



**BIBLE SURVEY:**  
**A Big Screen Perspective**

by

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*Transcription*

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# Introduction

Welcome to your journey through the whole Bible. Sounds pretty intimidating, doesn't it? But it really isn't. In fact, not to sound cliché, but it will be a real life changer for you. How do I know? Well, it changed my life.

Back in 1975 I was a Bible college student and thought I knew a lot about the old and New Testaments. Then I got a postcard in the mail, and it said to me, "Come to this seminar, this Walk Thru the Bible Seminar, and you will perhaps learn more about the Old Testament - it was an Old Testament seminar – than you ever knew before." And I thought, "yeah, sure, I know, I'm going to go and prove them wrong." And instead, what happened is, they changed my life. They changed my life because what they did was, they took all of the details that I knew, and they gave me a way of handling the details, talking about the whole, big screen look of the Old Testament. And I could have told you a lot about Jonah or a lot about Isaiah or a lot about The Psalms, or pick a book. My teachers were excellent, and I got it. But what I couldn't have done was told you how it all fit together. And what I discovered is, when you know how it all fits together, the story becomes incredibly powerful.

So, that's what we're going to do here. We're going to spend five hours. We're going to avoid a lot of details, although there will be some. And instead, we're going to learn together how the big picture fits together, how you can manage what you know about scripture, how you can teach it, how you can talk about it, how you can understand it. How, when you hear new things, you can put them into a filing cabinet that you can carry with you all of the time. You will become a walking and talking Bible encyclopedia if you do this, like I think you will.

It's a powerful thing. You're going to gain confidence in terms of your ability to handle scripture, because you are going to look at it through a leadership perspective. You're going to begin to sense how important it is for those who hope that God would use them in ways of influence, to have this kind of handle on scripture, to know how it fits together, to have confidence in it. We will always be asking to question, "Why is this important to a leader?" And I can guarantee you, you will have answers for that.

This is going to be a great, great journey. Yes, it's going to be fast. Yes, it's going to be energetic. Sometimes you're going to want to get up and say, "slow down", but really, part of the genius of it is that we are going to be so focused on these ten sessions, that we're going to get how it all fits together. And once you have got it, it will change everything. We'll have some more courses along the way, courses that will look more deeply into the various pieces of the big picture that you are going to learn. So, be patient. Let's get this foundational aspect down. Let's together, really learn how to

handle the big sweep of scripture. And in doing that, we will give ourselves the tools that will make a difference for us for a lifetime.

Well, I'm ready to go. Are you ready to go? If so, let's get to that first session, and let's go to work. Put on your track shoes, we're going to move fast, but it's going to be great. Welcome to the journey.

# Lesson 1 ■ Describing the “Elephant”

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSPECTIVE

Perspective, that is what you and I will be working on together. We take a big picture journey through the Old Testament and into the new, through the whole Bible.

When I think of perspective, I am often reminded of an old story that I know you have heard. It is ancient in fact, and there is some debate as to where it actually came from, though many think from India. It is a story of six blind men that are gathered by a king and are asked to describe an elephant for him. So they are put in a room with an elephant and they each need to check it out, and they each go to a different part of the elephant. One feels and touches the leg, and one gets the tail, and one has the ear, one feels the side, and one got the trunk, and the other one has the tusk. As they have checked out their various parts, the king asks them, “So, what is the elephant like?” Their response is, “Well, the elephant is like a hose”, and the one who has touched the trunk thinks it must be a strong, flexible hose. The other one says, “No, no, no, it’s a spear because I felt this tusk and it’s sharp on the end, and this must be a large, massive spear, so somehow it’s like a spear.” The one who touched the tail of course thought it was more like a wire or a rope, some strong chord. The one who touched the leg, “No, no, no, it’s a tree. You can feel the bark. It has to be a massive, strong tree.” The one who touched the side thinks it’s a wall, and the one who felt the ear is sure that it’s like a fan you hold in your hand to cool yourself.

## DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR THE COURSE

Well, here is the interesting thing, is that they were all right and they were all wrong. The problem was, is not one of them could see the whole picture. And that is what we are going to be doing together for several sessions as we try to develop a whole picture of the Bible. Now, whenever I do this, someone always comes along and says, “I really like that, but we didn’t go deep enough”, so I need to put a disclaimer in right at the front. Our intent is not to go deep. Our intent is to take the pieces of the Bible and to put them together in a uniform picture, so that wherever you are in the Bible, you can have a sense of what came before and what comes after, how the piece you’re looking at fits in. It becomes a very powerful journey for you, and it is very effective.

The other thing I need to say about what we’re going to do – and I don’t know if this is going to be true of all of you who are watching and interacting with this – but I’m going

to assume a perspective of leadership. In other words, as we go through the big picture, I'm going to try to portray it through a certain lens, and it is the lens of leadership. Obviously, there are many other ways that this could be portrayed, but I'm thinking that if you are taking the time to be here, and you are actually interested in the big picture of the Old Testament, that somehow God either is or will be using you in a very significant way as an influencer for him. In that case, it is really important that you have the big picture and that you get it from a certain perspective. So, that is what we will be doing. So, with due respect to all of the other perspectives that could have been covered, that is how we are going to approach what we do.

In 1976 I graduated from the graduate program of one of the finest Bible colleges in the country. Like many of you probably, I had been to college, went to a fine university, went through the graduate program in school administration at a couple of very good private institutions in the northwest. And then God kind of got hold of my life and I decided that I would take a year of Bible college, and do their graduate program. And it was probably the best educational experience I have had of all of my educational experiences, in many respects. It was hard, it was intense. They pushed us, they made us learn a ton. We memorized things. I walked away saying to myself, "If I know nothing else, I know the Bible."

It was about that time that I got a little postcard in the mail, and it was advertising a thing called, "Walk Thru the Bible" seminar. Basically it's pitch was, to come and spend six hours and you will know the Old Testament like you never knew it before. And I must admit, I kind of went because I sort of wanted to disprove the claim. I thought, "Nobody could know the Old Testament like I know it now." And so, my wife and I went. And about halfway through, just about the time we were walking out of the church for lunch break, I looked over at Alice and said, "You know, for all the good things that my Bible education did for me, - and they were very good - that if you had asked me to do this before this morning, I could not have told you the picture like this." I had my pockets full of pieces of the scripture. I knew tons of pieces of Ephesians, lots of Jonah, and a whole bunch of Genesis and some of Psalms. And I had an understanding of things like I never had before, and I was very grateful for that. But what I could not do was put it together from beginning to end. What I could not do was think through how it actually related, how pieces of Genesis have relevance in the book of Revelation, how the covenants of the Old Testament connect to the new covenant that Christ brings through what he says. Every time we celebrate communion, we take his body, we take the bread, "This is my body broken for you." We take the cup, "This is the new covenant with my blood." What does that mean? It was on that crazy six-hour day that I left going, "My goodness, the big picture is incredibly important.

So that is what we want to get at today together, is to take a look at the biggest possible picture we can and see if we can put all of the pieces together in a way that will help us

to manage our way through the scripture. My goal for you today, if I can state it succinctly, is this to give you a framework in which you can put biblical content for the rest of your life. In other words, I'm going to give you a whole bunch of filing cabinets and you are going to be able to take the content that you know now, and the content that you will learn, and you are going to be able to take that content and put it into those filing cabinets, so that you can manage your way around the scriptures. This is huge, particularly for those of us who desire to be influencers or leaders. Perhaps some of you are elders and deacons. Some of you may be Sunday school teachers who are dealing with this. Some of you may be leaders and you don't even think of yourselves as that. You're moms and you're dads, and you are perhaps living with the most important flock of all, your family.

So we want to as influencers, not just be able to look at certain pieces and determine what those pieces mean, but as influencers we want to make sure that what we are looking at here is consistent with the whole sweep of scripture, and that is significantly important.

I remember a few years back meeting a guy at a seminar I taught. After the seminar, he came up. People always come up after the seminar, either to congratulate you or correct something you have said. This guy wanted to kind of bring me into focus, so his whole point was, "Well, you know, it was really interesting what you did", but he said, "I've learned that the crucial piece is the book of Revelation, so I've studied nothing but the book of Revelation for the last seven years of my life." I congratulated him, I told him, "That's very cool, I'm glad you've done that. Good to be in the Word." As he walked out affirmed, I thought to myself, this guy has to have a really warped view of the program of God, with all due respect. You can't get it all by just knowing one piece deeply.

Just a few weeks ago I was at another place speaking, and at the end of the service, another gentleman came up, a very sincere person, who obviously is an eager student of the scriptures, and he had kind of the same story, only for him, he said, "You know, I've discovered that the key to knowing all of the scripture is Psalm 119." And I said, "Well, why is that?" And he said, "Because it's right in the middle of the book, and it's all about the Word." So he said, "Really, Psalm 119 is it." He said, "I've studied it and studied it and studied it, I need to teach everybody that Psalm 119 is it. It's right in the middle of the book." Again, I congratulated him. It is great that people are in the Word and you don't want to say anything negative about a wonderful thing like that. But the reality is, that is only in the English Bible. If you were to take yourself into the Hebrew scriptures where it came from, it is not in the middle of the book. So we have to be careful how we interpret things. It is so crucial that we not land on a piece and make that our whole interpretive approach to scripture, to make that everything we are about. We really need to have the broadest possible understanding that we can get, a way to manage the whole thing and understand the whole thing.

So that is what we are going to try to do, and what I would like to do if you have our booklet with you and some paper, is just to begin to show you early on how it all fits together. It is really quite easy. In fact, here is my hope for you. If you can envision this, that wherever you are – let's say you are in your favorite restaurant and you have a blank napkin in front of you – that if you wanted to, you could take your pen out of your pocket, take that blank napkin and you could draw the whole structure of the scripture on it. Let's say you are having lunch with someone who actually says, "Boy, wonder what the Bible is all about?" You know, you could in 15 minutes or less, tell this guy more about the Bible than perhaps he ever wanted to know. And you could tell it to him in a way that would make sense because it would give him the whole big picture.

## **THE BIG PICTURE**

What I'm going to do is, I'm going to take the Old Testament. You are familiar with the breakdown of your English Bible. It basically breaks into two parts, the Old Testament and then the other part that we call the New Testament. By the way, there are 66 books in the whole Bible, 39 of them are here in the Old Testament, and 27 of them are over here in the New Testament. So we will need to manage those books as we go along.

I am going to take each section, each big section, and break it into three parts. So if you are drawing boxes, just draw three boxes, that will do for now. We will draw three boxes on each side to represent three parts that apply to each major section: The Old Testament and the New Testament. Drawing those boxes is difficult, but it will get easier from here. You can see it must be difficult when I look at my boxes, they're not all that hot.

But here we go. If we take a look at the Old Testament, the 39 books, we have one section that covers books 1 through 5, covers five books, the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis through Deuteronomy. I'm going to call this section a foundational section. You might want to remember that. First five books, foundational. I'm going to go here and do the same thing. Over here we have books 1 through 4, we commonly call it The Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They too are foundational. I'm going to call them that because as leaders, as influencers for the Kingdom of God, we need to understand that there are aspects of the scripture that set the compass for the rest of scripture. In the Old Testament the compass center are the first five books, oftentimes called the Pentateuch, or the Hebrews oftentimes call it the law. Somewhere you will find it referred to as the five books of Moses. Whatever the title, that is foundational. That sets the compass for the rest of what follows in the Old Testament.

Over here in the New Testament are the biographies of Jesus. It is the Gospels and these Gospels set the compass for what follows. So, for you and me, as we think in terms of our own development, it is absolutely critical that we have a handle on what these foundations are, and how they influence the rest of scripture. We will get to those in a little bit. We will have a section. We will take on the rest of the Old Testament and we will look at each piece, so we will begin to understand how the foundation sets the stage and how the next books fit into it. So we will fit this together piece by piece. I want you to get the biggest picture this first time around.

So here we have Genesis through Deuteronomy, foundational. Here we have The Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, foundational. Next, we have a big section called the historical section. This will pick up with the book of Joshua and will extend down through the book of Esther. So you are going to have 12 books in that section. We also have historical as well. Only over here there is only one of them, and that is the book of Acts.

So, as you can see, so far we have foundational sections, then we have historical sections, and here is what is important for you to understand. This is the compass setter. This sets principles, this sets patterns, this sets foundational kinds of things that now are going to be lived out, or not lived out, in this history. So you need to know this, so that when you get into this history, you can figure out what the people are doing, how are they doing? For instance, God creates an agreement with Abraham. So as you watch the scripture after that agreement, you need to ask yourself, how are they doing with that agreement? Are they fulfilling it, or are they not? And what happens if they are, and what happens if they don't. That begins to work its way out into history, so the foundation now gets down here, and you watch this unfold, which we will look at together in one of the other segments along the way. Remember, we are looking at the biggest possible picture.

Over here, Jesus sets the foundation through his life for what we know as the church. Then, once that foundation is set, for instance the great commission: "Go into all the world and make disciples." As you are going through the world, make disciples. Then you can go down into the history, the book of Acts, for instance, and you can see, how are they doing with the foundation? What you will find out is that early on they settled in Jerusalem and Jesus had to stir them up and get them moving, for instance, to go into all the world and make disciples. So you begin to see foundation, here is what it looks like in history. Hopefully that is making sense to you. This is how these fit together. There are 12 books here in this historical section and just one here in the New Testament.

Now, by my calculations, we have viewed 17 books here, so we have 22 left down here in the last box. This last box we are going to call the instructional section. It basically

extends from Job out through Malachi. We will again look at these sections together in more detail later on. This instructional section, watch this, this is what is important. This instructional section, Job through Malachi, does not extend the story line. What this instructional section does, is it actually speaks to the people in this history. So, what we are going to learn as we go later on in a big-picture way, is how this fits into this history. So, look at it this way: Foundational sets the compass. Historical - they live it out, Instructional - they basically help the people either live it out successfully or make course corrections so they get back on the right course, if you will, in their lives. That is how it begins to fit together. So these are like teachers, teaching these people going through this history about these foundational things, helping them to live it out.

You are ahead of me again, I know, we have the instructional section here. Same deal, and interestingly, 22 books. Here we have letters, you know many of them well. It starts with Romans and ends with Revelation, and there are letters from Paul and there are letters from Peter and there are letters from John and there are letters from Jude and James. These letters again are instructional. They are written to people trying to figure out what it is to live this Christ life, what it is to be his church.

So, there you have it. That is how it fits together. Yes, there is a piece here in the middle that we will look at later, oftentimes called the 400 silent years. You see, the Old Testaments ends 400 years before the New Testament begins. We will actually talk about that along the way, as well, so you know how that works in.

There you have it, look at it. It is really easy. Old Testament, 39 books, breaks into three sections: Foundational, historical, instructional. Five books in the foundational, the law, if you will sets the compass. Now they begin to live it out, Joshua through Esther. And as they live it out, there are teachers, Job through Malachi, that help the people live it out. They give the people God's instruction as to how God wants the covenant fulfilled, what they need to do, what he is going to do. Same thing over here: Foundational, the life of Christ sets the compass. The historical begins to live out that compass setting. And these letters written by various authors, instruct the church and its people on how to live out these foundational things, how to become what Christ died for.

So, there you have the whole picture in a nutshell, really easy to put together. And I would advise you, that when we finish this section, which we are about to do, that one of the things you need to do, is close your book and find a blank sheet of paper or find that napkin, if you will, and see if you can indeed sit down and inform that person, maybe an imaginary person, across the table from you, in terms of how the Bible fits together in totality.

Let me end this by giving you just some key thoughts. We need to wrap this up quickly. Again, you can see them in the materials you have. Now we are in the last little piece of this. Just some key thoughts to draw everything that we have covered together. First is

that foundations, that is these first boxes, are like compasses that set the course for what follows. So it is really important that you and me as leaders, that we understand those foundational things. Second, the historical sections depict the living out, or not, of those foundational things. How did the people do with the foundations? How did they live them out? Did they do well? Did they not do well? We are going to look more carefully in the next sections, and see how that happens. Thirdly, the historical books help us understand the application and the misapplication of foundational things, and what the outcomes are.

Again, we need to put in the back of our minds that when God puts things in motion, God has outcomes in mind, and he does not keep them a secret. Those outcomes, which we will look at along the way as we go further, will be very important to our understanding how people in the historical sections do in terms of living all of this out. Fourthly, the instructional sections provide direction and correction for those living out foundational things in a historical context. Lastly, the instructional sections do not extend the story, this is really important. They do not extend the story, they amplify the story. So if you and I want to more fully understand the stories of the old or the New Testament, we need to pay careful attention to the instructional sections because they add to and amplify the story. They do not move it forward in history, but they make it more real, they describe it more fully, they bring life to it, they correct, they encourage. They do all of the things that are important, in order for the person of God to stay on track in terms of the plan of God, which is the whole point.

So there you have it. The biggest picture possible. One more time, two big sections: Old Testament, New Testament. Three subsections under each: Foundational – the Pentateuch if you will, the law, the books of Moses. Historical – Joshua through Esther, that is people here living this out. Instructional – Job through Malachi, teachers giving instructions to the people, living out life under the foundational things of God.

Same pattern over here: Foundational: Christ-like, setting the stage. Historical – it begins to be lived out, how do we become the people of Christ and the church of Christ, and 22 letters that give instructions for that, to help these people live effectively under the new covenant that Christ has established.

The biggest picture possible. Next time it is the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. See you then.

## **Lesson 2 ■ Setting the Compass**

Welcome back. I hope you survived that sprint through the whole structure of the Bible. And I hope you practiced it on a napkin somewhere, maybe even tried it out on a friend, showed them some of your new perspective as a number of people who are developing and are hoping that God may use us, which he will, as influencers in his kingdom. One of the important things is for us to have perspective, and as we shared last time, to have to a perspective that is not a little perspective, but a big perspective, on how all the scripture fits together.

Remember, if you can just picture in your minds eye – in fact, why don't you just close your eyes and think with me for a minute. We had two big sections, remember, written up. We had OT, Old Testament, NT, New Testament, and up with them we had 37 books by one of them and 27 by the other, 39 with the Old Testament, 27 with the New. We then had three boxes under each big section, and those represented three different parts of those sections of scripture, three big pieces for the Old Testament, three big pieces for the New Testament.

Remember, I said that we were putting this together from a certain perspective, perspective of leadership. That means that what I did and what we are doing together, is we have taken the pieces and segmented them functionally: How do these function in terms of how we think about the scripture? How do these function in terms of what we need to know as leaders, in terms of understanding what is going on in the scripture? But more than that, understanding the patterns and the practices of scripture, how people do well with it, how they do not do well with it, and understanding all of that in an arena of application. How do we help people to live out, to put it in terms of our day, to live out the life of Christ today? That means that we have to have handles on these big portions, on the foundational things, the patterns that we see in history of living them out, and then the instructional pieces of men of old, men moved by the Spirit of God, who wrote and spoke into those lives in ways to help them stay on target with respect in the Old Testament to the covenants that were there of Abraham and Moses, and in the New Testament, the new covenant introduced by the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, it is a very important thing.

So, we had three big sections, didn't we. We called the first box in each section foundational because it contains things that go through all of the rest of scripture, that set the compass, as it were, that are principles that we need to know, that we can see working out through the history of God, working in this world, working with man in this world. The second section we called the historical sections in both. Remember, in the Old Testament, it extended from Joshua through Esther, so there were about 12 books there.

In the New Testament there was just one, the book of Acts. But they are important because now what we see is people in real history living out the foundational things. Then lastly, you remember last week, the last section we called the instructional section. In the Old Testament that contained what we often call the poets and the prophets, 22 books. Those books speak into the history and speak into the real lives of people in that history. So that was instruction for them in the Old Testament and over in the new, which we are not going to look at today. But that was also the case, where letters were written by the apostles, by Paul and Peter and James and Jude and John. Those letters were written to give instruction to people who were new in faith in Jesus Christ, and to this new thing called the church. Both of the sections have the same pattern, and both of them follow functionally the same kind of desired outcomes.

So, that is where we were last week, and hopefully you have that down well, as we move into a new section. We are going to spend a little more time and we are going to look more carefully at this foundational piece today in the Old Testament. Of the 39 books, we are going to take a look at five. You know them as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, oftentimes called the law or the five books of Moses. But just to really make it difficult for you, I am going to call them the Pentateuch. It is commonly the name that you will find in lots and lots of study books and manuals that you would use that talk about this particular section. "Penta" simply means five and "teuch" means book, five books. So that is what we have here in this very foundational section.

If you were to look at the biggest possible picture of this, I want to take you to two places early on here. First, I want to give you three key words and talk with them you a little bit about them because those three key words will help us understand what is happening in these five books, Genesis through Deuteronomy. Then I want to talk with you a little bit about the flow of the books. How do the stories of the book flow? What are they flowing toward? How do they fit together? I think once you see a real key piece in these five books, it will be really easy for you to see how they fit together and what is going on.

So again, remember, we are not trying to dig deep, we are trying to create a big picture motif, so that you and I have this perspective of a leader. We are beginning to see the big picture. We are not just seeing little pieces and building everything off of a few little pieces. But we understand how it fits together.

## **THREE KEY CONCEPTS/WORDS**

Let's look at these three words here that I have for you. The first word is "culture." As a good teacher, you always have to start everything with the same letter, so we have

“culture” and we have “creation” and we have “character”, three words I want to talk about in relationship to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the Pentateuch.

“Culture” is the first word I have chosen and if you are taking notes for yourself, as I know you are, here is why I want you to see that word. It is because the Pentateuch is written into a culture. It is important that you understand that. It was not written as things were happening. It was written, we believe, by the movement of the Spirit of God upon people after the fact, after these things happened, and it was a reflection, more often than not, of what was taking place in this history, what was taking place. What was God doing? What were people doing? It is important that we understand that, and it is important that we understand that this culture written into really was not vastly different from our own today. It was written into a culture that did not understand, listen, that did not understand that there was just one God, that did not understand that there was just one God that created everything, that did not understand that there was one God that was actively involved in this creation. That did not understand that this God deeply cared about his creation. He was not a distant God, he was an imminent God. He was close to his creation, overseeing his creation, that he had a plan for his creation, that he had desired outcomes for his creation. The world that this was written into was anything but that, a world of multiple gods and gods that could not be counted upon and distant gods, and unknowable gods and seemingly gods that were not caring about the creation and did not care about people. As you know, because you know some of the history out of this period of time, that Israel, God’s people, later on their name, were ever wrestling with the impact of those kinds of cultures on themselves.

So, right away in the Pentateuch the writer, who most believe was Moses, sets apart this notion of culture. He says this culture that God has established, listen, is totally different from the culture that it is going to be placed into. And you begin to see that right away. Does that sound vaguely familiar? Those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ have become as Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live.” He is living his life out through Christ who is living in him. That vaguely sounds like a different kind of culture. It is amazing that though you have lots of history here that has gone by, between the old and the New Testaments, things are vaguely, no, clearly the same, are they not? And so here you have these first five books, zeroing in through a culture, saying to the culture, “Your thoughts about God have missed it.” We need to bring you back to understand the one and only and singular and all powerful God, who created this universe we are in and created this world that we live upon, and created us as a matter of fact, and everything else around us. And he is not unpredictable, he is predictable and he is faithful and he is trustworthy. He is all the things that the gods of the culture are not. So, that is why his word is so powerful.

The second word is “creation.” These first five books are filled with the creation of God bringing into being new things. Not just the days of creation, but other things that he brings into being, that we really would know nothing about if it were not for these books. Things like bringing into being covenants or agreements between God and man. Bringing into being the notion of redemption. Bringing into being a people for himself that later is called Israel. Bringing into being the notion of floods and judgment. You find yourself in the midst of not just creation of a world, creation of animals and creation of people, but a whole creation of a culture and a way of doing things that is totally counter to what exists. We cannot miss that as we go through this because it is a foundational thing all over Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, those five books that make up the Pentateuch, which is what we are talking about today.

Then the last one is “character.” You find right away in these five books that launch our scriptures, our Bible, that character is so significant, that character is a powerful, essential piece of living out an effective life in a world that really struggles with that notion. So, right away, the author in Genesis begins to establish the character of God and that God is so different from what people think of God in the culture he is writing to. Then, he moves that character from God, he moves it into people, that God in fact is displaying himself, giving himself in such a way that his character can become his people’s character. You begin to watch that work itself out in the lives of the people that fill the pages, these people that we will talk about in a minute, that fill the pages of the Pentateuch.

So, three critical words you need to think about, written into a culture. This culture he is writing it for is very different, very outside of the realm of the one true God. A lot of creation taking place, things that are created that are very different from the culture that tended to exist in the world at that time. Then, the whole character issue. That the character of the one true God is vastly different than the character of the gods the culture has created. The God who is the one true God has very different expectations with respect to the character of his people. So you need to follow those pieces as we work our way through the Pentateuch. By the way, if you were thinking of time frames - I realize I zing through some of this fairly quickly – but if you are thinking of time frames as we talk our way through the Old Testament, let me give you a way of thinking about it. I am going to use just a couple of names here, I am going to use Abraham and Moses and David and Ezra, to give us a sense of timeline. This is big picture, okay? This is not rocket science. This is just to help us get a big picture sense of where we are in the time frames in relationship to Christ.

If you think of Abraham, we will talk about him in just a little bit, shows up about 2,000 years before Christ. If you think of Moses, Moses shows up about 1,500 years before Christ. If you think of David, David shows up about 1,000 years before Christ. If you think of Ezra, Ezra shows up about 500 years before Christ. So, as we walk along

through this, we can get a sense of, not precisely, remember we are just trying to get the big picture. We have talked about that many times. But we can get a sense of where we are as we talk about these things. For instance, Adam and Noah, that we will talk about, they are before Abraham, so they are back here somewhere in a period of time that is very hard to date, the first 11 chapters of Genesis. But then as we go from Abraham to Moses, through Isaac and Jacob and through that time, we get a sense of the time that passes, as we come to major people and major events. That will help us to kind of get an idea of where we are in all of this. So, today we are basically functioning mostly from Abraham to Moses when we talk about the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Old Testament. So we are kind of in that range.

How does this flow together? I'm not going to write it down, I'm just going to tell you because you get it really quickly. Remember those five books, I hope you memorize all of the books, by the way. It is amazing how we do not. Even just learning the names of the books will help us manage what we understand about the Bible. So we have Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Here is the flow. The key event in my mind, thinking about this functionally now as a leader, the key event is down there in Egypt, early in the book of Exodus, when the people are in slavery and God is going to call someone to help them get out of slavery in Egypt. You know the story. So here is the flow of these five books. Genesis: Basically the whole flow of Genesis helps us understand how it is the people ended up in slavery in Egypt. How God set the stage in the first 11 chapters in Genesis, big picture things, is creation, sin entering the world, judgment, the tower of Babel, the creation of nations. All of those things. Then Abraham, where God calls out a person and creates an agreement and that person is going to start something. He is going to start a nation. Then, what you follow down through Genesis is the development of that through his family. From him, to his son Isaac, from Isaac to Jacob, from Jacob then it is going to flow out to the story of Joseph, until finally we get to Moses. All of that story is going to help us understand how it is that the people of Israel - they are not called Israel yet, but we will call them that - those folks end up in slavery in Egypt, for a long time, like 400 years.

So, if you look at this, there was a lot of this time they were enslaved in Egypt. How did that happen? Well, Genesis helps us understand that. But here is the key. The next four books - Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy - they are all about the people getting out of slavery. They are all about God buying his people out of that situation using a man, a leader - remember we are focusing on leaders - a guy like Moses, who is going to be a key to helping those folks get out of slavery, then to learn how to walk as God's people in preparation to eventually enter a place that God has prepared for them, which oftentimes we refer to as the promised land, if you will.

So the flow of it is that way. Everything through Genesis, oh, this is how they ended up in slavery. Everything after, this is how God got them out of slavery and the plans he

has for them. I don't want to push it too far, but you want to think if it kind of as a spiritual odyssey. It is not unlike our lives. When I think of my own life, I spent 17 years of it basically working my way into slavery, not slavery in Egypt, but slavery to other things. Then God entered into my life. And though he entered in a very real way, I like the people of Israel, did not know what it all meant, so I fumbled around, just like they fumbled around. They thought they were going to do the right thing, and they did not do the right thing, and then they disobeyed things that were clear, and then tried to make up for it later, and that did not work out. They ended up wandering around, mostly under God's judgment, but trying to figure out, trying to be instructed, trying to grow to become the people that God designed for them to be. That is just hard work on both God's part and ours. I recognize that as being my life from about 17 to 26 or 27 years of age. Then there was this moment when, like the people of Israel, I was standing on one side of the river and realized that here is what I have to do to cross this river and move on. And I did.

I'll bet you have patterns like that in your lives as well. If you are following Christ, you go, "Oh, I get what is going on here. I understand the flow of this, what this looks like, and it is real life." That is why it is so important to those of us who are students and who are influencers for Christ to understand these things, because they help us to take these truths and to bring them up in a way that makes them live today, and they surely can. So that is the flow.

## **SEVEN KEY PEOPLE**

Real quickly, once we have a sense of the flow, we realize that there are some key people that this is all built around, and there are also some key themes that we need to consider. I want to take you down those roads just real quickly, if I could, and fill in some things for you. So you buckle up your seatbelt, we are going to move really fast here now, and see if we can't put a wrap on this section.

Remember, we are working on the Pentateuch, five books, five of the 39 in the Old Testament. This group sets foundational things. These people are all about those foundational things. So let me just give you some terms that apply to these guys, as we go along the way, and you can see how they begin to be so crucial in the story in the Pentateuch. I am going to give you a way of thinking of each one of them. It is going to be very simple and hopefully will help you think along the way.

Adam: We need to think of Adam as the father of firsts. Everything Adam does is a first. In fact, lots of what we see in the Pentateuch are firsts. Remember, our word "creation." We are seeing a lot of things beginning, a lot of firsts. Adam reminds us that there are a

lot of firsts that take place in the Pentateuch, a lot of things that get started. It is the time of beginnings, particularly in Genesis.

Noah is a man who walks with God. We begin to realize that in that culture that this is written to and the story that it brings out, that even in the culture that was not very oriented to the one true God, that there was a man who was a man of faith, who was oriented toward God, and who did some amazing things. So, right away you begin to realize as a leader, that even in the worst of circumstances – and you will see this in other places in the scripture – God has his people, and Noah was one of them.

Abraham is a guy who was called out to start something and Abraham became a person who would be made into a blessing for all people. So, right away, you begin to see, okay, God has a plan for his people, and he calls out a person who began to execute that plan, just like he does today with you and me in the church. And his intent is for that person and ongoing generations that that person puts in motion, for them to be a blessing, a blessing to all people. We will talk more about this another time, but I want you to see this person. So here God is beginning to make a people for himself.

Isaac becomes a test and here God provides a lamb. Remember, Abraham is called to take his son Isaac make Isaac a sacrifice for God. Now, God is not a murderer, so do not look at this the wrong way. But there are tests in life and this was a big one. Abraham took Isaac out to follow God's instruction, believing God would do something different, and God did. And God showed Abraham that in his plan of making the blessing, that one of the parts of his plan was that he was going to provide a lamb. And he provided a lamb to substitute for Isaac; and if you know your Old Testament and New Testament, which I know you do, the ultimate lamb was the lamb, Jesus Christ, that God provided as a substitute for us, so that he became our sacrifice so that we could become truly alive, and died. It is a powerful thing, but you can see this unfolding way back here in this foundational section.

Jacob was a rebel redeemed. Are there rebels? Absolutely. Even in the Pentateuch there were rebels. Here is the good news. It is that rebels can be saved. Jacob, even though he rebelled against everything, kicked against all of the stuff that he should have known and practiced, that eventually God stepped into his life and got hold of him and brought him back to the foundational things. Jacob, in fact, gets his name changed to Israel. He becomes, in a very real way, the father of the nation that God is putting together.

Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, has a very important role. We need to look at Joseph's life, and there we see sovereignty in action. That is, that even though the people of Israel get in trouble, they end up in slavery in Egypt, that God calls another person out, a person named Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, and he sovereignly leads that person, even though at times he is in trouble and struggles and has difficulties, he sovereignly leads that person

to bring the people of Israel out of slavery into a better spot, into a place in which they not only survived. But in spite of the slavery, they thrived, they multiplied, they were fed. He in fact saves his people, preparing the way for what God is going to do with these folks through Moses, who is the guy who will take the people out of slavery. This is the shepherd that God calls, the shepherd called. God calls the shepherd to step up and to be the one who will take these people who have thrived because Joseph was used by God to save them, and to take these people now out of slavery in Egypt and to move them toward that relationship in that place that God has called them to.

## **SEVEN KEY THEMES**

There are seven key themes and we need to do these quickly together. I am not going to jot them down. Let me simply give them to you. The creation theme basically is around the notion of beginnings explained. That is, that this foundational part explains many things that will go all the way through scripture, even the New Testament, and these are the beginnings. Creation is a big piece of it, we have already talked about that. Lots of things get created.

Judgment is expectations met, where we realize early on that God has expectations for us, and he really means for us to fulfill those. We see that early on, don't we, in the Pentateuch. So when we read about judgment, we understand that those are related to God's expectations, and he really does mean for us to fulfill them.

Redemption. We also realize that oftentimes when we are under God's judgment, we can get our way out of things and right away, we realize that God is a redeeming God. He acts as a redeemer for Adam and Eve. He acts as a redeemer with Noah. He acts as a redeemer when Abraham takes Isaac perhaps to be a sacrifice and God instead provides a lamb, he redeems the situation. He acts as a redeemer when he buys his people out of slavery in Egypt. We find redemption to be all over this section.

The people of God is another theme. He is calling out a people for himself, a people who will live in a way that God intended for them to live in all of creation, and will begin to impact the world that is going another direction, a world that is influenced by the ruler of this world, which is Satan himself. Ephesians 2, check it out. These people are now being set apart to counter that, to bring real life into a world that under sin only faces death. These people are going to need leaders. We see them in father heads, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We see them in the person who is key to their salvation in Joseph, whom God uses in a powerful way. We see it in Moses as a leader, bringing the people out of slavery.

Covenant simply means that there are agreements that God makes. We will look at some of these agreements in other places, but that is an important theme here.

The last theme is promise, that God has made promises to people who will follow him and he will indeed fulfill those promises.

That was quick, wasn't it? Glad you have those in your notebook. Otherwise, we would be in big trouble at this point. So, we have gone multiple ways here with the Pentateuch, looking at a bunch of things, I hope not too quickly, but helping you along the way.

Let's do a quick review. Remember, this is in the Old Testament, three big sections. Foundational section has these five books we have been looking at : Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Historical section begins to live out the foundational things. Instructional section gives input into people living their lives here.

So there were three big words: Culture, this was written into a culture that was pretty contrary to what God desired, and so the Pentateuch begins to address that contrary culture, showing it a different way, a different God, how things are intended. There is a lot of creation in the Pentateuch, new things get started and the character of both God and man becomes a huge piece in this, and will carry all the way through the scriptures.

We have ripped through some things and our time is just about up for this section. What I want you to do is to just jot down just five more things for me, if you could, and we are going to be finished today. You have done a great job. We have had to go really fast, we have covered a ton of things. But remember, you have figured it out already. We will review and review and review, so you will get this.

## **KEY WORD SUMMARIES**

I want you to write down just 10 words that relate to these first five books, and we will be out of here. For Genesis, I want you to write down, "Beginnings and generations." Genesis is all about things beginning and it is all about the generations that will carry on those beginning things.

Exodus is about slavery and redemption. You already know that, we have talked about. The people of Israel, the flow of Genesis gets them into slavery. Everything after that is God getting the people out of slavery, just like he does for you and me in Jesus Christ.

Leviticus: The two words I want you to remember are "ritual and relationship." Leviticus talks about how the people of this time worshiped God through sacrifices and events and celebrations, and all of those things are tied to a relationship. How do the people productively relate to the Lord. Relevant topics for today, right?

Numbers: Two words, “failure and fulfillment.” Even when people know, even when people have good hearts, even when people are led by good leaders, sometimes they fail, and in Numbers they fail. But God never leaves them. And eventually, as they go in this 40-year journey because of their failure, a journey we often call the wilderness wanderings, that what happens is, they begin to get it, and a new generation grows up that is ready to step further into the fulfillment of God’s promises. So there is failure and there is fulfillment.

Lastly, in Deuteronomy, we have both law and land. This last one is a restatement of God’s expectation as found in the law, first stated in Exodus. It is all about a step into the fulfillment of one of God’s promises, which he promised to Abraham, and that is that there would be a land for his people. So that is how Deuteronomy ends, with the people ready to step into that promise, which is what we will look at next time when we begin to take a look at the historical books.

## **Lesson 3 ■ Living the Law**

Here we are, back for a third time. We have been cruising rather rapidly through the pages of the Old Testament and the themes of the Old Testament. I hope that since the last time we were together, you have caught your breath, but I also hope that you haven't forgotten too much. You know by now that review is a big deal.

So, let's think together for just a little bit before we get into what we are going to do today. Because today we're going to move into the historical section and we are going to take a look, big-picture style, leadership perspective, on the books Joshua through Esther, and that is going to be a big challenge for us, for sure. I am going to have to resist the urge to teach into every one of those books, and you are going to have to forgive me for not doing that. We will just have to have another time together in another course where we will dig a little deeper into some of these. Because, remember, our goal this time is not to dig deep, though that is important. Our goal this time is to take all of these puzzle pieces that are the Bible and to work those puzzle pieces together, so that we understand how they fit, and we understand the flow and the patterns and the practices and the applications in a big-picture sort of way. Then we will begin to develop a strength in terms of handling the deeper parts of scripture when we dig deeper in those times we do.

So, that is what we are about. We have been doing great so far. But we have a big job in front of us today. Before we get there, though, remember we took a look at the foundational piece the last time we were together. We called these first five books – you know their names – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. We called them the Pentateuch, which simply means, five books. They could just as well have been called the law or the five books of Moses, but that is what we chose for this.

### **REVIEW FOUNDATIONAL BOOKS**

Anyway, remember we ended last time and we ended quickly, probably due to a time management problem on my part. Let's back up and take a look at just these themes that we had as we wrapped up our last session. Remember, we said Genesis - we need to think in terms of beginnings and generations. What we are looking at is God beginning something. Remember, we talked about culture, that this book was written into a culture and the culture of that time was very contrary to the practices of God. And so, what you have here as this book unfolds, are beginnings of things, as the author begins to help the people who are going to receive this, understand the difference between the God culture, if you will, and how cultures developed really outside of the purview of God. So, we have beginnings all over the place, as they are introduced to

new things, and then we have generations of people that begin to live those beginnings out. That really is the book of Genesis.

In Exodus we saw that these generations living these beginnings out, actually ended up in slavery down in Egypt. And while they were in slavery, remember Joseph was a real key person in transitioning them out of the land of promise, if you will, down into Egypt. It seems like slavery was a bad thing, but it actually saved the people to be in Egypt. And in Egypt they multiplied into a great nation. Once they were that great nation, they begin to cry out to God in their slavery, and God sends them a leader, Moses, who becomes God's agent of redemption. God uses him to lead the people out of slavery. Once they are out of slavery, the book of Leviticus takes us to a place called Mt. Sinai, where they learn rituals. That is what we will call them. They were ways that the people worshiped God, ways that the people connected to God, ways that the people gave reverence to God. They learned about their relationship with God and what that relationship was supposed to be like and how you kept in good order, and even how you might let it get out of good order, and what would happen if you did. So, it was all about that. It was teaching, teaching the people who had been redeemed how they now become God's people.

In Numbers they begin to apply that. They begin to move toward the land that God has promised. But in their movement they fail. They fail to enter the land. Then they try to overcome their failure and they cannot overcome their failure, and they end up under God's judgment and they end up in the wilderness outside the land of promise for 40 years. But in that wilderness, God teaches them incredible things about himself, about who they are in him, about how he cares for them, all of those kinds of things. He is preparing them, until eventually when we get to the end of Numbers, we find that they are getting it. They are beginning to understand what it means to be God's people and how to live for him and follow him, and things are beginning to move toward a level of fulfillment in terms of God's promises again, particularly in relationship to the land. So by the time we get to the end of Numbers, they are ready to enter the land again; and here Moses, who is still their leader, teaches them the law again. Remember, they learned this stuff up here in Leviticus and Exodus. He teaches it to them again, getting them ready to live for God and preparing them now for another level of fulfillment in God's promises. That is, that they will get to enter the land.

So that is the push in the foundational things. I think you can see the flow of it, even from a spiritual odyssey sort of way. Remember, we mentioned last time, that when you look at this, it really parallels oftentimes the flow of our own stories. It teaches us about God and it teaches us about ourselves and how we interact and what his patterns and ways are. It is a powerful, powerful foundational thing to know.

Now we are moving down here into these books where these people and this history, real people and real history, are going to begin living out these foundational things. The challenge for us now will be to watch and see how they do, and that is where I want to take you today in the time that we have together in these 12 books.

Let's think through the books first, if we can. If we break this period up into five little sections, we are going to extend from Joshua to Esther. Remember, Moses was about 1500 BC. Joshua was a little bit after that. If we are going to work our way, we will pass David, down through Ezra, which was about 500 BC. So we are roughly going to be traveling through a period of about one thousand years. So this is a lot of history to talk about in 20 minutes or less. But nevertheless, we can get the big picture of it. Remember, that is our goal.

## **JOSHUA, JUDGES, RUTH**

So we have one section right away, when we move into Joshua, that we realize there are not any kings in Israel, that they are being ruled over by other kinds of leaders, but not by kings. These are the books basically of Joshua and Judges and Ruth. So, those are powerful books that fit into this period of time where there are no kings. The people are living without kingly leadership. They have leadership, but it is a different kind of leadership.

## **1 AND 2 SAMUEL, 1 KINGS AND 1 CHRONICLES**

Then we move into another period where they have kings. These books basically take us through 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2

Chronicles. In these books we have a flow of kings. In the first section we have kings that are united. That is, one king rules over a united kingdom. So that basically is 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, - so we will take 2 Kings out of this for the moment – 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles. After that, Solomon goes off the scene – Solomon was David's son. Remember, there are three kings here. We will get to these people in a minute. There is a period of time in which the family gets in a fight, the family of Israel, the family of God, gets at odds with one another. As a result, the kingdoms divide. You are going to find these stories of a divided kingdom basically in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles.

## **2 KINGS, 2 CHRONICLES**

So far, out of 12 books that we have in this period of time, we are seeing how they kind of fit together in the history. We have three that are in that period of time where there are no kings. We have basically four in a period of time when the kingdom is ruled over, is united under a single king. Then we have a couple of books that talk about a divided kingdom, and at the end of these books there is a time of judgment and exile. So basically, again we are looking at 2 Kings, toward the end of it, and we are looking at 2 Chronicles, also toward the end of the book, where God's judgment comes upon the people in this history and they are judged by being taken out of the land. Remember, I said that in the Pentateuch, one of the things we learn about God when we look at the reality of judgment, is that God actually means things that he says, and there are outcomes. And that is what we are going to see here, is that over time these people begin to ignore God, and ignoring God has outcomes. For these people, it was related to land, the place of God's promise. Follow God, they remain in the land. Fall away from God, and eventually God takes them out of the land. And that is what happens here in this little section. As the people become less and less inclined to follow God, then God does what he says he will do, and he removes them from the land. So, judgment has meaning. God's expectations have meaning. And he will take action, either blessing or in some cases, judgment.

## **EZRA, NEHEMIAH, ESTHER**

Then in the last little piece we will look at their return from exile. They are out of the land, under God's judgment and eventually some of them return. And the books here will be Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. So, that is basically the flow of it and how those historical books fit together. Let's see if we got them all. We have 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 – that is a repeat – 10, 11, 12. So we got them all. That is encouraging. That is basically what happens here.

Now, what I want to do is to put this together around key people that fit here, so that we get an understanding, we kind of know how the books fit. By the way, here is a little piece you want to remember, the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth actually fits in the story of Judges, so it does not stand by itself, it fits in Judges. Let me take a one-minute diversion to talk with you about that, because it is important.

In the book of Judges we have the people who have drifted a long way away from the Lord. In fact, they have drifted so far from the Lord that really some people even began to think that there was nobody left who followed the Lord. But that was not true. One of

the great examples of that is Ruth, who fits in this story. Ruth was everything that the people generally of Judges were not. They were faithless, she was faithful. They could not be trusted, she could be trusted. They were not loving, she was loving. They did not stick by anything, they drifted, and she was solid, she stuck by the things that she knew to be right. There was just a huge contrast. And I believe God gives us Ruth to remind us that even in the worst of times, that God has his people. We saw that even in the Pentateuch, we referenced that the last time we were together. So Ruth fits here.

In the same spirit, if we go down here to Esther – and I do not know why this applies to books named after women – but it does, for some strange reason. Esther actually fits over here in the book of Ezra. We will talk about her a little bit when we get down there. So, she is not by herself moving history along, she is really part of this history. We will fit all of that together when we get there.

Let's take a look at key people. There are three key people I want you to remember that will teach us a ton about this period of time. The first one is Joshua, who is the leader after Moses. The next one is – I am going to use a generic term, judges – to apply to a lot of men and a woman who lead Israel. During this period of time they are not led by kings, they are led by judges. Then also, they bring in the name of this person, Ruth. So we have three key people here. I am going to come back and do one more with this in just a minute.

Let me take you to the next one. In the kings, this period of time, we have four people I want you to remember. I want you to remember Samuel, who was not a king, but he was an important prophet who got us to the kings of Israel. So, he was a leader and he made the transition from this period to the period of the kings, and he was God's person to make that transition. The kings I want you to remember are Saul, David and Solomon. When we get to the divided kingdom, I am not going to have you remember any names.

The kingdom divides into two, a southern kingdom and a northern kingdom. The northern kingdom is called Israel. The southern kingdom is called Judah. Israel has 19 kings that rule over it. Judah has 20 kings, actually 19 kings I think and one queen, that rule over it. Just so we remember that we have 19 in Israel and we have 20 in Judah. So we have a whole lot of rulers during the divided kingdom time. If you have a whole lot of rulers over people in a short amount of time, what does that tell you about what is going on in the land, leaders? If no leader is leading very long and you go through a whole bunch of them, does that tell you that things are stable and going great? Or does that tell you that maybe things are not so good? I hope you are thinking, not so good. Because as in our time, when things are good, it is usually stable, consistent leadership, that understands how to follow God and they call people to follow them and follow God. When that goes astray, what happens is that over time, chaos enters. So, what

happens here, you get a little hint with all of these leaders in this period of time, is that chaos begins to become the rule of the land. That always happens when people drift away from God, leaders. We become chaotic. We become without direction. Proverbs says that without a vision, the people perish, probably more accurately interpreted, "without a vision, the people lose direction." Without the kind of leadership to hold them together, they begin to fall apart. That is what you see happening here.

Down in the judgment and exile piece, I am going to write three nations' names: Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. I am not going to say much about these, but they are very important in this short amount of time we call the exile. After that, there is a return from exile and there you are just going to remember these names: Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther as the key people.

I want to wrap this up for us, to help you understand this period of time. Remember, they are living out these foundational things. So the question I want to ask and answer as we look at all of this is, how are they doing? I want to do it by asking kind of a modern-day question, though it is not really a modern-day question. That is, who is it all about? Is it all about me? Is it all about you? Or is it about us? If you ask those questions and you watch these stages of people, you begin to see how they are doing. Because it becomes evident what they are all about. That has lessons for today, doesn't it? Though we cannot chase those things.

So, let me show you what we are doing here. When we look at Joshua and we read through Joshua, we realize that he leads the people to follow the Lord. Let us look at Joshua. We can honestly say with Joshua, he leads in such a way that it is all about us, not about him, it is about the people. How do I lead the people? How do I get them into the land? How do I help them to follow the Lord? How do I help them to accomplish what he has called them to accomplish? It is really all about us. Interestingly, when you get to Judges, with some exception, but in general, it is just with the leaders, it's all about me, not about us, it's not about you, it's about me. If it is about me, then I am going to become the center of everything. We together, probably are not going to do very well. And that is what you find in Judges.

In Ruth, interestingly, she makes it all about you. Everything she does, she does for another person. She lives her life into this other person. You need to read Ruth, it will take you five minutes. You will find a remarkable person.

So, people do good here, people do terrible here, which is a lesson for us as leaders. As leaders, if we ever sense that we are moving over into the arena where somehow we have let it become all about me, then we are about to lead our people into a bad spot. We certainly see that in these three.

If we look at Samuel, Samuel is all about us. It is all about the people. It is about God, he cares about that.

Saul, it is all about me. Saul cares about Saul. He has no heart for God. Saul is perhaps the brightest of the kings in many respects. He has the best lineage of the kings in many respects. In some respects, he is a very moral man. As near as I can tell, he is the only king who had only one wife. But, Saul could never get himself to follow the Lord. When he came to hard choices, it was always about him, and not about the Lord, and not about the people. That was his downfall.

David was mostly, I say mostly because not totally, was mostly about us. He shepherded his people well. He had some huge failures, but most of the time it was an “us” orientation.

Solomon mostly, not all of the time, but mostly, was about me. He started out really good – read the story of him and understand that – he started out really good, but then he began rapidly to drift away from what God expected of these kings. As he drifted, he became more and more, not about his people as a king, and more and more about himself and what was going on with him. Of course, that led to disaster in the kingdom because eventually the kingdom divides. As you might guess, looking at 19 kings in Israel, I can tell you – you are going to have to take this by faith – none of them were godly kings, zero.

So, as you would guess, in this period of time it was all about me. One after another, after another, none of them leading people, could be us as the people of God, to follow the Lord. In Judah there were actually eight that were godly. But mostly you would have to say, it was also about me. Once in a while, a godly caused a revival in Judah, but was soon replaced by an ungodly king, who changed everything.

So you see how this works? When it is all about me, it is a mess. When it is all about us, and when it is all about you, and I am following God as the leader – remember, this is a leader perspective – then I begin to lead you well in the direction that God calls me to lead you. As you lead your family well in the directions God calls your family to be led, or your Sunday school group, or your church, you find almost always it is a you and us mentality, and when it begins to fail, it becomes a me mentality, it is all about – me.

In the judgment and exile there are three countries that conquer: Assyria conquers Israel and takes them out of the land. I am not going to say any more than that at this point. Babylonia conquers Judah and takes them out of the land. Persia, when they conquer this whole area that was held by Assyria and Babylonia, they actually let the people go back to the land. So what we have here is Persia in control and they let the people of Judah, not Israel, but the people of Judah, return to the land. They returned under Ezra, who was a priest, who led them to renew themselves before the Lord and they returned

under Nehemiah, who was a builder, who built the walls of Jerusalem and rebuilt the great city. They also have a role with Esther, who keeps the people of Israel, the Jews if you will, from being exterminated by a plot from a leader in Persia.

So, when you look at these three, what you find in every case, that with these three, it is all about you and us, never about me. Ezra invests his total life in rebuilding the people. Nehemiah invests his wealth, invests his time, risks his great job, gives himself up totally for Jerusalem and rebuilding, and for the people. Esther, as the queen of Persia, puts her whole life on the line to save people. She could have easily been executed by the king for what she did. But because it was not about her, it was about God and the people, it was about you and us, she stepped forward and was used by God to protect God's people.

Powerful period of time, is it not? Powerful period of time. We need to wrap it up as we work our way toward the end. What I would like to do is just to encourage you as you look through the scriptures, to continue to commit the books to memory. Get to where you could really talk your way through the books. As silly as it seems, or as simple as it seems, it will help you in huge ways to be able to frame these things and put them together.

Remember our eight key people. Try to pick up on these people along the way that are just critical people. There are really more than eight. With Joshua, who was a critical person, a very us-oriented person. Ruth, who was a very you-oriented person. David, who was mostly an us-oriented person. Get down the line to Ezra and Nehemiah and Esther, very much you and us, other people, living their lives under the hand of God, to care for God's people. And then back up and look at the ones who were not. Samuel was an us-oriented, but Saul was very much a me-oriented person. Along the way, all those in Judges were very much me-oriented, you get the picture.

How did the people do when they were led by a godly person who follows the Lord and calls the people to follow the Lord, who is willing to give himself or herself, up for that? Who is willing for it to be about you and about us and not about me, because I am just God's agent. I am following him. I have been called, I have been blessed to follow him. In those seasons, things go well. In the seasons where the leaders kicked that aside and said, "No, no, no, it's all about me. What is going on here? You exist for me. All of this stuff exists for me. I want this wealth for me, I want this blessing for me." They forget that they are called of God to lead and they forget that their role is to shepherd the people. Then things begin to fall apart, as their selfishness takes over, it begins to infiltrate the people and they begin to reflect that, as well.

You have this period of time where you have great success and great failure, and all of the reasons surrounding it, that relate to foundational things. How did they do with

these foundational things? That is the question you always have to ask and answer as you are working your way through the historical books.

I want to conclude today and this time together, by giving you just two critical leadership principles that play out of this period of time. There are way more than two, but we have to stick with the big picture. These will not be a surprise to you, but they are really important for us to remember as we develop this big perspective.

The first one is this: As leadership goes, so go the people. That is the way God designed it. Sometimes people rise above their leadership. Sometimes when there is bad leadership, from among the people a good leader rises up and leads them a different way, praise God! That is God's redemptive work. But we need to realize the fact that all through these historical books, we see this principle at work, that as the leader goes, so go the people. If the leader is a man of character and faithfulness and trustworthiness, then generally speaking, the people will fall into line behind that, not totally all the time, but mostly. When that gets lost, when the leader is all about himself, when he is selfish, when he does not really care about the status of his people as long as he is okay, then you find that they take that on and they become selfish and they become me-oriented and chaos begins to rule and the land begins to fall apart. So this is the #1 principle: As leadership goes, so go the people.

The second principle is God's covenant, this is his agreements with people, those things that he has called the people to who are living here: The law, the rituals, the way of serving him and pleasing him, how they carry out life, how they relate to him, how they relate to each other, all of the things they received back here that we looked at when we went through the foundational books in that section. How they lived that out. That is not done without opposition because God's people have been planted in a culture and in an environment, in a world much of which is opposed to him, much of which is desperately in need of his redemption. And yet, the ruler of this world will cause the people of this world to fight that, sometimes with all of their energy. So what you see here, lastly, is not just the failure of people living this out, but it is people actually living in an environment that is hostile, living in an environment that is filled with challenge, filled with temptation, filled with things that would lead them off course if they every lose site of the foundational things.

So I would just leave you with that thought for you and me as we lead our classes, our churches, our families, our businesses, that we do not do it in a neutral world. That if we are trying to lead for the Lord, we are like these people, facing realities that can either strengthen our faith and keep us on course as we practice the foundational things, or can call us off course and begin to bring things into our lives that frankly become disastrous. That is the lesson of historical books.

I hope you have picked up on it, hope it has been helpful to you. Next time we are going to take a look a little further into the instructional books and the poets and the prophets. I think you will enjoy that trip. So thank you until next time.

## **Lesson 4 ■ Soul Food of the Poets**

I hope you have had time for a little rest since that last marathon that we ran through the historical books. In some ways, you find it foolish almost to take on that much content in a short amount of time, and yet what that does for us oftentimes is, it intensifies the big picture. I hope it did do that for you.

You will recall that we are working our way right now through the Old Testament. When we started, we created a whole picture of how the Bible in effect fits together in terms of big sections. Remember, we had the Old Testament and New Testament, that is the easiest part. Sixty-six books in all, 39 in the old and 27 in the new. We broke each into three sections. Each big segment had three smaller sections and we called them the foundational and the historical and the instructional.

### **HISTORICAL REVIEW**

In the Old Testament part, we have now worked our way through the foundational section and we picked up there some of the major themes and major people and the sense of what God is laying down as principles for his people to follow. We did not get all of it in detail, but you now know for sure some of the big picture things and you know what is going on there. So, as you work your way through it at another time – whether it is just one of the books or all of the books – you can begin to look and ask yourself, “What are the foundational things that are being established? What is God causing the writer to pay attention to that will be things that his people will have to then apply to their lives as they move on through the history that they are living in? So, that was this key part and we learned some things about each of the books – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The last time we went into the historical section where we picked up the books, Joshua through Esther, 12 books, and along the way we talked about some key people. Remember, one of the things that we did – and it was just one big picture thing – is that we asked ourselves, with these lives and these times, who were they all about? Were they all about other people and accomplishing God’s plan in and through those people, being part of the leading of that, stimulating that, being a catalyst for that, encouraging people in that? Were they about them or did it end up being all about me with some of these people? We found, didn’t we, that all through this period of time, that whenever the emphasis seemed to be that a leader who understood it was not about him, it was about the people, it was about you, it was about us, that they seemed to do way better than in the times where they had leaders where the decision was made, well, really it is all about me, it is what I get out of this, it is the recognition I get. It is all of that. It is my

stuff. We found that that is deadly in the world that God is putting together for his people, a world that is called to be an example to those desperately in need of his redemption. Remember Genesis? He is a redemptive God. That it is crucial that we not fall prey to all of the voices that would call us outside of what God intends for us.

Remember, when we ended it, I said that we do not live out these covenants, whether it is the old covenant with Israel, or the new covenant that Christ bought with his blood for you and me and the church, we do not live those things out in a neutral world. We live those things out in a world that frankly would love for us to fail. At least, the ruler of this world, who is Satan himself (Ephesians 2, I have referenced it before). He would love for this to fall apart. So, if he can get us off track in any way, if he can get us to say, "Well, it's really about me", then all of a sudden things begin to come unraveled, and we saw that in this history. But we did see great things when there were good people. We realize that Joshua was an about-you kind of guy, it is about us.

And Samuel was a prophet, it was about the people, it was not about him. Saul, well Saul was mostly about Saul, wasn't he? Saul therefore did not do so well as a King, and his people did not do so well under his lead. There's Goliath, that's not about me, that's about you, David. That was kind of Saul's approach to life. So, he led his people in not a particularly productive way. David was pretty much a you-and-us sort of guy with some failures that were terrible failures. Solomon over his life became more and more about him and less and less about the people. Ezra really gave up his life to renew and help the people, it was all about them. Nehemiah laid down his career, laid down his wealth, laid down his time, laid down his reputation, did everything for the people, it was all about them. And Esther, who was the queen in Persia. Remember, Persia was one of those countries that conquered Israel and Judah. And when they conquered them, they let people go home, but there was a mayor that was not neutral. There was a plot being built in Persia to destroy the Jews, to in fact exterminate them. And Esther, who was a Jewish woman who was queen in Persia, laid her whole life on the line to stop the plot. It was all about the people.

So you can see that contrast you want to see along through these books. This is a powerful story of living out foundational things. When they are lived out, not perfectly, but intentionally and generally well, God engages in ways that are powerful, remarkable and dare I say, even miraculous. When we get off track, when somehow there is a voice in the world that begins to make us think it really isn't about the folks, it is about me, and we go down that road, pretty soon what happens is that we bring chaos, we bring disaster, we bring a fall, as it were, just like we see at the front of Genesis when Adam fell into sin and things get totally off track. The good news with that, though, is that the true God of this world is indeed a redemptive God. So remember in Genesis, remember Jacob, the rebel? He was a rebel redeemed, wasn't he?

So even the rebels can be called back into a right relationship and a productive track and path for the Lord.

So this is a powerful, powerful piece that we worked our way out of along the way, working our way into the instructional section. Remember, both in the Old Testament and New Testament, that the instructional section gave teaching to the history. So what we have talked about going on here, these people are actually addressing. They are speaking into this history that is in these books. That is the same in the New Testament. When you get to the letters of the apostles, basically you find that what they are doing is, they are speaking into the history of the developing church and the people of that time. So it is the same pattern in both big segments.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL SECTION, POETIC**

Today I want to use our time and the minutes that we have to move on further in the Old Testament and to move into this section, the instructional section. Remember, this section is a biggie. It contains 22 books and I can guarantee you that your teacher is not going to try to do 22 books in one swing. So what we are going to do today is, we are going to take a look at the poetical books. I am going to break the instructional section into a couple of different kinds of literature. One piece of the literature is poetical in nature. Basically there are two kinds here. There is the kind that is classic poetry, some of it even meant to be sung. Then there is another piece that oftentimes is referred as “wisdom literature”, which is a more classic kind of instruction. Here is how you live, here is what you avoid, here are things that you do, this is how you relate. We think of that most often with Proverbs, but wisdom literature is scattered all through the poetical books, as is poetry scattered all through the poetical books. So there are two kinds of literature here and we want to take a look at that in five books that make up this subsection if you will, of instruction, the poetical books.

So that is where we are headed today in this regard. You know, you don't have to go very far in these to understand why people love this piece. When you talk with people about sections of scripture they love, you almost inevitably end up with lots of people identifying books in this section. In fact, the most loved book perhaps in the scripture, if you can be fair in that – they are all wonderful, aren't they? – but if you say, “Where is your favorite?” oftentimes people will land in The Psalms and we will talk about that when we get there. The poetical books are favorites of many of the people.

Let me just read you a piece or two out of them and you get a sense of the feel of the poetry. From Job, Job writes, “Let me have silence and I will speak and let come on me what may. Why should I take my flesh in my teeth and put my life in my hand? Though he would slay me, yet will I serve him.” Do you sense the power of that? This has a

whole different kind of feel in terms of literature, doesn't it? Or how about Psalm 8: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all of the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the Son of Man that you care for him?" Can't you feel the presence of that person? Can't you almost sense where the writer is as he sitting and he is either thinking, or he is observing and he is taking you into his thoughts and into his heart. And it is a whole different feel, isn't it, from the history or the foundational things?

Proverbs 3: "Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart, so you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man. You sense there the instructional aspects of this, this wisdom literature, as it speaks into the lives of the people of the time for which it was written and following times. Or Ecclesiastes, a book interpreted a myriad of ways: "For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up what has been planted; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up." And right away you sense through that beautiful poetry which goes on, that this is a book that is reflecting on the seasons of life and their implications, and even identifying some of those seasons and again, pulling us into heart issues that relate to life.

Speaking of heart issues, the last of these books in the poetical section is Song of Solomon. Just as an aside on the Song of Solomon, it is said and I do not know the truth of it, but it said in plenty of places, so perhaps it has validity, that this particular book, that good Hebrew parents would not let their children read this book until they came of a certain age, because of it's topic, and its topic really was love and marriage and intimacy and very, very clear, dare I say sensual. Listen to the words: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death. Jealousy is fierce as the grave, its flashes are flashes of fire, and the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all of the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised."

Do you sense the flow of these, the sense of poetry, the power of it? This has a whole different feel because now it is taking you into, listen, here is the key word. It is taking you into heart issues. It is taking you into the very core of what it means to be human, and how that humanity governed by God, lives its way out in this history. So it has a whole different feel to it. It has a whole different implication for us. It wants to instruct us in terms of how the core of who we are responds to everything around us and the things that are happening in our history. Sometimes it is beautiful, sometimes it is harsh, sometimes it is inspiring, sometimes it is almost deadly boring when you have read

your hundredth proverb in a row. But if you pay close attention to it, what you find here are instructors who are taking a certain kind of literature that is experiential, and they are using that literature to take us into the heart of the people of this history. And we dare not miss the heart.

If there is one thing we do as leaders, as I do, I will point the finger at myself, as oftentimes I learn this content as if it is just content and it isn't about real people. I think one of the great things about the poetical books is, it pulls us back to realize that what we are studying in these God words that are our scriptures, we are studying about real people, real issues, real applications, real successes, real failures, real relationships. It has that element to it and the poets bring that to the fore. All of a sudden it is not hidden back behind long lists of history, it is pulled right to the fore. Oh, my goodness, here is how King David felt when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and realized that he had failed God. Read Psalm 51. It takes you right into the heart of the person who has been devastated by his failure, not just a failure that impacted his people and his family, but a failure that most of all impacted God, whom he loved dearly.

Or into the heart of King Solomon, who writes in Proverbs that you are to guard our heart, for from your heart flows life. And when you think about Solomon, did Solomon guard his heart? The answer to that is no. That as Solomon went on, you already know he became a me-oriented guy and one of the things that he did is, he married hundreds of women and he did not guard his heart. And as a result, those women who worshiped other gods, led Solomon's heart far from the Lord. So when Solomon, this wise person, says, "Guard your heart", he knows of what he speaks. And when you make those links, you realize these are authors bringing to the very fore what it means, the heart of being human, the heart of being people under the hand of God, the heart of living life out in a world that has challenges in it, that either we can lean on God and follow him and overcome those challenges in ways that make us stronger and that carry us into God's promises and advance his life and our life, or can carry us far from him. Here you get the heart of the matter. Let me take you into these. We need to grab these quickly. We cannot linger over these things. But let me just talk with you a little bit about each of these.

## **Job**

Job is a powerful book. I am going to talk about each book just a little bit, a little different approach than we had the last times. I do not know how else to do this. They are not easily outlined or categorized. You just kind of have to talk about each one of them because they are so individualistic in their approach to things.

Remember, Job was a wealthy man in his time, had a big family, had lots of stuff, and followed the Lord and you probably have read the book so you know the scene in

heaven where Satan comes and talks to God and basically says, "You know, Job just follows you because of the stuff you do for him." And so short of Job's life being taken, God lets Satan intersect Job's life and take just about everything away that he has. Take his family, take his stuff, eventually take his health, even his friends in a way become not his friends, but rather become his critics. What you begin to see in all of that then is, how does this man who is a good, godly man, how does he respond to this. Satan says, "All of the stuff keeps him loving you, God." When all of that disappears, how is he going to do? He wrestles, doesn't he? He has friends come, who criticize him, and he has a loving wife who tells him to curse God and die. He has a wonderful amount of negative help and yet, somehow if you read the whole story, he manages to hold it together. Not that he doesn't question God, not that he doesn't question what is going on. Listen to me, God doesn't mind if you question. God doesn't mind if you ask hard things of him. And Job asked hard things. But when God responded, then Job responds back in miraculous and marvelous ways. Here is the key. This is what I want you to remember of Job in all of this. Remember this word, "sovereignty." That is what Job is all about, God's sovereignty. That is, is God sovereign and can he do as a sovereign God, whatever he wants with our lives, and is that okay? That is what Job had to come to grips with, is that just as God gave him tons of good things, could God also take all of those away, and would God still be God? And Job had to come up with a "yes" answer. This is all about allowing God to be sovereign.

Listen, as leaders and as a leader myself, I have come to counsel tons of people who have questions like Job, that really cannot be answered. I have found the most important thing that I do in those settings, is to listen, not to criticize, and to bring people back to who God is, and God's sovereignty. Because there are things that happen in this world that you and I will never explain. Who could explain what happened to Job? Job did not know the end of the story. We know the end of the story, but he didn't know it, he had to live through it.

Sovereignty becomes the key issue here. Is God sovereign? Will you allow him to be sovereign in your life, regardless of whatever life seems to bring? Interestingly, if you do that, it will actually lead you into the heart of the theme of the next book.

## **Psalms**

The next book is Psalms, and you know it is 150 poems of varied lengths from varied authors, many of them written by David, but by other authors as well. They extend over a long period of time, actually some may have been written by Moses, so they extend way back, and some were written by Solomon and others. So, they cover a big period of time and they are poems with a purpose. Their purpose is singular. Their purpose is worship. So, just as I need to come to grips with God's sovereignty if I am going to live

successfully in this historical world, facing all of the blessings and challenges of it, I also need to understand there is a role in it called “worship.” That is, giving God his due, recognizing God for who he is and as his creation, offering him the reverence and the love that is due him. Here is the great thing about Psalms that I love. It is because Psalms teaches us that worship is way bigger than we often think it is. That these poems that are written in The Psalms, run a gamut of subjects from creation, like Psalm 8 that I just read to you when we began our session together, to what righteous people look and live like, to a psalmist that is being attacked by his enemies. In hopes that God is going to do something for him, he prays about relief from his enemies. Psalmists who are angry about things. Psalmists who are loving about things, Psalmists who are confessing sin, Psalmists who are doing all sort of things.

What you realize is that the Psalm teaches us. Listen, this is so critical. The Psalm teaches us that every element of life is about worship. That the diversity of these wonderful poems, many of which were written to be sung by the congregation, by the assembly, that these poems teach us that life is worship. That how I live it when I am hurting, how I call out to God when I’m angry, how I pour out my anger to him and not take it out on people, that when I am uncertain, that I come to God and lean into him for his certainty. When I feel unloved, how I come back to God to receive his love which he offers willingly and graciously and fully. How, when I fail I can come and confess, and I’m confessing to a God who is a redemptive God and has provided the way for me to receive forgiveness and to get beyond my failures and to live for him again. All of those things that are the fabric of life are found in The Psalms and The Psalms teach us that all of those things, all of those things are worship.

So as a leader, I am about the business of living a life like that and helping my people to understand that. It is not what we do for an hour on a Sunday morning. It is what we do with our lives as we live them out in the presence of God, in the presence of others.

## Proverbs

Proverbs is all about wisdom. So Proverbs takes us into the realm of, how do I think about life? And it is all about skill. How do I live life skillfully? And so the Proverbs address that for me, it addresses it in beautiful and powerful ways, saying here is how you live out life skillfully. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart”, the Proverb writer pens. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don’t lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight. He will carve out a path for you. Begin to think through that. The crucial things of life and that is what these wonderful little gems of literature help us to come to grips with. How do I skillfully think about and live out life? Many of these came from the hand of King Solomon, who in other places in the scripture is recognized as one who collected man

proverbs and wrote many himself. So, this is wisdom. God is sovereign. In his sovereignty I worship him. When I worship him a la The Psalms, I begin to understand the fear of the Lord and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, a la Proverbs.

## **Ecclesiastes**

Now, this wisdom works its way out into two ways. Ecclesiastes, the key word is “vanity”, used in the book many times. It means emptiness. The whole part of this is that if I succumb to the things that life outside of God offer me, if those become more important to me than God, then what I will find with all of those things, is that they are empty. As pretty as they appear when I have them, they are empty. This was probably written by Solomon as well. Did Solomon have all the stuff? Did he ever. He had an RV, he had a ski boat, he had two quads. He had a cottage at the beach. Oh no, that’s not Solomon, wait a second, I am thinking of the wrong one. Solomon had more stuff than that. The Queen of Sheba came and looked at what he had, she said, “The half hasn’t been told” in terms of what you have. He had all of the stuff and his life ended up a miserable failure because he made that stuff god.

And as he thinks through, as he writes this book, he says, all of those things were empty. What a message that is, right? What do I give my life to? If I give my life to education, Solomon says it is emptiness. If I give my life to relationships, Solomon says it is emptiness. If I give my life to money, Solomon says it is emptiness. If I give my life to recreation, Solomon says it is emptiness. If I give my life to owning great homes, Solomon says it is emptiness if those things become god. So, the end of the book tells us the whole story. At the end of the book Solomon says, here’s the deal. “Fear God and obey him.” That’s the whole story. In other words, let God be God. And when you let God be God, then however he blesses you, those blessings will not be empty. But if you make those blessings god, then emptiness will be the result. Kind of a message, isn’t it? Not just for that time, but for this time. There were people in this history who understood that and let God be God. And there were people in this history who let the stuff become god. And you saw what happens when they do that. That is the message here.

## **Song of Solomon**

The last one is Song of Solomon and the emphasis here is on love and really a particular kind of love found in marriage. It is very sensuous, it is very beautiful. It is about a courtship and an engagement and a marriage, and its consummation. And in that regard, because it is wisdom literature, as well as poetry, I think the message of it is that marriage is a key building block in all of this. That one of the places where we need both worship at its highest degree, where we need wisdom and dare I say where we

even need to understand the sovereignty of God, that one of the key building blocks in place in the life, both then and now, is in this arena of love and marriage. And it is a battleground, even in this time was a battleground. Is God going to have his way, and is marriage going to be what it is intended to be, or is the world going to have sway, and it is going to go a different direction.

Do you see the heart of these? I wish we could stay longer in these. We will come back to them perhaps in another class and in greater depth. But what I want to see is the big picture. That these books about sovereignty and worship and wisdom and vanity and love and marriage, that they are pulling out the heart of people who lived here. So you now begin to see how they lived in relationship to their history, both their successes and their failures, the emotion of it, the heart of it.

I need to close this off. How I would like to do that, is just to give you out of this period, just a few more leadership axioms, themes as it were, that might help us as we move forward in our perspective. Remember, we are developing a leadership perspective.

## **THREE LEADERSHIP AXIOMS**

Three leadership axioms that grew out of these great books. Let's close with this. You may want to look at them in your materials and jot a note or two.

The first one is this: Sovereignty says listen, learn and lean on the Lord, as you may not see the whole story in times of trouble or blessing. That is one of the things certainly that Job and the other pieces of this poetic and wisdom literature teach us. We do not always see everything and when we do not, then the place to go is to go back to a sovereign God.

Secondly, that worship has many facets, all of which should be understood and practiced. Remember, life is designed to be worship. If The Psalms teach us anything, they teach us that worship is expressed in more ways than we can imagine, and mostly through the living out of the life, and sometimes through planned celebrations and other sorts of things.

Thirdly and finally, helping as a leader, helping keep God in his proper place in people's lives, is a leader's main calling. That is, if you are becoming a person of influence under the hand of God, if you think that God is going to use you or is using you in a shepherding or leadership position, then your main calling as a leader is to help people keep God in the proper place in their lives. That means that you have to keep him in the proper place in your lives. And that is what these wonderful poetic books – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon – are all about.

That was a load for a short amount of time. Next time we are together, we will take a look at the prophetic books. Until then, God bless and we will see you soon.

## **Lesson 5 ■ Will Power of the Prophets**

Here we are at the prophetic books, moving our way toward the end of the Old Testament. I must admit, I come to this section with a little fear and trepidation, not because it is a huge section, we have 17 books to cover here in our 30-minute sprint together. But every time I teach out of one of these books, I have this vision of a teacher I had in Bible college who was a magnificent teacher, a gentleman named David Needham. Those of us who had the prophets class from him, I think we always felt that when we left class, that we had been taught by a prophet. He just had a way of presenting the material and taking you into the life of prophets that just made it so very personal. So, I always feel a little inadequate when I come to these books, especially when I have to talk about and we have to engage in 17 books together in just a short amount of time. But, we will do it, we have done it so far and we will do great with it.

### **REVIEW OF POETICAL BOOKS**

By now you know the structure, you get what is going on. We are working our way through instructional books. This last section of the big part of the Old Testament, total 39 books, five of them in the foundational section that lays down the compass settings for how we carry out life. The history then, we begin to see people living in the light of the foundation, how they do, what happens when they do poorly, where is God in all of it. Then last time we were together we got into the instructional part and we talked about the poets, the poetical section. Remember, we talked about Job, where we said that the fundamental notion of Job is, it is all about God's sovereignty, can God be sovereign in our lives regardless of our circumstances. Psalms, which is all about worship. Proverbs, we identified the key to Proverbs was wisdom. We talked about Proverbs in light of developing skills to live effectively. That is a key piece of this wisdom and poetic literature.

Then, two other books that somewhat follow the theme of Proverbs in terms of wisdom. Ecclesiastes, which teaches us that we need to keep God in his proper place in our lives. That there will be lots of things in life that will want to be god. But only God is God, and when we let those other things become god, whatever they might be, then our life will eventually begin to experience emptiness. So the author, who is Solomon, who experienced all of those things, said here is the bottom line: "Fear God, obey him." That is the whole story. So, that is what this one is about.

The next one, which is another area of great wisdom is the area of love and marriage, and that is Song of Solomon, which as we mentioned before, although briefly, is a whole reflection of a man and woman, a shepherd and a shepherdess, who fall in love, who

court, who get engaged and who eventually get married and consummate the marriage. It is a wonderful poetic expression of how they feel about one another and what that love looks like and feels like and it is marvelous. You are going to have to look at this for yourself, because I am not going to go there. But one of the things, when you read it this next time – and I hope you will read it soon – is that you will find it is filled with outrageous comparisons, where her beauty is like the hair of goats and that kind of stuff. You go, “My goodness, what are these kinds of comparisons?” It is fun to read in that regard and to realize that if we were to move back into that culture, we would not get the vernacular; and if folks from that time could come and move into our culture, they would not get how we say things, either. But it is a marvelous reflection on two people in love and how that works its way in a beautiful marriage.

So, these are heart books. They take us into the heart of the people who are living out the history. Then we have the prophetic books, 17 of them, written by men who were known as prophets, people who spoke for the Lord. This is very different from the poetical books. The poetical books, the writers spoke for the Lord, but they revealed the heart of people, living out their lives in light of who God is and in light of the history. These prophets are now reflecting on how the people live and they are making commentary on it. Generally speaking, they are addressing the people’s failures. The prophets tend to show up when things are not going well. That is the thing that you have here, is they are showing up when things are not going well.

## **PROPHETIC BOOKS**

So we want to be able to put this framework together as we wrap up the end of this Old Testament and see how these books work together. Remember, we have been trying to see, how do these books work? These books, these prophetic books, again, they all fit over here in this history. Watch this real carefully and I will show you in general where they fit. In general, these prophetic books are going to fit down here in 1 and 2 Chronicles, 1 and 2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, into this history. The reason they are going to fit into this history is because, as the people of Israel move into this history, they begin to follow the Lord less and less. And when they follow the Lord less and less, then God raises up prophets, whose job it is to call them back to the Lord. If you remember just that much, you can have a great handle on the prophetic books.

So in this history, remember this is the history of the divided kingdom and the exile. This is a history where the people fall away from the Lord, 19 bad kings in Israel, 20 kings in Judah, eight of which were sort of good. And eventually, because of the leadership and the way people go, the thing falls apart. And in its falling apart, God does not want it to fall apart, so he brings his prophets, who speak to these people,

calling them back into a relationship with God. That is the fundamental notion of the prophetic books. And that is what you will see in each and every one of them.

## Pre-Exile Prophets

What I want to do now, and we are going to do it fairly quickly, is I want to give you a way that you can think about these in terms of how they fit together and what they have to say about the periods in which they fit. So, let me give you a chart. You can work on it in your materials and we will kind of fill it in together. Here is going to be the key place. Right here, I am going to put a little block and we are going to call this the exile. This is the period that shows up to be in 2 Chronicles and 2 Kings. This is the period of time in which Judah is conquered by Babylonia and the people of Judah are basically carried out of the land and resettled in Babylonia, at least a lot of them are. So, if we work around the exile, which is all about God's judgment, we can figure out how these books fit because there are some books that are going to be in the exile. Then there are some prophetic books that are going to be pre-exile. Then there are going to be some that are post exile. When you understand this, then you are going to understand what history they are talking into. You will be able to fit these together, which is absolutely critical to our understanding and work around these prophetic books.

## Exile Prophets

Seventeen books. I know it is not a Biblical term, but we need to rock and roll, to use our time wisely, and to get this done. So, I am going to take these books and show you how they fit. Let's start with the exile. We will start with the easy parts first. Two books fit in the exile, two of the 17. Those are Ezekiel and Daniel. So, when you come to Ezekiel and Daniel, toward the end of your Old Testament, as you are reading along, you are going to say to yourself, "Oh, this is all about Judah in exile." Ezekiel and Daniel basically are going to focus in on judgment, judgment has come, and basically how the people should live in light of it. Their encouragement, they are don't-give-up kind of books. They remind people that God is a redeeming God and even though they have fallen under the judgment of God, that God was not going to leave them there forever. They are the kind of books that go, "Hey, look, here is what happened. Shame on you, but that is what happened. Now, learn how to live. Learn how to live for God in exile. Learn how to live for God even under his judgment. And learn to understand that a sovereign God is not going to leave you there, that he will eventually bring you back." So Ezekiel pictures it as dry bones in a valley that come back to life.

Daniel looks way downstream and talks not just about their immediate renewal and restoration, but actually even looks further to an ultimate renewal and restoration, which frankly most of us realize is yet to come.

So, that is the nature of these books. When people are under God's judgment, it does not help to pile it on. Ezekiel and Daniel do not pile it on. Ezekiel and Daniel help the people to return to the Lord, even though they are experiencing judgment, and to get things back in order, and to prepare themselves for a time when God's judgment will be over and he will once again call them back to a more full fulfillment of the promises he has for them. So these are powerful books. You find yourself out of sorts, you find yourself feeling like somehow you are disconnected from God, Ezekiel and Daniel are great books, they are great connection books.

## Post-Exile Prophets

After the exile, Persia lets the people of Judah go home. Remember, we saw three books that fit there: Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. And there are three prophetic books that fit in that history. Those three books are Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. They all reflect on the people returning to the land. Once God's judgment is past, and God releases them to return to the land again as part of his promise, then they reflect on that. Haggai talks about rebuilding the temple. Zechariah talks about the coming Messiah. More Messiah per square inch in Zechariah than any other prophetic book. Malachi begins to see that the people, by the time he writes, are falling away from the Lord again. So Malachi talks about that and what might be the outcome of that if they continue to fall away.

So, there we have it. We have five of the 17 books. So that means the rest of them are here in this period, in the pre-exile period. A good student should ask himself or herself, "Why are the bulk of them before the exile?" Here is the reason. God intensifies his warnings before the judgment comes. So the reason these other prophetic books are all bunched up in front of the exile, is because God is saying to the people, listen carefully, God is saying to the people, "You really do not want to go here, you really do not." Now unfortunately, they do not listen. So eventually God sends Assyria. Assyria, a great and powerful nation, conquers Israel and they take the people of Israel and they scatter them all over their empire. You probably have read or heard somewhere along the way of the 10 lost tribes, that is where they got lost. Assyria took them and scattered them all over the place. Then they took people from other nations they had conquered and they settled them in Israel, which is the beginning many believe, of the people in the New Testament known as Samaritans.

So basically that is disastrous for Israel. Later Babylonia conquers Assyria and Babylonia conquers Judah. And Babylonia hauls the people of Judah away to Babylonia. And pre-exile we have all of the prophets warning against these things, warning about what is going to happen. Habakkuk, for instance, warning about being conquered by Babylonia and what that will mean. Hosea and Amos warning Israel about the coming disaster they will face at the hands of Assyria. But the people do not listen and so

eventually judgment comes. But why all of these books? It is because God is warning. He does not just throw judgment on people for no reason at all, "Oh, this would be a good day for judgment." God warns, God warns, God warns. But remember, we learned in the foundational things, that God really does mean what he says. So, if we do not listen to his warnings, eventually then the outcomes that he says will take place because of that, they take place.

But what I want you to be encouraged by is how incredibly he warns the people in this period of time. So, in front of this there are warnings to various nations. There are warnings to Israel and those come from the prophets Hosea and Amos. Remember the northern kingdom, 19 lousy kings, Israel. Hosea and Amos warn Israel about what is to come. They do not listen, so eventually judgment comes, Assyria conquers them.

There is another little nation called Edom, relatives really of the Jews. Obadiah basically is a prophet to Edom. He basically warns Edom that if they do not shape up and quit picking on the Jews, if they do not quit mistreating their brothers, that God is going to judge them. They do not listen. Eventually God basically wipes them off the face of the earth. So, that is another warning in this period of time.

There is another nation here you know it, it is Assyria, and it is the nation that conquered Israel. There are two prophets that speak to Assyria during this time. One of them is Jonah and the other is Nahum. Jonah brings a message of repentance to Assyria, and miracle of miracles, Assyria repents and God holds off his judgment. So they hear the warning, they respond to the warning, even though they are not Jews, they are a gentile nation. Because they respond to the warning and they repent of their sin, God does not judge them, much to Jonah's disappointment. But they eventually go back to their old ways and Nahum comes along and says, "You've had it and here is how you are going to fall." And he predicts the conquering by Babylonia. So there are two here. Let's see, what do we have now? We have ten gone, so we have seven left. And all of those seven bring warnings to Judah. All of those seven begin to talk to Judah about the fact that they are falling apart. They are falling into sin and the ultimate fall will be disastrous. Those seven are these: Habakkuk, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, and also the book of Lamentations fits in here. Lamentations was written by Jeremiah.

So you have seven of these prophetic books that zero in on Judah. Now let me ask you a question, student. How important was Judah in God's plan and economy? That he directed seven of these prophets to zero in on Judah before judgment fell on Judah. Do you think they were kind of important? When you begin to look at the big picture, you begin to see these things. Because God is not desirous that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. God does not find it great fun to bring judgment upon people. It fails his plan. But when people fail to listen, then eventually judgment does

come. Because in God's character, justice and righteousness are significant parts of his character, as are grace and love and mercy, and many other characteristics as well.

So, we look at this and we realize pre-exile all of these prophets worked in this period of time. We find in 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, all of them warning Israel and Judah about coming judgment if they did not shape up. They did not shape up. So they went into exile. They were judged and taken out of the land. Remember, the land is always a key part of the promise. Follow me, obey me, you stay in the land, the land of blessing. Fall away from me and eventually I will take you out of the land.

Well, they go into exile and two prophets speak to Judah, particularly in exile, Ezekiel and Daniel, encouraging them to get back in the right pattern for the Lord, to stick by it, to realize that they will not be under God's judgment forever, to learn how to live in a very non-God environment and still be Godly people, and to believe God that eventually will remember his promises and call them back to the place that he had for them. Then, when they are called back to that place and they return to Jerusalem and Judah, there are three prophets that function then. One of them calling the people to rebuild the temple, the place of the presence of God among the people, crucial to the people. One of them calling the people to recognize that God is going to send a king in line of David, a Messiah, and pointing them toward that day. And another, seeing them beginning to fail already, calling them back to the right relationship with the Lord before they once again face judgment.

And that is how the Old Testament is around this particular set of books and prophecies, attached to the history of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

We need to put a wrap on this. We are just about at the end of our time together. If there was a speed limit for going through the Old Testament, I would have to bet that over the five sessions we have had together so far, that we have broken the speed limit. But what I hope is that in breaking the speed limit and going fast, that it has caused a sense that we see in fact the bigger picture, that it does not get lost in details, but all of a sudden, we go "Wow! That is what is going on here. I get the picture of what God is doing. I see how he puts his Word together. I see how these things fit and begin to give me a fuller picture of the priorities of God and the principles of God, and how those fit into history, and how he uses key people to lead this people to follow them, and how he uses other key people to instruct his people when they are falling away from those principles and things. And I can watch it and see how God intersects all along the way. And I can see the hearts of the people in all of this, as I look at the poetical books and see how the people are responding with the core of their being, to what is going on in their lives, the relationship to each other and to the Lord." It is a powerful thing, is it not? A powerful thing.

So let me wrap it up with just a couple of comments along the way, summary kinds of things that are in your notes, I am just going to call your attention to a couple. First, the Biblical terms for prophet. There are basically three you will find in the scripture. One is the term, visionary. The other is the term, seer. And then the most prominent term, the word, prophet. I think you can see with the visionary and the seer ones, you have more of an emphasis of looking out into the future; and with the prophet, the word there really means “to announce.” It is more of a teaching role, a “calling to” role. I am going to announce to you something that God has told me and that you need to respond to. So, it is helpful to see those along the way. Oftentimes we think of prophet and we think of looking into the future all the time. But the prophet was more like the preacher of his day. He announced things to people that he had heard from God and that God wanted his people to know.

There were within these as well, some other terms that come to play, particularly in the wisdom literature. Three kinds of people that are often identified in the wisdom literature, and that need to be considered. One was the wise. The wise was the person who recognized who God is, recognized what God was doing, and basically crafted his or her life to follow those ways and patterns, always referred to as “the wise.” We see that in and out of all of these books, the wise person listens to the Lord.

Then there is the fool, and the fool is just the opposite. The fool just blows off everything that God desires, everything that God is, and basically goes off and does whatever he or she wants to do, and considers that there will be no consequences. And of course, the fool then gets the consequences. The good news about the scripture is that even Proverbs teaches us that fools are not unreachable, that fools can be reached and sometimes their lives are changed. Lastly, we have the group that is called “the simple.” They are the folks who have not quite figured it out. Sometimes they are for God, sometimes they are in another direction. They are the people that we work hard to reach, that we pull off those destructive paths and aim on constructive paths and following the Lord.

We are surrounded. I can look at my life and I can see a fool season and I can see a simple season and occasionally a wise piece. We need to be reminded that all of those make up the world that we live in and the world that we work in and the world that God is redeeming to Himself through Jesus Christ.

Let me put the wraps on it by just giving you a handful of leadership axioms out of all of this, and we will be finished. Our time will be up and we will have sprinted through the Old Testament. Here are five:

God holds leaders responsible for the way that they lead people. God holds leaders responsible for the way they lead people. We have seen it. We have seen it in the history.

We have seen it in the political books. We have read about it and we have seen it in the prophetic books. God holds leaders responsible.

Secondly, sometimes shepherds have to correct their flocks. None of us like to be correctors, and yet when I read all of the prophetic books, I find that these guys were called into existence, were called to function and they were called almost always with a corrective purpose. It does not mean that correction is the only thing that people ought to hear all the time. But when things are going off target, correction is necessary, and that word sometimes needs to be offered.

Thirdly, to lead well, shepherds stay sharp in their relationship with the Lord. If this teaches us anything as we get a leader's perspective, is that if I am going to be a person of influence in the kingdom of God, if I aspire to that or I am being used for that, I need to make sure that I keep my relationship pristine, clean, sharp, growing, never taken for granted. Because the day that I take it for granted is the day I begin to slip. And if this teaches us anything, it teaches us that about leadership.

Fourthly, shepherds intentionally acquire wisdom to help their flocks live skillfully. We looked at this wisdom literature, it is for us. We need to acquire wisdom. We need all the wisdom we can have as we influence our families and our classes and our churches and our communities. It needs to be intentional. It does not happen to us just by osmosis. True influencers understand that and they intentionally seek out the wisdom of the Lord. Proverbs teaches us that when we seek it, we will find it.

Lastly, a prophetic calling, that is, the calling that is sort of a "thus saith the Lord" calling, is typically for a season and circumstance. It is not the forever message of our lives. But from time to time, we may have to offer a corrective message and when we have to offer it, we need to offer it. It is the prophetic role. But it is not our only role. And certainly we have seen that as we have worked through these Old Testament books together.

It has been a powerful time. We get to move on to the New Testament with just a slight detour over into those 400 silent years, those years between the old and New Testaments. I am looking forward to it. I am looking forward to seeing you again. God bless. Follow him well.

## **Lesson 6 ■ The Inter-testamental Period, 400 Not-So-Silent Years**

Today, we want to move on out of the Old Testament and work our way toward the content of the New Testament. So we are going to be working our way through five sections ultimately, that will take us through the inter-testamental period and then the Gospels, and then the book of Acts. Then we will take a look at all of the letters, both the letters of Paul and the general letters, and we will bring this all to a conclusion with a summary at the end. So, we have some tasks in front of us, but at this particular session, we want to specifically look at the inter-testamental period.

### **REVIEW AND SUMMARY**

Before we get there, though, it probably doesn't surprise you that I would like to review just a little bit, if we could. Remember, we laid out the Bible in a structure and our goal, remember, of taking this from the perspective of a leader, that you are aspiring to be an influencer in the church, and that we are giving you a structure that will help you manage your understanding of scripture, the scripture being one of the most significant tools that you have in your leadership tool kit, so to speak. And we set it up in two big sections, one for Old Testament, one for new, 66 books in the whole Bible, 39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament. Then we took each section apart into three big parts, that we labeled as foundational, historical and instructional. Remember, the foundational part lays down values, lays down principles, lays down covenants, agreements, actions of God toward his people and his people toward God, that become the foundational things upon which a life of following the Lord is built.

So, here in the Old Testament we had that foundational section. Then a historical section and that really is a reflection then of the people living out the foundational things. How did they do? Did they do well? Did they not do well? When they did well, what happened? When they failed, what happened? You begin to watch the foundational things take shape in the lives of the people, both people corporately – a country, if you will - and people individually, both leaders and just the people in the land.

Then this third section is an instructional section. What we said about it was that this instructional section has a unique value and role in all of this, in that what it does, is it reflects on how people are doing in the history. And remember in the instructional section - which in the Old Testament was Job through Malachi, - we broke it into parts, a poetic part – Job through Song of Solomon – and a prophetic part, - Isaiah through Malachi. And we talked about these, realizing that these help us to reflect on the lives of

people here and then they also bring instruction to the lives of people here, related to, you guessed it, the foundational things.

So, this begins to fit together in a unique and powerful way. We also put some dates – remember that these are just generally estimates, they are not specific, - but they help us to a feel for time and how things are flowing. And remember, we pegged Abraham at about 2,000 BC and Moses at about 1500 BC and David at about 1,000, and Ezra – particularly the rebuilding of the temple – at about 500 BC. So that gives us a sense of the flow of things as we look at about 1500 years of history, from Abraham through Ezra. So that really pegged us in terms of our Old Testament. Obviously, we put much more into it, didn't we? But you get the sense of the overview and having this handle on it is really critical to you being able to manage your understanding of the Old Testament scripture.

We are going to be moving toward the New Testament and low and behold, it has the same framework, 27 books this time rather than 39. The foundational section is going to have four books. Those four will be what we know as the Gospels, basically Matthew through John. The historical section is only going to have one book, and that is going to be the book of Acts. Literally, most of the titles say, "The Acts of the Apostles", and that is what it records. It is the acts of the early leaders of the church and how they functioned in relationship to the foundation that they had learned through the life of Christ and what we call "The Gospels."

Then there is, as you would already guess, an instructional section and this instructional section here has 22 books in it. And interestingly, these are letters. You recall, over here we had basically poetry in this section and prophecy, poetry being a heart reflection of how the people were doing in the history, how they were living out these foundational things. And prophecy largely being the teachers of the time, teaching these people with respect to how they were doing with the foundational things in the times in which they lived.

Over here we have a slightly different kind of literature, in that we have letters now, letters largely from apostles and these letters are going to reflect on how people and how the church is doing in the history it is living, that is the early church. So, there are 22 of these from various authors, Paul being the most prolific of the authors, as we will see later when we get to this section. Something happens here that we need to reflect on just real quickly, just as a reminder. Remember, we go from the foundational things that feed down here as people live out these foundational things. These instructional things feed back into that history, reflecting on how people are doing, reflecting on the heart of the people, reflecting on the things that people need to learn or re-learn in order to live out the foundational things effectively. So, there is an energy that goes from this section,

foundational, and this section, instructional, into this history, which is this stuff being lived out.

The same thing happens over here. These sections that we call the Gospels are basically a biography of the life of Christ, these foundational things work their way into the history of the early church. So, when we read Acts, we begin to see the foundations lived out. And when we read the letters, we begin to see the teachers of the time, Paul, Peter, James, Jude, John, they are going to be speaking into the living out. So, you are going to begin to see what the teachers of the time are having to say with respect to the actions of the time, as the church begins to be formed and people begin to shape it. It is the same pattern in both major sections, the old and New Testaments. I hope that is making sense to you along the way and is hopeful. Remember, one of our goals is to be able to think through all of this as we work our way toward the end of all of our sessions together. It is a challenging goal, but I suspect you are beginning to capture it, and that is a good thing.

Now we end the Old Testament. I know in your Bible, as in mine, if I close Malachi and turn the page, I am in Matthew. But the reality is, it does not work like that from the standpoint of history. What happens here is, the Old Testament closes and there is a 400-year gap here before the New Testament begins. Many people refer to this as the 400-silent years, and the reason that they use that terminology is, there is a general belief that during these years, from the closing of the Old Testament text with Malachi and Nehemiah, who were contemporaries, from the closing of that text until the time of John the Baptist, you had roughly a 400-year period in which no prophet spoke in the land of Israel. So there was no official text of scripture being developed, there were no prophets speaking in the land, and it was if God was silent.

Now, having said that, you need to understand that though he may have been silent, he was not inactive. He was busy and that is what we want to talk about very briefly in our time together here, is what was going on in this inter-testamental period. It is so significant because, think about it for a minute, if God was silent, if there was no prophet in the land, if it was if God had quit speaking to the people of Israel, then it helps you to understand a lot of what goes on over here, particularly in the foundational books.

For instance, you don't read very far into Matthew, until you discover someone who has come on the scene, whose name is John the Baptist. If you read the little narratives about John in the various Gospels, you discover that he came speaking to the people and it was a message of repentance. "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." It was a message of preparation. Get prepared for the coming kingdom of God. It was a powerful message and people flocked to the desert, he spoke in the deserts of Judea. So it was not necessarily convenient for people, and yet people flocked to hear this man

speak. And you have to ask yourself, “Why is that so? “And you now know the answer. Because for 400 years there has not been anyone like that and now, all of a sudden is. Could God be speaking again? Could this be a prophet in the land again?

So you see, it is very important that we get a little handle on this. We cannot pretend that in the 20 minutes or so that we are going to be involved in this, that we are going to get a detailed handle on it. What we want to do is to get a big picture, just so that you are comfortable and understanding that there are some things that went on here that made a huge difference over here. I hope this is making sense to you. As always, we are running kind of fast, aren't we?

There is a passage in scripture that I think captures the notion of this period that we call the inter-testamental period. It is found in Galatians chapter 4, verse 4, where Paul writes, “But when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” That little phrase, right at the front of that verse, verse 4, “But when the time had fully come”, I think really applies to these 400 years because while perhaps there were not prophets speaking in the land, what God was doing was that he was filling up time. He was getting things ready for the most significant person and event of all, and we need to take a look at that in light of these things later on.

## **THREE KEYS TO THE SILENT YEARS**

Let me bring you up to speed with what is going on here. In this 400-year silent period. I want to break it into three categories. I want to talk with you a little about rulers, groups who ruled over the land. Once we have talked about rulers, then we are going to talk a little bit about readings; that is, there were things that were written during this time that are important, that we need to be aware of, so we are going to talk a little bit about readings. Then lastly, we are going to talk some about religion. The reason we need to do this is because there are some things that developed during this time that we read about over here in the New Testament. But if we do not know what happened over here, they are going to seem kind of strange to us. So we need to understand what is going on religiously during this time, as well. That is the challenge for us. We are going to see if we can face this challenge in some real quick run-throughs.

### **Rulers**

Let's start with the rulers. There were four. The first we are going to remember is the nation of Persia. Persia is the ruling group, the ruling nation, it rules over what we know as Israel, what in the New Testament will end up being called Judea. They rule

over this area when the Old Testament comes to a close. So up until 331 BC, they are in charge. What I want to do is to pause a little bit. Just take a note or two with me in your notes, that in terms of, "What did Persia contribute to the scene?" So we want to know the rulers and we want to know a little about what they contributed to the scene.

The first thing that Persia contributed, which was a big deal, is they contributed a foreign policy. You need to remember the history of the people of Israel. Remember that under time of the kings, that once Solomon goes off the scene, the kingdom splits into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. Both of those kingdoms eventually are taken out of the land. Israel is scattered all over the Assyrian empire and later Babylonia conquers Judah and basically takes the people out of Judah - not all of the people but certainly the leading people - out of Judah and settles them in Babylonia. Persia eventually conquers Babylonia and when they do, their foreign policy lets the people of Judah go home. That is why that is important. So with Ezra and Nehemiah, we have people who have been in exile, coming home. And that really launches us into this 400 silent-year period, as we now have people who have returned to the land of Judah and have rebuilt the temple and are continuing on with life, and Persia let that happen.

So we think of foreign policy, we think of restoration and we think of the rebuilding of the temple, or the second temple period, if you will, because Persia let them rebuild the temple. Remember how crucial the temple was to the people of Israel. It was really a marker of the presence of God among them. So these are huge things that Persia let the people do, and it is all related to that foreign policy that let them return to the land and if they did not rebel, actually let them pretty much govern themselves. So Persia was big on the scene. But Persia does not last clear to the New Testament period. In fact, in 331, Persia is conquered by Greece.

Alexander the Great begins his push to in effect conquer the world as he knew it, and he eventually conquers this area and displaces Persia as the kingdom in charge. And Greece is going to rule here from 331 to about 164 BC. So they are going to be in charge and they are going to have a tremendous influence during this time. This is not going to be all good or all bad. Early on, when Alexander conquers the area that we will call Judea, that is what it is called in the New Testament, he allows a good deal of freedom for them to govern themselves and the times for Judea are not too bad. But that does not last forever as Alexander goes off the scene and as other rulers are appointed to rule over this area.

Eventually, toward the end of this time, toward 164 BC, rulers get difficult, in fact some rise up that really want to in effect, exterminate the Jewish religion, if not the Jews themselves. So it becomes a very hard time filled with persecute toward the end.

But what did Greece bring to the table? How did they influence the land? That is the crucial piece of this. They bring a huge influence, largely through culture. They bring a

Greek culture which is educated, which is a multi-god worshiping culture, so now there are many gods in the land. They bring magic. They bring the onslaught of mystery religions. Mystery religions were the kind of religions that had secret ceremonies and ways of doing things often attached to the occult. So the religious impact was big on the land. Perhaps the most important impact they had, outside of culture, was that they brought a language. They brought the Greek language and the Greek language will in effect become the language of the land. So people will become bilingual over time. They will speak whatever the local language is that they have or the dialect that they have; and many, many people will speak Greek. And Greek will stay in place as the language, even as Greece loses control of this area, which it ultimately does.

So the fourth person coming on the scene here is really not a person, but a group of people, who actually bring about independence. And that obviously starts at about 164 BC and extends its way down to about 63 BC. What happens here, not to belabor it, is that people in the land rebel against the Greeks, and will rebel against Greek rule. The Greek rule has become weak enough, it has become dispersed enough, it has become incapable enough that a group led by a priest, is able to overthrow the Greek rule and establish themselves; and for awhile, the people of Judea are in fact ruling over themselves. They become independent, if you will. Not all good news. Still some good rulers and some bad rulers. But now they are themselves, they are not being ruled over by another nation.

What happens during this period is really significant because there are responses now to the cultural things that Persia and Greece brought. Those responses I will narrow down to just three that I think will be helpful to you. One is that there is a re-emphasis to the fact that there is just one God. Remember, Greece brought multiple gods into the picture, and Persia had to some degree as well, as had Assyria and other nations before. But Greece was the strongest of these, gained a real foothold in the land with some of these multi-god worshiping religions and when independence was gained, the priests of the land began to emphasize one God again. "Hear, oh Israel, the Lord your God is one God." And they bring that emphasis to the fore.

They also bring a sense of hope. There is hope that we finally have gotten out from under the rule of these other nations. That once again we can rule ourselves and that hope was lodged in the third thing I want you to remember, and that is the thought that there is a Messiah coming, that there was a real Messianic expectation at this point.

So the fourth person on the scene in the shape of a nation is the nation of Rome. Rome comes on the scene with a blitz. It conquers all of the land, it overthrows everybody. It displaces Greece wherever Greece still has a foothold. It displaces the independence in Judea, and Rome becomes the ruler and basically takes up shop at about 63 BC and stays strongly in control of this area until about 135 AD. Then it becomes to gradually

lose control. It hits its most powerful peak right here as it rules over the area we know as Judea.

What does Rome bring? Rome brings law. So all of a sudden you have a law that is put in place and it is enforced, sometimes brutally. They bring a peace. Where this land has known little peace for a long time, Rome enforces the peace, the Pax Romana, which characterized the Roman Empire. So peace became a positive thing. They bring a stable government. They bring systems, they are systems people. So they bring ways of doing things, from collecting taxes to governmental processes, their systems. And they bring slavery. It is estimated that in the Roman Empire, five out of every seven people were slaves. So, Rome was built on slavery.

The last thing I want you to note, it is very important, is that they brought roads. They brought the network of the time. They built roads all over their empire. They were the freeway builders of their time. So they connected their empire together and that is going to be vitally important as the church begins to fulfill its mission of taking the Gospel into all the world.

So God is indeed using these nations to fill up the time and to prepare the way for the one who is going to come, the one that they are hoping for; but when he comes, they will not recognize him.

## Readings

So those are the rulers. Let's think through the readings for just a minute, if we could. We have readings, there were things being written in this period of time, and the first thing I want you to note is the Apocrypha. The Apocrypha was a group of books, about 15 of them, sometimes credited to a familiar author, but usually that author was not the one who actually wrote the books. So they were never really recognized as scripture; but nevertheless, they speak into the history. So, as you are looking through this period of time, you will want to note somewhere along the way, the reality of these groups of books called the Apocrypha. In fact, if you have a Bible that is used in the Roman Catholic Church, or typically in the Orthodox Church, you will find these books in the middle of that Bible edition. You might want to take a look at them.

Another group of writings that I am going to mention is the pseudepigrapha. The pseudepigrapha were basically sectarian writings. They tended to focus on values and thoughts of people of the time, there were 60 or so, various kinds of writings that also make up an important group of historical things that we want to keep track of.

Then there were the Dead Sea Scrolls. We have heard a lot about those in our time because they were discovered not too long ago. And they basically reflect the thought and the ways and the practices of various separatist groups that pulled away from

Rome and away from the common culture of the day, and frankly tried to preserve the values and things that they considered to be important. We will pick up on that group in just a bit.

Then a fourth item that I want to make reference to for you that was shaped during this period of time is an addition of the Bible called the Septuagint, often abbreviated LXX. There is a belief that 70 scholars produced this Bible in 70 days, which probably is not true, but it is a nice story. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. Now, all of a sudden, remember that language that Greece brought, well that language now is a key in carrying the scriptures through the land. The Septuagint becomes a key tool, the translation from Hebrew to Greek; and as people learn the Greek language through the land, then that addition of the Hebrew scriptures becomes the much quoted, much read edition through the Roman Empire.

## Religions

So this is a busy time for readings, isn't it? We need to get a picture of those along the way, because I want to get you to the third piece, which we are calling the religions. What I want to do is contrast some things. You have this in your notes, so I will just pick it up with you a little bit. I want to contrast two things first and that is the temple versus the synagogue. During this period of time, temple worship is re-established. It struggles. The priests become more and more politically connected to whoever the ruler is and they become a little more compromising in their approach to things. The response to that is that there is the establishment of a local level teaching device known as the synagogue and teachers who then function in localities and teach the people in those localities. You begin to see a shift from temple, which is ceremonial, over to synagogue, which is much more moral and ethical. This is much more formalized, religious in that sense. This is much more common and of the people. So you see a shift in that direction.

The second thing I would like you to consider are some people then who come on the scene. The first group is called the Sadducees and the other group is the Pharisees. The Sadducees become connected to the temple. The high priest comes from this group, as do most of the priests. They become very connected to the rulers of the land, to the Greeks, and then independence comes, and of course they are very prominent; and when Rome comes on the scene, they connect themselves to Rome because they want to stay in power. There is power, there is wealth, there is prestige attached to being a temple servant, and they want to stay that. But, there is another group of teachers who arrives in the land and those teachers are the Pharisees, often connected to that institution that we know as the synagogue. And they become the local teachers. They are much more of the people. They are not common in any sense. They are, in fact,

brilliant by all accounts. But they are now reflective of the teaching of the people, not at the formal, religious temple level, but more at the grassroots of the people level. So you can see that shift beginning to take place.

There is another group here called the Sanhedrin. They are a ruling counsel of Jews that have managed to stay in power from the time of the Greeks and they basically are the local group, the Judean group, that brings civil law to the people. They answer to the rulers, but they are the Jewish people who rule during this time. So Jesus will encounter the Sanhedrin, won't he? And they will be threatened by his power and his authority, and they will wonder what to do with him.

As opposed to the Sanhedrin, there is a group that does not connect to the politics of the time, and they are known as the scribes. The scribes are teachers and they are those who were most involved in the preservation of the Hebrew scriptures. So as you might guess, – this is not fair, but I'm going to do it anyway - in a sense you have a liberal/conservative divide. Let's compromise where we need to to stay in power, let's not compromise at all, let's preserve the scripture and its traditions.

So you begin to sense, don't you, that there is a little bit of a divide taking place in the land. A little bit of a rising conflict in this 400-year period, that you are going to see come to the fore in the New Testament. A couple of more and we are finished. There are Herodians who are Jewish people, who have been connected very closely to the Roman rulers. They tend to be wealthy people who attached their wealth to Rome, known as the Herodians because the Herods were the rulers from Rome who ruled over this area we know as Judea. And as opposed to those, we have a group called the Essenes. They are a large, fairly diverse group that pulled out of the culture, became separatists. Many of them moved down by the Dead Sea, a la the Dead Sea Scrolls. What we see in the Dead Sea Scrolls is how these people lived, how they preserved the scripture, what they valued, how they related. But they were separatists. These guys were compromisers, these guys were separatists. And the divide continues, doesn't it?

The last group I want to get a handle on were known as "publicans", not Republicans, but publicans. And the opposing group, if you will, to that was a group called "the zealots." So, what you have are the publicans, who were tax collectors. Who likes a tax collector, right? And Rome managed to always pick the lowest of the low from the culture to be tax collectors. The reason they did that, is they wanted the people to hate the tax collectors, not the Roman rulers. So the publicans were not very loved and were very connected to Rome, they got their income from Rome. The way they gathered taxes was simple. I get what Rome wants and if I get more, I keep it. So they were not the most favored people in the land. As opposed to them were the zealots, again who continued the divide, only more violently. As well, the Essenes pulled out and the scribes tried to preserve and the Pharisees taught the traditional values, and this was all

aimed down at the lowest level where the people were. The zealots said, “We will do anything to overthrow Rome, including violent things.” So they became in effect – I hate to use this term - but in effect in terms of the Romans, they were the terrorists in Rome’s life, as they tried to violently overthrow the Roman rule.

## **SILENT YEARS SUMMARY**

That was a run-through. We need to pull all of this together. I think we need to do that just real quickly here as we wrap this up. If you look at all of this, here are a couple of things to remember. Remember, out of this 400 years, that you begin to see a fight for the Hebrew identity. What is that Hebrew identity going to be? Is it going to be compromised into the culture and lives of the ruling nations? Or is it going to be hung onto and preserved as it was sent down, as it was lived down from this time in the values and foundational things, down through all of this that we talked about in our prior sessions. What is going to happen here? There is a sense of conflict growing. I think the other thing that we need to realize out of this time, because it influences the New Testament so, is that as you move from here towards the New Testament, there is a growing intensity. There is a hope that a Messiah is going to come, but there is an intensity over this clash between those that would compromise to the ruling groups, and those that want to hang on to what they view as being the traditional, important and the kinds of values that you just never let go of.

So the 400 silent years was anything but silent in a lot of respects, as God was remembered, Galatians 4:4. God was filling up the time, getting things ready for the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ. We will pick up that story in our first New Testament session.

## **Lesson 7 ■ Meet the Many-faceted King, Servant, Man, God**

I hope you survived the sprint through the inter-testamental period, or the 400 silent years. They were not so silent, were they? We discovered there was a lot going on as God was indeed filling up the time, preparing the time for the coming of his son, Jesus Christ.

### **REVIEW**

Just as a quick sense of review, remember we broke it into three bit parts that we talked about: One part being the rulers – I am going to come back to that in just a second. Another part being the readings, that were written during that time that have influence and are important. It was not scripture, but much of it was good and helpful history to be paid attention to, the one key piece there being the Septuagint of course, which was scripture, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. We will pick up a review on that downstream somewhere. The third aspect was the religious piece, and I think you get a sense there was sort of a growing conflict. Are we going to compromise and go with the ruling group of the time, whether it is Persia or Greece, or our own rulers during the period of independence, and then Rome, of course? Or are we going to hang onto the things that we perceive as foundational things, as it were, preserve them and practice those at all cost? So, there is this tension growing as we move our way toward the New Testament and begin to pick up the story in the Gospels, which is where we want to pick up the story today.

Before I jump there, though, let me back up to that ruler section that I mentioned. Remember, there were four nations that ruled coming out of the Old Testament when Persia was in control, and Persia's great contribution grew out of its foreign policy, that people who were exiled under the Babylonian nation, Persia let them go home. So Judah begins to get re-established. The temple was rebuilt. Life begins to reflect foundational things again.

Then Persia is conquered by Greece and Greece brings culture, brings education, brings multi-god worship, brings magic, brings mystery religions, brings all sorts of things to the fore, brings philosophies that were outside of the philosophies of the Hebrew foundation, and brings the language and the language becomes that powerful tool that God will use again as his church that is established under his son, Jesus Christ, begins to advance throughout the world. So Greece makes a huge impact on the land. Greece is eventually overthrown by the people of Judea themselves and for a period of time they

rule over themselves. But it is not all wonderful. There are good rulers and there are bad rulers. But the thing that happens is that there is a response now, particularly to the Greek influence and the priests and teachers begin to go back to teaching the one God principle, "Hear O Israel, your God is one God" and they begin to bring a sense of hope to the people that maybe the promises of God are going to be fulfilled. Maybe they are going to see more of that fulfillment, and they re-invent that hope in the third thing we shared together, and that is the coming of the Messiah, a promised king. That raised the hope of this period of time. That hope was quickly dashed a bit when Rome conquered them. Rome takes over in about 63 BC and they are in charge when Christ comes on the scene.

Rome brings many things. They are builders. They are systems people. They bring stable government, though it is at a cost. They bring peace. They in effect force peace on the lands they conquer. And they bring roads. They build roads all through their empire. They create networks, and those networks will also be vital when the church is birthed and begins to fulfill the mission that Christ has for it.

So, the time is being filled up. God is silent in a way and yet, not silent in terms of actions, as he is preparing the people for the coming of his son, which is what we want to take a look at today as we look at this foundational piece in the New Testament. Remember our pieces: Foundational piece in the New Testament are the Gospels, there are four of them, beginning with Matthew and ending with John. And that is what we want to look at today. When we get into the historical section, we will look at one book, the book of Acts. When we get into the instructional side, we will look at a number of letters written to the early church and early believers, and there will be 22 of those that we will need to take a look at.

For this moment in time and this session, I want to take you into this foundational section and to take a look at each of the Gospel books. Each book is a reflection on the life of Christ. Each book is a biography, if you will. And each of them has a distinctive feature. Each of them comes at the life of Christ a little differently. I like to tell people, it is like a diamond. A diamond has facets. If you just look at the diamond this way, yes, it is a diamond, it is beautiful. I'm holding a big one, as large as my hand, so it is pretty cool. But if I just look at this way, I really do not see the whole thing, do I? But if I turn it, I get another facet. All of a sudden, it is the same diamond, but it looks somewhat different. I learn new things about it. And if I turn it again, it happens again. And if I turn it again, it happens again. That is what you see here in these books. In fact, you have the diamond of Christ's life, as it were, being turned and looked at from different perspectives. It is the same life; but when you look at it from a different direction, you learn new things about it.

So, each of these writers of the life of Christ, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are in effect turning the diamond. When they turn the diamond, you begin to see a different facet. It is so important for us getting a pretty full understanding of this life that in some ways is beyond understanding. If God did not tell us about it himself, how would we know? It is so crucial that we get these perspectives to help us fill out our understanding of this Jesus who was sent to save his people and to offer eternal life, new life, found only in him.

So, let's take a look at this. What I am going to do with each of these is give you a key thought related to them, the dominant feature. Then we are going to talk about the audience. We are going to talk a little about the author of the book. We are going to look at a major focal point. Remember, we are summarizing, so we are not going to get everything, we are going to try to create a big picture to help you manage this area. As you study it and you work with the big picture, you will add to it, so the big picture will become more and more detailed.

Today we have to focus on the biggest possible picture. So we will pick up a focal point, we will pick up the distinctive feature, we will talk a little bit about themes, what were some of the themes of this Gospel. Then we will do some leader applications. That, is, I will try to give you two or three or four applications that will apply to you specifically as a leader or a leader in training, things that you will want to think about that are of value to you as you practice your shepherding craft in relationship to these foundational books that we know as the Gospels.

So, let's take a look. We will start at a reasonably fast pace and probably finish in a sprint. Let's see if we can together gain a sense of this magnificent life, the life of Jesus Christ.

## **MATTHEW**

Let's start with Matthew. If you are going to think of a word to describe Matthew, a word to help you remember, let's remember the word, "king." This is the Gospel of the king. If you look at chapter 1, verse 1, or if you look at chapter 21, verse 5, and a lot of others, you will discover, here is the genealogy of a king. Here the people are reflecting on the triumphal entry of Christ in Jerusalem, just a short time before he will be crucified. They reflect on a prophecy that says, "Here is your king coming, riding on a donkey, the colt of a donkey." So you get this sense that everywhere you go, there is a reflection that this Jesus is the promised king. Remember the hope from the 400 silent years? The hope that the Messiah was coming? Well, Matthew is talking into that hope, he is saying, "Jesus is the promised king, look at his life."

We need to look at his life a little more carefully. You probably already have guessed that if he is being presented as the promised king, that probably the key audience - though the audience can be larger than this - but the focal point, the focus of this in terms of the audience, is a Jewish audience. What Matthew is trying to do is to convince the people of Judea that Jesus Christ is indeed the promised Messiah. So his whole push is toward that Jewish audience. The author, Matthew - this is an interesting thing - author Matthew was a tax collector. Of, if we pick up the terminology from the 400 silent years, he is a publican. He was a guy, probably not the greatest guy in Judea, that Rome identified and said, "Here is a guy who would make a great tax collector." So, Matthew takes up that role, really working for Rome, understanding Rome, watching what goes on with the Roman Empire from his little tax booth. Jesus puts his hand upon this guy and says, "No, I have another job for you." Matthew does a flip-flop. There is a change in his life. He becomes this person who eventually writes about this Jesus as the king. I think that is very interesting, when you think of a guy who worked for other kings, who gave his life in effect, a piece of his life, to serving other kings, and saw them in operation.

So when Matthew speaks to Jesus as the king, I think he knows whereof he speaks; and my guess is that Matthew saw in Jesus a very different kind of king that he now wants everyone else to see. The focal point here - and there are many really - but the key focal point that I want you to see out of all of this, the result when you respond well to the king, is to make disciples. If I understand this king, if I know this king, if my life is connected to this king, the king is calling me to find others who will become followers of him.

It is interesting that right away in Matthew and in a couple of the other Gospels as well, but prominently in Matthew, when he calls his first disciples, he calls them to follow him. He says, "You come follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men." "You come follow me, your responsibility, I will make you into something; and you will know when I have made you into something because you will catch people." Matthew starts that way with the original disciples and ends that way with what we call "the great commission", to go into all the world. If you are a follower of the king, your job is to go into all the world; and as you are going into that world, make disciples, teaching them what Christ has taught you. This becomes a powerful emphasis out of this book about the king. If you are following the king, the king wants you to make disciples, to bring more and more people into his kingly realm.

A distinctive feature out of this particular Gospel are the genealogies. We find here the genealogy sets in motion the notion that Christ is the king because it attaches to the key people, the kingly line, all of the way down until you see that it goes through King David and beyond. So the genealogy becomes the opening salvo, if you will, for

Matthew saying, "Look, I want you to look at this Jesus. He fits in the family. He is the king." Then he begins to flush that out. This is unique to this particular book.

Let's look at themes and leader applications together. If you have notes, let me give you three themes. There are really too many to write, but we will pick them up if we can. The first one is that Jesus is the Messiah and the king. I think you already have that one. If you want to learn about him as Messiah and king, leaders, this is the place to go. Matthew gives you more per square inch of this than any of the other Gospels. Matthew has more quotes from the Hebrew scriptures, from the Old Testament, than any of the other Gospels. Its push is to have its readers see this reality.

The second thing you will find here, which is interesting, is there is going to be the establishment of a new community of faith. So you might want to write the note, "new community of faith" and jot down "Matthew 16." Because in the midst of all of this, even though he is the promised Messiah and king, and it is a Jewish audience, Jesus begins to talk about a new community of faith. Remember, Peter says, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God", identifies Jesus as who he is. Jesus says, "Good job, Peter, you did not figure that out yourself." Then he goes on to say that "Upon this rock, upon this big boulder, I am going to establish my church, my called-out people, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." "I am going to build my church" he says. He begins to focus on what will be a new, called-out group of people, who will become his people on a mission, following the king, fulfilling his mission in the world that is in front of him. Make note of that because that is a very important aspect of this first Gospel.

The third thing I would like you to note is, "great commission." The great commission is the driving energy of this. As you finish this Gospel, it is the push forward into the coming of Christ's kingdom and the role of followers of Jesus Christ.

The fourth thing to make note of is the whole piece of kingdom citizenship and character. Matthew was filled, from the opening discourse, where we had what is oftentimes called "The sermon on the mount", with what a kingdom citizen is like, here is what it means to be a follower of Christ. Here are the characteristics of this citizenship. Here is the character of a citizen. These become powerful things in this book, to which you want to pay very close attention, they are very dominant in this particular presentation.

Some leader applications. Leader applications would be the whole sense of Old Testament fulfillment. If you are a leader, you are helping people understand the New Testament is attached to the old and Matthew has a lot of Old Testament fulfillment in it you will want to watch. Kingdom citizenship. When it comes to character building, Matthew is a key, both in reflecting Christ's character and reflecting the character of kingdom citizens. A third thing would be the whole notion of discipleship, the

reproducing of ourselves, the outworking of the great commission. “Come follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men” type thing. The last piece that you would want to look at very carefully is the notion of future things. When you get toward the end of the Gospel, Matthew talks a lot about future things, what is yet to come, what is downstream for Christ’s followers and his kingdom and the world at large. So, you will want to check those out. Those are powerful leadership applications that you will want to understand as you move from there. So that is Matthew, quite a run-through, a powerful book.

## **MARK**

Then we get to Mark. The reason I put these in quadrants is, I want you to see the differences in them. Mark is the Gospel of the servant. Not the Gospel of the king, but the Gospel of the servant. If you look at the key passage for this, chapter 10, verse 45, it tells you that the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. The audience here for Mark is not a Jewish audience. The audience now was a Roman audience. The author, not a tax collector, the author interestingly is a missionary. So he is going to look at it from a whole different perspective. Missionaries, aren’t they classically servants? Isn’t this the perfect choice for the person to write this Gospel that is all about Christ, not as king, but Christ as servant. The focal point here is basically life given in service, Christ’s life, but then also the lives of his followers. The distinctive feature here is a term that shows up multiple times in this Gospel, it is the term, immediately. The reason it is there is the audience. The Romans were action people. “Don’t talk about it, do it.” So what Mark does over and over again is, he shows Jesus doing it; and doing it, not tomorrow or the next day, or the next day, but oftentimes doing it immediately. That fit the Roman notion that when the leader in Rome said “jump”, you did not ask how high, you just jumped. So this is a powerful communication into the audience of that time.

The distinctive feature, we have immediately some themes that we want to work in, then some leader applications. The themes of this would be: First, the power and authority of Jesus. Rome loved power and authority and so Mark shows how Jesus being a servant still had power and authority. It really fit the niche in Rome. In Rome, if you wanted to be a great leader, you got there by being a great servant. So this fits that whole audience kind of thing. It also focuses on suffering; that is, that Christ and his followers will suffer. It focuses on humility, this whole sense of the king being humble was a powerful piece of Mark. And it focuses on the idea of imitation, of imitating Christ, of becoming a servant like him and denying yourself in that process.

Here are a couple of leader applications, leaders. First is to pay attention to that power and authority of Christ. How did he exercise it? Did he exercise it by lording it over people? Or did he exercise it by serving? There is a message in that for us, isn't there? Secondly, that followers of Christ will face suffering. The master faced suffering and we who would serve him will face that as well. There is a servant character I want you to pay attention to the next time you read Mark. What is the character of a servant? What is the character that Jesus develops here? A great leader application. The fourth thing to take out of this is, where strength comes from. Strength does not come from position or power, or wealth, or any of those things. Strength really comes from a character quality that is in fact embodied in the notion of servanthood. So that is Mark, a different facet, but a powerful one.

## LUKE

Let's move to Luke. What I want you to remember is the term, "Son of Man." Luke focuses on Christ and his humanity. Therefore, the terminology that he uses so often is the notion of the Son of Man. If we look at the audience, now it is Greek. Greeks loved humanity. Look at Greek art. Look at the things that the Greeks did and how they portrayed humanity in their art and their literature and other ways. They had a thing for the beauty of humanity. And Luke takes us into the beauty of the life of Jesus Christ, and presents his humanity in full bloom as the Son of Man.

A key verse here would be verse 19: 10: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save those who are lost." This whole book is really about the seeking and the saving of lost people. When we think in terms of the author, he was a physician, but he was also a historian. That is why his books tend to be the longest and the most detailed, is because he is looking at everything through the eyes of history and trying to portray it as it happened. This is an affirming book. This is a book that is designed to affirm what you have been taught about Jesus. Therefore, the details are significant and plentiful, in comparison to the others. If we take a look at the focal point, I have already given it to you. It is that notion of seeking and saving. If we look at the distinctive feature of this particular Gospel, the distinctive feature is the humanity of Christ. If you want to know about Christ in his humanness, leaders, Luke is the book you want to look at. This will teach you tremendous things about the Christ who was both God and man, a la Philippians.

Let's catch the themes and the leader applications. The themes would first be God's rule over history. What Luke does is, he shows us the God who is ruling over all the elements of history. He is excellent in that regard and that is a powerful message in and of itself. It is an affirmation of the teaching that has been going on, the factual nature of

Christ's life. Luke gets at that very well. The coming of the Holy Spirit is a powerful piece of Luke's writing, Godly practices in life. He puts a lot of emphasis on the right living of life as expressed not just in Jesus, but in the lives of others. Lastly, he points to a growing paradox in the world. This is really significant to hang onto. Here is the paradox. This is a Jesus teaching, that the weak will become strong, and the last will become first, and the first will become last. There is a paradox that is beginning to take shape as Jesus works through his kingdom and Luke probably better than any others, portrays that paradox for us, teaches us about that paradox, and we want to do that, that those who would be strong in the kingdom will become servants of all. If you want to be at the top, you need to work your way to the bottom, so to speak. It is that kind of paradox.

We have a number of things. Let me give you some leader applications. A leader application would be God's beauty in humanity. In the midst of all of the things we do, do not lose sight of the fact that there is real beauty in the people that God created. There is a love for all humanity found in Luke's Gospel, as found in the notion that Christ came to seek and to save those who are lost. There is this deep sense of love. There is the seeking to save element that you find all through the Gospel. It speaks to me, hope it speaks to you. When you read it next time, watch for it. It was a compulsion, a compulsion. There is an assurance of the Jesus story. Luke is very careful in his details, which brings real assurance to you and me as we teach those details. The last piece is that Luke helps us learn that God is indeed in the details. We sometimes overlook that. We forget. We think of God and big picture things and forget that Luke teaches us that God is in the details of things as well.

## **JOHN**

The last one here is John. Let's move through it. If he is the Son of Man, John teaches us about the son of God. The audience is not Greek or Jewish or Roman. The audience really is global. It is really speaking to people who are in need of the savior. Its broad sweep is a global sweep. That is why John is so typically translated early on in translation processes for people, because its message is a global message. Its author, John, interestingly is a fisherman. Is God in the details? Who would choose a tax collector, a missionary, a physician/historian and a fisherman, to write about his son. Each and every one of them is able to look at his son in ways that bring out different facets of the diamond. Here we have the apostle who loved Jesus so thoroughly. This apostle steps into the realm of Jesus as the son of God. This Jesus that he knew, and yet we find even in the book of Revelation, did not know like he thought he did. He unfolds this beautiful picture of God's son.

The focal point is around the notion of believing and therefore getting life. Life is found in believing in Jesus Christ. The distinctive feature is found in miracles, seven of them extending from turning water to wine to raising Lazarus from the dead, and then a final miracle, which is his own, his death, burial and resurrection. John builds the whole book around the miracles and he uses the miracles to convince you that Jesus was indeed God. That is the whole point here. In fact, just read 1:1. Right out of the box, God tells you that Jesus was with God and Jesus is God. So, he does not mince words in terms of what he is doing here.

We are going to wrap it up with these themes. There are many, but here are the themes I would like you to note today. Jesus is God. Do not lose that fact. There are lots of people today who would teach otherwise. John teaches us, Jesus is God. Jesus is the source of eternal life. There is no other source of eternal life. John teaches us that there is a unity of the Father, the Son and the Spirit in the whole process of redemption. Read John 13 through 17, that we call “the upper room discourse”, right before Christ goes to the cross, and you will see that unity displayed. He teaches us that believers experience salvation now, it is not just something for the future, a day out there; but salvation becomes real and it becomes now for believers. He calls us to a faithful, fruitful mission. He talks a lot about the indwelling Godhead; that God is not someone out there; that when I come to faith in Christ, that God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit find their dwelling place in me; that I am indeed the temple of the living God.

So leaders, here are some applications from this one. First, eternal life, who is the source? Jesus Christ. Second, grace and truth. When you wrap up the Son of God in terms of two characteristics, John wraps them up this way, that this Son of God was full of grace and truth. I do not know how this works, one hundred percent grace, one hundred percent truth. But that is the summary of who the Son of God is in terms of his character, and that would be our summary as well.

I want to point you to an executive summary. I believe John’s book is the only book that has an executive summary in it. It is found in chapters 13 through 17, that upper room discourse that I just referenced previously. It kind of takes everything that is important and pulls it together in this last night that Jesus was with his disciples, and the things that he tells them there. It is the classic executive summary that pulls together the point and purpose of the life of Christ in a powerful way. Lastly, it is evangelistic.

So, if we were to look at these in a wrap-up sort of way, we think through, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength.” This is not fair to do because the Bible never does it, but I am going to do it just to help you think about it a little in terms of emphasis; it is not totally the case, but for emphasis. John is probably the book of the heart. Matthew is probably the book of the will. Mark is probably the book of the soul. Luke is probably God acting out his will.

The servant is an action person, he is motivated to take action. There is the soul piece, your soul motivates you to take action. You open the door of that new car and smell that new car smell, your soul says, "you need this." That is the soul at work. This is the soul at work, the soul of Jesus Christ. There is the mind, details as to what I want you to know, here are the details of it, I am covering it carefully. Wrap your mind around this because I am telling you all you need to know about Jesus. And then John, of the heart. Here is the source of eternal life, your heart lodged in God's heart. Let me show you the heart of God as expressed in his son. The picture of the life of Christ. Foundational things of the Gospel.

Next time we will take a look at how those begin to work their way out in the life of the church.

# Lesson 8 ■ Acts ... the Gospel Hits the Road

## REVIEW OF THE GOSPELS

I hope you enjoyed the journey through the life of Christ, four distinct views presented by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, on who this incredible person is. Some people struggle with the fact that there is not just one biography. I hope we helped you see that by four different people who knew him in different ways and saw different things, that they were able to take facets of this one person's life and bring those facets to the fore, to address important things that we need to know about this person who is in fact the author and the giver of life.

We thought through those. We had Matthew, the Gospel of the king, the focal point being, here is the promised Messiah, here is the promised king. Matthew quoting the Old Testament, Matthew bringing out character, Matthew bringing out family line. Matthew trying to convince us that here is a king and he is indeed the promised king that God had from the beginning, and he is worthy of following.

Mark takes us into the Gospel of the servant and shows us that side; that even though he is the king, he came to serve. We learn right away the power found in servanthood, a power that we are called to imitate and emulate. Mark addresses that power to a Roman audience that indeed valued servanthood. In fact, its great leaders were usually great servants somewhere in their lives.

Then Luke takes us into that Greek mindset that liked detail and liked beauty. Luke says, "Here is Jesus, not the king, not a servant, but here is Jesus the perfect person. Here is Jesus, the Son of Man." He unfolds the beauty found in Christ's humanity. The Greeks would see that and that resonated with them, that we get king and we get servant, but look at this person, look at his character. Look at how he responds to kids. Look at how he engages women. Look at how he responds to need. This person is so remarkable in his responses, and Luke wants you to see that.

Then John takes you to the whole other side of the equation and says, "Yes, king. Yes, servant. Yes, Son of Man. But here is the capstone, that Jesus Christ is God himself, the Son of God." So John then unfolds that for us, that this Son of God is the author of life. That believing in the Son of God brings eternal life. This Son of God has the power and the right to do that, and John brings that to the fore through seven miracles. We just reflected on them, all the way from turning the water into wine to various healings of people, to raising Lazarus from the dead. Then finally, returning to life Himself in the

resurrection. Those are all affirmations that this one who calls you to believe in him for life, is indeed entitled to make that call, and to make that offer of eternal life for those who would believe in him.

## **ACTS**

So you have this multifaceted look at the Gospels, foundational things that we talked about, that now begin to work their way out in the book of Acts. What I would like to do here is to give you some big picture ideas related to the book of Acts. I would like to take you to a diagram that just kinds of breaks Acts into some parts and we will talk our way through it quickly, and then we will wrap up with a few more leader applications. Here are some things important to leaders as we study and use the book of Acts.

Let me give you some big picture points first. The first thing I would like you to note is, this is a pattern book. What you have are patterns of foundational things working their way out. That is important because there are many patterns here. What you do not want to do is look at a pattern and say, "That is the way it is always done." That is not the point of the book. The book is going to give you many ways that things are done, many applications for foundational things. So it is a pattern book, you want to look at the patterns and say, "Here was the issue, how did they work that out? What was the pattern?" You will begin to find how they applied foundational things, which is the key.

The second thing I want you to feel is that this is an adventure, that the life of faith is a phenomenal adventure. You just cannot follow Peter or Paul very long without saying, "Oh my goodness, their lives were filled with challenge, yes, but with adventure." I do not want you to miss that. Not too many people ever reflect on that.

I want you to realize that this is a book that is expansive in its organization. That is, it starts small and it grows big. I want you to not miss that pattern, that this is the pattern of the church - start small, grow big. Mustard seed, a plant that nobody can believe. That is the idea of the book of Acts.

Fourthly, that it is really a series of summaries. You need to pay attention to those series of summaries. You will see them as you read. They are summaries of the life of the early church, and how the early church developed. You will need to pay attention to sermons, because sermons make up a third of the book. Sermons of Paul, sermons of Stephen, sermons of Peter. Pay attention to the sermons because they are crucial in the setting of the book and they are a large portion of it.

The ministry focuses tend to be on Peter and Paul, though there are others in the book. Places are critical. They are critical we will find when we get to the instructional part

because a lot of the places named in Acts have letters that are written to them. So places need to be paid attention to, though we can only do that in a limited way here.

Listen to this one carefully. This is really crucial. What is in the book of Acts are representative examples. It is not the whole story of the development of the early church. What Luke has done is selected examples that represent what is going on, but what is going on is going on in other places. So, what we get are little pictures of what is happening in terms of the church coming to life and growing, but it is not the whole picture, just representative samples of it.

Lastly, there is a cycle that I have noted in your notes. It is a little complicated, but I put it there for you, rather than you having to write it down. You will see it happening. The cycle is like this: Leaders arise, leaders preach. People listen, and they respond. The church grows. Opposition arises and then God rescues and protects his people. That cycle, four-part cycle is repeated through the course of the book of Acts, dare I say, probably repeated over and over again even today. Pay attention to the cycle.

Some big picture things that I hope will be of help to you as you you're your way through this marvelous book, that reflects on the life found in Christ, working its way out in the church that he called into existence here in the Gospels. On this great stone that Jesus is The Christ, the Son of the Living God, he is building his church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it, he says. That is what you are seeing at work there in the book of Acts, even though Hades tries to prevail against it.

We have the book broken into three parts. I told you it was expansive. It starts in Jerusalem, moves to Judea, Samaria. That is the area just outside of Jerusalem. It extends further and further into the world. That is the pattern of the book. If you need chapters, basically it is 1 to 7 and 8 to 12 and 13 to 28. So you can see that the focal point gets birthed here in Jerusalem, spreads out into Judea, Samaria and to the region around Jerusalem. Then the pressure. The church keeps moving into the Roman Empire and then beyond, as found in the last part of this.

## **Jerusalem/Jewish**

When the book says that Jesus says to his disciples, "You will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth." he actually in that verse in chapter 1, gave us the outline for the book. That is how the book fits together. Who are the key people in this? In the first section it is Peter. And because this is largely a Jewish section, that is very important because Peter is going to connect to these Jewish believers. He is going to help them get ready for the next section. The pattern in this first section that is a Jewish section, is one of birth, it is a birthing pattern. It is

something getting started, something getting underway. It has its successes, it has its setbacks. It has its challenges it has to address. But it is something getting underway.

In terms of keys, there are three I would like you to note here. The first is the idea of the Spirit of God. Remember, Luke emphasized the Spirit of God and the coming of the Spirit. John talks about the coming of the Spirit in chapters 13 through 17 of John. In Acts you see in this first section, the coming of the Spirit of God upon the church, upon the followers of that time.

The second key I would like you to understand is the notion of power. With the coming of the Spirit comes the power that has not been there before and people recognize it. For instance, in Peter's preaching Peter preaches and people respond to it and they respond in ways that have not been seen in a long, long time. There is a power that now exists with the coming of the Spirit. I need to attach that to something that happens early in the book. I am going to use the word, "ascends." It is Christ's ascension to The Father. Remember when he says, "When I go to the Father, I am going to send my Spirit and my Spirit will do certain things in and through and for you." What you see is the outworking of that in this section. These are all birthing processes and the place of course, as you already know, is Jerusalem. Pretty much everything is happening there, where Christ came and spent a lot of his earthly ministry, and then was tried and crucified and later resurrected. Jerusalem is the key.

All of this flows this direction to a larger outreach. Peter is the key. Peter connects to the Jewish audience. But Peter is preparing people here for this next step, which will enlarge the audience. Peter is the guy who has to get them ready for what is going to happen next. Because down in another key, I need to write the word, "persecution." Remember the cycle: Leaders arise, they preach, people respond, then what comes next – opposition, persecution. Persecution comes and pushes the church out of Jerusalem. There is still a church in Jerusalem, but many people who are now followers of Christ leave to go somewhere else, under the pressure of persecution. And we get to this next section. The key person here is named Philip, who is representative of many new leaders that are now arising. I am not going to say anymore about him, but when you read this section, you will see that there are now new leaders coming on the scene. It is moving beyond Peter.

## **Judea/Samaria**

When we get to an audience now, it is not a Jewish audience, it is a Samaritan audience. This audience is neither Jew nor all Gentile, but it is a changing audience. That is what I want you to see. The pattern here is one of growth and then the keys, persecution continues on. A second key is the key of people. So we have persecution, we have people. What I mean by that is new people are now being reached, the mission is being

enlarged. You are seeing new people come on the scene. You are seeing new leaders arise. You are seeing a new response to the Gospel. The last thing that I want to say is, this is a time of vision. In particular, I want to reference Peter's vision. Peter, the Jewish guy, has a vision. It is a sheet coming down, filled with unclean animals, and God tells him to kill and eat. Peter struggles with that, doesn't he? Three times, until he finally figures out what God is saying is that what God declares to be clean, is clean. And that vision is what propels Peter to build a bridge over to the Samaritan audience, to reach into the Gentile world. Only Peter could do that. If anyone else would have done that, the Jews would have rebelled. But Peter was really the apostle of the Jews. So when Peter gives them this vision, it opens the door to mission. Leaders, hear that? Vision opened the door to mission. A very important thing to see as we travel from this section, with the birth of the church, to this section where its mission is beginning to grow and work its way out.

Places, I am going to zero in on a city. The church's focal point is going to start sliding from Jerusalem over toward Antioch in Syria. So the church itself in terms of its focal point of operation is moving from Jerusalem to Antioch. Church's focal points have always moved. Think of Europe centuries ago, or the shift into North America, or the shift now to the action really being south of the equator. God is always on the move and Acts just shows us that God is always on the move.

## **Beyond (World)**

The last section we need to pull together, the key person here becomes Paul. Because of this vision and Peter's work and others, Paul was converted in this time. Paul becomes the missionary that God is going to use to drive this particular piece that we see in the book of Acts. The audience here becomes a Gentile audience. See how it is expanding? Not without its problems. Whenever we reach into new cultures and new people, there are always challenges. But the Gospel, the foundational things, can answer those challenges, and they do as we see in the book of Acts. The pattern here is birth, growth and then expansion, and that expansion will speed up as you get toward the end of the book of Acts.

In terms of some keys, some keys here are preaching. You want to watch how Paul preaches, how he interacts with different cultures. Paths, that is there are journeys, this is the Gospel on the move. And mission, go into all the world and make disciples. You can now begin to see that the pace is picking up. From Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria. Local ministry, regional ministry, global ministry. By the way, every church needs all of that. Jerusalem needed to be involved in this and needed to be involved in this. The churches that were launched here became local churches that needed regional ministry and needed global ministry. This is one of those patterns that we need to watch, that we

are called to function in these arenas. All at once, it is not all about local, it is not all about regional, it is not all about global. It is about all of those. Eventually the place begins to shift. The center of gravity moves from Jerusalem to Antioch; and by the time you get to the end of the book of Acts, you get a sense that it is now shifting toward Rome. Again, you have that center of gravity, you have the church on the move. You have the foundational things reaching into ever expanding groups of people.

I hope I have been able to convey some of the dynamic of Acts. You can read through the book and frankly, if you are not careful, you can find it boring, and it is anything but. It is filled with this dynamic of something that is born and grows and expands, that is filling out the foundational things we talked about in the Gospels. In that respect, it is incredibly, incredibly powerful.

I wish we could linger over all of those, but we cannot. Let me give you some themes and leader applications as we bring this section to a close. There are quite a number. Follow along with me and I think you will see these.

## **LEADERSHIP THEMES**

The first theme I want you to see is theme of empowerment. That is, that the ascension of Christ to the Father and the coming of the Spirit, has an empowering effect on the church. That empowering effect continues on from follower of Christ, to follower of Christ, to follower of Christ. That God today is continuing to empower his church in the same way that he empowered it here in the book of Acts.

The second thing I want you to see is the emphasis on a worldwide witness. That while there is a section on birth that is important, and a section on its beginning to grow out, important, you will notice a great amount of time is spent in the worldwide witness. I think that is there for a reason, and the reason is that we need to stay aggressively in that mode. That we are called to be his witnesses; and the minute that we back our witness out of any of these areas, we begin to fail in terms of our fulfilling Christ's mandate for us as a church. We need to be a witness here, here and here, all at the same time. The worldwide witness certainly gets a powerful emphasis in the book of Acts.

The third thing, there is a cost to faithful witnessing. That cost is found in persecution and suffering. You certainly cannot miss that in the book of Acts. You cannot miss the fact also that God protects and preserves his people, evening the midst of much suffering.

There is a fourth thing, the importance of integrity. Throughout the book of Acts what you find is an emphasis on integrity, of things being fulfilled in a right way. It is an aspect that for instance you find when the Greek women are struggling with getting

their share of the food and they appoint deacons to take care of that. If you read that passage carefully, you realize that one of the key characteristics of those who would be appointed is the characteristic of integrity. That these need to be people of good reputation who understand the Word, who are practitioners. All through the scripture, all through Acts you will find even times when Paul interacts with political leaders, that he will interact in a way that demonstrates integrity. That integrity is a key piece of our working our mission out in this world.

The next one is that there is a need for unity to have an effective witness. We see that being very important in all of this, that unity among the churches is one of the powerful elements of witness and needs to stay in place. Disunity brings a disruption to the nature of witnessing for the reality of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is at the cornerstone. Watch the sermons. The sermons will ultimately drive you toward the resurrection as being the key piece in this. As Paul says at the end of 1 Corinthians, that if the resurrection be not true, then we are people who are to be pitied, because everything rests on the resurrection, as you will see in the book of Acts.

Three more and we are finished. The Gospel witness always calls for a response. You have not witnessed if you do not somewhere along the way, call for a response. Acts gives us a sense that there is always a continuation in Christ's ministry, that it goes from person to person, place to place, entity to entity, culture to culture, and we are part of that continuation. We need to feel that. The book of Acts needs to help us sense that. Such a powerful thing, when we sense that we are in a long line of people who are continuing this powerful ministry, inaugurated by the master and king himself, Jesus Christ.

The last piece that I will leave with you that Acts clearly teaches us, is that God preserves his witness. That even as was true in the tOld Testament, even in the most perilous times, that God preserves his witness. There are those who will not bow the knee to other gods. There are those who will always take the risk, always offer the faith that it takes to be a faithful witness in a perilous and sometimes persecuting world.

That is the book of Acts. It is powerful. It makes me want to live it out, how about you?

## **Lesson 9 ■ Life-changing Letters from Old Friends of the Church**

I don't know about you, but my legs are tired from that roaming through the book of Acts. We really poured it on there. I want you to get a sense even in going through it quickly, of the dynamic of the book, that it is a book that moves from one action, to another action, to another action. It has that deep sense of vibrant mission that we need to capture along the way. Remember as we looked at it in terms of its place in the New Testament, that it is the historical book. It is about the birth and growth and expansion of the church, this thing that Christ announced in the Gospels, one of those foundational things.

As such, it begins to show us how the Gospel itself, the good news of life found in Christ, the announcing of the church and its development, that those kinds of things begin to work their way out. Remember, we said it is a pattern book; that is, it shows us patterns, it shows us examples of how the leaders and the churches, the congregations of this historical period, how they took the foundational things and applied them in their culture; how God empowered them through his Spirit and his indwelling presence to bring this alive and to make it happen. So this is a powerful book that sadly we could only give a little bit of time to, but I hope that you got the big picture of that along the way. These foundational things are really taking root and are spreading rapidly and with great, great power, which certainly is found there.

### **REVIEW**

These things are all coming out of the context that we picked up in the 400 silent years and even before in the Old Testament, if you go back to those inter-testamental things for just a minute. Remember, we talked about coming into this, we needed to know some of these things. We needed to know who ruled over the land and we needed to know some of the things being written, the readings. And we needed to know some things about the religion of the land; and some of those things included temple worship versus the synagogue, where the temple was more ceremonial and the synagogue was becoming more grassroots; where the priests were becoming more and more wrapped up in the formalities of their positions; and the Pharisees, who were the teachers at the grassroots level, were more of the people and dealt with things more on a moral and ethical level.

We talked about the Sadducees, who were temple servants and generally had found great wealth and power in their positions, versus the Pharisees that were more of those

grassroots folks working around the synagogue and with the people. We talked about the Sanhedrin, that group that had gained power with the Greeks and had been assigned to rule over the civil laws of the land in Judea. They continued to have their power through all of the rulers, but they became compromised in order to keep their power; versus the scribes, who basically took the other approach, "We're going to do everything possible to retain the tradition and preserve the scriptures." We began to see a conflict arise, that frankly you see even down into the Gospels, and Jesus becomes part of the conflict. You have the Herodians, the wealthy people who link up with Rome, versus those who would not, along the way the zealots being one of those groups, the Essenes being one of those groups. We talked about the publicans, who were kind of a lower level class of Jewish people, who signed on with Rome to be tax collectors.

So you have these conflicting things going on. Jesus steps right into the middle of it and basically says, "It is not this way or this way, I am The Way." He causes a conflict of his own. As the king, as the servant, as the Son of Man and the Son of God, he begins to draw many people to himself. He begins to establish this called-out group called the church. It is put in motion in Acts. The conflicts continue, but the church continues to expand.

So we have this dynamic going on that I do not want you to miss. But the dynamic is going to need instruction. Here in the book of Acts, with churches growing in places like Philippi and Colossi and Ephesus and others, not everything is going to be done perfectly. Just like today, not everything is done perfectly. There is a need for instruction. So we move into an instructional piece that involves letters as key leaders of the time begin to write to and interact. They do not have phones, they do not have e-mail, they cannot hop a plane, but they can send a letter. And they send letters to these churches and leaders who are developing, and these letters are to help them stay on track. This is going to sound like a repeating theme, to stay on track with the foundational things.

## **THE NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS: OVERVIEW**

Let me give you some general observations. They kind of apply to all of these letters. First, let's talk about authors. There are just a few. There is Paul, who wrote 13 of these letters that we will talk about in a minute. There is John, who wrote four of these letters. There is Peter, who wrote two. There is James, who wrote one. There is Jude, who wrote one. Then there is an unknown author who wrote the book of Hebrews. Some think that is Paul, but the author is never identified in the book, so we do not know for sure. We have Paul being the most prolific of the authors, but others are offering important instruction as well.

The dates for the writing of these – and this is rough, this is not precise, but it will give you an idea – is they were written from about 40 AD up to about 90 AD, so about a 50-year period that these letters were written as the early church developed. If you think of Christ's crucifixion, depending on whose book you read, Christ was either crucified in about 30 AD or 33 AD. We will not argue over that. But to give you a sense of it, it was a few years after Christ's crucifixion and resurrection that this instructional stuff began. The church had its birth, they got a bit on the move. Then as things develop, voices begin to speak into it.

In terms of organization of these letters, they are organized pretty much the same way. There is an opening, which generally talks about the author, the recipient, a salutation, and oftentimes has a prayer. There is a body that has absolutely no pattern, it depends on the writer. There is a closing, which generally includes plans for the future, requests for prayer, greetings, afterthoughts, blessings. I want you to keep in mind something, it is really important, that these are personal. We sometimes treat these like they are textbooks, and they are letters. When I write a letter, I do not write a textbook, I write something personal. So when we read these, we need to realize, these are from the heart and the mind of one person, into the hearts and minds of others. These are letters, they are personal. We will try to pick up on some of that as we go along.

I think here is a key to studying these. I would offer this to you as you continue to develop your understanding of these letters. It is important that you read the whole letter and try to get the big picture before you start dissecting the details. Oftentimes we get these in little bits and pieces, a sermon out of Ephesians and another one out of Colossians. The bits and pieces are great, do not get me wrong; but if you want to understand the letter itself, whatever letter you are in, read the letter once or twice, or three or four times until you finally find yourself saying, "I get what the big idea is here, I get the big picture." If you get that, it will make all the difference in how you manage these letters. Just a hint in terms of how you deal with those.

## **POSITION IN HISTORY**

The last piece I would like to talk with you about relates to the position in history of these letters. Simply put, they are written on the other side of the cross. Mostly the biographies of Jesus speak to Jesus' life up to the cross, with a little about the cross and the resurrection, those are vitally important. These letters are now speaking into what is going on after the crucifixion and the resurrection. So in a way they are unique. They have a different perspective on Christ's death and resurrection, the importance of it to the church. They have a different perspective on fulfilled promises, they are looking back into Christ's life and back into the history, and they are going, "Here are fulfilled

promises, I see these promises.” So they have a whole different perspective. Because they are now interpreting Christ’s life, they become a source of doctrine and a source of theology, and we need to recognize them as such. They give us new insights into Old Testament teaching, again because they are looking at it from a downstream perspective. They see more of history past. They now understand some of the obscure things in the Old Testament, which is very helpful to us.

They talk very specifically about the new life found in Christ and they are now seeing that develop in people. So it is becoming a more and more powerful theme. Faith is always center stage. Faith was the key for Abraham and in the letters, faith is still the key. So do not miss the key. Faith is a big deal. Suffering continues to be an aspect of discipleship and the letters speak much about suffering. Not a favorite theme of mine, but it is a reality. Lastly, the letters now represent teaching, where the teachers have been around long enough that they have seen the danger in false teaching. So there is a lot spoken to with regard to false teaching, identifying it, responding to it, not falling prey to it. Those are some of the things that are big as we work our way through these 22 letters, and things that you would want to pay attention to.

## **THE “INSTRUCTIONAL HOUSE”**

What I want to do now is to give you a way of thinking about them. I want to take you into the letters a little bit. I want to take you into one of my best artistic renderings. At least this will be pragmatic. I want to put the letters into a New Testament house. Look with me. I hope the symbolic nature of this helps you remember things about the letters that will help you manage them in the future. If we look at our house, every good house has a foundation. The foundation of our house is our foundational works, the Gospels, - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We have talked about them as foundational. A good house also has not just a great foundation, but it has a really good sub floor upon which it rests, the flooring on which it rests. That has been our historical section, the book of Acts. As we have watched the birth, the growth, the expansion of the church take place, that is like the sub floor in this house. Foundational things hold it up, the sub floor is really what this whole history lives on.

I want to suggest to you that this house, which has a great foundation and a great sub floor, has excellent walls. These walls and roof represent the letters. In this left wall I am going to put Paul’s letters to churches. There are nine of them. We begin with the book of Romans in your English Bible and it goes clear up to 2 Thessalonians. These will all be letters that are written to the churches: 1 and 2 Corinthians, written to the Corinthian church; Galatians to the church in Galatia; Ephesians to Ephesus, etc., etc. You get a sense of Paul addressing these letters, nine of them, to churches. On the other wall we

have some general letters to believers. There are several authors that are writing generic letters to believers of the time and this section begins with Hebrews and ends with Revelation. General letters, general topics, addressed to believers, Hebrews through Revelation. Paul's letters addressed to churches, Romans through 2 Thessalonians. In the roof – I want to put them in the roof because they are like the bridge, the topics. They are Paul's letters, but the topic is important to both walls. It is in fact what holds the walls together. These are Paul's letters to leaders. Leadership, shepherding, becomes crucial. Whether you are looking at these letters or these letters, there is always an element of the importance of shepherding that comes to play. Here we have four letters that address that, nine down here. So, nine here to churches, nine generally to believers, four specifically to leaders. This begins with 1 Timothy and runs through Philemon: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon, all addressed to shepherding/pastoral/leadership issues. Leadership issues are critical to the church as it is addressed in both of these sets of letters. That is why the bridge across the top.

So you get a big picture of how these fit together. They are unique. Let me put some other pieces in play here for you. We are going to work around this. I want to help you see some of the differences that are here. If you look on the church side, you are almost always looking at things related to the most key piece of all of this, you are looking at salvation-related things. How does the church live out new life in Christ? How does the church give witness to new life in Christ? How does the church shape itself in such a way that it becomes that powerful witness. Remember that up until this time, there has never been a church. So what Paul is doing here in these letters is addressing the kinds of things that would need to be addressed as you bring birth to something. What is this all about? The book of Romans I have put at the base of this because it is the base book. It tells you what it is all about. All of these others bring aspects of what is found in Romans to play, but Romans is really the cornerstone on this wall. These others then speak into those issues.

It has been a long time since Christ was around and he has not come back yet. What do we do? We are reaching people for Christ and they are coming into the church, but their lives are so filled with sin. What do we do? We got this thing going and grace seemed to just mobilize us; and all of a sudden, teachers are coming and teaching us a different kind of Gospel that seems all about works, and it is leading people off base. What do we do? What does the body look like in full if it is really operating? What are the tools that God gives it? How do those look when they are lived out? These books are all filled with the answers to those kinds of questions, as a thing that never existed before. A living organism called the church begins to take shape. That is how God uses Paul. He is using Paul to shape the beginnings, to put the key pieces in place for the church to thrive. A powerful thing, isn't it?

If we move into the roof, leadership becomes critical to this. So Paul begins to talk through a letter to a leader he has helped develop, named Timothy. In speaking to Timothy, he teaches those like you and me who are or would aspire to be influencers in the church, leaders if you will. He begins to teach us about what it means to be that, about what we need to pay attention to, what we need to avoid, about the importance of other people helping us grow. All of those things begin to get shaped here.

Titus, who was another leader that he knew well, who had skills that Timothy did not have. Titus was this person who could go into bad places and get them right again. You begin to see the qualities of his life and how he managed those situations and how he took things that had gotten off track and helped them to get back on track and fundamentally to get back to thriving again. Powerful, powerful leaders. Philemon, who deals with some very personal things in terms of being betrayed; someone who failed him and having to come to grips with what that means when this person comes to faith in Christ and begins to grow; and how we embrace people out of an environment of failure into an environment of following Christ, a key aspect of shepherding.

In these letters you have another emphasis. Here it is salvation, or beginning things. Here the emphasis changes away from that, to maturity. So these letters tend to focus on that. We know you are a Christian, but how do you grow up? What are the elements of growing up? What are the obstacles to growing up? That becomes the emphasis in this wall. We have very different reasons for these letters existing. You want to know about the issues of church, how it was birthed, how it grows, how it thrives? What are the key things to think about? Paul has it for you. If you are interested about what leading or shepherding or pasturing looks like in that arena, here are some letters that very specifically focus in on key issues that we need to understand and learn how to practice.

If we are wrestling with maturity kinds of things, then we need to go to this side of the equation, where Hebrews through Revelation give us key insights into how it is that those of us who come to faith in Christ, how it is that we grow into maturity, how we move from being babies in Christ to adults in Christ. You have a powerful setup. These letters have a strategic role to play in helping us understand how the foundational things apply to the life of the church and to the life of believers as well.

Let me fill in just a couple of more things as we work our way through this. I want to give you some differences. Let's do some observations about these letters, see if we can contrast and compare them. All of these letters in this section have one author. God is using one person to convey all of these important concepts that relate to his church. This one person is not just studying it, he is not a scholar of church, he is really a practitioner. He is out there really doing the birthing process and wrestling with all of these issues and working out the foundational things in all of these locations that we read about, in

Ephesus and Galatia and Thessalonica and all of those places. Then he is being led by the Spirit of God to write about the important things he discovered, because that is all about what happens in the church. So this is also about churches, that is the emphasis. More about corporate, less about individual. Salvation is at the heart of it. How do people find new life in Christ? These were generally written earlier. Remember, the writing period was basically about 40 AD to 90 AD. These were all written earlier in that period, for the most part, not all of them, but for the most part. This is about growing churches. Are you seeing the leadership applications in all of this? This is about obstacles to development. We see a lot of those, don't we, in many of the churches?

The heart of this is still the resurrection. Paul has a unique way of bringing the churches back to the essence of the Gospel and the essence of the Gospel is ultimately found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Frankly, this is all about place. This is about a church in a place, a church in a culture, the church in Antioch, the church in Jerusalem, the church in Ephesus, the church in Rome. It is about the church in a place. We operate in a place, don't we? We need to pay attention to that and how these churches were shaped in these various places.

If you go to the other side of the equation, it is a little different, in that you don't have author, you have multiple authors. You have the unknown author of Hebrews. You have James. You have Peter. You have John. You have Jude. So you have multiple authors. It is not so much churches now, as it is believers. These are not mutually exclusive, there is just an emphasis piece. This is all about the church corporate, emphasis piece. This is more about believers, emphasis piece. You already know, this is really about maturity, about growing up. These were written later generally. The church had been around longer. You are able to see more about what is happening in the church. The church has had time to lose energy. The church has had time to face problems. The church has had time to not mature, and so maturity is becoming a big issue for believers and obviously through believers, for the church.

This is about growing people. If you want to go, leaders, to letters that help you understand how to grow people, this is about growing people. This is about obstacles, obstacles to discipleship. This is more about obstacles to church and growing church. This was more about Christ's resurrection, the power found in his resurrection. That does not go away, but now the focal point changes more to his return. There is something about focusing on his return that is a powerful element in our maturity. When we lose sight of the fact that he is coming again, we seem to begin to decline in our maturity. While this had the importance of place in it – Rome, Ephesus, Philippi, etc., this is tending to be more people oriented and the importance of people.

There you have kind of a big picture of the house that is built around these letters. What is important here is for you to understand what they do, for they have purpose. So

when you are thinking in terms of church corporate and developing it, and what is it like and what are its obstacles and what are its keys, Paul was there. Leadership, Paul was there. When you are thinking of growing up and maturity and how you need to step over into these other letters, Hebrews being the foundation over here, the cornerstone, these others being built toward Christ's return, as emphasized in the book of Revelation. Hopefully that is going to help you manage your way around those letters.

## **THE CORNERSTONE BOOKS**

Let's wrap this up by looking at your two cornerstone books, the book of Romans and the book of Hebrews. I want to give you a quick outline of each in summary, to show you how this works in Romans. Remember, in both books, faith is the key. Faith is the key to being saved. As Paul says in Ephesians, we are not saved by our works, it is by grace through faith, not the result of our works. No one can boast about it. Hebrews, this book on maturity, is all about faith as well. So, whether you are looking at coming to new life in Christ, corporately becoming a new church, a new group of followers of Christ, or you are looking at growing up in Christ, that faith is center stage in both. Let us not lose track of that. Having said that, Romans tends to focus on that finding of new life, we often call that salvation today, which is the centerpiece of church. Church is a group of people who come to faith in Christ, who have found new life in Christ. Hebrews is about maturity, it is about people growing up in Christ.

Let me show you how this works its way out in Romans in a quick outline. In Romans this foundation cornerstone starts with sin, that we are all in the same place, we all have fallen short of what God expects. It moves to salvation: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." When you accept that gift, it then moves you toward, then how do I become set apart for God's service, for God's worship, for all of those things? This is a whole section on being set apart, oftentimes called sanctification. Then it reminds us that this is not just about us and our response, but it is about God's sovereignty, that God is sovereignly acting in all of these things. It ends with a life that works its way out, the salvation out, in service. So Romans ends that way. So it has the flow that you will now find the elements in all of the other books that talk about all of these things, from sin, to salvation, to being set apart or sanctification, to God's sovereignty in these matters, to service and what that looks like.

So that is this piece. Those things are all worked. They are here in outline form and summary form in Romans, they are all through these letters. When you get to Hebrews, the cornerstone one here on this wall, which is about maturity, kind of looks like this, and this is how it works its way out in Hebrews. This is sort of the outline. It begins

with the importance of the Word and a warning not to drift from the Word. So the Word of God, the scriptures become center stage in the growth process. It then moves from the Word to obedience. It is not just enough to know it, but you have to obey it. It has a warning there, what happens when you do not obey. Then it moves from obedience to practice, that it is not just obedience once, but I make obedience a practice of my life.

Here is the key. Practicing what I know becomes the key to my growing up, practice of my faith. Fourthly, I now find the element of sin, because sin is an obstacle to maturity. So I can be paying attention to the Word, I can be obedient, I can be practicing, but if I allow sin to creep in, it is deadly. So the author then picks up the topic of sin - remember, it was first in Romans, but it is fourth here - and says, here is the way you counter sin, because sin will kill maturity. Then he ends the last part of Hebrews with a discussion on an attitude and the attitude is a willingness to be corrected. Here is the bottom line. I am going to mess up, I am going to make mistakes. But God, who is a loving father, does not want to wipe me out for my mistakes, he really wants me to receive his forgiveness for my mistakes, to learn from my mistakes, to grow through my mistakes into more maturity, and he is there to do that, in me, through me, with me. But I have to have a willingness to be corrected.

So each of these then sets the stage through their broad outlines for what happens in these letters. These form then those foundational ideas based on things from the Gospels, form those foundational ideas and practices that bring these other letters alive. It is a powerful piece of instruction isn't it? It has had marvelous purposes that have changed lives for centuries. I hope this big picture will help you fall in love more with what God did in and through these incredible authors and their lives, as he shaped these important things to help us: 1) Find new life in Christ and a new family in the church. 2) Help us grow into the sort of person that we never dreamed we could be; but because of Christ, we can.

We need to wrap this piece up. We have one more time together. I hope you have enjoyed the journey through these very personal, very powerful letters.

## **Lesson 10 ■ The Finish Line's in Sight**

Hard to believe when we started this nine sessions back, that we would be able to put the whole structure out in front of us, pull it apart, talk about the parts, then come back and put it all back together again, together. But we have done it! It is an incredible thing, is it not? And it is so important, so important. Remember the perspective that we developed from the beginning, that perspective that this is important to leadership; that if we are going to lead well, our primary tool is the scriptures, the Bible that God has given us. So learning how to manage that tool is absolutely strategic to who we are. Whether we are leading in our family or we are leading a Sunday school class or a Bible study, or perhaps we are a deacon or an elder in the church, or perhaps God has called you to a major shepherding role. Whatever it is, this is a tool that is absolutely mandatory for your effectiveness, as God leads you in that important role that he has given you.

As I was preparing for this time together, I just pulled out a piece of paper, something that I have told you to do many times, and drew some boxes on it, - you are probably familiar with these boxes – and in a matter of about seven minutes – I looked at the clock and then looked up when I finished – in a matter of seven minutes I put together the whole picture that you and I have been working on. I was able to think about many of the parts and to talk to myself, as I hope you will in a healthy sort of way, talked to myself about how all of these parts work in terms of what God is presenting in terms of the macro theme, if you will, of all of the Bible.

So what I would like to do today with you, as we finish up this session, is to do that very thing, to have you think with me through the structure, and then I would like to take you into a really important part of scripture and sort of draw this together around an application out of one of the last letters written in the New Testament.

So, the boxes are easy, right? By the way, do not put these down anywhere, just think with me as we work through this. And then sometime today or tomorrow, I would like you to get out that piece of paper, just like I did, and prep through this, and draw the boxes on it, and think your way through it. And let us just agree together that every week or so for the next few weeks, you will do that somewhere along the way. Maybe you are having lunch with a friend, just pull out a napkin, say, “Look what I can do”, and just draw out the whole thing of the scripture and explain it. Show them the whole structure. Keep yourself fresh until this is really part of who you are, and that you are thinking these thoughts, no matter where you are in the scripture.

## **STRUCTURAL REVIEW**

If you will recall, we drew three boxes, side by side, and we reminded ourselves that those boxes represented the Bible. And this side represented the first major section of the Bible, the Old Testament; and this side represented the next one, the New Testament. By the way, you can tell by this that this does not have to be pretty. This is just really all about giving myself some cues to think through how the Bible fits together.

Here in the Old Testament, you will remember, there were 39 books and here in the new there were 27, a total of 66 books in the whole Bible. That is all I am going to write on this, just little bits and pieces as we go forward. Think with me for a minute. Remember, on this side we had three major sections and we called the first section the foundational section. Remember, in the foundational section of the Old Testament there were five of these 39 books. The foundational section laid down the promises and the premises and the principles that really are going to have an influence through the whole scripture. That is why they are foundational. Remember that one of the major players in this section – there were many major players – but one of the major players in four of the five books here was the leader, Moses, whom God used to take these foundational things and to shape them into a people, a people who would be begin to be his people for the ages yet to come. So these foundational things become very crucial. Remember the books, Genesis through Deuteronomy fit in this section.

Now we move out of the foundational section and we move into the second piece, which is the historical section. The uniqueness about this is, this is the picture of the people living out these foundational things. So, as a student – remember, we talked about the fact that when you get down here into these books there are 12 of them, basically Joshua through Esther, - that these books depict how the people do, living out the foundational things. So, Joshua, Judges and Ruth, for instance, describe the people living out these foundational things and living them out in a situation where there were no kings in Israel. They were led by Judges, they were led by elders, if you will, but there were no kings. How did they do? That is one of the questions you will always have to ask is, “How did they do with the foundational things?”

Read Joshua for instance, and you will find they do really great with the foundational things because Joshua is a very great leader. Get to the book of Judges and it all falls apart and it all falls apart on the failure of leadership. Get to Ruth and you discover a lady who is not even a Jew, who learns to follow the Lord and had tremendous influence. We get a couple of pictures, that 1) God is already reaching out beyond to these people we know as Israel. 2) The second thing is, that these people who lived their lives out kind of in obscurity, can still have powerful influence. Ruth was one of those people who demonstrated carrying out the foundational things well, in a matter of

speaking, in spite of where she came from and who she was. So, this is a powerful picture, just an example. Later in the books, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, depict how they do when the kings are ruling. And of course, the answer is, sometimes they do good and sometimes they do not. And it all depends on the quality of the ruler.

So, right away we begin to see this leadership perspective. Remember the principle, simple principle we played out through all of this, was as the leadership goes, so go the people. So, you have the history playing all of this out and then you have a third section, remember we put in, and we called that the instructional section. In this instructional section we have 17 books here, and we need 39, so there must be 22 books in this instructional section. These 22 books have a unique role in that they speak into this history. Here are the foundational things, this is the compass. Here is the history, these are the people trying to live by the compass, sometimes doing well, sometimes doing poorly. Oftentimes it is connected to who is leading them.

Here is the instructional section, the largest section, where God has his people speaking into this history. Remember, we broke this section into pieces. One of the pieces had five books in it, and the other has 17. We called this one a poetical section because the genre is largely poetry, and we called this the prophetic section because the genre is teaching or prophecy. These two sections speak into this history. The poetical section, remember we said, is a focus mostly on the heart. How is the heart of the people? How are they doing? From Psalms, for instance, sometimes their heart is lifted up, sometimes their heart is depressed, sometimes they are struggling, sometimes they are victorious. You get a sense of, "here's the heart."

When you get down to the prophetic section, the shift is over more toward the will. What is the will of these people? Do they have the will to obey God? Do they have the will to follow through on the things they promised they will follow through on? How is that going? So you have these two sections teaching into this. Now I know I said "prophecy." And many when you hear that word, you think of someone who is predicting the future. But it is really important to realize that in this section, that while that is here, there is a prediction of future things in this section, particularly the prophetic section, that by and large, most of it is addressed to teaching into this history. It is not addressed to some future promise, so much as it is addressed to what is happening in the present. Of course, we can then draw principle, we can draw understandings that fits our own situations from this teaching section.

So, here we have 39 books, broken up this way: Foundational, historical, instructional, a powerful lineup. Remember, the foundation is the compass. The history, we see the people playing out the history, living their lives out, fulfilling or not fulfilling the compass principles. Then finally, in the instructional section, we see the teachers of the

time, both writers and speakers, both those who were aimed more at the heart and those who were aimed more at understanding the will, speaking back into this history, either encouraging this history because they are doing so well, or trying to correct it because they have gotten off base. So, that is how the Old Testament fits together.

When we move to the New Testament, we have basically the same structure. But before we grab that, I would like to get right here in the middle it for just a second. Because between the close of the Old Testament and the close of the new – remember, before the opening of the new, we have 400 years. That is, if you think of Nehemiah, when Nehemiah goes off the scene, the New Testament does not come on the scene until John the Baptist shows up, and it is about 400 years later. So you have this period of time that we often refer to as “the silent years.” The reason many people call it that is because there is a belief that there were no prophets speaking in Israel during that time. And that does seem to be the reality. So, in that period of time, those silent years, while there were no prophets speaking, there was a lot going on. Remember, we talked about that and it is so important because the flow of history and of God’s working in history, comes out of the Old Testament, pours through these silent years and pours into what happens here in the New Testament, as recorded in these 27 books we will look at in just a minute. So these years are important. Remember, we talked about just a few things in them. I will just remind you real quickly. We talked about rulers. We talked about readings. And we talked about religion.

For the rulers, remember, we discovered that when the Old Testament comes to an end, that Israel, I will call it that, Israel is being ruled over by other nations. So, when the Old Testament comes to an end, Persia is in charge. Persia is eventually conquered by Greece and Greece rules over Israel for a time. Greece is eventually thrown out by an independent movement and the Jews end up ruling over themselves for a short period of time. I am just reviewing here.

Eventually, as the New Testament opens, Rome is in charge. So, we talked about these groups bringing something of significance to the story of the scripture. Persia brought a foreign policy. Their foreign policy was, the people they conquered they allowed to live in their homeland. So when they conquered this area and they discovered that lots of the Israelites had been transplanted by Assyria and Babylonia, they let those people go home if they wanted to. So Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther are all about that home-going. So the Old Testament ends with people going home or getting ready for this. People are coming home. The Jewish people are moving back to the homeland and it is part of the prep for the New Testament period. Greece brings a marvelous thing, many things. But what they bring that has the most impact is the language. And the language becomes the language of the commerce of the day. So eventually wherever Greece rules, the language is going to be spoken. There is going to be a common language, so the people

will have their native tongue, if you will, and they will also speak Greek. And that is going to be huge when we get to the New Testament period.

The period of independence is going to bring hope. The Jews all of a sudden are ruling over themselves again, they have not had that experience in a long time. It arouses a sense of Messiah coming. So you get that sense of hope. Then Rome brings many things, lots of which were not good. But Rome as a nation were a builder nation. So they brought roads. If you think of today, we talk about networking. Well, Rome established one of the first really great networks, it was the network of roads. Those roads eventually would take believers to the far corners of the known world of the time, taking the Gospel, fulfilling the mandate, to go to all of the nations, to bring the good news.

So these all contributed hugely: Readings, remember, we talked about an Apocrypha, which is a group of books that mostly are not put in the scriptures. The Roman Catholics and the Orthodox Church include them in their scriptures. The common belief, at least in evangelical circles, is that though they are valuable history, they are really not part of the canon, they are not part of the official scripture, if you will. There was another group that we referred to called the pseudepigrapha. It is a big word that basically says, "These are cool, historical books that are named for people who probably did not write them." So they are a help to us, but they are not again, part of the scriptural canon. We also have the Septuagint, a very important book. That was the translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek. When you run into quotations of the Old Testament and the New Testament, they are often quotations from the Septuagint. So this is a big deal in this period of time, the creation of that translation if you will, of the Old Testament scriptures.

Lastly, something we have become familiar with in our time, the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were archeological discoveries, late discoveries, in recent history mostly. Those scrolls teach us a ton about the traditions of the time, groups of people who struggled with what was going on under Rome, and they give us great insights in terms of culture and the application of scripture and the like.

There were a bunch of things going on here that were very significant. Then the religions of the time, I will just use one word and I will just demonstrate, it with a lousy thing here. That represents conflict, tension. The religious groups of the day basically caused lots of tension. Things begin to ramp up. The temple began to have conflict with the synagogue. The temple is like the institutional church and the synagogue is like the home church. The temple was not real fond of the home church and the synagogue was not real fond of the institution. So you had those tensions. It sounds familiar, doesn't it? In that, you have a grouping of people: the Sadducees, who were in control of the temple, and the Pharisees, who were basically influencers at the grassroots level. The

Sadducees and the Pharisees really did not care for each other. The Pharisees were very big on the following of scripture, extremely so. The Sadducees were pretty liberal in their day. So those tensions grew along the way. There were other groups not particularly attached to religion. For instance, the Herodians, who were wealthy people, who attached themselves to Rome. In opposition to that, you had a group like the Essenes, for instance, Dead Sea Scroll people, who just pulled out of the culture. Instead of falling into the culture and becoming part of it, they said, "We want no part of that", and they pulled out and kept their own traditions and were separatists, if you will.

At the extreme end of it, you had groups like the publicans, they were Jews who sold out to Rome, they became tax collectors, they were not very popular people, oftentimes really the dregs of the culture. Up against that, you had this other extreme group called the zealots. While these tax collectors figured out how to get rich from Rome, the zealots wanted nothing more than to throw Rome out and so, they became – this is an extreme statement, but they were extremist in some regards – they became the terrorists of their day, and tried to use violence to remove Rome, which really, when you think of the power of Rome, these were guys with a lot of faith thinking they could do that.

So you had, what I want you to see, is conflict. And here is the interesting thing, that in the middle of all of this, here comes Jesus. Jesus brings - guess what - his own conflict. Here is the interesting thing. When you look into this, with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who really disliked each other. The only time they really got on well was when they discovered that neither of them liked Jesus. Then, all of a sudden, they were friends. But they really were not. You see this now beginning to build and so, as you get into the New Testament, you had that sense of conflict that will build and build and build and come to a crescendo, where? The crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Conflict will continue on and you will see it in the book of Acts where people will begin to try to stop the progression of the church, to try to put an end to this Jesus talk. And you will see it extremely in people like Paul, who became the apostle; but before he was the apostle, he was a terrorist himself when it came to the Christian culture.

So this conflict is a big deal and dare I say, we can look all around our world today and see that it is still a big deal. But it helps us to see it here in the scripture. So that was the 400 silent years. So you can see how much we have packed into this, it has been pretty incredible. Foundational, historical, instructional. All of these things going on, they flow into this period of time where we have a period where God seems silent in a sense; and yet in another sense, he is very busy, laying the groundwork for things that are going to come here in the New Testament.

Over in the New Testament we have three boxes again, and guess what? We have the same structure. So, the first section we called foundational. This section had four books in it, books that we call the Gospels. They are biographies of Christ's life. Jesus, this one

who was promised over and over and over again throughout the Old Testament. This coming king, this Messiah, the son of David, the Son of Man. All of these terminologies. Then picked up over here is for instance that messianic hope, that hope of the coming king, rises up here during this period of independence in the 400 silent years. Then, onto the scene comes this person called Jesus.

Why was John the Baptist such a big deal, by the way? Think about it. He did not go to the big city to preach, he preached in the wilderness. And people came in droves from the big cities to hear him. Well, the reason is, God was silent for 400 years. And all of a sudden, the big question with John the Baptist is, "Could God be speaking again?" And it is John the Baptist who eventually recognizes this Jesus, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. And this sets the stage then for this life, this real life lived briefly in this world, this life to come to fullness and arrives at the point that God had destined, of going to a cross, of dying as the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

And then God affirming that by raising him up again, the story at the end of all of our Gospels, bringing him back to life. The great tool of sin in our world is the tool of death. And the savior had to defeat sin's principle tool, and that tool was death. His resurrection was God's affirmation that death has been defeated. What a great thing to sink your life into, right? Such a powerful, powerful section. This becomes the foundational piece, the lamb of God, portrayed through these Gospels, the one who was sent, who will indeed conquer death, who will open the gateway as it were, to a relationship with God that has not been seen since the Garden of Eden back here where we started. So, this is the foundation, it sets the pattern for what follows.

The next section, you could guess already, it is the historical section. In this historical section there is only one book and that is the book of Acts. The book of Acts takes us from Christ ascending into heaven to the expansion of the early church. It takes us from Jerusalem, where the early church started, to Judea, Samaria, as the early church was persecuted and scattered; and finally to the ends of the earth as the church continues to press out the walls of its existence, following the mandate. Remember the mandate? "Go into all of the nations, teaching them, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, making disciples" and there fulfilling that mandate in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth. And we get to see how that happens. We get to see the conflict. We get to see the success. We get to see the price paid by the early followers of Jesus, who pressed his church out into pagan culture all around it, people who knew nothing about Jesus, who became followers of Jesus because of the faith of these people, living out these foundational things.

Then we have at the end, you guessed it, an instructional section. That instructional section contains 22 books. This instructional section speaks into the history. It tells us

about what is going on here. It gives instruction to the church, there has never been a church before; so it gives instructions on the doing of church, if you will. It gives instruction to disciples, keeping them on track. When they are on track, encouraging them. When they get off track, correcting them. Just like over here, same pattern, different genre. Here we had poetry and prophecy, which is generally narrative. Over here, we have a unique, very personal communication and it is in the form of letters and as you know, letters are personal. Letters are not a textbook to be dissected, though sometimes we dissect them. Sometimes we dissect them too much, because they are really from the heart of a writer to people that he loves. As such, we need to look at them through the eyes of leaders, yes, a perspective; but also realize these are letters. These are very personal communications. If we do that, we will begin to see the heart of these leaders speaking into the history of their time, a very important thing.

Remember, here we broke these into three sections. The Apostle Paul wrote the bulk of these letters, 13 of them. Nine of them he wrote to beginning churches. Here is what church looks like, here is how it grows, here are the problems, here is how you handle them. They are speaking into a circumstance that never existed before. And then, four of them speak into the leadership of those churches. So we have basically Romans up through the books that are directed to the church in Thessalonica. Then you have these leadership books that start with Timothy and extend through Philemon, four books there.

Remember, we created like a house, with the foundation being the Gospels and Acts. One wall being Paul's letters to the churches. The roof is the leadership piece because it connects both the walls. The last wall were nine books that we call the general letters to believers. These are letters written, not so much to churches, as to believers. How are believers doing? They come later, rather than earlier. That is, many of Paul's letters written to churches are written early in the history, following Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. These letters, starting with Hebrews and running through Revelation, tend to be written later, not totally, but mostly. If these letters focus on the early church and its development, largely built around the power of the resurrection, these letters at the end – remember, we talked about this – they do not leave out the resurrection, but their emphasis is much more toward the return of Christ. That is, I am going to live my life in light of the fact that my savior is coming back, and he is coming back as the victorious king. So, how am I doing with that? How am I living that out? becomes a crucial question. Am I fulfilling these foundational things as a follower of Jesus Christ? So, Hebrews through Revelation give us that piece.

That was quick, huh? It is amazing when you get this down, how you can think through the scriptures and how you realize how powerfully it fits together. How there is rhyme and reason to our English Bible, that our forefathers who evaluated and who selected the books that are in our scripture, who at times did battle over what should be there

and what should not be there, who thought about how it should be organized and how it fit together. You cannot say it was inspired, not like you say that of scripture, but you have to believe that God's hand was upon them because it is a marvelous structure that just reflects the reality of our creator God, who loves us deeply and organized and fulfilled a history that allows us not to live our life without hope, but to find that hope locked in him and locked in him through the great sacrifice of his sending his son to die for use, so that in him we can find life.

That is the message, and that is what we need a handle on, leaders, as we work and shepherd the people that God has given us. Again, whether that shepherding is with your family or with the church, or with an influence group at your work, or wherever it might be, this becomes a crucial tool in that process.

## **COURSE WRAP-UP – JUDE**

We need to wrap up. I want to wrap up by taking you to a passage in scripture that I think is incredibly important. We from time to time have opened the book as we have moved along, but mostly we have stayed at the macro level, haven't we? And staying at the macro level, we have only from time to time gone down into the pages. But I want to take you down into the pages. I want to take you into the book of Jude, which is one of the final letters in the instructional section of the New Testament. I call it a book, but it is really like a postcard. It is the kind of book I love to read, because I can read it in five minutes. That is about all the attention span I have most of the time.

Jude says this when he starts this wonderful little postcard: "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt it necessary to write to you, appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints." You see, Jude says, "As I started to write, here is what I wanted to do. I wanted to share with you all the information that we believe together." I think Jude would have been a great teacher of the big picture of scripture. But as he is saying that, it is as if the Spirit says, "Hold it, there is something important here, that I need you to write about, so people do not miss it." And so he shifts and he says, "But rather than doing this, as important as this is, I rather want to write to you about contending for the faith." Not being contentious for the faith, we have too much of that. But learning how to truly contend. Here is the key. It is taking this that you know and everything you are going to plug into this system.

Remember, we talked about how you are going to grow this system, so you are going to be able to look at a piece of it and go, "I know what is here, I know how Joshua fits there, I know how Esther fits here, I know how the lives of three major kings – Saul, David and Solomon – I know how this fits here, I know what is going on, I know how it

relates." You are going to begin to fill those pieces in. It is going to be so important. Jude says, as important as that is, here is something more important. You need to learn how to take this information and you need to learn how to live it out, in such a way that you contend for its truth in the lives of other people. In other words, you learn how to speak a message and along with it, you learn how to live a message. And when you speak the message and live the message, then you become a contender.

Unfortunately, in our environment, over the last few hundred years, we have slipped over to the informational side of it. I think Jude saw that in his own time. He said, I was going to write you about the information and all of a sudden, the Spirit said, "It's important, but do not go there. You need to go here because here is where we are slipping. We are slipping, not in the information, but we are slipping in the application. We are slipping in living it out. So write to the people about being contenders, people who not only have information to speak a message, but people who by their very lives, live out the message and can contend." It is a fair question to ask, "How do you do that? How does that happen?" Jude answers for us.

And I would just like to give you those answers very quickly. In fact, I can give them to you in a very memorable sort of way. All you need to do is remember three words, make that six words: Be builders, be reachers, be real. That is what Jude said is the key if we are going to be contenders, that we need to work on three major areas. We will take a look quickly and you can see how it fits with scripture. In verse 20 he says, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in the most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life."

So you see it there, the building part. "Keep yourself in the love of God." This is the central piece of all of this. It is in fact one of the major messages of the New Testament, you know that. How do I keep myself in the love of God? Well, Jude says, here is how we do it. First, we do not do it alone. We do it by building each other in the faith. That is, we invest in each other. We do not invest, tearing down things. We do not invest, criticizing things. We do not invest, "I need to be better than you" things. We literally take the faith and we invest in each other in such a way that it strengthens and builds us toward the objective, which is to become more and more like our leader, Jesus Christ. So, we invest in each other.

The second thing we do, Jude says, we pray. We pray, he says, in The Holy Spirit. He is not talking here about a mystical kind of prayer. He is literally talking about our knowing the heart of God well enough that when we pray, we pray consistently with the heart of God. We know what is on the Spirit's mind and it becomes the centerpiece for our prayer life. It is what Jesus did when the disciples said, "Teach us to pray." "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." His name is important to him, it

ought to be part of our prayer life. "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." His kingdom is important to him. His will is important to him. What happens here, being consistent with heaven, is important to him. It becomes part of our prayer life. "Give us this day our daily bread." He is concerned about our needs. That ought to be part of our prayer life. "Forgive us our debts, even as we forgive our debtors, forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive those who trespass against us." Forgiveness is a big piece of our prayer life. Do you see what I am saying? That is the heart of God. How often do we do that? Jude says, if you want to be strong in the faith, it becomes part of who you are. If you want to be a contender. If you want to stay rooted and centered in the love of God, then that is what you need to do.

There is a third thing that goes with it, we have already mentioned it before. So I will not linger on it, but the third thing he says is, "Anticipate Christ's return." Live in light of the return of Jesus Christ.

As a very young man I worked on a construction crew, felt like I lived there most of the time. I learned something from the guys on this crew who were truly a motley crew. They never were better at what they did than when they knew the boss was going to show up. When they knew the boss was coming, they were like, different people. Well, here is the message that Jude has for you and me. The boss is coming. We need to live in light of that reality, in anticipation of it. It should be something we are enthusiastic about. It should be something that keeps on target, keeps our compass set. And those days when we want to get off target, we need to remind ourselves that one day we are going to stand before the boss.

So, it is a powerful piece. You are going to be built up, you are going to be builders. How am I going to do that? I am going to be rooted in a key thing, the love of Jesus Christ. Rooted right there by investing in one another, by praying in the Spirit, by anticipating his return. But I can't just do that. I can't just do that. I need to go beyond that if I am really going to be a contender. That second part is, I need to be a reacher. Jude says, here is how you reach. He says to have mercy on some who are doubting and save others, snatching them out of the fire and on some, have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

So as a contender, there is an inside part. Listen to this carefully, this is so important. There is an inside part in terms of the church. The inward part is that we are rooted in the love of God and we build each other and we pray together often, and we anticipate Christ's return. But that is all inside stuff and Jude says if it is going to have power, there is an outside aspect to it. The outside aspect is, reaching, reaching to those who have doubt. Pretty easy to reach, but very important. Our churches are filled with people who have doubt. They do not say it, but if you listen, you will discover it. And you can answer their doubts.

Then he says, you need to reach out a little further than that to people who are in danger of hell, whose lives are right on the edge. That's a little harder reach, a little more discomfort. But as you grow, your reach should lengthen. The psalmist says we are like trees planted by water. Trees do better in that kind of great environment, grow deep roots and a long reach. And that is what we are seeing here. Deep roots, long reach. Finally, he says that the reach is from doubters to those in danger of hell. Then he says even a little further, to people who by their very lifestyle, pose a danger to us, frighten us, make us fearful. There is no need to be fearful because you are following the one who won. So this reaching is crucial to our becoming a contender. This reaching is crucial to our becoming mature. This reaching is crucial to our becoming everything that God envisioned through Jesus Christ, that we would be. Be rooted, centered in the love of God. Be reaching out of that strength to those who desperately need to know him.

Then the last thing he would say that pulls this all together is, be real. This is not a game to be played. This is a place where you can be authentically you. Christ saved you as you are. God made you as you are. And you can live out the realities of all of those things as Christ and The Spirit and the Word and other people develop you, help you grow in him, you can live those out authentically. Jude would say, "Watch out for false teaching" because there will be those who will try to get you to play the game. There are those who will try to get you to stop being who you are in Christ and be something else. Do not go there, he would say. Beware, as Jesus said, of the leaven of the Pharisees. The leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. Literally, it is putting on a mask. It is playing a game. It is not being real. You have to believe this. God really wants you to be who you are in Christ, really. And that is the power of this. This is how I contend, rooted in the love of God, reaching even sometimes when it scares me, and not being distracted into false teaching and thinking I have to be something I am not, letting God use me as he saved me and as he is making me and developing me in Jesus Christ.

How do I know that works? Well, Jude tells me how it works and we will end with this: "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling." In other words, when you walk out in this journey of faith that we have just talked about, if I walk out there, I surely do not have the power to keep me from stumbling. But I am attached to the one who does. "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling"; listen to this: "And to make you stand in the presence of his glory"; to make you stand in the presence of his glory. He is leading you on this path and it has a destination. And one day, you are going to be in the presence of the Lord, right in the midst of his glory. Listen to this last piece: "Make you stand in the presence of his glory, blameless." You do not have to listen to those people who are telling you, you need to be something you are not. Christ is in the business of making you into what he wants; and one day that person is going to stand

in his presence; and because of him, you are going to stand there blameless. Listen to the last piece: "With great joy." Can you think of a life better than that?

That is why we worked out all of this. To take this and to take it into the realm of being rooted in the love of God, being reachers, being real, so that we can fulfill his mandate of reaching people in this world who desperately need to know the one, the only one, who brings real life to this world that suffers under the penalty of death.

I will close like Jude closed, can't think of a better way to do it: "To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time now and forever."

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