; Dan.2:45).

Chapter 9: Daniel's Prayer

Verses 4-20 recount an amazing and beautiful prayer of Daniel on behalf of his people, pleading with God to forgive Israel for her sins, and repenting on her behalf. Verses one through three tell us why this is so significant. Daniel is reading the scroll of Jeremiah about the 70 years of Israel's exile, the fall of Babylon, and the restoration of Jerusalem (Jer. 25:11 and 29:10) that is to one day take place. Daniel is a faithful servant of Yahweh he knows his Bible. We also know that, "Daniel was

taken into exile around 605 B.C. and ch.9 is set around 538: 67years after the exile. Daniel's wondering if the promised restoration from exile will take place soon" (Mackie, 9). Daniel also knows that Israel's restoration is dependent upon her repentance (Lev. 26; Deut.30; Jer.29). The prayer of Daniel found in chapter twelve is a profound example of theologically informed prayer.

In verses 20-27 Daniel receives an answer to his prayer, but it is not exactly what he hoped for. The angel Gabriel comes to Daniel and tells him his pleas for mercy have been heard and he is greatly loved (v.21-23). That was the good news of Gabriel's message. The bad news from Gabriel has been wrought with much conjecture and calculator work. However, what is important and the purpose of these symbolic numbers and imagery is this: Israel as a whole has not learned their lesson, they have not repented, and they are still rebellious. Therefore, the 70-year period of punishment and judgment has been multiplied by seven, as specified in the covenant in Leviticus 26 (Mackie, 10). Verse 24 makes the purpose of delay very clear. It is "to complete the rebellion", "to seal up sins" "to atone for iniquity", "to bring eternal vindication", "to seal up vision and prophecy", and 'to anoint a most holy place." In the final period of time (the last 7 years) the suffering will be ramped-up, the temple defiled, and idols introduced into it (9:26-27), but the desolator will be destroyed suddenly. So what does this mean? Dr. Mackie is helpful here,

> The most likely initial referent of all of this language is Antiochus' attack on Jerusalem in the 160s B.C. He made the practice of Judaism illegal in Jerusalem, he presided over an altar to Zeus in the temple, and publicly executed Jews who would not worship his gods (See 1 Maccabees ch.1 for details)… But, like the other prophetic books, the literary design of Daniel establishes Antiochus (who is never named) as *yet another manifestation of "Babylon"* whose arrogance and self-deification was the focal point of Daniel 1-5 and of the vision in Daniel 7. (12)

Chapters 10-12: Daniel's 3rd Vision

These final chapters describe the events in chapter seven through nine in historical terms, absent most of the symbolic imagery and numbers. This is most easily seen and understood in chapter eleven. Verses one through four describe the empires of Persia and Greece culminating in Alexander the Great, and the dispersion and scattering of his kingdom after his death (Mackie, 12). Verses 5-20 describe the reemergence of Egypt as a power player and of Syria, two kingdoms that were in constant conflict over the territory of Israel (Mackie, 12). Verse 21-45 describe the rule of Antiochus (however the prophecy departs from known history v. 40) who, "who defeated Egypt and attacked Jerusalem, defiling it by stopping the sacrificial system and setting up an idol statue and persecuting the faithful Jews in the city (see 11:30-37 and the historical narrative in 2 Maccabees chs. 5-8" (Mackie, 12).

Nobody knows what the numbers mean in this chapter. They are not the point or the focus of the book of Daniel. To focus on them is to miss the beauty and hope of the entire writing. The final chapter of Daniel points forward to a great moment like that at the end of Isaiah (think New Jerusalem, and New Jerusalem people [Isa. 26; Ezek. 37]). The final persecution will sift through and produce two kinds of people: the unfaithful and the faithful among God's people. Daniel shows us that the faithful put their hope in God's future defeat of evil once for all and in the resurrection of the righteous (Mackie, 13).

Key Themes:

The Royal "Seed"

One of the first themes we are introduced to in Daniel has to do with the royal "seed" that is Davidic heirs. The author from the get-go wants us to be thinking about the fate of the "seed" (Gen. 3:15; chpt.12, 15, 17, 2 Sam. 7) in Babylon, and how God is going to be faithful to his covenant promises. This should be making us think back to Isaiah's mention of the "seed" (Isa. 6 and 11) in which the "seed" is revealed to be a son of Jessie, a New David, which elsewhere is a title given to the messianic king that is to come (Hosea 3:4-5; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23). Daniel and his friends embody the faithful remnant, and represent corporate Israel in the narratives of the book of Daniel. We see this image of the one representing or suffering on behalf of others quite pervasively in the prophets (Isa. 40-55; Jer. 11-20; Ezek. 3-7, 24; Daniel's son of man in ch.7).

Providence

Chapters one, three, and six tell of how the faithful remnant trust in Yahweh despite perilous circumstances and are vindicated and exalted. God's providence is a prevalent theme in Daniel and perhaps most vividly seen in the narrative passages in chapters one through six regarding the "seed." God, throughout all of Daniel, is shown to be intimately involved in human affairs and sees to it that history progresses according to his plan no matter what beasts may arise and try to thwart him. Yahweh is mighty to save and always shown to be faithful and just.

Imago Dei Distorters

Mankind is unique in that they alone, out of all the living creatures God formed, are made in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). This gives value, dignity, and worth to man (Matt. 10:29-31), therefore all humans should be treated with respect and honor as image bearers of the living God (Jam. 3:9; Mk. 30:31; Lk. 6:31; Rom. 15:2). Man was given the gift of work dominion, from before the Fall (Gen. 3) for the purpose of glorifying God, increasing our joy, promoting peace, doing righteousness, and for stimulating human flourishing as God designed it to be (Gen. 1:27-28; Eccl. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:58; Acts 20:35; 1Thes. 4:11-12). Man reflects the creative energy of his maker through his work done in service of others to create such an environment.

However, that is not the picture that we receive in Daniel, of the kingdoms of the world. The kingdoms in Daniel reject Yahweh's authority over them and fail to recognize that their authority is derived from him. When they act in rebellion they become beasts (Dan. 4, 7, 8-12). In the Old Testament, the beast imagery is deeply profound and multifaceted. The Psalms, Job, and the Prophets in particular use beast imagery to describe base sinful human nature (their own included), and to describe their enemies (Psa. 49:21, 57:4,68:30, 73:21-22). In the prophets, God's divinely ordained enemies that he uses to judge his people are depicted as beasts as well (Isa. 5:26, 29; Hos. 13:6-8; Dan. 7:4-7). When humans forget they are under God's authority they don't rule beasts, they become them. When one wants to become God, in reality they become beasts, what they weren't created to be. When humans redefine good and evil and make themselves divine, they become animals and the most vulnerable suffer from their brutality, neglect, and injustice. People behave like animals to protect their idols and operate as lone wolves based purely on their own needs, wants, and desires, at the expense of others. Therefore, Yahweh visits in judgement and destroys evil, both now and once for all in the future (prevalent throughout the whole book of Daniel).

Kingdom of God

The hope of the book of Daniel is in the coming kingdom of God that will one day put a bullet in the evils of this world and eradicate it for good establishing a never-ending kingdom. In chapter two the interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream ends with the reader realizing that every evil kingdom comes to an end, and will be humbled before the mighty God, and subjugated to him. A similar conclusion is drawn from Daniel's dream in chapter seven as well. The final chapter of Daniel points forward to a great moment like that at the end of Isaiah (think New Jerusalem, and New Jerusalem people [Isa. 26; Ezek. 37]). The final persecution will sift through and produce two kinds of people: the unfaithful and the faithful among God's people. Daniel shows us that the faithful put their hope in God's future defeat of evil once for all and in the resurrection of the righteous (Mackie, 13).

There are many different aspects and nuances to the kingdom of God. The term is heavily loaded today, but in Daniel it refers primarily to the kingdom that is coming to destroy evil and establish God as its king forever.

Implications for Today

What could these crazy stories, impossible numbers, wild symbols, and fairytale monsters have to do with anything today? Has human nature changed since the days of Daniel? Do humans still behave like beasts? Are God's people still faced with persecution, trials, and temptations that test their faith and trust in Yahweh? Though the kingdom of God was inaugurated at the death and resurrection of Jesus, we too still await the consummation of all things, the new heavens and earth, and the undoing of the curse (Gen. 3). The book of Daniel gives us glasses for which we can wear to see more clearly and interpret the events taking place in the world around us. Jesus did this using the book of Daniel in in Mark 13 and Luke 21, and John in Revelation applied the book of Daniel to Rome.

Daniel is a wakeup call, a slap in the face in which God shows the kind of world we create apart from him and in defiance of his authority and reign. Even though humans have so marred His image and transgressed his commands, there is hope for the repentant and humble. As New Covenant believers we have the fortune of being able to look back across the whole cannon of Scripture and see how it all fits together. Hopefully, after reading what has been discussed in above sections, one can see how Daniel is connected to the events, stories, and people before him. In what follows I will attempt to show the relevance and importance of Daniel's message for Jesus in his ministry and for us today with just a couple of examples of Jesus' use of Daniel.

Jesus' two most common names for himself were servant and son of man, which are found together in Mark. Mark 10:37-45 reads,

> And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. **42** And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The imagery is a metaphor for Jesus' death. It is also pulling on Exodus imagery in which going through the parting of the Red Sea was Israel's baptism. The disciples are thinking about sitting next to Jesus in his glory, meaning in heaven one day, but what is so profound here is that Jesus is saying he is going to be sitting in his glory when he's on the cross, making the ones sitting at his right and left the two thieves (Matt. 27:38) (Mackie, Lecture). This is an exaltation by death, the suffering servant from Isaiah 52-53 and the son of man from Daniel seven. Jesus sees himself as all of these figures, merging the suffering servant with suffering son of man in Daniel seven (Mackie, Lecture). He is the suffering one on behalf of the many. In Daniel seven the son of man is vindicated to share in God's own rule before all the nations because he is faithful to his mission and is in fact God himself.

In Mark 13 Jesus demonstrates how Israel has become one of the beasts. Instead of being a light to the nations, they became like the nations, a beast as well. Mark 14 further exemplifies Jesus' crucifixion as his exaltation in verses 60-65 when Jesus is asked if he is the Christ and responds, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." This is explicit enthronement imagery from Daniel 7:13-14.

In Matthew 26:57-68 Jesus is on trial before Caiaphas the high priest. They ask him if he is the messiah, and Jesus responds, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." What Jesus is saying here is, "The moment you kill me is the moment I become the divine king and you show yourself to be a beast" (Mackie, Lecture). It begs the question, "Who is really on trial here?" Jesus, describing who he is from Daniel and Isaiah shows that his plan to defeat evil, to conquer the beast is to let it kill him.

Jesus' death was substitutionary (Isa. 53:5-6; John 1:29; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 21). He suffered the penalty of sin that humanity should have undergone, and in taking man's place, died on the cross as a sacrifice (Heb. 7; 9; 10:10, 12; John 1:29; 36) for the sins of the world. Thus he fulfilled the demands of God's righteousness and His desire to show mercy, through the redemption and reconciliation of an alienated and fallen humanity unto himself (Isa. 53:4-6; Rom. 3:23-25, 6:6, 8:3; Eph. 2:16; 1 Pet. 2:24).

Study Questions:

1. What is the significance of the author telling us that Daniel and his friend are from the "seed of the kingship"?
2. Chapters one, three, and six all display the same pattern of what theme in the book of Daniel?
3. What do the four metals from chapter two and the four beasts from chapter seven represent?
4. The beast imagery in Daniel describes what about human nature and God's authority?
5. Chapters four and five speak about the pride of two kings showing two contrasting ways the nations can respond to God's rule. Explain their response, and God's response.
6. What is the significance of Daniel's son of man for Jesus in the NT?
7. Do you think human nature is the same today as it was in Daniel's day?
8. Someone share about a time when God was faithful in seeing you through a trial.
9. What is the hope of the book of Daniel? How does this help you cope with the evil you see in the world?
10. Have you ever used the prayer of Daniel in chapter nine or other prayers in Scripture? How has it impacted your prayer life?
11. Where have you seen the hand of God's providence moving in your life lately?

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The Book of Ezra-Nehemiah

Structure

Ezra 1-6	Ezra 7-10	Neh. 1-7	Neh. 8-12a	Neh. 12b-13
Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Jeshua lead the Return from Exile and Rebuilding of the Temple	**Ezra Leads a Return and Restoration of Torah and Temple**	**Nehemiah Leads a Return and Rebuilding of the City Walls**	**Spiritual Renewal**	**Regression and Concluding Commentary**

Main Idea: Ezra-Nehemiah records the fulfillment of God's promise that Israel would return home after spending 70 years in Babylonian captivity, and their rebuilding efforts of a land in utter shambles.

Main Idea Explained

Ezra-Nehemiah, was originally written as one book, telling a unified story with a shared design, structure, and themes. Ezra 1- Nehemiah 7, contains three "Return and Rebuild" sections, each of which share a strikingly similar pattern: God providentially moves a Persian king to let Israelites return to Jerusalem and rebuild, they face opposition once they are there, they overcome the opposition, and then there is an anti-climactic resolution to the story (Mackie, 2). The final six chapters record Israel's spiritual renewal and reform, and her tragic regression on the other side of exile.

Ezra chapters one through six have an intentional, symmetrical design, with exception of chapter 6:13-22 (temple is completed and Passover Celebration). There is an edict given, (1:1-11;6:1-12), a list of returnees demanded (2:1-70;5:3-17), building taking place (3;5:1-2), opposition (4:6-23), and building being halted (4:5-5; and 24) {Mackie, 2). These stories mirror each other in the narrative. King Cyrus's edict (Ezra 1:1-11) is shown to be part of God's providential plan in guiding history according to his redemptive purpose, and his promises. Not only does his edict highlight the main themes in this section "return" and "rebuild", but Ezra 1:1 explicitly links this story to the prophet Jeremiah (25:11-12 and 29:10) who foretold that the exile would last 70 years. All over Jeremiah and Isaiah there are passages speaking of how God uses foreign nations for his purpose, both as instruments of his divine wrath and judgement, and also as tools that can bring about the beginnings of restoration for his people (Jer. 25,51; Isa. 40,41,45). The return of the exiles is a major part of fulfilling his promise to restore his people after exile.

The return of the exiles is also portrayed as a "New Exodus" the, "rebirth of Israel on the other side of exile" (Mackie, 3). Instead of Egypt, this time it will be from Babylon (Isa. 43:14-21; 48:20-21), now ruled by the Persians. The parallels between these exodus stories are fascinating: plunder (Ezra 1:6; see Exod.3:22), people being brought out of the land (Ezra 1:11; see Exod. 33:11), and the climax of the Passover celebration (Ezra 6:19-22; see Exod. 12-13) {Mackie, 3). Soon upon their arrival back in the land, Israel rebuilt the altar, began offering sacrifices again, and reinstituted the

liturgical calendar planting seeds in the familiar soil of their past traditions (Ezra 3). However, the last few verses of chapter 3 tell us that this "New Exodus" isn't all that it may have appeared to be in the beginning (3:12-13). The people are not seeing their efforts to rebuild as God bringing his kingdom (Mackie, 4). In chapter four we are introduced to the opposition group (at this point only known as the "enemies"), but as we read more of the narrative we find out that they become Israel's enemies, because of Zerubbabel's policy of excluding them from helping with the rebuilding efforts (4:1-3). One must ask the question at this point though: How does this jive with Zechariah's promise that the nations would participate in the rebuilding and worship in the temple (Zech. 2:10-13; 8:20-23)? (Mackie, 4).

Chapters seven through ten transport the reader forward some 70 years after the events in the first six chapters. These chapters focus primarily on the character of Ezra, and his leading another wave of exiles back to Jerusalem to "return" and "rebuild". Just as Cyrus commissioned the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 1:1-11, 6:1-5), Artaxerxes commissions Ezra to establish the "law of God" in the land of his forefathers (Ezra 7:1-26). Chapter 7:1-5 records Ezra's family genealogy and packs a powerful theological statement (7 priest before the first temple, and seven priests before the second temple), and tells the reader that Ezra is a descendent of Aaron, Moses' brother (Mackie, 4).

This section also presents Ezra as a "New Moses" figure leading a second "New Exodus" in this narrative. From the time of the departure from Babylon (Ezra 7:9; Exod. 12:1-2), to the Levites carrying the temple paraphernalia (like they did in the wilderness, Ezra 8:15-17; Num.10:13-21), to the support from the royal treasure to fund the expedition (Ezra14-20; Exod. 3:22; 11:2; 12:35), it all echoes back to the original Exodus event (Mackie, 5). The narrative also highlights the phrase, "straight path" (Ezra 8:21) which echoes back to Isaiah 40, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make a straight path in the desert for our God" (Isa 40:3). Ezra is shown to further resemble Moses in his task at hand for he is to be the one who will lead the people back to covenant faithfulness (Ezra 7). Another interesting feature in this section is how much imagery and vocabulary is used from Jeremiah 31, which describes the return of God's people from exile.

Chapters nine and ten describe Ezra's attempts to implement the Torah in a new cultural context particularly as it pertains to intermarriage issues (Mackie, 7). We might not think this is a big deal today, but as Dr. Mackie points out,

> Marriage with non-Israelites as such was not prohibited in the Torah (the patriarchs' marriages were well-known: Abraham to Hagar, Gen 16:3; Joseph to Asenath, Gen 41:45; Moses to Zipporah, Ex 2:21). However, the danger of religious syncretism due to marriage and family alliances was the main danger, and such marriages were forbidden (see Exod. 34:11-16; Deut. 7:1-4; 20:10-18). (6).

Therefore, Ezra sees these intermarriages with "the people of the land" to be unacceptable as their religious practices are said to be "like" that of the ancient Canaanites, and decrees divorce (10:1-16). It's important to realize here that Yahweh never commanded this, he opposes divorce (Mal. 2:13-16). So, we end the second section of Ezra-Nehemiah much like the first, with an anticlimactic and tragic event.

Nehemiah's rebuilding efforts have been arranged in a symmetrical design in the third major section of this book (Neh. 1-7). Chapters one through four highlight again the theme of divine providence, this time in the life of Nehemiah, and how he becomes the leader of the third wave of "return" and "rebuild" that we see in the book. Chapter five introduces the first note of the people's

failure under Nehemiah's leadership. He is shown to be a righteous and godly leader, exuding courage and hope even when circumstances seemed stacked against the purposes of Yahweh. This chapter stands outside of the symmetrical design, perhaps foreshadowing the failure narrative in chapters twelve and thirteen (Mackie, 12).

In chapters eight through twelve (section four of the book) the renewal of the covenant is presented in three parallel scenes (Neh.7:72b-8:12; Neh. 8:13-18; Neh. 9:1-10:39), in which the people are gathered together, the Torah is read aloud then applied, and the people respond (Mackie, 12). Chapter 10 in particular highlights biblical interpretation and the role it plays in the community of God. Nehemiah and Ezra were faced with a new cultural context in which to apply Yahweh's words to their lives in ways that would honor him. Nehemiah 10:30-39 records seven "newish" laws, "None of them correspond precisely to any specific law in the Pentateuch. Rather, each one represents an interpretive summary of multiple, differing laws on the same topic, or the formulation of a new law for a new need, based on the interpretation of an older law." (Mackie, 13).

The later section of chapter twelve to the end of chapter thirteen forms the concluding section of Ezra-Nehemiah. It includes both the climax and anti-climax to the story, following the familiar pattern of the rest of the book thus far. In chapter 12:27-43 Nehemiah dedicates Jerusalem's walls and there's a celebration that echoes the celebrations in Ezra 3:12 and 6:22 (the temple and altar dedication and completion). However, the optimism and joy are short-lived as chapter 12:44-13:31 explains how Ezra and Nehemiah's reforms are all thrown out the window. All the things the people promised to do regard the temple and the Torah in the previous section of the book, they are now violating. This final section forms a commentary on how the people failed to live up to what they promised to do, much like the Israelites did at Sinai (the Golden Calf, Exod. 32). As it turns out, the people who returned from the exile, look much like their ancestors before them. The book ends a total downer, deferring hope to the future, and Jeremiah and Ezekiel's "New heart" promise still a dire yet to be met, need (Jer. 31; Ezek. 34).

The Purpose of the Book

Ezra-Nehemiah was primarily written for two reasons: to show God's faithfulness to his promise to restore his people from exile, and to show what life was like after the return from exile. It had ups and downs, but it was far from being what the prophets had envisioned the kingdom of God to be (Isa. 60-66; Ezek. 40-48). Israel still had a massive heart problem. The promise of a new heart (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36) still awaited a future fulfillment. The final section of the book (chs.12-13) shows this explicitly. This side of exile looks eerily familiar to the previous side.

Key Themes

Divine Providence: "Return and Rebuild"

The narrative pattern of Ezra-Nehemiah plays a major role in displaying this theme. The first three sections record a Persian king who has been moved by Yahweh to send a leader to Jerusalem to "return" and "rebuild" in various ways (Ezra 1:1-11, 6:1-5, 7:1-26; Neh. 1-2). Ezra 1:1 explicitly links this story to the prophet Jeremiah (25:11-12 and 29:10) who foretold that the exile would last 70 years. All over Jeremiah and Isaiah there are passages speaking of how Yahweh uses foreign nations for his purpose, both as instruments of his divine wrath and judgement, but also as tools that can bring about the beginnings of restoration for his people (Jer. 25,51; Isa. 40,41,45; Ezra 1,6, 7, Neh. 1-2). The return

of the exiles is a major part of fulfilling his promise to restore his people after exile and highlights his faithfulness and guiding hand in the events in human history. He does not simply sit back and watch things take place. He is intimately involved in the affairs of his world, ensuring that his redemptive purpose come to pass. This is true of the nation of Israel as a whole, but also of individuals (particularly Ezra and Nehemiah), who through all the events in their lives God is shown to have been working to move them towards their tasks recorded in this book. Ezra-Nehemiah is an incredible display of this theme that is woven into the fabric of the Scriptures from beginning to end.

"New Exodus"

The return of the exiles is also portrayed as a "New Exodus" the, "rebirth of Israel on the other side of exile" (Mackie, 3). Instead of Egypt, this time it will be from Babylon (Isa. 43:14-21; 48:20-21), now ruled by the Persians. The parallels between these exodus stories are fascinating: plunder (Ezra 1:6; see Exod.3:22), people being brought out of the land (Ezra 1:11; see Exod. 33:11), and the climax of the Passover celebration (Ezra 6:19-22; see Exod. 12-13) {Mackie, 3). Soon upon their arrival back in the land, Israel rebuilt the altar, began offering sacrifices again, and reinstituted the liturgical calendar planting seeds in the familiar soil of their past traditions (Ezra 3).

Ezra himself is portrayed as a "New Moses" figure leading a second "New Exodus" in this narrative. From the time of the departure from Babylon (Ezra 7:9; Exod. 12:1-2), to the Levites carrying the temple paraphernalia (like they did in the wilderness, Ezra 8:15-17; Num.10:13-21), to the support from the royal treasure to fund the expedition (Ezra14-20; Exod. 3:22; 11:2; 12:35), it all echoes back to the original Exodus event (Mackie, 5). Ezra, an esteemed Torah scholar knows exactly what he is doing, symbolically with these acts.

The story also highlights the phrase, "straight path" (Ezra 8:21) which echoes back to Isaiah 40, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make a straight path in the desert for our God" (Isa 40:3). Ezra is shown to further resemble Moses in his task at hand for he is to be the one who will lead the people back to covenant faithfulness (Ezra 7). Another interesting feature in this section is how much imagery and vocabulary is used from Jeremiah 31, which describes the return of God's people from exile. As the readers of this portion of Scripture, we are expected to see what a big deal this return from exile is. However, as we know from reading the entire story, it is not all pretty. This becomes yet another "New Exodus", but certainly not the last, and even further from the final "New Exodus".

Not the Ultimate Fulfillment of the Prophetic Hope

In Jeremiah, God explicitly promises restoration after exile (30:3, 18; 31:23; 33:6–9). Perhaps the most astonishing future promise and message of hope is the New Covenant (31:31–34; 32:37–41 see also Ezek. 36-37), where God will give his people a new heart with the Torah written on it, and forgives their sin and iniquity, remembering it no more. This is harkening back to the circumcision of the heart spoken of in chapter four of Jeremiah and in Deuteronomy 30:9, the first mentioning of this concept. What an astonishing promise and message of hope offered to people who sacrifice their children to other gods, neglect the lowly in society, and abuse their relationships with others. What love Yahweh has for sinners like us, and what radical faithfulness to his promises.

All the things the people promised to do regarding the temple and the Torah in Nehemiah 8-12 they fail to do. The final section (Neh. 12-13) forms a commentary on how the people failed to live up

to what they promised to do much like the Israelites did at Sinai (the Golden Calf, Exod. 32). As it turns out, the people who returned from the exile, look much like their ancestors before them. The book ends with a total downer, deferring hope to the future, pitching Jeremiah and Ezekiel's "New heart" promise further into the future (Deut. 30; Jer. 31; Ezek. 36). The exile to Babylon didn't cure Israel of her disease, it only left her wanting once again, waiting for the prophetic hope to be fulfilled.

Implications for Today

If the problem with humanity is that our natural inclination is a hard heart like Pharaoh's in Exodus, then we need a soft heart, a fleshy heart rather than the stone one we possess before regeneration. Israel throughout the Hebrew Bible is shown to be incapable of keeping the covenant, so God must give her people a new heart and a new spirit (Deut. 30; Jer. 31; Ezek. 36). However, this doesn't happen upon return from exile in Ezra-Nehemiah. Imagine the disappointment they must have felt when Jerusalem, even when rebuilt looked hardly like anything the prophets had described that it would. How tragic and sad. The same proclivities to past sins still followed them down the road back home from Babylon. Yahweh's desire is for heart transformation (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:3-4) for there is no other way in which we can walk in his ways. Ezra-Nehemiah starts with hope, but ends with disappointment. The exile to Babylon didn't cure Israel of her disease, it only left her wanting once again, waiting for the prophetic hope to be fulfilled.

As New Covenant believers we should be excited that this prophetic hope has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The New Covenant promises three things: transformation through providing a new heart, final and permanent forgiveness, and the consummation of relationship with the Lord (Ezek. 11:17-21). How does one participate in the New Covenant? By being "in Christ" (Eph. 2:13) and being made wise to salvation through the gospel message (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8,3:23, 6:23, 10:9-10,13; Cor. 5:21). We were enemies of God, but have been reconciled to him through the death and atoning work of the Messiah Jesus (Col. 1:21-23, 2:6-15). It is only through being "in Christ" that we may participate in the New Covenant. John 14:6 Jesus says, "…I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus is the seed of Abraham, the better Moses, the greater David, and the promised Messiah, king, and servant (Isa. 53; Ezek. 34). He drew near to his creation as the God-Man to reveal who God is (Col. 1:15; Jn. 14:8-9), bring glory to the Father (Jn. 17:1-6), buy back humanity (Mk. 10:45, Col. 2:14-15), and he will, as the Messiah and coming king, reign over God's kingdom for all eternity (Rev. 17:14, 19:16, Matt. 28:18; Heb. 9:28). Like those during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, we await the coming of the Messiah too, just with a slightly different view and with the hope already living inside of us.

Study Questions

1. Why should we read Ezra-Nehemiah as one unified story? What is some of the evidence for doing so?
2. What is the purpose(s) of this book? Does its conclusion surprise you?
3. What do the first three sections of the book all have in common in their literary structure?
4. How are these stories of return from exile portrayed as a "New Exodus"?
5. Who are the "people of the land"?
6. What was Ezra's logic behind his decree of divorce? Did God approve of this?
7. What is the theological message presented by the conclusion of this book?

8. How does knowing Israel was unchanged on this side of the exile project the prophetic hope into the future?
9. How would this story help you present the "human condition" or "problem of sin" to someone you were discipling, or a friend?
10. How does Nehemiah pray? What can we learn from his prayer? Do you pray like this?
11. How have you, your friend group, or church been like the characters who excluded, mistreated, or abused their neighbors in the narrative? How can we better live out the "Shema" in our relationships with those we encounter this week, so that we may show them Christ?
12. How has this book challenged and/or encouraged you in your walk with God?

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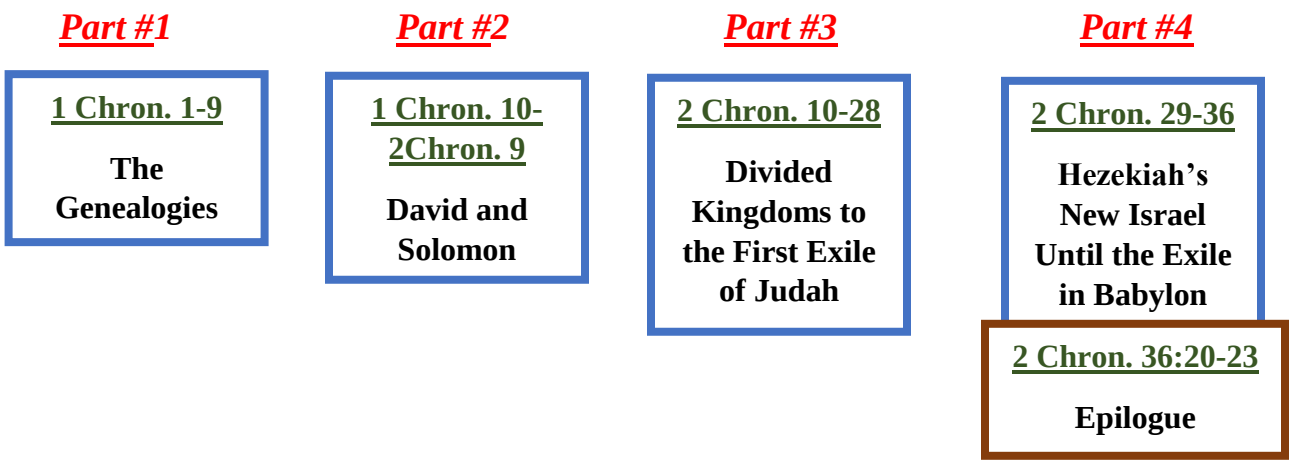
The Book of Chronicles

Structure



Main Idea: Chronicles retells the entire Old Testament story involving God's relationship to his covenant people, with special attention given to the future hope of the messianic kingdom, and the restored temple.

Main Idea Explained

The book of Chronicles, in TaNaK order, is the capstone to the Hebrew Scriptures, is one book, and retells the story of Israel from Genesis through Kings. Though there is much repeated material that the reader of the rest of Scripture has already read, there is some new material and new perspectives on prior stories. As to its design Dr. Mackie notes, "Just as the New Testament's use of the Old Testament shows us how Jesus and the apostles understood the Old Testament, Chronicles itself is one of the earliest biblical interpretations of the TaNaK as a unified, theological whole" (2). The perspective we receive from the author is of someone who is living long after the return of the exiles from Babylon (see 1 Chron. 3:1-24; 9:1). Commentator Bruce Waltke's comments regarding this perspective are enlightening,

> The Chronicler writes Israel's salvation history from a different viewpoint than the compiler of Joshua-Kings, who wrote his history to accuse the exiles and their ancestors of breaking the covenant. The Chronicler adapts that history to give the nation new direction during the postexilic period and aims to answer the burning questions of the Jews returned from Babylon: After the exile, who inherits the covenant promises? After all of Israel's misfortune . . . is God still with them? Will the old institutions of kingship and temple be restored? (754-755).

The first section recorded by the Chronicler is one massive genealogy stretching nine chapters in length. Though they can be tedious to read, genealogies are always significant in Scripture. The ancestral lists take us from Adam all the way to several generations of people living after the Babylonian exile (Ezra 2; Neh.11). What the author is doing is summarizing the storyline of God's people by mentioning key figures. Out of all the people mentioned, the Chronicler gives significantly more air time to two things: the tribe of Judah and King David, and Levi and his tribe {the priesthood} (Mackie, 3). Therefore, here it seems the author is revealing his hand as to the two major themes that

the rest of the book will play out: hope for a future Messianic kingdom, and a restored temple (Mackie,3).

Part two of the book is contained in 1 Chronicles 10 through 2 Chronicles 9, which focus primarily on David and his son Solomon. This section is fascinating in what it does and doesn't say about these characters. If people read closely they will notice that the Chronicler excludes nearly all of the negative stories about David (no persecuted David, no David and Bathsheba, no conflict among his children, no rebellion of Absalom etc.) {Mackie, 3}. Further, 23 chapters in the book of Samuel, dealing with the fall of Saul and rise of David are summed up in just fifteen verses (1 Chron.10:1-11:4) in the book of Chronicles. The author even adds seven new stories to the life of David (1Chron. 15-16, 22-29). These stories all show David to be the primary prepper and planner of the new temple, and he looks a lot like Moses (Exod. 33; Lev.9; Deut.31 and 33). King David also in a sense fulfills the prophecy spoken by Balaam in Numbers 24 becoming the, "prototype of the messianic deliverer who defeats Israel's enemies 1 (Chron 18-20)… David conquers Israel's archetypal enemies Philistia, Moab, Aram, Edom, Ammon, and Amalek as Balaam prophesied about the Israel's eschatological king in Numbers 24" (Mackie, 6). In 1 Chronicles 17 (compare to 2 Sam. 7) we receive God's Covenant with David. Just like we learned from the book of Samuel, David becomes the beneficiary of the promise of the messianic king and is himself a prototype of that future coming king (Mackie, 6).

The center of gravity in the rest of the Hebrew Bible is, "I (Yahweh) saved you. Be faithful to me by keeping the covenant." However, the Chronicler's center of gravity is Yahweh's "seed" promise to Abraham and David. That is what he thinks brings most hope for the future, not the Mosaic Covenant. That is why he turns down the volume on the Exodus language and narrative so prevalent in the rest of the Old Testament. It is not that he doesn't think it matters or that it didn't happen. The author is not contradicting, just choosing to emphasize God's promise to David as the hope for the future. The remaining chapters in this section record Solomon doing exactly what his father David told him to do, and Solomon himself becoming yet another archetype of the future messianic king, the *new Joshua and Aaron* to David's *new Moses* (see 1 Chr. 22:12-13 and 28:20 = Josh 1:5-9; Lev.9) {Mackie, 6}. Leading into the next major section of the book Dr. Mackie comments,

> Now that David and Solomon have fulfilled their desire to provide a resting place for the ark in a permanent temple (the main theme of 1 Chron 22— 2 Chron 6, and the focus on the first half of Ps 132), now the story's focus can turn to God's promise of a future king from the line of David (precisely the focus of the 2nd half of Ps 132). The author reinforces this by combining quotes from Ps 132 and Isa 55:3. Now that the temple is built, the story will shift to explore whether each generation of David's descendants and whether they will be faithful to the covenant and experience the fulfillment of the promises to David. (7)

Part three is recorded in 2 Chronicles 10-28. Interestingly, the Chronicler has excluded the stories about the Northern tribes and focuses solely on the line of David, the tribe of Judah (rationale is offered in 2 Chron. 13:1-21). The Chronicler further lays out a paradigm for evaluating the kings that we encounter in these chapters as, "All of the Davidic kings are evaluated on whether or not they acted like David did (chs.11-36). Good kings 'seek Yahweh' (*darash* Yahweh, repeated 32 times) and bad kings are 'unfaithful to Yahweh' (*ma'al* Yahweh, repeated 33 times)" (Mackie, 9). Obedient kings receive blessing and are successful, while unfaithful kings suffer hardship and failure. They are character studies for future generations (Mackie, Lecture). However, even in failure we see God has made a way for restoration in Solomon's prayer in 2 Chronicles 7:13-15. We see this pattern (sin, consequence, warning, repentance, Yahweh shows mercy, restoration) from the prayer played out

narratively in Reheboam's reign in 2 Chronicles 11-12 (Mackie, 9). Lastly, perhaps more than anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible the closeness in unity of the monarchy and the priesthood is highlighted in the story of Joash (2 Chron. 22:10-24:47), in which we get a foretaste of the hope for the unification of the king-priest role in the kingdom of God (Zech. 6:11-15 and Psalm 110) {Mackie, 9}.

The concluding section of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 29-36) tells of Hezekiah's reign to the exile in Babylon. He is the only king other than David and Solomon who receives this much air time, and for good reason. He looks just like they did! He restores Israel to looking as close as it ever would to how the kingdom was under David and Solomon. The book concludes very strangely, as it projects forward the hope of a future king and temple builder by the decree of Cyrus (2 Chron .36:20-23), which ends in mid-sentence (Mackie, 11). 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 connects the prophet Jeremiah's promise of a seventy-year exile (Jer. 25 and 29), the representation of the exile in Leviticus 25-26 as a "Sabbath rest", and Daniel chapter nine's 70 7's, by quoting Ezra 1:1-3 and cutting it off mid-sentence. The Chronicler, " … cut off the decree mid-sentence, at precisely the place that would describe what Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah accomplished (rebuilding and restoring the temple). The implication is that the real return from exile is yet to take place" (Mackie, 13). The 490 years from Daniel nine is forward pointing from the decree of Cyrus (Ezra. 1:1-3). The Hebrew Bible ends and the prophetic clock starts (a 490-year countdown), which gets us to about the time of Jesus' birth when the clock goes off and the world changes (Mackie, Lecture).

> Ending the Old Testament canon with Chronicles is a reminder to the reader that Israel's return from exile documented in Ezra-Nehemiah is not the full story—it is only a physical return, not a spiritual one. Such an ending places the reader in an eschatological posture, *looking ahead* to the time when the Messiah, the son of David will come to Jerusalem and bring full deliverance to the people. (Kruger, 154).

The Purpose of the Book

Chronicles is the capstone to the TaNaK. Its purpose is to summarize the Biblical narrative so far, and to show us where we are to now place our hope: in the coming messianic kingdom. The genealogies point us to this purpose (1 Chron. 1-9), God's covenant with David even more so (1 Chron. 17), and the epilogue further affirms this (2 Chron. 36:20-21). The Chronicler tells us as much in what he doesn't say as when he does speak if we pay attention. He turns the volume way down on Exodus and Mosaic Covenant dial (major driving themes in the rest of the TaNaK). Further, what takes place in Ezra-Nehemiah was not the fulfillment of the "real", or better, ultimate return from exile, but that day was yet to come. The people of Yahweh eagerly await in anticipation of the coming messiah.

Key Themes

Messiah, David, Solomon, and Hezekiah

The book of Chronicles if not the most, is at least one of the most messianic books in the entire Hebrew Bible. The center of gravity in the rest of the Hebrew Bible is, "I (Yahweh) saved you. Be faithful to me by keeping the covenant." However, the Chronicler's center of gravity is Yahweh's "seed" promise to Abraham and David. That is what he thinks brings most hope for the future, not the Mosaic Covenant. That is why he turns down the volume on the Exodus language and narrative so prevalent in the rest of the Old Testament. It is not that he doesn't think it matters or that it didn't happen. The author is not contradicting, just choosing to emphasize God's promise to David as the hope for the future.

The author is revealing his hand as to the two major themes that the rest of the book will play out: hope for a future Messianic kingdom, and a restored temple in the genealogies in chapters 1-9 by specifically highlighting the line of David and Levi. 1 Chronicles 10 through 2 Chronicles 9, focus primarily on David and his son Solomon. The Chronicler excludes nearly all of the negative stories about David (no persecuted David, no David and Bathsheba, no conflict among his children, no rebellion of Absalom etc.) {Mackie, 3}. Further, 23 chapters in the book of Samuel, dealing with the fall of Saul and rise of David are summed up in just fifteen verses (1 Chron.10:1-11:4) in the book of Chronicles. The author even adds seven new stories to the life of David (1Chron. 15-16, 22-29). These stories all show David to be the primary prepper and planner of the new temple, and he looks a lot like Moses (Exod. 33; Lev.9; Deut.31 and 33). King David also in a sense fulfills the prophecy spoken by Balaam in Numbers 24 becoming the, "prototype of the messianic deliverer who defeats Israel's enemies 1 (Chron 18-20)… David conquers Israel's archetypal enemies Philistia, Moab, Aram, Edom, Ammon, and Amalek as Balaam Prophesied about the Israel's eschatological king in Numbers 24" (Mackie, 6). In 1 Chronicles 17 (compare to 2 Sam. 7) we receive God's Covenant with David. Just like we learned from the book of Samuel, David becomes the beneficiary of the promise of the messianic king and is himself a prototype of that future coming king (Mackie, 6). We see the same thing to a large extent happening with Solomon and Hezekiah (2 Chon. 1-7; 2 Chron. 29-36) They are historical figures of the past for sure, but they also stand outside of time as types of the future messianic king that is to come that will be the "better than" David, Solomon, and Hezekiah.

Temple

The hope for the restoration of the temple is a theme that is introduced very early in the book of Chronicles (1 Chron. 1-9, the genealogies). David and Solomon's desire to provide a permanent place for the ark, a temple, is the main theme of 1 Chronicles 22— 2 Chron 6. Solomon inherits the responsibility of building the temple in 2 Chronicles 1-7. 2 Chronicles 3 tells us that Solomon builds the temple on the site David had chosen (1 Chron. 21:16), which is linked to precisely the location where Abraham was going to offer Isaac, Mt. Moriah (Gen 22:2, 14). Mt. Moriah appears only in Genesis 22:2, 14 and 2 Chronicles 3:1 (Mackie, 6). In chapter six of 2 Chronicles Solomon dedicates the Temple, and now the story's focus turns to God's promise of a future king from the line of David.

The following chapters tell of two kinds of kings: faithful and good or disobedient and wicked. Each king is tested by the Chronicler by way of how well they measure up to David and Solomon. Every man falls into one of these two categories. Eventually these stories land the reader in exile in Babylon with no temple. The epilogue quotes Ezra 1:1-3 (the decree of Cyrus) when the Jews began to return to rebuild Jerusalem and eventually the temple itself, but the book concludes very strangely. Instead of fulfillment of a new temple and the return of God's presence to that temple, it projects forward the hope of a future king and temple builder by the decree of Cyrus (2 Chron 36:20-23), which ends in mid-sentence (Mackie, 11). The implication is that the real return from exile is yet to take place even after Jeremiah's 70 years (Jer. 25 and 29) {Mackie, 13}. The 490 years from Daniel nine ("70, 7's") is therefore forward pointing from the decree of Cyrus (Ezra. 1:1-3). The Hebrew Bible ends and the prophetic clock starts (a 490-year countdown), which gets us to about the time of Jesus' birth when the clock goes off and the world changes (Mackie, Lecture).

Repentance, humility, and their Counterparts

It is worth noting that the book is infused with positive examples of people who are faithful to Yahweh, and negative examples of people who turn away from him. The following chapters after the dedication of the temple (2 Chron. 6) tell of two kinds of kings: faithful and good or disobedient and wicked. Each king is tested by the Chronicler by way of how well they measure up to David and Solomon. Every man falls into one of these two categories. Eventually these stories land the reader in exile in Babylon. After exile and return (which is the Chroniclers own time), the author is trying to tell Israel that she needs to humble herself and seek Yahweh with a heart of repentance in order to experience the renewal of the covenant and its blessings (Mackie, 14). Humility leads to exaltation and pride leads to destruction.

The Sprit of God

This theme may seem surprising here, but its thread runs nearly through the entire story. Dr. Mackie comments, "The Chronicler shows a heightened interest in the work of the Spirit to speak through prophets and poets" (14). This can be particularly seen whenever a prophet speaks (most prevalent in the second half of Chronicles), and interestingly includes the Levitical choirs (1 Chron. 25:1-5).

Implications for Today

Sadly, I think the book of Chronicles is usually overlooked, or viewed as dare we say it, possibly unnecessary. This is a huge mistake though, and not just because it's holy Scripture, though that would be enough. The Chronicler in a very real sense pens the first commentary on the Old Testament as a whole unified story. The book represents God's point of view on Israel's past, so we better pay attention! Mostly importantly the Chronicler is telling us that exile and the disappointment found upon return are not the end of the story, but rather he offers the same hope that the latter prophets did, that is hope in a "New David". The title "David" is used for the messianic king in Isaiah 11, Hosea 3:4, and Jeremiah 30:9. Pervasive throughout the prophets (major and minor, which the Chronicler no doubt had in front of him as he composed this scroll) is the concept of a divine messianic shepherd king (Dan. 7; Hos. 1, 3; Amos 9; Obadiah; Mic. 5; Hag. 2; Zech. 3-4,12-13; Isa. 11; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23). Each prophet picks up similar language, but also at times adds to the portrait new aspects of the messiah. Isaiah gives us the "suffering servant" portrait, Jeremiah adds the emotional piece to that (obedience despite not wanting to endure the pain), Ezekiel really plays into the shepherd aspect, and Zechariah adds the priestly language to the messiah job description. They are all powerful images of what Israel's leaders should be at their best. The prophets know it is going to take a figure who will represent them, that embodies all of these things and does on behalf of Israel what she cannot do for herself (Isa. 7-9, 11; 49:8-13). The future hope is in this "New David". The hope of the world rests on his shoulders.

It is vitally important to remember when reading this book that the Chronicler wasn't simply interested in giving us a cool biblical theology of Israel's past. As Dr. Mackie notes, "The book's message has a pastoral purpose: to bring comfort and hope to generations of God's people who were tempted towards despair, or apathy. During a time when many wondered if God was ever going to fulfill his promises, the Chronicler retold the story of their collective past in order to rekindle hope for the future" (Lecture). As we read this book our own faith and hope should be rekindled, we should be encouraged, and moved to anticipation of the coming again of our messiah.

Study Questions

1. Chronicles was written some 200 years after the return from exile to Babylon. How does that play into how we interpret this book?
2. Why should we read this book as one unified story rather than two separate books?
3. What is the significance of the nine-chapter genealogy? What important themes that run through the entire book do we glean from the genealogy?
4. What are some of the differences you noticed between God's covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17?
5. Why do you think the Chronicler left out all the negative stories about King David?
6. Explain how the Chronicler uses historical David as an Architype of the future messianic king.
7. How does this book offer us hope today?
8. What was challenging for you in reading this book? What did you see perhaps for the first time in working your way through the book?
9. Do you have a reverence for Yahweh like David and Solomon did? What does this type of reverence look like today in the church?
10. How could you use examples from this book to help you share how God views a repentant and humble heart?
11. How does this book point us to Jesus?

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