

## Old Testament Overview (Part 2)

### I. Act 3, Scene 3: Israel's Land (Joshua, Judges, Ruth)

- Joshua, Moses' successor, led the people of Israel out of the wilderness into the land of Canaan, the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- As God's judgment upon violent peoples of Canaan, Israel drove the Canaanites out of the land and fought battles with those who organized to fight against them. However, Israel allowed some Canaanites to remain in the land, and Israel began to adopt their false gods, values, and way of life.
- Downward spiral (Judges): Idolatry
  - God allows oppression by enemies
  - Israel cries out in distress and repentance
  - God sends a **judge** to defeat enemies and rule Israel
  - rest and relative faithfulness to the covenant for a time
  - a new generation falls into idolatry again
- Israel descends into spiritual and moral chaos becoming like the peoples of Canaan. "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:23).
- God's final judgment in this period (1 Samuel 1-5) was the loss of the Tabernacle: the enemy Philistines captured the ark of the covenant, which symbolized that God's special presence (glory) had departed (1 Sam. 4:22).

### II. Act 3, Scene 4: Israel's Kingdom Established, Divided, & Ended (Exiled)

- Israel asked the prophet Samuel (the last of the judges) for a king "like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5). While God had planned to provide kings for Israel (Gen. 17:6; Deut. 17:14-20), the people wanted the wrong kind of king for the wrong reasons.
- Israel became a kingdom united under a single king for three generations:

(1) **Saul** was a tall, skilled warrior whom God gave to Israel to fulfill their request for a king. He started well but had no enduring faith in God and refused to obey God. He became insanely jealous of David, his best general and eventual successor, and tried for years to kill him.

(2) **David** was a "man after God's own heart" (1 Kgs. 9:4, 11:4)

- Military leader and warrior (e.g., fighting Goliath: 1 Sam. 17)
- Song-writer & musician who wrote over half of the book of Psalms
- A humble leader who began as a shepherd, became the leader of Saul's army and spent years in hiding running from Saul while refusing to seize the throne by force.
- God made a **covenant** with David to govern the life of Israel in a new era of now that the nation had become a kingdom (2 Sam. 7):
  - Presence & worship: David laid plans for the Temple in Jerusalem, a permanent sanctuary for worship and added music to the corporate worship of Israel with professional singers and instrumentalists.
  - People & community: David reestablished the Law of Moses as law of the land.
  - Place & work/culture: David established Jerusalem as the capital city with new and more centralized administration and army that brings new unity to the nation.
- Covenant promise: David's throne/kingdom will be eternal (2 Sam. 7).

(3) **Solomon** extended Israel's kingdom to its greatest size and glory.

- God gave Solomon extraordinary wisdom (1 Kgs. 3:5-28; 4:29-34). He became the author of much of the book of Proverbs & other wisdom literature.
- Solomon coordinated the building of the Temple (1 Kgs. 5-8).
- Solomon became a blessing to the nations: Hiram, king of Tyre, helped build the Temple (1 Kgs. 5), and the Queen of Sheba from Arabia (1 Kgs. 10) and other peoples (1 Kgs. 4:34) visited him to learn from his wisdom. This partially fulfilled God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3).
- Solomon violated the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7) and disobeyed every single Mosaic law for kings (Deut. 17) in fulfillment of Samuel's warnings (1 Sam. 8). He acquired excessive wealth and military power, many wives, and ultimately worshiped other gods (1 Kgs. 9-11).

• As God's judgment upon Solomon's fall, the united kingdom of Israel divided into two separate kingdoms: (1) 10 tribes in the north became the kingdom of Israel and (2) 2 tribes in the south (Judah and Benjamin) became the kingdom of Judah.

• **Prophets**

- Prophets were men and women who received special revelation from God for the people of God. God called them to be his authoritative representatives to speak God's word to Israel & Judah about both the present and the future.
- The role and prominence of prophets expanded during the period of Israel's kingdom because some prophets served an official role as counselors/advisors to Israel's kings. Although many false prophets simply told kings what they wanted to hear, true prophets were teachers for the people of God (in addition to, and sometimes instead of, the priests) and served as a voice of protest against the kings' idolatry and abuses of power.
- Prophets had a two-fold message:
  - (1) Summons to repentance and return to God and warnings of the threat of imminent judgment. Prophets were like covenant lawyers, prosecuting Israel's violations of the law of God's covenant.
  - (2) Promise of comfort and hope centered in a repentant, renewed people of Israel who return from exile and eventually encompass all peoples and lands under a **new covenant** and a new Savior-King and kingdom (e.g., Isa. 40-66; Jer. 31; Ezek. 36-37).

• The decline and judgment of the **northern** kingdom of **Israel**

- Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, set the whole kingdom on the wrong spiritual path. He established false worship with forbidden images (golden calves, like Exod. 32), a false priesthood, a false temple, and false prophets.
- King Ahab married a foreign wife, Queen Jezebel from Phoenicia, who brought the worship of the false Canaanite god Baal into Israel and killed the true prophets of Yahweh.
- All 19 kings in the northern kingdom were evil. None was faithful.
- The empire of Assyria destroyed the kingdom of Israel and took its people into exile in 722 BC for the reasons summarized in 1 Kgs. 17: idolatry leading to immorality (child sacrifice, breaking all the commandments; v. 16).

• The decline and judgment of the **southern** kingdom of **Judah**

- Judah was relatively more faithful to God than Israel. They had the system of worship authorized by God in the Law of Moses (the true priesthood, sacrifices, Temple) and some

good kings, especially Hezekiah & Josiah, who listened to true prophets, reformed worship by getting rid of idolatry, and supported the teaching of Scripture.

- Judah became steadily more corrupt and engaged in the same idolatry as Israel.
- The empire of Babylon destroyed the kingdom of Judah (including the city of Jerusalem and its Temple) and took most of its people into exile in multiple waves ending in 586 BC. Judah was exiled for the same reasons as the northern kingdom of Israel even while maintaining worship of Yahweh as an empty ritual.

### III. Act 3, Scene 5: Israel's Kingdom Restored & Expanded

- During the six centuries prior to Jesus, God **partially fulfilled the new covenant** promised by the prophets.
  - Presence of God & worship: A group of Jewish people returned to Judah from exile in 538 BC after the empire of Persia under **Cyrus** the Great conquered the Babylonians in 539 BC and gave financial support to the returning exiles to begin rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem (as predicted four centuries before by the prophet Isaiah; see Isa. 44:28-45:7). But many Jews were now spread across the whole Middle East and established synagogues for worship where they lived, which also attracted Gentile worshippers of Israel's God.
  - People & community: In 458 BC, the priest **Ezra** returned to Judah to lead a renewal of commitment to God's covenant and strengthen the ministry of priests and Levites in teaching the word of God. God also preserved Jews living in other parts of the empire, and their faithfulness blessed the nations (e.g., Daniel, Esther).
  - Place & land: In 445 BC, **Nehemiah** returned to Judah as governor to lead the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and to assist Ezra in restoring faithfulness to God's covenant.
- Patterns of sin emerged in these centuries that were different than the pre-exile period.
  - Jews did forsake the idolatry of foreign gods and never returned to the widespread worship of false gods that occurred prior to the exile.
  - Religious formalism/ritualism became a more common failing. Some Jews practiced the worship rituals and symbolic behaviors commanded in the Law of Moses (e.g., kosher diet) but without the moral integrity and a genuine love for God and others that was at the heart of the Torah and the covenant.
  - Immorality and hypocrisy thus existed alongside concern for outward religion and trust in mere possession of the Law (e.g., Neh. 13 & Malachi).
  - Religious nationalism and separatism grew among more religiously committed Jews. They were distressed by Greek and Roman rulers who attempted to impose their religion on the Jews and were horrified by the numbers of Jews who compromised their faith in order to get along with their pagan rulers (which even included many in the priesthood). These Jews lost the vision of their role as a kingdom of priests to the nations and their purpose to bring God's blessing to the world (Gen. 12:3); instead, these Jews grew proud in being God's elect and developed a hatred of Gentiles and desire only for their judgment.
  - In order to maximize their difference and separation from Gentiles, religiously observant Jews developed rabbinic traditions of teaching about applying the Law of Moses that added to the requirements for Jewish practice in strict ways that went beyond what God had commanded.