

## Class 8 Devotional

### The End of an Era

As we close out our time studying the Hebrew Scriptures, let's look back at the journey.

**INTRODUCTION.** The first class challenged us to “Find a New Window, Use a New Tool, and Explore a New Theme.” We learned that the Old Testament (OT) was Jesus’ Bible and that he claimed that these scriptures were about him! Seven “windows” of interpretation challenged us to take a fresh look at how we interpret scripture to consider more than just a literal or pattern lens. Other tools to help us on our quest include chronological and study Bibles, books from experienced scholars we trust, and plain old Wikipedia! We also talked about themes and the value of resources like the Bible Project to understand the OT as “a unified story that leads to Jesus.” We gave you an outline for the journey [CASKET] that we’ll use to review our steps.

#### **CASKET\***

Creation (date uncertain)  
Abraham (~2100-1450 BC)  
Sinai (1450-1050 BC)  
Kings (1050-586 BC)  
Exile (586-539 BC)  
Temple (539-430 BC)  
\* [www.casketempty.com](http://www.casketempty.com)

**CREATION.** We entered the story at the beginning—the “genesis” of the Bible. Genesis 1-11 is the introduction to the characters (YHWH, ruakh or Spirit, the tselem or images of God, Adam, Eve, Noah, Nephilim, etc.), the worldview (creation & decreation, good or Tov, elohim or spiritual beings, rebellion & sin, etc.), and the themes to follow (Eden / Paradise / Heaven, Sabbath, Exile, Justice, etc.) throughout His Story. Here everything started: the world, humanity, sin, death, marriage, violence, nations, and divine covenants.

**ABRAHAM.** Genesis 12 introduced YHWH’s plan of redemption through the line of Abraham and Sarah as traced through Isaac, Jacob/Israel, and Joseph. In a time where almost no one else did (except Melchizedek), these “Patriarchs” walked with YHWH despite the infrequent communication with YHWH, no written scripture, plenty of obstacles, and even personal failings. Abram and Sarai left Babylon (Ur) to go toward the land of promise, leaving behind their families and way of life, to fulfill YHWH’s instructions to spread his dominion, multiply, and fill the earth. Yet they themselves struggled to follow YHWH, seemed too old to have children, and stumbled in their travels. YHWH entered into a divine covenant with them and their chosen children, promising that they would be blessed and a blessing to the whole earth. So they trusted YHWH!

**SINAI.** 400 years later, these “Hebrews” wondered what happened—finding themselves slaves in Egypt. They cried out to God and he gave them the prophet Moses. YHWH revealed himself through plagues that overpowered the gods of Egypt, delivering the Hebrews, and marching them toward the land he promised Abraham. Despite grumbling and rebellion, Joshua led the next generation of Hebrews to conquer Canaan. They established the new nation of Israel in the promised land... but quickly forgot YHWH’s commands and entered into the cycle of Judges:

Idolatry → Oppression → Crying Out → Deliverance [Repeat]

**KINGS.** Up to this time, Israel operated as a theocracy—their only King was YHWH. Israel cried out to the final Judge, Samuel the prophet, insisting, *“We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”* They rejected YHWH’s reign, and Saul became their king. Indeed, he was like the kings of other nations. Soon YHWH intervened to choose *“a man after God’s own heart”* anointing David of the line of Judah as Israel’s new king. YHWH established an eternal covenant with David—all kings of Judah after that would come from David’s descendants. Just two generations later, the Kingdom divided as Solomon strayed from YHWH’s instructions for the king (Deut. 17) that forbid kings to accumulate wives, chariots, horses, gold, or *“consider himself better than other Israelites.”* As Israel and Judah deserted YHWH, prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Isaiah proclaimed the voice of YHWH, calling them to restore God’s reign and to honor their covenant through justice, righteousness, and holiness.

**EXILE.** The Northern Kingdom of Israel indulged in idolatry and found themselves constantly threatened by their enemies until they were finally destroyed and exiled by Assyria in 722 BC. Despite the desperate prophetic pleas of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel against the Southern Kingdom of Judah, they also plunged into idolatry. Spiritual revivals led by Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah brought only temporary glimmers of hope. After barely surviving Assyria's sieges, the Kingdom came to an end at the hand of Babylon. Over a period of 20 years, the Babylonians deported the Israelites on three separate occasions and destroyed both the city of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC. God's presence left the city and the descendants of Israel were carried off in disgrace, dispersed from their homeland to become aliens and exiles in a foreign land. It was during this time that some Israelites with great faith assembled their historical artifacts and polished them into what we now call the Hebrew Scriptures.

**TEMPLE.** Just when it seemed there was no more hope for Israel, YHWH reminded them of his promises. Jeremiah prophesied a return to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile. Isaiah called out a future king "Cyrus" to lead Israel back to rebuild the temple. Daniel envisioned the destruction of Babylon, predicting the future reign of the Medo-Persians and Greeks. Sure enough, 70 years after the first Babylonian deportation, Cyrus defeated Babylon and declared an edict for the Israelites to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem. 50,000 exiles returned under Joshua the priest and Governor Zerubbabel. Despite opposition, with prophetic encouragement from Haggai and Zechariah, the second temple was completed in 516 BC. A few years later Esther the Jew became Queen of Persia—just in time to save the Jews from another massacre. Ezra and Nehemiah then led another 50,000 returning exiles to build the Jerusalem wall and restore the city. Although the city and its temple failed to resemble the glory of the original, the Jews once again felt hope.

The latest Hebrew prophet Malachi aptly finishes the pre-Christian story with both a curse and a hope for the return of YHWH's voice and presence:

*"Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse." Malachi 4:5-6*

Here are some closing thoughts to help us reflect on the Old Testament story:

- **The OT is His Story.** *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)* The OT reveals the story of the God you and I worship today; the one true God who will reign forever.
- **Elijah has come!** *For before John came, all the prophets and the law of Moses looked forward to this present time. And if you are willing to accept what I say, he [John] is Elijah, the one the prophets said would come. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand! (Matthew 11:13-15)* We can now look back on the prophesies and see how God fulfilled his promises through John the Baptist and Jesus!
- **Our eyes are blessed.** *Then when they were alone, he turned to the disciples and said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you have seen. I tell you, many prophets and kings longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it." (Luke 10:23-24)* What a privilege—to see God fulfil his promise to deliver us through his Messiah. We have witnessed events that the prophets longed to see!
- **God's reign cures the curse!** *No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him. And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:3-5)* We can find hope as we continue to long for the fulfilment of these promises about our reign in the New Jerusalem, the New Heaven, and the New Earth!