

# Old School

*An Introduction to the Old Testament*

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## Introduction

The Old Testament. Yes, that big part of the Bible full of blood and sacrifices, kings and heroes, laws and regulations, worship and lament, clarity and mystery. Though it makes up close to two thirds of our Bible, the Old Testament remains a bit unknown or disconnected from the lives of many contemporary believers. I'm not so sure if it's the strange laws of Leviticus regarding bodily emissions or seeing God wiping people out that tends to make people shy away. Yet one thing is certain, God in His wisdom has given us the Bible as a unified whole, made up of 66 books.<sup>1</sup> The story line is consistent from beginning until end; God, The Creator, at work to redeem the world through the person and work of Jesus Christ. J.I. Packer says it well:

*There is but one leading character (God the Creator), one historical perspective (world redemption), one focal figure (Jesus of Nazareth, who is both Son of God and Savior), and one solid body of harmonious teaching about God and godliness. Truly the inner unity of the Bible is miraculous; a sign and a wonder, challenging the unbelief of our skeptical age.<sup>2</sup>*

As Jesus is the local hero of the Bible, He is also the subject and view of the Old Testament. Though many people may not think “Jesus” when they think Old Testament,

its pages indeed anticipate, prepare and foreshadow His coming. Mark Dever, in speaking of the unity of the Bible's storyline and focus upon Jesus explains it this way:

*The context for understanding the person and work of Christ is the Old Testament. God's work of creation, humanity's rebellion against Him, sin's consequence in death, God's election of a particular people, His revelation of sin through the law, the history of His people, His work among other peoples—I could go on and on—all these form the setting for Christ's coming. Christ came in history at a particular point in the story line.<sup>3</sup>*

The Old Testament places our gaze and expectation on the coming one who would fully deliver a world which is under the curse of sin and death. Getting a good overview of the purpose of the Old Testament and its unity can make it much more approachable for modern readers. So I do pray this booklet will be of help to motivate study of the Old Testament Scriptures. We will first look at some of the literary divisions of the Old Testament and then follow this with a look at the importance of the work and its theology.

## **Divisions and Literature of the Old Testament**

The Old Testament is the first section of the Bible yet within this division are many different books from various literary genres. We find narrative, poetry, wisdom literature,

laws, songs, prophecies and apocalyptic<sup>4</sup> literature. Various schemas exist for organizing the Old Testament books from Jewish, Protestant and Catholic perspectives. It should be said at the outset that the Hebrew Old Testament and the Protestant Old Testament contain the same 39 books, while the Catholic compilation has these books and some additions known as the apocrypha.<sup>5</sup> We will use:



***The Law – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy***

The first five books of the Bible are known as the Law, or Torah. They are also sometimes referred to as the Pentateuch which is used to reference the five books of Moses. These books include several literary types but are mainly comprised of narrative and the giving of laws or commandments. The Book of Genesis, as its name portends, is the book of beginnings. It contains a summary account of God's creation of the universe, the earth, plants, animals and human beings. It explains the rebellion and sin of our first parents and God's subsequent curse upon the created order. It also foreshadows and begins the unfolding of God's plan for the redemption of all things. More will be said on this later, but in Genesis God's forming of Israel by making a covenant with a people is central throughout the book.

The Book of Exodus describes the mighty work of God in history to redeem Israel from a cruel bondage in Egypt and foreshadows the redemption which would one day be brought by Jesus Christ. Exodus also details the giving of the law of God and the design of the tabernacle (tent) and how God would be worshiped in this place. Leviticus gives further detailed laws for the worship of God by the priesthood and sacrifices and also includes holiness codes by which Israel would be set apart from the nations. Leviticus reveals that God is known as holy and Israel's very communal life would reflect this truth. Numbers and Deuteronomy include the account of Israel's disobedience and failure to enter into a land which God had promised them and how God teaches them in a period of wandering in a barren wilderness. Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses and the transition of leadership to a man named Joshua. Whereas the first generation of Israelites which came from Egypt grumbled and disobeyed and hence did not enter the land, Joshua would lead the next generation into the land where the nation of Israel would be established.

***Historical Books – Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra/Nehemiah, Esther***

*Joshua, Judges, Ruth*

The Book of Joshua begins with the multi-stage invasion of the land of Canaan.

Joshua is exhorted to be a military leader and a humble leader for the people of God. His success was hinged to his adherence to the Law of Moses. He is exhorted to be strong and courageous, that God would be with him and prosper his way as long as he followed the will and ways of God. The Book of Judges records a dark time in the land of Israel after the conquest under Joshua. The time was a dark time where everyone seemed to do whatever they wanted and Israel was having constant drama with the surrounding nations. During this time God raised up judges—military, diplomatic, and spiritual leaders for the nation to lead the people of God in these dark days. Some well known judges from this age include Samson, Barak, Deborah, Gideon and Jephthah. The cycle that unfolds in Judges is a disobedient nation being judged by a foreign power, then crying out to God for help, the raising up of a judge and deliverance brought by God. During the time of the judges the small narrative of the Book of Ruth takes place. The narrative records the faithfulness of two women to seek refuge in the righteousness and provision of God. It is a story of redemption and a small look into how God providentially preserves the bloodline which one day would bring forth Jesus The Messiah to the earth.

#### *Samuels, Kings, Chronicles*

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel record the leadership of the prophet Samuel and the

transition to the time of kings. Saul becomes the first king of Israel at the request of the people. Due to his disobedience Saul is rejected by God and a boy named David is chosen to lead the people of God. David is the archetypal king in the Old Testament with whom God makes a covenant (see below discussion of covenants). He is very human, very flawed, but called a man after God's own heart. He is not a perfect king, yet he repents of his many grievous sins. Solomon succeeds David as king and brings Israel to a height of power and influence and oversees the building of the first temple for the worship of God in Jerusalem. After Solomon's passing, the kingdom undergoes a religious and political split with the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah separating from one another. The Books of Kings and the Chronicles cover much of the same history of Israel under a divided monarchy from different perspectives. Kings focuses on the folly and disobedience of the north and Chronicles focuses more positively upon Judah and God's faithfulness to His people. During the end of this era the northern kingdom falls to the Assyrians and the southern kingdom falls and is exiled to Babylon.

### *Ezra, Nehemiah*

After the exile the people are given passage to return to their land. This happens in several waves. The first led by Zerubbabel who begins work on rebuilding



the temple and the final stages under the dual leadership of Ezra the scribe and Nehemiah. Nehemiah was made governor of the land and Ezra served as her spiritual guide. Under their leadership, the walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt and a great spiritual revival breaks out.

### *Esther*

Esther records events which took place during the exile in the capital of Persia. It chronicles the events of the life of the Jewish people living under persecution and the deliverance brought through the courage and faithfulness of a young girl named Esther. The Jewish feast of Purim<sup>6</sup> celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from a Persian plot by the bold acts of Esther, who providentially had become the wife of the Persian king.

### ***The Psalms***

The Psalms can be seen as the worship book of the Bible. There are 150 Psalms of various lengths. Some are very short; others very long. Psalm 119 for instance has 176 verses! The Psalms record humanity's worship and struggle with God and contain the gamut of human emotions. There are songs of praise and joyful exaltation as well as songs of ache, sorrow and lament. In the Psalms the heart of man is laid open before God with beauty, poetry and worship. Communities have and will

continue to use the Psalms as a source of devotion and corporate worship.

### ***Wisdom Literature – Job, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes***

God is all wise and several books of the Old Testament are given to us for wisdom and prudent living under His leadership. The Book of Job teaches us how to walk with God in the midst of suffering. Proverbs offers wise counsel for the young and old on all matters of life and godliness. Song of Solomon is a love story which displays the beauty of marital love and sexuality while metaphorically teaching us of Christ's love for the church. Ecclesiastes, one of my favorite books in Scripture, is a philosophical look at what life would amount to if God were not real. These books wrestle with deep issues of the heart and ultimately lead us to the God who walks with us in pain, teaches us through life and gives meaning and purpose to a life which can seem pretty crazy at times.

### ***Major Prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel***

In general, a prophet in the Old Testament was a person called upon to speak to the people on behalf of God. They were called to be His direct messengers to the people. Now before you start thinking “Wow, what a great job!” remember that many times the message they were to carry was something like this: “You guys all suck, and you are going to be destroyed if you don't repent. SO REPENT!” So these

guys were not always the most popular kids on American Idol. No, many times they were despised by their own people simply because they told them the truth. They also dressed weird and at times did and said all kinds of crazy things. The Major Prophets are called such due to their times of service and the length of their works. Here we will only briefly touch these important Old Testament works.

*Isaiah* was a prophet called to speak to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel during their decline and the rise of the ancient Assyrian empire. He spoke of God's coming judgment on a wayward people who were disobedient to God and practicing injustice. Additionally, this book teaches us of a coming servant of the Lord who would save His people. He would be a man of sorrows, be pierced for our sins and would be the deliverer of the people. Isaiah's words contain some of the most important prophecies of the coming Messiah or Christ. The virgin birth and the incarnation (Isaiah 7:14), the nature of Messiah (Isaiah 9:1-7) and His death for our transgressions (Chapter 53) are all predicted in this book. Along with the Psalms it is one of the more preached books of the Old Testament. God also had him walk around barefoot and naked for a few years in order to make a point (Isaiah 20:1-4). I imagine that was as weird then as it would be today.

*Jeremiah* is often called the weeping prophet as he consistently warned the

southern kingdom of Judah to turn back to God before His judgment came. Even though he did all sorts of wacky things to get their attention, the people refused to listen and were overrun by the Babylonian empire. Jeremiah also wrote the Book of *Lamentations* which is a group of poems which recounts deep sorrow over the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Even though his role was to speak judgment, he also reminded people of the hope the God held out to people when they turn back to Him. He spoke of a coming new covenant age where all things would be made right and the Kingdom of God fully realized. In the Book of Lamentations chapter 3 we receive a great reminder which my family sings on most mornings before heading out:



*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.”*

*Ezekiel* was both a prophet and priest who spoke to Judah both before and after

the fall of Jerusalem. He gave his prophecy to the people during the exile as well as those remaining in the land. Perhaps some of the most striking imagery from this book recounts how God takes hearts of stone and makes them hearts of flesh thereby symbolizing how God brings spiritual life to all who believe in Him. The book also has some spooky-weird imagery of flying creatures and worshipping heavenly beings. It was not that he was on meth or anything, yet he was describing the glory of God through fantastic visions he received.

*Daniel* served during the time of the Jewish exile from the land with two different foreign powers, the Babylonians and the Persians. This book includes many important passages and memorable stories. In fact, what Jewish or Christian kid does not know about Daniel and the lion's den? Daniel was one of the young men taken from Judah to Babylon as a captive. He was highly intelligent and was trained in all the Babylonian arts and sciences. Interesting enough, he remained faithful to God and the traditions of his people even in the midst of all the power and prestige of pagan Babylon. He is a great example of living faithfully under unbelieving ideologies showing excellence, courage and conviction while being wise and aware of his situation. His book also has some important prophetic literature that all that specialize in the end of the world tend to confidently argue about.

## ***Minor Prophets***

The Minor Prophets is the representative name for 12 books of the Old Testament. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are called “minor” prophets simply for the brevity of each of the writings. In fact, all the Minor Prophets appear together as just one book in the Hebrew Bible which is simply entitled *The Twelve*. There are many themes found in the Minor Prophets but there are some commonalities throughout these books. James Montgomery Boice observed the sovereignty of God, the holiness of God, and the love of God to call people to repentance as common themes in the Minor Prophets.<sup>7</sup> O. Palmer Robertson makes note of the justice and judgment of God<sup>8</sup> as well as the faithful salvation of God<sup>9</sup> in these books. I find them both helpful in unifying the themes of these prophecies which were given in dire times for the people of God. More than anything the people needed to know that the coming judgment was from God.<sup>10</sup> Yet God had not forsaken His promises to them as His people if they would repent and return to Him, and as a consequence, a faithful remnant of Israel would be preserved and saved in the end.

This is but a quick fly over of the contents of the Old Testament books. But let us

now see the immense relevance and importance the Old Testament holds for believers in every age.

## **The Importance of the Old Testament**

As we look at some of the huge importance held by the Old Testament, I first want to make one thing very clear. There is one God who created the world and this God does not change. He is who He is and has told us so: *I am who I am* and *I am the Lord, I do not change* (Exodus 3:14; Malachi 3:6). One of the unfortunate misunderstandings about the Old Testament is that it reveals a different God than that of the New. Or that God has grown up or evolved over the course of the Bible. I want to emphatically state that the God of the Old and New Testaments is one and the same. It is not like God was having a bad hair day, was going through puberty or forgot His Nicorette gum during the days of the Old Testament. The Old Testament does not reveal a 13-year-old God throwing temper tantrums at divinity junior high. Likewise the God of the New Testament is not a fluffy, nice bunny rabbit who was never offended by the sins of people. No, God is loving and merciful in the Old and wrathful and just in the New, just as He is wrathful and just in the Old and loving and merciful in the New. This is important and should not be missed. The God who created all things, called Israel out as a nation, brought forth the Messiah through this nation and lineage is the same God who will bring about the

Kingdom of Heaven at the end of the age.

With that said, I want us to focus on three major areas of importance of the Old Testament. First, it gives us a proper historical context to understand the work of redemption. Second, it rounds out and gives us a complete vision of the person of God. And third, it actually gives us a fully developed picture of Jesus which is not seen if He is only observed through the New Testament. We'll handle each of these now in turn.

## **Redemptive Historical Context**

For Christians, the Old Testament provides a rich understanding of the historical context for our faith. It is a bit proverbial, but it is true that if we don't know where we have come from, we will not know where we are going. Anyone in the real estate business will tell you that there are three things which matter: location, location, location! Likewise when we come to the Bible there are three things which are equally important: context, context, context! In other words, *where* something is found in the Bible is very important to understanding its meaning. There are many "contexts" that are discussed when coming to the Scriptures. Many will think first of *literary context* which is looking at where certain sentences are found in relationship to surrounding sentences, paragraphs, and divisions of a book. Although this is extremely important, right now I want us to look at a different context, namely the *redemptive historical* context of a portion of Scripture.





To illustrate what we mean by *redemptive historical* context let me give you a picture. For a moment, imagine the plans of God for the world as a tightly rolled scroll. It is written from beginning to end with all its contents established but it has not yet been read by those interested in its contents. Now for a second, think with me about the time before<sup>11</sup> God created the world. God knew His plans from beginning to end perfectly in His mind. Yet His plans were still “rolled up” as it were, not yet revealed. In many ways His plans are like the scroll, not yet read by anyone on the earth. Yet slowly, over the course of time, God began to unfold His plans, in wisdom unrolling redemptive history bit by bit. God’s plans to redeem a people for Himself were set in motion before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:1-13) but continue to unfold up to the present day. It is important as we come to any section of biblical literature, for example an Old Testament prophecy like Habakkuk, that we ask when the people and events took place within the overall plan of redemption. This helps us understand what God is doing in the big picture scheme of things when we come to a certain book in the Bible. We’ll give a brief overview of the Old Testament narrative below so we can find Habakkuk in its redemptive historical context, but for now I simply want us to see the importance of reading both the Old and New Testaments. By reading the Old Testament we can understand the big picture of history and understand things in their proper context. Doing so will help us not only interpret Scripture better, but it will also help us understand our own place in

the larger story. Indeed we are all part of His story that still unfolds today. Knowing the Old Testament teaches us our own history and it also shows us what to anticipate as the scroll continues to unfold until the end of time.

## **A Complete Vision of God**

The New Testament letter known as the Book of Hebrews begins in dramatic fashion:

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.*

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke. That to me is interesting! God spoke to whom? How did He speak? What did He say!?!? The writer to the Hebrews tells us that He spoke to *our fathers* by the prophets. Did you know that we are able to see who these fathers were and what these prophets said to them? In the stories of women and men gone before us and their interaction with God we actually see a great story unfolding. The characters are fascinating, the circumstances profound, and the main actor revealed fully to us for our love and worship. The main actor of the Old Testament is God Himself and by the Old Testament we know the Lord more fully in all the diverse wonders of His character. We see His mercy upon His enslaved

people in the Book of Exodus. In the same book we see His justice poured out upon the Egyptian oppressor. In the Psalms we see His beauty and holiness, in the Proverbs we find wisdom personified and displayed through the words of God. In the long story of Israel, the people of God, we see God's faithfulness, His discipline of sin, and the redemption of His own. In the prophets we see God's fierce wrath against spiritual idolatry and His weeping heart for those that turn from Him to lesser things and ruin their lives. If you were to list the many biblical attributes of God (love, justice, holiness, unchangeableness, righteousness, truth, goodness, sovereignty, etc.) we would be amazed at how much is revealed about God to us through the Old Testament.

As we read, study, and contemplate the drama of the Old Testament we come to know God more in our own lives and learn how to walk in a way that is pleasing to Him. The entirety of Scripture reveals to us both who God is and what He desires for the world. Neglect of the Old Testament will warp our vision of God and allows us to substitute the truth about God for our own ideas about who God "should be" in our own minds. In doing so we replace the living God with the idols of our imagination; the Old Testament revelation of God's character keeps us from such sin. Finally, we see the importance of the Old Testament in revealing to us Jesus Christ. What?! Jesus revealed in the Old Testament? Oh yes, HD Jesus at that. Let me explain.

## HD Jesus

Without the gracious gift of God which is the Old Testament, we would not see the extent of the beauty, majesty and glory of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our vision of Him in the New Testament would be very accurate, but it would be small and the horizon incomplete. Let me give an example. My wife and I used to have a 13" Orion<sup>12</sup> cathode ray tube television that we would watch in our bedroom. For those of you have not seen one of these sorts of ancient devices, it has a small screen and it is fat panel, not flat panel. If I were to watch a movie on this TV I would see it, I would get it and could honestly say I watched the movie. Now, think for a second if I got this same film on Blu-ray and watched it on a 60", 1080p HDTV along with theatre surround sound. Same movie? Absolutely! Same vision and experience of the film? Well, those of you with the home theatre system know the answer to that. The same thing could be said of *seeing Jesus* in the Bible. If you only had the New Testament you might be asked who Jesus is and reply in a 13" TV fashion: Jesus is the Savior and the Son of God. This would be absolutely and beautifully true. Now if you looked at both Testaments you would get a full-featured High Def Jesus. This Jesus is the promised one who would crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15), who is the seed of Abraham through whom the whole world would be blessed (Genesis 12), the long promised Messiah of Israel who sits on the eternal throne of David as our covenant King (2 Samuel 7), who fulfilled the Law of Moses perfectly

(Matthew 5:17-18) and lived without sin (Hebrews 4:15), the final priest of the tabernacle (Exodus 25-28) and sacrificial lamb foreshadowed in the Book of Leviticus (Leviticus 16). He is our Savior, He is our God, and He is the suffering servant prophesied long ago by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53). He is our great High Priest, our Covenant Mediator, and unique sacrificial Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world (Hebrews 8-10). The one whose cross reconciles all things to God and whose return will usher in a new Kingdom which will have no end. 60” HD Jesus, we have to study the whole book to see the difference.

The Old Testament is central to seeing the big picture of the history of redemption, understanding the character and attributes of God, and seeing Jesus, God the Son in all His glory. Now that we see a bit of the importance of the Old Testament, let's go ahead and unroll the first part of the scroll and get an overview of this first section of Scripture.

## **Theology and Teaching of the Old Testament**

Many use different ways to describe the story of the Old Testament. Some focus on dividing the work of God into dispensations of divine activity<sup>13</sup>, others have focused on the unfolding of the covenant of redemption initiated by God the Father, carried out by God the Son. Others focus on the story of major characters or the narrative of Israel. Yet one thing is clear; the story of the Bible contains an account of the ongoing relationship between

Creator and creation, God and His world. Even more specifically it unfolds the relationship of God with the creatures He has made in His image, those known collectively as the human race. In describing the story of the relationship of God to humanity I will do so in two fashions. First, I will do so through some major categories which describe the biblical worldview: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Secondly, I will look at the story through the means of relationship God establishes with people throughout the Old Testament, that of covenants. First, let's look at some big picture categories.

## **Categories Which Tell Our Story**

If we step back and see the big picture of the grand drama of the Bible, we see that it can be described in four acts with God the main actor. Each act we give a name, a category by which we understand what God has done and is doing. The categories we will use are creation, fall, redemption, restoration.

***Creation*** – *In the beginning God...*so thunders the first words of the Old Testament.

The Book of Genesis, the book of beginnings, tells us what we know intuitively and by scientific investigation. The universe began to exist in the finite past; it came to be when before it simply *was not*. God in His wisdom created the universe with both purpose and design. The Scriptures of the Old Testament teach us that the world was created by God

and created good. Yet God did not only create the universe, but he also created a unique species, specially fashioned in His own image and likeness.

*<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." <sup>27</sup>So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. - Genesis 1:26-27*

So at the outset of the Bible we see a Creator, a good creation, and a unique creature with a great responsibility given to him by God. Humans would rule over the created earth, hand-in-hand in fellowship with God.

Then the treasonous act which echoes even to

this day took place in paradise. The foreknown path of man would be taken—they would sin and rebel and the results would be devastating then glorious. Before turning to the rebellion of humanity, let's say one last thing about creation.





I was once asked some very profound questions by an unbelieving friend. What he said went something like this: *If God is perfect, if in Himself He has no needs, has no imperfections, is not lacking anything, why did He create a world and little play friends to go with it?* I thought...that is a great freakin question! But the answer is even better. First, my friend is right. God is perfect so He did not and could not create us and the world out of *need*. He was not lonely and He did not need anyone with which to watch the football game or go to the concert. He did not have to create anything, yet He did. Why? The answer is awesome. God created not out of lack or need, but out of a desire to display, to show off His glory, and to share His delight with others. He created to give Himself to His creatures and thereby share His beauty, glory and joy with them. As Jonathan Edwards so aptly described long ago in the book *The End For Which God Created the World: "It is fitting that God's glory be delighted in as well as known"*.<sup>14</sup> God created the world for Himself; we only exist by Him and for Him (Psalm 24:1; Colossians 1:15-17). We were made to worship, delight in, and have joy in God. Which makes what we will discuss next all the more tragic and treasonous.

**Fall** – C.S. Lewis, in his classic work *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, describes the mythical world of Narnia as existing in a state where it is *always winter*, but never *Christmas*. Narnia was in a state of perpetual coldness, underneath the power of a great evil.

The world was held in its wintry bondage until the time when Aslan, the great Lion, renewed and redeemed all things. Lewis' Christian worldview soaks the pages of his story as he understood the reality of our world. Our world, like Narnia, is too in bondage to decay, cursed long ago as the result of a treasonous revolt of our ancient ancestor, one known to us by the Hebrew name for man...*Adam*. The Old Testament teaches us that the first human beings, in direct contradiction to their creator, disobeyed Him and reaped the consequences on the world and the human race. The Christian doctrine of the fall of humanity is established in the Old Testament in the first three chapters of Genesis. As a result of our rebellion, God Himself cursed creation and human beings. The results are devastating. All people die, though we presume that we will live forever. As a result, the world is not a paradise, but rather a war zone full of disease, human atrocities, natural disasters, and our own separation from God and each other. Yet God did this in hope, (Romans 8:18-30) for His plan was just beginning. Though we had sinned, in love God set about to forgive and restore. He would win back a people from the curse and vindicate His name which had been dishonored by the very creatures He had created.

***Redemption*** – Therefore, God set about a course of redemption, by which He would pursue and reconnect with His creatures that had rebelled against Him. The plan included

many people and nations, many hundreds of years and a complex matrix of events and signposts. His plan would find its fullness when God Himself, incarnate as the second Adam, the person of Jesus of Nazareth, would pay the final price for sin and bring us back into relationship with God. This drama unfolded throughout the Old Testament and was ultimately fulfilled in the New Testament. It unfolds on various continents, centered in the Promised Land, through various covenants (more on that in a moment) by which God invited people back into relationship with Himself. This was all extended by grace, a free gift from God who offers peace to those who now live at war with Him.

***Restoration*** – We now live at a time where God is at work redeeming a people to be His very own children. God is giving new birth to people today around the world from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. His work is ongoing through the church which relates to God by a new arrangement—one sealed in the blood of His own Son. An engagement ring has been given; a promise has been made in the first coming or advent<sup>15</sup> of Jesus. We now wait for the time when Jesus will return in power to claim His bride and fully realize the Kingdom which began at His first coming. At the end of all history, when the scroll of the plan of God is fully revealed, there will be a great wedding feast with Christ. At this time the eternal, joyful, and fully realized, restored and re-created world will begin. What is spoken in the Old Testament by the prophet Jeremiah (Chapter 31) will

be completed in the description found in Revelation 21:1-4:

*<sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

To be honest, I am looking forward to it...

All of these important truths, creation, fall, redemption, restoration find their beginning and backdrop in the Old Testament. The Old Testament once again gives the big picture we need in order to see clearly. Yet the Old Testament also unfolds a *relationship* between a loving God and His people. He initiates with us over and over with the highest level of faithfulness and commitment. The word used to describe this relationship is covenant; a committed, until death, faithfully promised bond of love. This is the second

way we can garner an overview of the Old Testament, through God initiated covenants with His beloved people. To this we turn.

## **The Covenants**

As God worked to redeem a people throughout history, He has done so by making promises, establishing covenants with people. Seeing the whole of redemptive history, particularly the Old Testament, through the grid of the unfolding of the covenants is very helpful. The idea of a covenant was prominent in many cultures that existed in the time of the Old Testament. A covenant was usually seen as a treaty or contract between two parties binding them to certain benefits and consequences should one party prove unfaithful to the deal. In his book *Christ of the Covenants*, O. Palmer Robertson defines a covenant with firm sobriety: *A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignty administered.*<sup>16</sup> In other words, a covenant is a bond between two parties in relationship that is not casual in nature but has commitments of a life and death nature.<sup>17</sup> As such this relationship and its terms are conveyed to us and established by the Sovereign God of the universe. It is both a privilege and a responsibility before God to be His people by covenant.

A complete discussion of the nature of the covenants God has established with people is well beyond the scope of this paper. I will refer the reader to the afore

mentioned work by Robertson for that treatment. For our purposes I simply want to present the work of God in the Old Testament as an *unfolding* of relationship with us through various covenants He established. Seeing the people associated with each covenant displays God's working at various times and places to call a people back into relationship. As we walk through each of the major biblical covenants, we will be able to locate the Minor Prophets, specifically that of Habakkuk, in its proper *redemptive historical context*.

### ***The Covenant with Adam***

The first covenant with man takes place in the Garden of Eden in the first chapters of Genesis. God created a man (Hebrew for "man" is *Adam*) and told the man he may eat of whatever he wishes except of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If man obeys, he will live. If he transgresses the command he will die. Sometimes people get hung up on the "the fruit tree" part of the story and fail to see the significance of God's work with the first humans. He did not desire to withhold from them, He was providing the best of relationship with Himself. God wants them to trust His Word, heed His voice and receive thereby the promise of His blessing. If the man uses his God-given capacity of choice to turn from God, he will be necessarily choosing evil. As we read in the Bible, the man and his wife do indeed ignore the voice of God and

reap the consequences of their sin and the breaking of covenant with God. Death will now visit the human race until the end of the age. The prophet Hosea recounts this sin specifically as a transgression of covenant:

*<sup>4</sup>What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. <sup>5</sup>Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. <sup>6</sup>For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. <sup>7</sup>**But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.***  
- Hosea 6:4-7

In addition, God makes promises to the first man and woman after they sinned and broke covenant. This involved consequences for their sin and a promise to crush the serpent through the offspring of the woman. In Genesis 3 we see the initial promise of redemption, through a human being, who would smash the enemy rather than succumb to his temptation. This was the first promise of the gospel (which some have called the *proto evangelion* or *first gospel*); one day God would reverse the curse now upon the world through a human being, born of a woman, who would crush the head of the serpent. Now when you see Mel Gibson's *Passion*

*of the Christ*, one of the first scenes depicts the head of a snake being crushed by the foot of Jesus. Now you will understand the imagery in this scene.

### ***The Covenant with Noah***

Many will remember Noah due to his ark full of animals that was displayed throughout their childhood. Others may recount him as the man acting like a guy pledging a frat, getting drunk and naked after the flood. But what many fail to see is that God specifically describes His relationship with Noah as covenantal. At the beginning of the narrative of Noah and the flood, God utters the following words:

*<sup>17</sup>For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. <sup>18</sup>But I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.*  
- *Genesis 6:17-18*

God's covenant with Noah was one of protection and provision. God would protect and then reestablish the human race through Noah's family and their descendents. After the flood God does several things. First, He established the sanctity of life and the consequences for taking it in Genesis 9:6. Second, God



assigns meaning to a common occurrence after the rains. The rainbow, the dividing of the spectrum of light into its beautiful array of colors, would be a reminder for all time of God's covenant promise to protect and to sustain the earth and human beings.



### ***The Covenant with Abraham***

Think for a moment. What makes the people of Israel distinct? Is it ethnicity, is it language, or is it merely geographical location? It is not so simple. In fact it can be argued that Israel is defined as the people related to God by covenant. Quite frankly one cannot speak of the history of Israel without speaking of God. The origin of this people can be traced to a lone nomadic figure in the Old Testament whom God called to Himself and made covenant with.

God promises this man that he would be the father of nations with innumerable descendents. His promise is that through His offspring the whole world would be blessed. This man was named Abraham and it is through the promise that he believed God and was counted righteous. God's faithfulness would be

expressed to this man and his offspring as it would be from the people of Israel that salvation would come for the whole world. Jesus the Savior would come; He would come from the seed of Abraham.

### ***The Covenant with Moses***

The next major event in the Old Testament is the Exodus. From Abraham until the Exodus many events had taken place. God had brought His people into Egypt through the faithful leadership of a person named Joseph. That story is a great place to do some reading (Genesis 37-50). The people had greatly prospered and became numerous while in Egypt. Due to this population explosion, the Egyptian leadership had made slaves of the Jews and had kept them in a cruel state of oppression and servitude. From this point God raises up perhaps the greatest of the Jewish prophets, a man by the name of Moses. Through Moses' direction, the people of Israel are taken from slavery in Egypt and set free by many miraculous and providential acts of God. The two things which took place in this time which are of great importance were the *promise of a land* and the *giving of the law*. The land would be the place of provision and blessing from God and the law would teach them of the holiness and right ways of God and ultimately point to their need of forgiveness. These two themes, *land* and *law* are huge throughout the Old Testament. The covenant made with Moses was simple. If the people of God walked in His ways and kept His laws there would

be covenant blessing. If the people turned away from God and broke His laws there would be covenant curses upon them (Deuteronomy 28). It is at this time that God also gave the people the priesthood and covenant mediation through a blood sacrifice and worship at the tabernacle. The blood of animals would be offered for sin; not simply to appease God but as His gracious gift to temporarily cover the sins of the people.

The land represented provision, protection and blessing to the people of Israel. The law would be their guide for faithful living in the land before God. These themes will be important when looking at the Minor Prophets. For as Moses and Joshua guided the people to the land, the voice of the prophets were to guide them into exile from the land under God's discipline for their rebellion and law breaking. We will come to that in a moment.

### ***The Covenant with David***

After the Exodus, the conquest of the Promised Land (See Book of Joshua), and a time of chaos, (See Book of Judges) God creates a monarchy in Israel. After the people ask God for a king to be “like the other nations” God finally gives them their wishes despite His warnings. God in His wisdom knew that an unrighteous king will bring them great burdens and trouble (1 Samuel 8). The first king of Israel was a guy named Saul. He turns out to be a loser so God chooses another king named David who would be called a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). It is to this king that God makes an additional covenant promise.

In 2 Samuel 7 God promises David that his throne, his lineage of rule would be established and one of his offspring would sit on his throne forever. An eternal King would come and take his place on the very throne of David. This King will bring an eternal and righteous rule to the world and the age of crooked human politicians and governments will finally end.

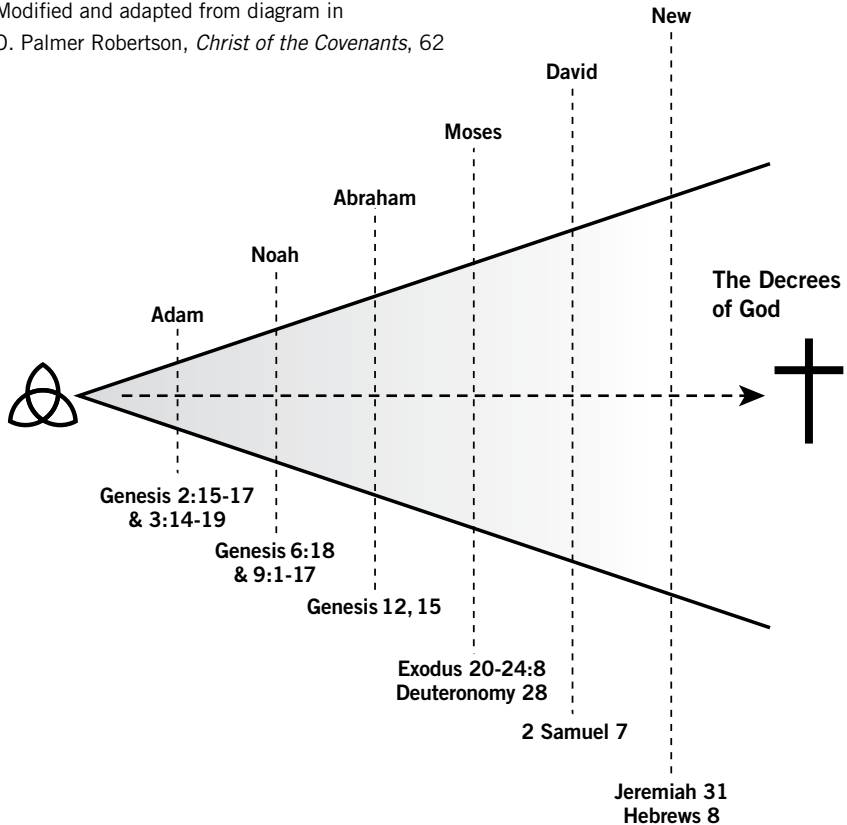
After David—things just fall apart for Israel. They undergo a bitter split into a northern (Israel) and southern kingdom (Judah). Their kings and priests become corrupt and wicked to the point where God brings foreign nations to conquer them and thereby brings His judgment upon them. It is in the latter days of the northern and southern kingdoms that God sends some of the Minor Prophets to speak both judgment and hope to the disobedient people.

### ***The Organic Nature of the Covenants***

At this point in redemptive history God had promised Adam to crush the head of the serpent through the offspring of a woman. He had promised to protect and maintain the human race to Noah. He had made a great nation through Abraham through which His blessing would flow to the world. He had given His people a land and a law through Moses, and promised an eternal, good, covenant king to his man David. These covenants were in no way arbitrary, they were building, one after the other towards the covenant which would fulfill and bring them all into fullness. The following diagram is helpful in seeing the connection between the covenants.

### Figure 1: Unfolding of the Covenants

Modified and adapted from diagram in  
O. Palmer Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 62



God, before creating the world, had decreed or purposed that He would redeem a people for His very own possession. For His glory and their joy He had created the world. This decree had to be worked out in time and through history with a building from one covenant to the next. Like a large wave gaining momentum as it moves closer to the shoreline, the plans of God would crest and find their ultimate fullness in what Scripture calls the New Covenant. To this final covenant we turn.

### ***The New Covenant in Jesus Christ***

History marched forward under the direction of God until the arrival of what the Scriptures describe as the fullness of time. Of this time, the Book of Galatians tells us a beautiful truth:

*<sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, **born of woman, born under the law,** <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*

- Fulfilling the covenant with Adam, the Son of God would be born of a woman, the seed promised in Genesis 3, the second Adam (Romans 5) whose victory secures our destiny.

- Fulfilling the covenant with Noah, God had protected humanity for this very purpose.
- Fulfilling the covenant with Abraham, a great nation had now given birth to the Savior of the world.
- Fulfilling the covenant with Moses, this person would be born under the law and he would fully obey all its demands, himself becoming the blood sacrifice for the people's sins.
- Fulfilling the covenant with David, this person was from the royal line of David and would be crowned by God as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Yes, the fullness of time had come. God the Father had sent God the Son into the world as a fulfillment of all of God's covenant promises over the ages. His coming was foretold by prophets, His work unfolded in the covenants, and His love would fulfill the hearts of His people. It is no wonder that Nehemiah, when the people were returning from exile from the land, described God in his prayer as follows:

*O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God **who keeps covenant and steadfast love** with those who love Him and keep His commandments.*

*- Nehemiah 1:5*

So when we come to the New Testament, the Old Testament is the only backdrop by which we can understand the identity and work of Jesus. He is the promised second Adam and seed of the woman, He is fully human protected from the time of Noah, He is the descendant of Abraham, a fully obedient servant of God following all His commandments, He is the King descended from David, He is the sacrificial lamb provided by God to take away the sins of the world. He is the final and greatest Prophet who brought us the Word of God, He is the great High Priest whose ministry mediates the New Covenant, He is our covenant King who will govern the nations in righteousness when the fullness of His Kingdom comes at the end of time.

The New Covenant is the culmination of the works of God to redeem a people for Himself. It was decreed from eternity, set in motion throughout history, culminated in Jesus, lived today through His church. One enters this covenant by grace through faithfully trusting in the person and work of Jesus. The entry into the covenant is signified by baptism and God's faithful maintaining of the covenant is celebrated at the Lord's Table. For Jesus said of this celebration: *"This cup that is poured out for you is the **new covenant** in My blood."* Luke 22:20





So now we return full circle. The Old Testament is a story about the work of God the Father to bring glory to Himself through God the Son by the ministry of God the Spirit in redeeming a people to be His own. If you are interested in getting a great overview of each book in the Bible, I highly recommend Mark Dever's new volumes *Promises Made the Message of the Old Testament* and *Promises Kept the Message of the New Testament*.<sup>20</sup> These volumes are tremendous in getting the big ideas of the two testaments and every individual book of Scripture.

## **Conclusion**

The Old Testament is the beautiful beginnings of God's work of redemption in the world. It gives us the background and context of God's work to establish with His people a lasting relationship through the work of Jesus Christ. It gives us a full vision of Jesus, teaches us that God has been at work to redeem a people throughout time and in many places. I pray that this small introduction will shed new light on this book full of strange cultures and practices. The Old Testament gives depth and understanding to the New as it foreshadows the coming of Jesus the Messiah. May you be enriched by its history, enlightened by its wisdom, led to worship through its Psalms and convicted and inspired by its prophecies. May the eternal vision of these ancient words bring new lessons to our hearts and lives as we serve diligently and await the return of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

## **Appendix - The Book of Habakkuk**

### ***Authorship***

We know very little about this person Habakkuk other than what is in the text of his prophecy. We know he would have likely lived through the reforms and righteous kingship of Josiah<sup>21</sup> (2 Chronicles 34) as well as seeing the sharp decline under his successors. This decline culminated with the wicked leadership of Jehoiakim<sup>22</sup> most likely the king at the fall of the Kingdom of Judah. For those interested in the full decline of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, it is described in the works of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

### ***Time and Place of Writing***

There are many important bits of information which help us to date Habakkuk's prophecy. Each of them serves to narrow the time frame so that we have a very good approximation of the time of writing. First, we see from Habakkuk chapter 1 that the Chaldeans or Neo-Babylonians<sup>23</sup> were already a known power which was on a conquering path. We know that the Chaldeans conquered Ninevah in 612 BC so our date for the book is likely to be after this event. Second, we see from the description in Habakkuk 1:2-4 that the Kingdom of Judah is in decline not in a state of reform or revival. This must mean it is some time after the death of the godly King Josiah which is dated to 609 BC, likely during the reign of the wicked king Jehoiakim.<sup>24</sup> Two other dates can be brought to bear at this point. It seems

the Chaldeans had not yet made their inroads into Jerusalem so this puts Habakkuk's writing before the final fall of Judah in 587 BC. Additionally, the coming of the Chaldeans was still in the future during Habakkuk's writings so we must place it even before the first victory they had over a combined Egyptian-Assyrian force in Syro-Palestine in 605 BC.<sup>25</sup> So this puts the date between the first defeat in 605 BC and the death of the King Josiah in 609 BC. So by inference, a date somewhere around 605-608 BC is likely. The following table shows the dates of the relevant events:

**Table 1: Events surrounding the writing of Habakkuk**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
612 BC	Fall of Nineveh
609 BC	Death of Judean King Josiah
608-605 BC	Writing of Habakkuk
605 BC	Defeat of Egyptian/Assyrian army in Palestine
597 BC	First Exiles to Babylon
587 BC	Final Conquering of Jerusalem

One interesting note of history about King Jehoiakim is warranted. This king's evil doings became notorious. His reputation was so evil in the eyes of God and people that Jeremiah

said the following of him at his death:

*<sup>18</sup>Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: "They shall not lament for him, saying, 'Ah, my brother!' or 'Ah, sister!' They shall not lament for him, saying, 'Ah, lord!' or 'Ah, his majesty!'" <sup>19</sup>With the burial of a **donkey** he shall be buried, dragged and dumped beyond the gates of Jerusalem." - Jeremiah 22:18-19*

As the old King James translation puts it, this king received the burial of an ass. You can guess what kind of guy he was. You must be a real donkey if God has His prophet promise you the burial of a donkey.

### ***Form and Purpose for the Prophecy***

#### *Literary Form*

Habakkuk's prophecy is unique in that it records the prophet's personal interactions with God. This is a word given to the prophet about the people, but not directly *to them*. The book takes the form of a series of questions from Habakkuk and subsequent answers from God. It is sort of like getting to live in Habakkuk's head for a bit. I know some of the interactions I have with God in the privacy of my own soul; this book is a great look into such a dialogue. So this divine Q & A is the main literary structure of the book.

Additionally there are two other literary styles of note. First, there is a taunting or mocking song given<sup>26</sup> by God in chapter two (yes, God does talk smack in the Bible...not in arrogance, but in truth) towards the evil Chaldean empire. Yes, He was allowing their success in conquering Judah, but they would in no way be excused for all their evil doing and excess. Finally, chapter three includes a psalm of worship by the prophet which sets up the culminating message of the book.

#### *Purpose of the Prophecy*

The purpose of the prophecy was to prepare a people to live faithfully amidst an unexpected downturn of events. Judah was in a state of internal sin and chaos where both justice and religion were being perverted. As a consequence they were about to be conquered as discipline from God. God wanted His people to know several things during this time of discipline and turmoil. First, the righteous would live by faith in the midst of the discipline. They would trust God in the middle of the storm. Secondly, He wanted them to know that their hope was in Him, not simply their temporal circumstances. This prophecy was also to steady the people of God through one of their darkest hours of exile from the Promised Land. They were not to lose hope; they were to persevere in faith. I believe the same purposes are eternally relevant for the people of God for we all travel through many troubles and trials in life and we too must persevere. The many themes

found in this book establish our faith, trust, and hope in God which transcends our circumstances. We will close our discussion with a brief look at the themes found in Habakkuk.

### ***Major Themes in the Book***

Pastor James Montgomery Boice recounts a conversation he had with someone when he was teaching a series of messages from the Book of Habakkuk. The man explained to him that he had never heard one message from this book in all his years of attending church.<sup>27</sup> Many of us probably resonate with this man; I personally have never heard a series of messages from this book. Many have likely never read its contents. This is indeed unfortunate as the book has an important message for our times. The vision of God found in the book, the questions it raises, the struggle it brings to our hearts are so needed today. Our own joy is at stake if we miss the message conveyed here and echoed in other parts of Scripture. The message is clear—steadfast joy can be found in spite of circumstances. Indeed, in preaching an overview of this book, Mark Dever entitled his series *The Message of Habakkuk: How Can I Be Happy*.<sup>28</sup> By this he means that in this prophecy we discover the foundation and ground of true happiness; it is found in a steadfast faith and a hope that God in the end will triumph and save His people. Some of the themes in the book are difficult, at times perplexing, and provoke many questions.

As we have noted, the very book itself is framed by the prophet's *own questions*. This is our first theme, that of *questioning*.

- **Questioning God** – There are many who say that you should never question God. I disagree. I find questions to be a great way to seek truth, wrestle with God, open my mind to knowledge, and persevere in faith. However there are two ways in which we might question our God, neither being dispassionate. I will use a metaphor to describe. We can bring our questions in one of two ways. We either bring our questions to God with open hands or with clenched fists, and there is a world of difference. First, one can with great zeal press the heavens, but we do so with open hands. We do not accuse the Almighty; we come as desperate sinners, angry at times, yet open to His voice and leading. The other way to come is to raise angry and clinched fists *at* God. I find this to be a great evil. Indeed, C.S. Lewis once remarked that we are quick to put God on trial, we are quick to put *God in the dock*.<sup>29</sup> In doing so we become an accuser and treat God as one who is guilty of wrongdoing. I am a firm believer that we should come to God with all our emotions and all of our questions. Yet the Christian should come with open hands raised to the heavens, not the clenched first, nor the middle finger. We see a great example in the way questions are posed in this book by the prophet. David Prior summarizes the many questions Habakkuk raises in this book.

*Beginning with his own situation, he found himself **articulating timeless questions**—about the problem of evil, about the character of God, about the apparent pointlessness of prayer and the impotence of God, about the oppressiveness of unrestrained violence and the silence of God.<sup>30</sup>*

Timeless questions indeed.

- **The Suffering of a Fallen World** – If you are awake, you will realize that we live in a world of great blessings as well as great suffering. The reality of living in a world of human sin, natural disasters, diseases and famines weighs upon the soul as we travel life's roads. Yet there is also great goodness found in creation and in human beings. How are we to understand our present situation where life is mingled with both pain and blessing? Habakkuk guides us in wrestling with life outside of the garden in a fallen world.
- **The Sovereignty of God in Human History** – Are we the director of our own destinies or are we part of a grander scheme of things which has greater captain? If God is in control of all the good things in the world, does He have anything to do with the bad things? It is easy to sense that God has a purpose and plan for your life when you get a good job, get married, have kids, move forward in your career, and win American Idol. Yet how do we view life when unemployed, after we get dumped, our nation is conquered, or we



suffer deep personal loss of various kinds? Habakkuk confronts us with the resoundingly clear but difficult doctrine of the sovereignty of God. God is in complete control of all things, or as Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones once taught in England after the horrors of World War II, *history is under God's control*.<sup>31</sup>

- **Faith in the Faithfulness of God** – If God is in control of the best and worst of times, how should His people live in the middle of the darkest hours? Habakkuk gives a resounding answer which is echoed three times in the New Testament.<sup>32</sup> The *righteous shall live by faith* for indeed the day will come when the *earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*.<sup>33</sup>
- **The Justice and Wrath of God** – If there is a theme which is constant throughout the Scripture yet is woefully neglected in the churches of our time it is the justice and wrath of God. We simply do not want to believe that God is fiercely wrathful against sin and He is just in being so. Yet we see this theme repeated throughout the whole counsel of the Word of God. God is utterly holy and separated from sin. Human beings transgressing His laws and disregarding Him is a great offense before God and there is a reckoning which will visit the unrepentant. This is not just an Old Testament theme as it is found abundantly in the New Testament. Jesus Himself burned with intense anger at those abusing the temple (Mark 11; Matthew 21). Paul writes of the coming justice of God

(2 Thessalonians 1:6-10) as well as our judgment by Him (2 Corinthians 5:10). Finally, the apostle John, in the final book of the Bible is frighteningly clear as he described the coming wrath of God:

*<sup>11</sup>Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup>His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. <sup>13</sup>He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. <sup>14</sup>And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup>From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup>On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.*

*- Revelation 19:11-16*

Yet the great news is that Jesus Christ is rescuing all who have faith in Him from the wrath to come. He in no way turns away those who come to Him for refuge and forgiveness. We can have great hope and courage reading the promises of the gospel:

*<sup>1</sup>Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup>But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup>For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. <sup>8</sup>But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup>For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. - 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11*

- **The Evil of Idolatry** – The worship of created things, human inventions, gods of our imaginations, the worship of ourselves, our possessions, and anything that is not the creator God is a great sin which lives in the hearts of people. Idolatry is something Habakkuk speaks about with brutally honesty. Though we may not see ourselves

worshiping statues of gold there are many substitute saviors that populate our hearts and lives.

- **The Source of True Rejoicing and Happiness** – That which we all long for in our journeys on the earth can indeed be found. It is no pipe dream—we were made for joy, even when the darkness falls on our days. Habakkuk will help us believe this deeply.

I hope you all enjoyed reading this small but wonderful prophecy. Diving into little known parts of the Old Testament can bring a deep challenge and growth to the soul.

**Soli Deo Gloria,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Reid S. Monaghan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Reid S. Monaghan**

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> For those interested in a brief treatment of how the sixty-six books arrived in the Bible see Reid S. Monaghan, *One Bible, Many Books* (Power of Change, 2006, accessed December 31 2006); available from [http://www.powerofchange.org/blog/2006/11/one\\_bible\\_many\\_books.html](http://www.powerofchange.org/blog/2006/11/one_bible_many_books.html).
- <sup>2</sup> J.I. Packer in the introduction to Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery - Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Philipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988), 8.
- <sup>3</sup> Mark Dever, *Promises Made: The Message of the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 27.
- <sup>4</sup> Apocalyptic literature deals with the time frame at the end of history sometimes known as the end times.
- <sup>5</sup> See our other booklet *One Bible, Many Books – The Canon of Scripture* for a brief treatment of the apocrypha.
- <sup>6</sup> Purim commemorates a time when the Jewish people living in Persia were saved from extermination and is celebrated on the 14th day of Adar, the twelfth month in the Jewish calendar. This usually takes place in March. See *Purim - Judaism 101*, (accessed December 11 2007); available from <http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday9.htm>.
- <sup>7</sup> See the preface to James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Robertson, 21, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>10</sup> Assyria was the conquering power for the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Babylonians for the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

<sup>11</sup> Here I use the term “time” in a metaphysical sense of being “logically before” creation. I want to clarify my usage in this way to avoid the confusion of there being a “time” before the creation of time.

<sup>12</sup> Orion is the brand of the TV, it seems it is a Japanese company who sells inexpensive TVs at places like Wal-Mart.

<sup>13</sup> See Greg Herrick, *Dispensationalism and God's Glory* (Bible.org, accessed December 28 2006); available from [http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=535](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=535). There also is a fairly balance wiki on the subject of dispensational theology found at *Dispensational Theology*, (Wikipedia, accessed December 14 2006); available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispensationalist\\_theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispensationalist_theology).

<sup>14</sup> John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory: With the Complete Text From "The End for Which God Created the World"* By Jonathan Edwards (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1998), 149.

<sup>15</sup> The word “advent” comes from the Latin word *adventus* which means *coming*.

<sup>16</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 14, 15.

<sup>18</sup> There are some who separate a covenant of the land or Palestinian covenant, from the Mosaic covenant. I am treating them as one here. The promises relating to the land are found in Deuteronomy 29 and 30.

<sup>19</sup> The exceptions being Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are post-exilic Minor Prophets and they address the nation returning from exile to the land.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Dever, *Promises Kept: The Message of the New Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005). And *Promises Made: The Message of the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Boice, 391.

<sup>22</sup> Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> The word used for these people in the Old Testament is Kaskdim.

<sup>24</sup> J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 83.

<sup>25</sup> There is an excellent timeline of events from the 7th century BC in Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 29, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Frank Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor's Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 495.

<sup>27</sup> Boice, 389.

<sup>28</sup> Dever, *Promises Made: The Message of the Old Testament*, 835-860.

<sup>29</sup> The “dock” is a phrase from a British courtroom, where the accused would be placed “in the dock” when he was on trial. Lewis has a series of essays published under this title. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock; Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids,: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> David Prior, *The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk: Listening to the Voice of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 204. emphasis added.

<sup>31</sup> James Montgomery Boice recounts his indebtedness to Lloyd Jones’ teaching on Habbakuk following the anguish following the second world war in Boice, 393.

<sup>32</sup> A phrase from Habakkuk 2:4—the righteous shall live by faith, is quoted in Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38.

<sup>33</sup> See Habakkuk 2:4; 14.



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## Notes

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