

# YOBL

## Year of Biblical Literacy

### Week 34: The Story So Far, Part 2

#### Daily Reading for Week

- 2 Chronicles 18-20, Psalm 75
- 2 Chronicles 21-24, Psalm 76
- 2 Chronicles 25-27, Psalm 77
- 2 Chronicles 28-31, Psalm 78
- 2 Chronicles 32-34, Psalm 79
- 2 Chronicles 35-36, Psalm 80
- Matthew 1-2, Psalm 81
- Video: Matthew 1-13

#### Focus of time together

To remember and recall the covenant promises that God made with Israel at different points in the Old Testament and to begin to see how these promises would have been anticipated by Israel at the start of the New Testament.

#### Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 18 as your opening prayer

#### Intro to Discussion

It took more than half the calendar year, but we have finally reached the end of the Old Testament! Chronicles is the last book in the Jewish ordering of the Old Testament. It functions as a long recap of much of Israel's history that is at once an invitation for the reader to reflect back on Israel's history and look forward to the time when the promises of God will be fulfilled. Last week, we reflected on our own personal and communal interaction with the Old Testament: what was difficult, what we found particularly life-giving and impactful, and how we assessed our own thoughts/emotions/actions when it came to the spiritual discipline of reading Scripture daily.

This week, we will finish our reading in the Old Testament by trying to create a basic foundation of understanding what we have just spent the last 8 months reading. The hope is to synthesise some of the major themes/ideas of the Old Testament that will be important as we step into the New Testament. Regardless of if you have kept up with the reading or stopped somewhere along the way, it will be crucial to have a shared basic foundation from which we can approach the New Testament. Though the entire Old Testament is important for understanding Jesus and the church, we will focus on

simply understanding the major covenants God made with Israel — which Jesus, according to the New Testament writers, fulfilled.

At various points in the Old Testament, God made covenants with Israel. In those covenants, He promised certain things to Israel. When the Old Testament ends — literally with an incomplete sentence in Hebrew — there is a collective longing and anticipation for these promises to be fulfilled. This week, we will try to understand the basics of these covenants and the promises that are embedded in them.

## **Whole Group Discussion (75 minutes)**

Throughout the Old Testament, God made covenants. These covenants often build on one another and give us an important framework for understanding the New Testament — especially the person, teachings, ministry, and death/resurrection of Jesus. Let's quickly look at the 4 major covenants and the promises tied to them. This way of organising the covenants comes from Christopher Wright's book 'Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament':

### **A. The covenant with Noah (Genesis 6:18-21, 8:21-9:17)**

This covenant which God makes is universal. First, He promises to save Noah and his family before the flood. Then after the flood, He makes a promise to all creation to never again destroy the world with a flood and to preserve the conditions necessary for life on earth to continue.

### **B. The covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-2, 15:1-21, 17:1-27)**

This covenant which God makes with Abraham is similarly universal to the Noah covenant in that it pertains to all humanity but with a different focus. It concerns God's redemptive work through history. God promises that through Abraham and his descendants He will bring His redemptive blessing to all nations on earth.

### **C. The Sinai Covenant (Exodus 19:3-6)**

This covenant which God makes is national in scope. Specifically, it is a covenant between Yahweh and all of Israel, His chosen people, mediated through the leadership of Moses. It is linked with the covenant with Abraham in this way: It is through Israel that God's promised blessing to all nations will take place. Israel will be God's chosen, priestly people reflecting the loving goodness of Him to the nations around it by adhering to the terms of the covenant, the Torah. The Sinai Covenant also includes the promise of a land for Israel, a physical space God had prepared for them to call home.

### **D. The Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7, 23:1-7, Psalm 89 and 132)**

This covenant is one which God primarily makes with David and his house (or dynasty). God promises to establish and sustain David's house forever. However, this promise doesn't only concern David's family but Israel itself. In promising David that his house will be permanently established, the covenant by implication extends that promise to Israel itself. This, along with the expectation that David and subsequent kings would be faithful to the Law given to Israel on Mt. Sinai, ties it to the Sinai covenant.

### **E. The Prophets (especially Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel)**

This isn't a "covenant" in the way the previous four were, but the Prophets are filled with

promises which God makes with Israel before, during, and after their experience of Exile and extends through to the time of Jesus in the New Testament. God promises that Israel will return to the promised land that they have been exiled from and rebuild the temple that Babylon destroyed (where His presence would dwell again in that new temple). They will also have a renewed relationship with Him, a new experience of God's forgiveness after experiencing the judgement of exile, and a new obedience to the Law. There is also a promise of a new Davidic king that would defeat Israel's enemies and establish them as an independent nation freed from foreign rule and the promise of a time of agricultural abundance and prosperity that ties the new covenant to the Davidic Covenant and the covenant with Noah.

These four covenants and the promises in the Prophets form the narrative backbone of the Old Testament. They would have been deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the Jewish people in the time of Jesus, and indeed still are today. As we step into the New Testament, we will continually see the New Testament writers referring back to these covenants and promises, consistently interpreting the life of Jesus through these texts.

As we begin the New Testament in the next week, it is important to remember the pieces of the covenants and promises that were yet to be fulfilled at the end of the Old Testament. These promises were on the forefront of Israel's mind for hundreds of years in the Intertestamental Period. When Jesus begins His public ministry, Israel is still waiting for many of these promises to be fulfilled and wondering when and how God will fulfil them. The most recent and pressing promises, which are listed in the Prophets section above, are those Israel is most eagerly awaiting and looking out for in the time of Jesus. Practically, they were still waiting to be liberated from exile, vindicated and exalted over the oppressing nations, and returned to power in their homeland, after which the temple could be rebuilt and filled with the return of God's glory/presence.

### **Questions for Basic Understanding (15 minutes)**

*These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.*

1. Before you embarked on the journey of reading through it this year in YOBL, what would you have said was the overall theme and/or storyline of the Old Testament?
2. Now having read through the Old Testament over the past 8 months and especially keeping in mind the covenants mentioned above, what would you now say is the overall theme and/or storyline of the Old Testament?

## Questions for Listening to Scripture (30 minutes)

*These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.*

Read the following passages:

- Genesis 9:8-17
- Genesis 12:1-2, 15:12-20
- Exodus 19:1-6
- 2 Samuel 7:8-17
- Jeremiah 31:31-34

Take a moment to step back and recall the story the Old Testament tells as a whole using the four covenants and the promises of the Prophets as reference points.

1. What stands out to you about God choosing to continually renew covenants with Israel and stay in relationship with them for nearly two millennia?
2. What does it say about God's character and hopes for Israel?
3. What do you notice about Israel's seeming inability to remain faithful to the covenants?
4. What does this say about how difficult it can be for an entire community to obey the commands of God?

## Questions for Self Examination (30 minutes)

*These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware of who we are in the light of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.*

1. How are you feeling about entering into the New Testament this week?
2. Is there anything in particular you are looking forward to?
3. Is there anything in particular you will miss about the Old Testament?

## Closing Prayer