



A Holy History

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Finding Jesus in the Old Testament

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Adam & Eve

This story starts right at the very beginning of humanity. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, living in perfect fellowship with God. Creation as it was meant to be, flourishing, painless and free. Yet, within this paradise entered sin and temptation. Adam and Eve ate the one fruit they were commanded not to. This act of disobedience towards God brought judgement and death, separation from perfect divine fellowship. Which brings us up to today's part of the story.

God finds Adam and Eve, ashamed and hopelessly trying to cover their nakedness. His holy response to their sin is judgement and banishment from the garden. But, even before he pronounces their judgement, he curses the snake. And it is here that we find the very first glimpse of the gospel message.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

- Genesis 3:15

Yes, even before judgement, God offers hope! He could have destroyed Adam and Eve right then, but he speaks words of promise to them, allowing them to continue for a greater purpose. This is the merciful, faithful heart of our God!

The word 'offspring', also translated as 'seed' ('*zera* in the original Hebrew) is very important here. The word can be both singular or plural, but the use of a singular pronoun suggests that this case refers to a single offspring or seed. It seems very possible that Adam and Eve hoped one of their immediate children would be this seed, the one who would defeat Satan. Sadly, this hope was dashed with Cain's murder of Abel. Hope was renewed with the birth of Seth, of which Eve says 'God has granted me another child ('*zera*).

Throughout Genesis, we see the development of a specific line of Eve's seed, traced through Seth to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The whole Old Testament asks this question each time a leader or hero is raised up. Is this person the seed of Eve? Will this person deliver us from the power of Satan and this fallen world? And each time, they inevitably fall into sin, in need of a saviour just as much as everyone else. So when Jesus comes in the world, we might ask the same question. In Luke 4, Luke traces Jesus' ancestry all the way back to Adam. By doing this, he hints at Jesus being the seed of Adam and Eve, the one the whole Old Testament has been waiting for.

Romans 16:20 picks up strong Genesis 3 imagery when it says '*the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet*'. This is in the immediate context of '*the grace of our Lord Jesus*'. The promise made to Eve is also hinted at in Galatians 4:4, which describes Jesus as being '*born of a woman*' when the time had fully come.

Jesus is the promised seed of Eve who did what no one else before him could do. The enemy indeed bruised Jesus' heel. In his crucifixion, it seemed like the powers of evil conquered Jesus.

Yet, the promise also speaks of the seed crushing the serpent's head. A bruised heel is a minor injury but a crushed head is a death blow. When Jesus was raised from the dead, he crushed the head of Satan, winning ultimate victory over evil, sin and death. *The whisper of hope found all the way back in Genesis 3:15 reaches its fulfilment in Jesus*. He took the curse of Adam and Eve onto himself, paying the penalty we deserved and restoring us to Eden fellowship with the Father. God's plan for salvation promised right from the beginning.

Over the next few sessions, we're going to look at how this promise develops through the Old Testament, until it reaches its fulfilment in Christ.

Reflect

Read Genesis 3:1-13

How did Adam and Eve respond to God's command? What were their motives?

What does this tell us about the nature of sin?

Read Genesis 3:14-15

How does the snake's curse bring hope for Adam and Eve?

What does it mean for the woman's seed to crush the snake's head?

For the snake to strike his heel?

Read Genesis 3:16-24

How do we see hints of God's mercy even in the midst of judgement?

(v.21) What does this tell us about God's character?

Abraham

Last week, we looked at the promise made to Adam and Eve - one of their descendants (seed or *zera*) would crush the head of the serpent. Generations came and went, but none of them brought forth this promised seed. In Genesis 12, a crucial shift occurs in the way God relates to his people. Earlier chapters focus on all the nations, but now the story focuses in on one person – Abraham. God’s promise of a seed now continues specifically through Abraham’s family line.

Why did God choose Abraham? It had nothing to do with who Abraham was. He wasn’t even a follower of God when he was called. Rather, it was all because of God’s grace. Abraham simply obeyed in faith when God called him, and received the promise of the covenant.

Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you

and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

- Genesis 12:1-3

God's covenant to Abraham, found in Genesis 12, has three main parts:

- a promised land
- a great nation made up of many descendants
- all nations being blessed through him

These are big, amazing promises! But looking at Abraham's life, it's clear that there were some major roadblocks. Abraham had no children at all, let alone a nation full of descendants. He'd just left his homeland and was wandering in a strange land. If these promises were to be fulfilled, God would have to miraculously intervene.

In the Ancient Near East, a covenant was a solemn promise between two parties, each with particular responsibilities. But here, the covenant was all on God's side. In fact, we see in Genesis 15:12-18 that Abraham was asleep when God confirmed the covenant! All Abraham had to do was respond to God in faith.

Genesis shows how these promises begin to be fulfilled, tracing the covenant in each generation after Abraham through a specific line - Isaac rather than Ishmael, Jacob rather than Esau. This was a family characterised by deception, rivalry and fear. Each one of them a

sinner, none of them truly deserving God's gracious covenant love.

God is faithful, even when his chosen people are not.

Throughout the Old Testament, God's promises are fulfilled further.

Abraham's descendants enter the promised land and settle there.

They become the great nation of Israel, the special covenant people

of God. They were called to be a light to the nations, set apart and

shining the way to God. Yet, Israel fails again and again to be a

blessing to all nations. They fail to be God's covenant people and

eventually come under the rule of other kingdoms. The complete

fulfilment of the covenant would have to wait for something greater.

Let's go now to the New Testament. Galatians 3:16 picks up again

the idea of Abraham's promised 'seed', the one through whom all the

promises of Abraham would come. Using the singular rather than

plural, this refers to one particular descendant of Abraham – Jesus!

Jesus perfectly fulfills all the covenant promises made to Abraham.

He is from the promised line of Abraham. He leads people into the

Promised Land of heaven. And he offers his salvation to people of

all nations. If we are believers of Jesus, we also receive the complete

fulfilment of the covenant to Abraham. More descendants and more

blessing than Abraham could ever have hoped for.

Reflect

Read Genesis 12:1-9

What promises did God make to Abraham? How did Abraham respond to God's call?

Read Genesis 15:1-20

What obstacle seems to be in the way of the promises?

How does God reply when Abraham points out this obstacle? What does this tell us about God?

What was Abraham doing when God confirmed the covenant (v.12)?

How does this reflect the way we receive salvation?

Read Galatians 3:14-16

Who does the 'seed of Abraham' refer to? How does this fulfil the promises made to Abraham?

How does Jesus bring blessing to all nations?

In light of Jesus, how can we respond in faith like Abraham did?

Moses

We're now going to look at the next stage of God's covenant with his people. The descendants of Abraham were living as slaves in Egypt. God, in his covenant faithfulness, worked through Moses and delivered them through the Red Sea and led them to the land he promised to Abraham.

In Exodus 19:4-6, we see God do something absolutely amazing! He personally delivered them from slavery, and now he enters into a special covenant with the people of Israel.

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

-Exodus 19:4-6

God called them to be his treasured possession. Holy and set apart, a kingdom of priests who would represent God to the surrounding nations. We see here God's promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him. This great privilege, however, comes only if Israel is obedient to the commands God gives them.

At Mount Sinai, God gave his people the Law. These commandments provided a way for them to be set apart and holy, and live in that covenant relationship with Him. Yet, here's where we find the dilemma running all through the Bible's story. While the Law was holy, the people were not. *How can a sinful people live in covenant relationship with a holy God?*

Within the Law were very specific instructions on how the Israelites could have their sins forgiven and thus approach God – the sacrificial system. One of the biggest events in the Israelite calendar was the Day of Atonement. Here, the priest entered the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle and offered up sacrificial animals. The blood of these animals sprinkled on the altar served as a substitute for the people, cleansing them from their sins. God is so perfectly holy, however, that the priest first needed to offer a sacrifice to cover his own sins before he could intercede for the people. Even the physical altar itself needed to be consecrated with sacrificial blood.

After these sacrifices came the high point of the sacrificial drama - the 'scapegoat'. The sins of the Israelite people were confessed and symbolically placed on a goat, before it was taken away into the

wilderness. Such a striking visual representation for Israel of their sins not only being covered, but being completely removed.

Even when the instructions were followed exactly, these sacrifices needed to be offered up year after year. Why? Because, in reality, they were unable to deal with the problem of sin. The blood of bulls and goats, offered up by an imperfect, sin-stained priest, could not make lasting atonement for the people' sins.

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament merely pointed towards the greater sacrifice that was to come. Hebrews 9:1-14 shows Jesus as the perfect High Priest who shed his own blood to intercede for us. Not on an earthly altar, but on the heavenly altar in the very presence of the Father. He is our scapegoat, who carried our sins on himself and, being cast out into the wilderness of the grave, removed them completely.

And because Jesus was perfect, without any sin or blame, his sacrifice was effective once and for all. As Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the temple – which surrounded the Most Holy Place where God's presence dwelt – was torn from top to bottom. An earthly symbol of a heavenly reality. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, the barrier of sin that kept us from being in God's presence has been completely destroyed. We now have eternal redemption. We can now live as God's treasured possession and represent him to the world as a kingdom of priests, holy and set apart.

Reflect

Read Exodus 19:1-7

How had God already shown himself to be a deliverer to the Israelites?

What does God promise to do for the Israelites? What does he ask them to do in return?

How does this shape the way we think about the 10 Commandments? (*Ex 20:1-17*)

Read Leviticus 16:1-34

How do we see Jesus foreshadowed in the scapegoat? In the sacrificial sin offering?

Read Hebrews 9:1-15

How does Jesus' blood cleanse us from sin? How is this different to the Old Testament sacrificial system?

What does it mean for us to be a kingdom of priests in the new covenant?

David

In this session, we're going to look at King David and see how God's promise to him points clearly to Jesus.

By the time of David, the people of Israel are firmly settled in the land promised to Abraham. Under David's rule, Israel is prosperous and has victory over neighbouring enemy nations. The ark of the covenant – symbolic of God's presence with his people – had been captured by the Philistines, but after defeating the Philistines at the Valley of Rephaim, David brings the ark back to Jerusalem. This sets the scene for the next big promise God made to his people.

When David looked at the splendour he himself lived in, he was stirred to build a dwelling place for God. However, the prophet Nathan told him that, while he wouldn't be the one to build the temple, God had something even greater planned for him.

The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to

succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

- 2 Samuel 7:11-13

God promises that he will make David's name great and that Israel will have a place to live where they won't be disturbed or oppressed by enemy nations. In these promises, we see a direct echo of the covenant made to Abraham. But next, God makes a promise that extends even further. While David had wanted to build a house for God, God instead declares that he will build a house for David. *It always comes down to what God gives us in his grace, rather than what we can give Him.* And what God gives us is greater than we could hope or imagine!

The word 'house' here doesn't only refer to a physical dwelling place, but a dynasty or family line. From this point on, the ruling line of Israel would come from David's family. The promise, though, speaks of one particular descendant. He would be the one to build a house for God. He is also described as having a very special, father-son relationship with God. He will be chastised when he sins, but God's love will never be taken away from him.

At first glance, much of this promise seems to be fulfilled by David's son Solomon. He built the physical temple in Jerusalem. He sinned against God, yet God's love for him remained faithful. There is,

however, one part of the promise that absolutely could not be talking about Solomon. The promised descendant of David would have his throne established forever. He would be the one anointed by God, or the Messiah - God's special, chosen ruler.

In Jewish thought, the hope of the Messiah continued even when they were in exile or under Roman rule. Isaiah 11:6 speaks of a king from Jesse's line who would reign forever, with great wisdom and care for the poor.

Let's now think about Jesus in light of this promise. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he said that Jesus will reign over the house of Jacob forever. This immediately identifies him as the promised king from the line of David, the one who will rule eternally with wisdom and justice. The one that the people of Israel had been hoping for all these years.

How is Jesus able to keep this eternal throne, when every other king's rule was cut short by death? Through his resurrection, death has no power over him! He has now ascended to heaven where he sits, exalted in the highest place. Jesus has defeated the power of death and now reigns in eternal life. And this eternal life, he also offers to us as we live with him as king.

Reflect

Read 2 Samuel 7:8-11

How does God respond to David's desire to build a temple? What does this reveal about God's heart to bless his people?

How does this connect to the promises made to Abraham?

Read 2 Samuel 7:12-16

How does Solomon fulfil the promise God makes to David? How does Jesus fulfil the promise's ultimate meaning?

Read Matthew 1:1

Why is it important that Jesus is described as the Son of David?

Read Acts 2:29-36

How does Jesus' resurrection fulfil the promise made to David?

What does it mean to live with Jesus as our eternal king?

Exile

Over the last few weeks, we've looked at some of the big names in Old Testament history – Adam, Abraham, Moses and David. Now we're heading to a part of the story that's a little less familiar.

As Judah's monarchy continued, most kings did evil in the eyes of God. This led the people of God down a slippery slope, heading deeper into sin and idolatry. Through his prophets, God gave warnings of judgement if they didn't turn back to him. By the time of Ezekiel, this judgement had come - Babylon had destroyed Jerusalem and taken many people into exile. In fact, Ezekiel himself was writing his prophecies while exiled in Babylon.

Judah had reached the bleakest point in its history. Yet, in the midst of this judgement, God breaks through with a promise of restoration. He promises that he will gather his exiled people and return them to the Promised Land. God remains faithful to the covenant he made to Abraham all those years ago. Alongside that, he promises to renew the covenant relationship – that they would live in their land as God's people, in personal relationship with him.

For I will take you out of the nations, I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.

- Ezekiel 36:24

Yet, simply restoring the people from exile wouldn't deal with the real problem. The sin and idolatry that destroyed Judah would only come back. The relationship of the covenant people towards their God would be defined again and again by unfaithfulness, apathy and disobedience. For we, as people, have hearts that are hard and incapable of truly obeying God's ways. It's a problem so deeply ingrained within us, something that can't be fixed by just trying harder next time.

In light of all this, God promises something completely ground breaking and revolutionary.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

- Ezekiel 36:25-27

He doesn't just promise a new moral direction or new strategies to better keep the law. God does something we're completely incapable

of doing for ourselves. He says he'll actually take the hard hearts of his people and transform them into hearts of flesh. Hearts that are able and willing to live for God and obey his commands, not out of obligation but from a genuine desire. So that we can live in true covenant relationship with him as our Lord and we as his beloved people. Such a transformation can only come from God!

This same transformation is echoed in Jeremiah 31, where God promises to make a new covenant with his people. Something that goes far beyond the external laws and rituals that governed our hearts of stone. A covenant that will be defined by God's law written on our minds and our hearts. *By a genuine and personal relationship with God made available to all people. By complete forgiveness of sins.*

If we jump ahead a few centuries, we find Jesus talking with Nicodemus about what it means to be born again. Jesus says that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. This goes right back to the imagery of Ezekiel 36, where God promises to sprinkle cleansing water on his people and put his Spirit within them. Jesus is saying here to Nicodemus that he is the fulfilment of that promise. He's the one who deals with the heart problem of sin, who not only covers our sins but completely washes them away. He's the one who transforms our hearts, through his Spirit, into hearts of flesh beating for God.

Reflect

Read Ezekiel 36:24-27

What does God promise in these verses? How is this different to the promises made before?

Why was an inner transformation necessary for God's people? Is this the same for us today?

What does it mean to have a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone?

Read John 3:5

What does it mean to be born of water? Born of the Spirit?

In what ways does this fulfil the promise of Ezekiel?

What does it look like to live according to the Spirit and a transformed heart?

Restoration

We've come to the end point of Old Testament history, and the final session in our series.

We saw last week that God's people had sinned so much that they were sent away from the Promised Land to Babylon. Eventually, Babylon itself was conquered and taken over by the new superpower, Persia. Under the rule of Persian king Cyrus, the people of Judah were allowed to return to their homeland. This was seen as a great act of divine deliverance, just like when the Israelites were delivered from slavery in Egypt.

Once people had returned to Jerusalem, they undertook the task of rebuilding the temple. The temple had been an essential part of worship for Israel:

- it symbolised God's presence with his people
- it was the place where people could be reconciled with God

Even though they were in the Promised Land again, things weren't quite living up to the promise. The line of Davidic kings were no longer ruling in the land and only some of the tribes of Israel had returned. As the new temple was being built, a sense of disappointment grew – it didn't seem to match the splendour of what had gone before.

Through Haggai's prophecy God encourages his people not to become disheartened.

In a little while, I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD Almighty. The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the LORD Almighty. The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the LORD Almighty.

- Haggai 2:6-9

God promises that, in the near future, he will 'shake the heavens and the earth' - he will revolutionise the way that people relate to God. And connected closely to this, the arrival of 'the desire of all nations'. Going right back to the promise made to Abraham, it has always been God's plan to extend his blessing to the whole earth.

Although the temple being built seemed underwhelming compared to Solomon's temple, God promises that it will actually have even greater glory. A stronger sense of God's presence and favour. Lasting peace between God and his people. All of these promises – a new order, blessing for all nations, glory and peace – come through the new temple.

Yet, as with all these Old Testament prophecies, the immediate fulfilment points ahead to something further still. By Jesus' time, the temple had fallen into corruption and profanity. In John 2:18-22, Jesus rebukes the corrupt practices he sees happening. Not only that, Jesus identifies himself as the true temple. He fully lives out the theological truths that the temple pointed towards. Through the incarnation of Jesus, God dwells physically with his people, not merely symbolically.

Jesus is the place where we can find ultimate reconciliation with God, once for all through his death on the cross. As Jesus gave his last breath, the veil in the temple – separating humanity from God – was torn in two. Heaven and earth were shaken up, forever changing the way people can approach God. And Jesus is the 'desire of all nations', the one who offers salvation to all people. It is through this Temple that people of all tribes and languages will come to God, and the promise to bless all nations will be fulfilled.

Through the sacrifice made in Jesus' body, we can have deep, lasting peace with God that radiates out into peace with one another. Jesus'

glory is far greater than that of Solomon's temple, or even the temple of Haggai's day. *For Jesus is the perfect representation of the Father, and accomplishes his age-old plans to redeem and restore his people.*

When Jesus walked on earth, he was the physical Temple of God. But now, through the Holy Spirit, we as believers are also described as God's Temple! We are the dwelling place of God, and the place where people can come to meet him. Not only us individually, but as a community of believers – built together with Jesus as our cornerstone.

Reflect

Read Haggai 2:1-9

How could Jesus' coming be described as 'shaking heaven and earth'? How is he the 'desire of all nations'?

How does this fulfil the promise to Abraham to bless all nations through him?

Read John 2:13-22

What does it mean for Jesus to refer to himself as the temple?

In what way did the Old Testament temple point towards Jesus?

How is he different?

Read Ephesians 3:19-21

How does being a temple change the way we relate towards each other? Towards non-believers?

Jesus is...

The seed of Eve who came to crush the serpent's head

The son of Abraham, bringing blessing to all nations

The pure and spotless lamb, the once for all sacrifice

The eternal king from the house of David

The one who transforms us through his Spirit

The true temple, bringing us into God's presence

The whole Old Testament reaches its fulfilment in Jesus!

About the author

Bella Easterbrook lives in Sydney, Australia with her husband Daniel and their three little boys.

She first discovered her passion for theology and Biblical studies in the Christian group at uni. She then went on to study a Bachelor of Theology, where this passion blossomed further.

Bella loves strong cups of tea, walking through gardens and finding Jesus on the pages of the Old Testament. Her blog Over the Teacups encourages people to grow in their knowledge and love for God through his Word.

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