



# “Understanding the Bible”

## Section 3: What is the Message of the Bible?



### Unit 3.3 – The Old Testament: God Establishes a Covenant and Builds a Nation

#### I) God’s Promises for God’s People

- As we continue our journey from the telescope to the microscope to uncover the message of the Bible, we now shift our focus in this unit to the formation of the gospel throughout the Old Testament. From the very beginning of Genesis to the last words of Malachi, God progressively revealed Himself and His plan to the world through a covenant and a nation. The story of Israel is really a story about God, and the Old Testament is a historical account of how this story ultimately points to the promise of a messiah who would redeem God’s people from their sin.
- In his book, *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, Christian scholar Max Anders makes the case that the entire Old Testament narrative can be explained in nine progressive eras that prepare us for the revelation of Christ in the New Testament. These nine eras including the following: **Creation, Patriarch, Exodus, Conquest, Judges, Kingdom, Exile, Return, and Silence**. We will now take a closer look at these eras as we see the gospel message continue to get a little sharper with each biblical account.

#### II) From a Fallen Creation to a Chosen Nation

- When the world’s first two human beings, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God by eating fruit from a forbidden tree, sin entered the world and brought with it the wages of death and separation. As we see throughout Genesis, when the offspring of Adam and Eve multiplied so did sin. God was so disgusted with this violation of His holy image that he orchestrated a universal flood over the entire earth. The Lord preserved only a righteous man named Noah, his immediate family, and a representative of all the living creatures of the earth on an ark. After the flood, Noah was expected to repopulate the earth through a bloodline of righteousness, but he and his family continued to fall short of the glory of God.
- As sin kept a stranglehold on humanity, a righteous descendant of Noah named Abraham received a special revelation and covenant promise from God. In Genesis 12:2 God said to Abraham, “*I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.*” Abraham believed God’s promise and it was credited to him as righteousness. He became the father of the Hebrews because of his faith. Abraham would eventually have a promised child in his old age named Isaac, and Isaac would have a prominent son named Jacob. While wrestling with God, Jacob was renamed “Israel,” and God decided through Jacob’s twelve sons that He would establish twelve tribes as one holy nation set apart from the rest of the world. These twelve tribes of Israel include: **Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph, & Benjamin**.

#### III) Breaking Free from Egyptian Bondage

- Jacob and his family were living in the land of Canaan when a severe famine hit. They were forced to migrate to Egypt to get food and receive protection from Jacob’s son Joseph, who was providentially placed in Egyptian leadership under Pharaoh. After Joseph and Pharaoh died, the Israelites were no longer protected. As they grew in number, the new leaders of Egypt enslaved them for fear of rebellion for nearly 400 years. God heard their cries for freedom and raised up a man named Moses to lead them out of Egypt through several miracles. They entered the wilderness where they would wander for forty years as judgment for their disobedience. During these four decades, they would receive ten commandments from God as the Lord handed down a holy law for the nation of Israel to live by. God also committed to dwell with them and provide all their needs if they would simply trust and obey Him.

#### **IV) Taking Possession of a Promised Land**

- After their time of punishment was up, Moses led them to the edge of a promised land of milk and honey that God had prepared for them. This was the same land of Canaan that Jacob and his twelve sons had previously lived hundreds of years ago before they fled to Egypt for help. Moses was not allowed to enter this promised land because of his own disobedience, but God enabled **Joshua** to lead Israel in the conquest of Canaan. Just before Joshua led them into the land, he reminded the Israelites of their covenant responsibilities to God. In Joshua 24:15 he said to Israel, *“If it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”* Israel made a commitment to faithfully serve God and they took complete ownership of the land through God’s providential hand. Once the land was completely secured, the twelve tribes of Israel settled into designated areas and continued to grow and flourish. The only tribe that did not receive land ownership in Canaan was the tribe of Levi, because the Levites were holy priests of Israel consecrated by God and the Lord Himself was their inheritance.

#### **V) The Makings of a Monarchy**

- For the next four-hundred years Israel lived in the promised land according to the laws of Moses under a loose system of government ruled by judges. Throughout this era, we see in Scripture that there is a very recognizable cycle that repeats itself in Israel’s history under this form of government. The cycle can be described in six stages that includes the following: **(1) Israel serves the Lord; (2) Israel falls into sin and idolatry; (3) Israel is enslaved; (4) Israel cries out to the Lord; (5) God raises up a judge to deliver Israel; (6) Israel is delivered.**
- Israel eventually insisted on having a monarchy because they wanted a king to rule over them. God decided to work through the prophet Samuel to anoint a man named **Saul** from the tribe of Benjamin to be the first king of Israel. David and Solomon later followed Saul to the throne as Israel was ruled by a united monarchy under these three kings for a total of 120 years. When Solomon died, the nation divided over the issue of taxation under King Rehoboam and split into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom kept the name “Israel” and consisted of ten of the twelve tribes. The southern kingdom received the name “Judah” and consisted of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

#### **VI) Israel’s Unrepentance Ends in Exile**

- As the habitual cycles of sin and disobedience continued, God eventually punished the Jews for their lack of repentance. The Lord allowed **Assyria**, a nation to the northeast, to come in and conquer the northern kingdom of Israel, scattering them throughout the world. About 150 years after the Assyrian exile, the southern kingdom of Judah also continued to rebel and this led to them being captured by **Babylonia**. The Babylonians burned down the Jewish temple and dragged Judah into captivity for a seventy-year sentence before they would eventually return to Jerusalem.

#### **VII) Returning Home to Rebuild**

- After Judah’s seventy-year sentence was up, Persia overthrew Babylonia and the king of Persia allowed the Israelites living in captivity to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. 50,000 people returned, and under the leadership of **Nehemiah** they rebuilt the city, rebuilt the temple, and restored ceremonial worship of God. Upon the completion of the rebuilt temple, Nehemiah had a priest named Ezra read the Book of the Law of Moses and re-establish a commitment to their sacred covenant with God.

#### **VIII) God’s Voice Goes Silent**

- The Israelites continued to live in the rebuilt city of Jerusalem for another 400 years, and during that time Persia fell to Greece who fell to Rome as the most powerful empire of the world. Meanwhile, after the prophet **Malachi** spoke an oracle to Israel shortly after their return to the Holy land, the voice of God went silent for four centuries. No other prophet spoke to Israel and they continued to live in sin. And as their bondage to sin continued, so did their cries for redemption. This period of silence was not God abandoning His chosen nation, but it ultimately prepared them for the arrival of a chosen messiah.