

Old Testament Narrative (Joshua-Nehemiah)

1. The importance of narrative overview

- The Bible is a story
- Worldview is a story
- Context is everything.
- So much damage has been done by taking OT verses out of context.
 - Mitri Raheb, “The Bible is like the bazaar in Old Jerusalem. You can get anything you want. If you want verses justifying oppression, you can find them. If you want verses about liberation and justice, you can find them. **What you find in the Bible says more about you than it does about the Bible.**”
- The Bible is a complicated narrative with multiple voices or perspectives.

2. Bethlehem vs Jerusalem

Schreiner “Surprisingly, Ruth forms a link in the chain that would bring David into the world, solving the problem of Judges, where Israel lacked a king. And a future son of David would bring many more Ruths, many more Gentiles into the fold of God’s people, and fulfil the promise of universal blessing made to Abraham.”

Mat 1:4 and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon,

Mat 1:5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse,

Mat 1:6 and Jesse the father of David the king

Themes from Ruth:

- **House of Bread.**

- **House of Lamb**
- **House of Gentile inclusion.**
- **House of Reconciliation of estranged cousins.**
- **House of Redemption.**

MacArthur, *“The goel was a relative who came to the rescue... He was the official guardian of the family’s honour.”*

- **House of Shame-Absorption.**
- **House of the Seed.**

The Rise of David

Peter Leithart *“Judah was proclaimed the royal tribe only after he had offered himself as a substitute for Benjamin. Similarly, Saul became king without ever accepting the cross, while David, the king from Judah, rose to the throne only after a death and resurrection.”*

Jerusalem (II Samuel 5, 6, 7)

The climax of the David story is the taking of Jerusalem and establishing of the kingdom there. Culmination of the whole journey from Exodus, conquest, Judges... and finally now we have a king from Judah, from Bethlehem and we have a capital city, Jerusalem.

Lessons – the problem with Jerusalem

- History is never: things get better and better and then the end comes
- You have never arrived.
- The goal is never Jerusalem as some position of Christian power and influence. We live in tension between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, between birth and death.
- Jesus: all prophets die in Jerusalem!

This tradition of royal authoritarianism and of poetic (prophetic) interruption is a rivalry that permeates Israel’s tradition. Brueggemann, Walter.

David as a type of Jesus Christ:

3. Divided Kingdom

Solomon: High Point or Low Point?

- Solomon mirrors Pharaoh in many ways.
- In the centre of the Solomon story, he builds a house for God (1 Kings 6, 7, 8). But the centre, ch 7, is him building his own house.
- The whole idea of a capital city with king's palace and God's temple together was an idea from Babylon and from Egypt.
- Passion vs Pomp

"The establishment of a controlled, static religion in which God and his temple have become part of the royal landscape, in which the sovereignty of God is fully subordinated to the purpose of the king. In Jerusalem in this period there is a radical revision in the character of God. Now God is fully accessible to the king who is his patron, and the freedom of God is completely overcome. It is almost inconceivable that the God domiciled in Jerusalem would ever say anything substantive or abrasive." Walter Brueggemann

- Remember, God did not seem to want Israel to have a king, just as he did not want to live in a temple (2 Sam 7:5-7).
- In 1 Samuel 8:7-9 when the people asked Samuel for a king, "like all the nations"
- The prophet then warned the people at length about the trouble that having a king "like the other nations" would bring on the nation (v. 10-18). This list of warnings was fulfilled word for word in the litany of Solomon's exploits (1 Kings 11). Likewise, Solomon's list of sins in 1 Kings 11 directly reflects Moses' warning about kings in Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

From here on, there are two "tones of voice" or perspectives in the story.

Royal Perspective	Prophetic Perspective
Concerned with physical Jerusalem	Concerned with ideal or future Jerusalem
Horizontal time (progress)	Vertical time (interruptions)
Centre	Margins
Optimistic	Critical

Metrics: growth, scale, prosperity	Metrics: justice and righteousness
Prose	Poetry

- The Bible is explicit in blaming Solomon for the dismemberment of the kingdom. (I Kings 11:11-13)

4. Prophets

The first seventeen books of the Old Testament history books about events in ancient Israel.

The next five books of the Old Testament are books of wisdom literature. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs

The final seventeen books are prophets

Of the writing prophets:

9th century prophets (like Elijah-Elisha) are not writing prophets. From 8th century BC they start writing books.

5. Inevitable Exile

Fall of Samaria

Samaria is besieged for 3 years by Shalmaneser V (Assyrian emperor).

Samaria falls late summer/autumn of 721/722.

27,290 people (according to Sargon) deported to Upper Mesopotamia.

II Kings 17:6-18

Deportations and resettlements. "The Samaritans"

II Kings 17:24-28

Sennacherib comes in 701, besieges Jerusalem. Hezekiah prays.

II Kings 19:35-37

From here begins the decline of the Assyrian empire, and the rise of the Babylonian empire as the regional superpower.

The fall of Jerusalem is in 587 BC. But Babylon start taking people away into exile a little before this.

Ezekiel/ Jeremiah/ Daniel/ Babylon

627 Jeremiah's call

622 Ezekiel born into a priestly family in Jerusalem.

605 Scroll burning in temple (Jer 36). Ezekiel was 17 years old.

605 was the deportation of the first group of noble exiles to Babylon, probably including Daniel. Daniel would have been very young – early teens: a fraction younger than Ezekiel.

597: deportation of the next group, including Ezekiel. Ezekiel is 25 years old.

593: Ezekiel's 30th birthday present from God

5 years later (587) the unthinkable happens - temple is destroyed.

“So while we can value all the positive contributions that Ezekiel's education and training as a priest brought to his prophetic ministry, we must also appreciate the immense personal, professional and theological shock it must have been to him when, in his thirtieth year, the year he ought to have entered on his ordained priestly career, God broke into his life, wrecked all such career prospects, and constrained him to a role he may himself have viewed with considerable suspicion - the lonely, friendless, unpopular role of being a prophet, the mouthpiece of Yahweh.” Alec Motyer.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks:

“It is hard to understand the depth of the crisis into which the destruction of the first Temple plunged the Jewish people. Their very existence was predicated on a relationship with God symbolised by the worship that took place daily in Jerusalem... In losing the Temple, it was as if they had lost hope itself.”

“This is what the sovereign Lord says: although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet I have become to them a small sanctuary in the counties where they have gone.” Ezekiel 11:16

The synagogue is born.

Professor Stern, A History of the Jewish People, “In establishing the synagogue, Judaism created one of the greatest revolutions in the

history of religion and society, for the synagogue was an entirely new environment for divine service, of a type unknown anywhere before.”

It is the ultimate revelation of monotheism: that God is present anywhere amongst his people.

“Thus, in the fateful year 587 B.C. Jerusalem fell. It was the end of the house of David as a temporal dynasty, the end of Judah as a sovereign state, the end of Jerusalem as a fortress. But it was the beginning, as Jeremiah already dimly perceived, of a new Jerusalem made without hands, of the House of David spiritually supreme amongst the kings of the earth, and of a conquered People conquering the world by suffering and faith.” Caiger.

6. Coming Home

II Chron 36.22 / Ezra 1/ Daniel 5

70 years. Literal or Figurative or Both?

Daniel 5 (539BC)

Babylon has fallen. There is a new power in town. The Persians. Darius is the commander who took Babylon. The Emperor is Cyrus the Great.

The year is 539 BC. The Decree of Cyrus.

II Chron 36:22-23

Ezra 1:1-7

Emergence of the priestly voice

“It was in exile, in Babylon, that Torah rose to a prominence in the life of the nation that it rarely had before, because it was now the very basis of the nation’s identity. A people in exile have by definition lost all the other things that made them a nation – their land, home, language, landscape, independence and sovereignty... It was then that the priestly voice came into its own. For monotheism makes possible something impossible otherwise: *a living relationship with God away from home.*” Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

Royal Perspective	Prophetic Perspective	Priestly Perspective
Concerned with physical Jerusalem	Concerned with ideal or future Jerusalem	Concerned with the Law
Horizontal time (progress)	Vertical time (interruptions)	Cyclical time (festivals)
Centre	Margins	de-centred
Optimistic	Critical	Atonement
Metrics: growth, scale, prosperity	Metrics: justice and righteousness	Metrics: holiness, biblical literacy, purity
Prose	Poetry	Laws

The end

The OT does not end happy.

Then we have 400 years or so of silence from God: no more prophets, no more scriptures.

And so we wait for Christmas