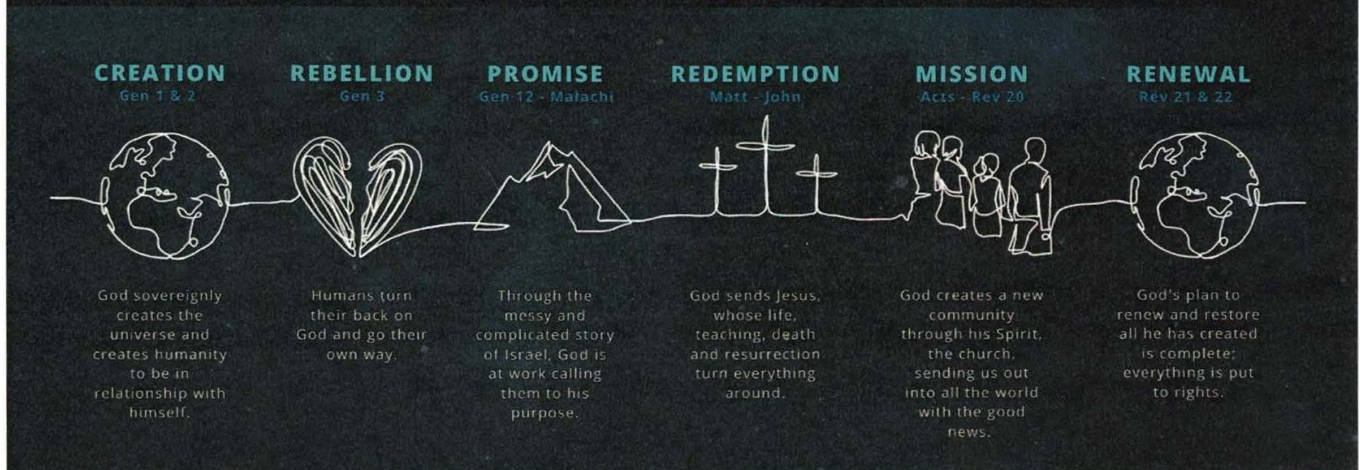


THE BIBLICAL STORY FOR EVERYONE

Act 3: Promise

THE SIX ACTS OF THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

GOD'S BIG STORY



The Old Testament consists of three sections: the law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Law or "Pentateuch" refers to the first five books of the OT. They tell a story which contains 3 key events:

Abraham and his family (Genesis 12-50)

The story centres on a number of promises that God gives to Abraham

- Land
- Offspring / descendants
- Relationship
- Blessing

What is God trying to do with Abraham? Abraham as the new Adam:

- Garden / Land
- Be fruitful and multiply / Promise of descendants
- Intimate relationship / Special relationship
- Expand Eden / Blessed to be a blessing

Through Abraham, God is renewing his vision for humanity. Each new generation in Genesis receives an affirmation of God's promises.

The Exodus (Exodus 1-18)

The book of Exodus and the deliverance from Egypt that it narrates is absolutely central to the identity and faith of Israel.

The God of the Exodus

- God is moved by the suffering of his people (2: 23-25, 3: 7)
- In Hebrew, God's "knowledge" of the people's suffering suggests that God participates in, and is in some mysterious way, experiences and is affected by their sufferings

Redemption according to Exodus

- Redemption essentially involves deliverance from all forms of oppression and exploitation: political, economic, social and spiritual
- The Exodus was God's total response to Israel's total need

Moses plays a very important role in the Exodus narrative (e.g Ex. 3:10, 12 and 6:13). Trust in God's liberating power does not do away with but instead calls for human participation / involvement.

Law (Exodus 19- Numbers 10)

- The law was God's expected response to salvation. *Torah* = instruction. The law reflects God's character
- The law is a gift which guides, protects, and blesses God's people (see Gal 3:23-24)
- The law has a missionary purpose (see Exodus 19:5-6, Kingdom of Priests, Holy Nation)
- The law functions as a promise. It is God's picture of how good life can be

Questions for discussion

What stood out to you from the session?

What are the implications for us if redemption involves deliverance from all forms of oppression and exploitation: political, economic, social and spiritual?

What do you think the common views of the biblical law is? How has your understanding changed?

What questions are you still pondering?

Former prophets: Joshua – 2 Kings

Latter prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel (major) and Hosea – Malachi (minor)

The Former Prophets

The former prophets tell the story of Israel's history from their arrival at the borders of the Promised land through to the exile (around 1250-539BCE).

After Joshua's death, the people are led by a series of charismatic figures, judges, who are empowered by God to deliver the nation from various threats.

In 1 Samuel 8 the elders of Israel come to Samuel and ask him to appoint a king over them. The reason: they want a king to lead them in their battles "just as all the other nations have" (vv. 4-5). God graciously grants their request, even though it amounts to a rejection of God as Israel's king.

Saul's reign starts well, and he has some success, but he makes two key errors: disobeying God and putting himself in God's place... (does that sound familiar?). He is succeeded by Israel's greatest king, David, whose reign is marked by the defeat of the Philistines, the establishment of the city of Jerusalem, and the establishment of a covenant between God and David's family line.

The Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7) identifies the line through which the universal blessing promised to Abraham will come. It also plays a key role in the development of the messianic hopes and expectations.

David is succeeded by his son Solomon, who is primarily remembered for three things: his wisdom; building the Jerusalem temple; having many wives and concubines!

The reigns of David & Solomon represent the high point or "golden age" for the nation of Israel. After Solomon's death, things fall apart. The kingdom is divided with ten tribes in the north rejecting the Davidic covenant and forming their own nations under Jeroboam and the other two tribes in the south remaining loyal to Solomon's son Rehoboam.

The history of the northern kingdom is a straight path of infidelity, religious apostasy and social oppression. In 722BCE the northern kingdom is wiped out by the invading Assyrian Empire, led by Shalmaneser V.

Throughout this period, God sends numerous prophets to:

- Call the king to lead the people faithfully
- Call the people back to their covenant obligations
- Warn the people of consequences of not turning back to God

Things appear to go a little better in the south, with the Davidic kings and the temple. There are some great reforming kings who listen to the prophets and lead the people back to Yahweh, such as Hezekiah and Josiah. But in 587BCE Jerusalem is captured by the Babylonians leading to the end of the independent rule by the Davidic dynasty, loss of land and loss of temple.

In terms of both the Davidic and the Abrahamic promises, we might be tempted to call this "The End."

The Latter Prophets

These are the 'writing prophets' for whom we have books of the Old Testament named. The primary role of a prophet is to speak for God rather than predict the future.

What are the prophets on about? The prophets were 'covenant enforcement agents.' There are some key similarities to their message, even though each spoke into their contemporary context.

Exclusive loyalty to Yahweh alone

- Addressing the key problem of idolatry (e.g. 1 Kings 18)

Economic and social justice

- The prophets also focus on the consequences of idolatry and disobedience to the law in the life of the nation (e.g. Amos 5:12; 6:4-7; 8:5-8)

God's judgement on sin

- The prophet's messages are often dominated by words of judgement. We need to keep two things in mind: These judgments are not arbitrary; they are connected with the covenant; and the purpose of these announcements is repentance

Hope

- Judgement is never the final word. The prophets also promise hope for the future – restoration, remnants, renewal and a future King (Messiah) who will bring justice and righteousness.

How did the prophets seek to bring about change?

Through the creative and imaginative use of language. The prophets were poets. They use dramatic imagery, symbolism, hyperbole in order to move people with their words. The prophets were able to see and imagine a new reality that God was calling his people into, and then articulate this in a way that inspired action and change in the present.

THE BIBLICAL STORY FOR EVERYONE

Exile, return & those odd 400 years between testaments (Intertestamental Period)

Timeline of key events:

587 _{BCE}	Destruction of Jerusalem, start of exile
539	Cyrus comes to power, decree and end of exile
515	Rebuilding of temple
420	End of Old Testament (Malachi)
333	Alexander the Great conquers Persian empire/known world
323	Alexander dies, empire split between generals
215-164	Antiochus Epiphanes IV
167-163	Maccabean Revolt
63	Romans arrive in Palestine

The Return from Exile

In October 539BCE, the city of Babylon was captured by the Persian Emperor, Cyrus the Great. He has a “policy of toleration” and allows the Jews to return home. In Ezra-Nehemiah, we are told of three groups who return to Israel:

- Ezra 1-6 (538-516BCE): under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, Joshua and Zerubbabel. With the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the temple is rebuilt.
- Ezra 7-10 (458BCE): under the leadership of the priest Ezra, obedience to the Torah is re-established
- Nehemiah 1-13 (445BCE): under the leadership of the governor Nehemiah, the city walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt, establishing safety and identity

One of the primary goals of those who returned home was to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple, and Cyrus even funded part of the rebuilding process!

The rebuilding process took a long time – 20 years – but the temple was eventually completed in 516BCE. The rebuilt temple was met with mixed reactions. Had Yahweh really returned to dwell with his people?

Many Jews felt like they were still “in exile” even that they had returned to their homeland (see Neh 9: 36). Although Cyrus allowed the Jews to return, many chose to stay in Babylon. This is the beginning of *Diaspora*. Because these Jews no longer lived in the land, they sought to develop new markers of Jewish identity.

Without land, temple or king, what do you think became the key markers of the Jewish faith?

From Alexander the Great to Jesus of Nazareth

Although the OT comes to a close with the book of Malachi, the story is clearly not finished.

In 333/332 Alexander the Great and the armies of Greece marched through Palestine. Alexander was a smart politician – he worked at establishing a single culture (Hellenism) with a single language (Greek) throughout his Empire. He sought to blend Greek culture and thinking with the local, native cultures. This blending of cultures was met with varying degrees of enthusiasm among the Jews.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes (215-164BCE)

Antiochus was absolutely hated by the Jews. He:

- Had no regard for the office of High Priest
- Outlawed some of the key markers of Jewish identity
- Plundered the Jerusalem Temple
- Opened up the Jerusalem Temple for the worship of pagan gods

Maccabean War / Revolt (167-163BCE)

This was led by Judas Maccabeus and marked the first time in 400 years that the Jews were not subject to foreign rulers. Significance: a redefinition of what it means to be the Messiah (military, political figure).

Roman rule (63BCE)

In 63BCE, the Roman army, under Pompey, entered Jerusalem. Pompey made one major mistake – he personally inspected the interior of the Jerusalem Temple. Pompey's act stirred up anti-Roman animosity.

Pompey appointed a Roman proconsul to govern the new Roman province, and a Jewish high priest in Jerusalem. After Julius Caesar's rise to power, he appointed a new proconsul, Antipater the Idumean, who in turn appoints his sons Phasel and Herod as governors in Galilee and Jerusalem.

Herod "the Great" fled to Rome after Caesar's murder, and persuaded Antony to appoint him king of Judea, Samaria and Idumea. He was unpopular with the Jews due to his Idumean descent and his brutality. He attempted to gain favour by marrying a Hasmonean princess and by rebuilding the temple precinct. Herod's sons and grandsons, including Archelaus, Antipas, Philip and Agrippa, had various official roles throughout the region both before and after his death in 4BCE.

Within Israel there developed a growing hope that God would return to deliver his people, to cast away their pagan Roman rulers, and rule the world from Jerusalem.

Judaism(s) at the time of Jesus

By the time of Jesus, there were a number of different “denominations” within Judaism. Each had a different understanding about how to respond to their Roman rulers/the influence of Hellenism and how God was going to bring about his kingdom.

The Pharisees were religious purists. They vigorously opposed the influence of the foreign rulers – by emphasising importance or carefully and rigorously observing the law in all aspects of daily life. They believed that God would act to deliver his people IF and WHEN their got their religious house in order

The Essenes were isolationists. They withdrew to start their own completely separate communities and were waiting for God to judge wickedness, assuming they would be the only ones to survive.

The Zealots were revolutionaries. They were willing to use any means, even violence, to overthrow their oppressors. They believed they could bring about God’s reign on earth by purifying Israel, by violent means if necessary

The Sadducees & Herodians went with the flow. They were happy to co-operate, make the best of the situation, play the political game in public and religious in private. They had virtually given up on God acting in any decisive or supernatural way

It is into this cacophony of hopes and expectations for the coming Messiah that Jesus arrives and turns everyone upside-down.

Questions for discussion

What stood out to you from the session?

Why did Israel want a human king? What are the implications of this in and for the story?

Think back to the covenants God made in Genesis and Exodus, how is Israel going at living those out at this point in the story? What has gone well? What points of tension can you see?

Was there anything in the Intertestamental Period that stood out to you? How does that help you understand the political, economic, social and spiritual landscape at the time of Jesus?

What changes if we read the gospels knowing there was multiple “Judaisms” or views on who the messiah would be and how the kingdom would come?

What questions are you still pondering?

THE BIBLICAL STORY FOR EVERYONE

Resources for further study

This series of lectures are based on the work of Bartholomew and Goheen in their book, *The Drama of Scripture*. This is a great starting place for anyone wanting a little more information.

For those wanting a deeper dive:

The Bible Project videos and podcasts on Intro to Biblical Law, How to Read Biblical Law, and Podcast interview with Carmen Joy Imes on her book *Bearing God's Name*.

Carmen Joy Imes, *Bearing God's Name: why Sinai still matters*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019).

The Bible Project videos and podcasts on How to Read the Prophets, Ezra-Nehemiah, Wisdom books and Biblical Poetry.

Tim Mackie from the Bible Project has a 4+ hour teaching on Ezra-Nehemiah. It is on YouTube. Search "Ezra-Nehemiah Tim Mackie (Bible Project)".

Appendix 1: The Writings

The two other parts of the OT that we don't have time cover are a part of the writings. The writings are dominated by two groups of books: Poetry (Psalms, Song of Songs and Lamentations) and Wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes).

Wisdom Literature

The purpose of wisdom is to share reflections on life. There are different types of wisdom: Practical – Proverbs; Theological – Job; Philosophical – Ecclesiastes. Major themes include successful relationships, avoiding excess, acquiring wisdom, order, living with questions.

Interpreting Proverbs:

- Look for the principle/truth the proverb points towards
- Use wisdom to discern how and when the proverb applies
- Read individual proverbs in light of the others, in the context of the book (chapters 1-9) and Scripture as a whole

Interpreting Job/Ecclesiastes

- Read and understand the message of the book as a whole (this is key!)
- Look for God's perspective, not just human questions
- Recognise the book as a journey or process – the search itself may be just as important as the conclusion

Poetry

Major features of Hebrew poetry: terseness, parallelism, and imagery.

Psalms

How were the Psalms used?

- In public worship, as Israel's "hymn book," connected to corporate gatherings, times of celebration, remembrance, and teaching.
- In private prayer/worship

There are many different types of Psalms. The three most common are:

Praise (e.g. Psalms 98, 117, 146-150). These Psalms acknowledge who God is and declare what he has done.

Lament (e.g. Psalms 13, 69, 77). These Psalms are cries of distress. They are highly structured, following a pattern of: invocation, plea, confession, imprecation, confidence/praise.

Thanksgiving (e.g. Psalms 30, 116). These are testimonies of God's work and call others to praise.

Other types of Psalms include Confidence, Wisdom, Remembrance, Kingship, Zion, Pilgrimage.

Above all, the Psalms call for *response*

- to praise God, to be transformed, to participate in worship
- to engage our minds, emotions, imaginations, and bodies

Appendix 2: Prophets chronological order

Prophet	Date (BCE)	History reference	Relation to the exile (587BCE)	Audience	Major /Minor	Other info
Jonah	785-760	Mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25. Sent at the height of Nineveh's prosperity.	Pre- exilic	Nineveh, capital Assyria	Minor	
Amos	760-740	During the reign of Uzziah king of Judah (2 Kings 15/ 2 Chronicles 26) and Jeroboam II King of Israel (1 Kings 11- 21).	Pre- exilic	Israel (northern kingdom)	Minor	Israel was conquered by Assyrians in 722BCE. After the nations divided (930's BCE), all but 3 of the kings of Israel did "evil in the eyes of the Lord." Jeroboam was one of the worst.
Hosea	750-715	During the reign of Uzziah, Jotham (2 Kings 15), Ahaz (2 Kings 16) and Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-21) kings of Judah and Jeroboam king of Israel.	Pre- exilic	Israel (northern kingdom)	Minor	
Joel	Unknown	"After a locust plague"- no other indication.	Pre- exilic	Israel (northern kingdom)	Minor	
Isaiah	740-680	During the reign of Uzziah, Jotham (2 Kings 15), Ahaz (2 Kings 16) and Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-21) kings of Judah.	Pre- exilic	Judah (southern kingdom)	Major	
Micah	720-700	During the reign of Jotham (2 Kings 15), Ahaz (2 Kings 16) and Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-21) kings of Judah.	Pre- exilic	Judah (southern kingdom)	Minor	Micah and Isaiah were likely contemporaries. Mentioned in Jeremiah 26:18
Nahum	650-630	Assyria in decline	Pre- exilic	Assyria (Nineveh)	Minor	
Habakkuk	640-620	Sometime between Babylon rising to power and the first group being taken to Babylon (of which Daniel was one)	Pre- exilic	Judah (southern kingdom)	Minor	
Zephaniah	640-610	During the reign of Josiah king of Judah (2 Kings 21-23)	Pre- exilic	Judah (southern kingdom)	Minor	Josiah was 8 when he became king. He was responsible for finding The Book of the Law.

Obadiah	500's?	Either Edom's attack on Jerusalem in 845 or Edom's support of the Babylonian exile in 587.	Pre- exilic/ exilic	Edom	Minor	Edom- Esau's descendants
Jeremiah	626-580's	During the reign of Josiah king of Judah (2 Kings 21-23), through the reign of Jehoiakim (2 kings 23-24), Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24-25) and Zedekiah (2 kings 24-25).	Exilic	Judah/ The exiles	Major	During Jeremiah's time as a prophet Babylon conquered Judah (587BCE). Jeremiah warned the kings, but when they finally listened it was too late.
Daniel	605-530	Daniel 1-6. During the reign of Jehoiakim.	Exilic	Exiles	Major	Daniel's story takes place starting before the fall of Judah. The Babylonians took a large group from Judah to Babylon in a first wave 20 years before they finally conquered Judah.
Ezekiel	593-571	During the exile- possibly writing from Babylon.	Exilic	Exiles	Major	
Haggai	520-516	During the reign of Darius king of Babylon. Darius was a Mede/ Persian.	Post- exilic	The remnant/ returnees	Minor	
Zechariah	520-480	Same as Haggai but continues later during the reign of Darius king of Babylon.	Post- exilic	The remnant/ returnees	Minor	
Malachi	470-430	Nehemiah no longer governing	Post- exilic	The remnant/ returnees	Minor	

