

Week 1: Introduction

Old Testament Historical Context

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

The Holy Scripture opens with the Creation of the World in the book of Genesis. From the very first chapter, we see the creation of mankind in the Image of God, according to His Likeness. But soon after, we have the fall of man. And man continues to sin and separate himself from God, even to the point that God wipes mankind from the face of the earth, except for one righteous man and his family - Noah. And from Noah, the Lord makes a new creation. From Noah's descendants will come the great man of faith - Abraham, the man after God's own heart - King David, and the Messiah Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ; the Incarnate Word of God.

The Holy Scripture lays out a single thread, from the Creation of the World and the Fall of Man, to the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of the Son of God. And as we read the Scripture, although it presents historical facts and narratives, we can see that thread. We can see the Love of God for all mankind, we can see the Promise of God and its fulfillment, we can see the Wisdom of God and those whom He gave it to. We can see the Spirit of God coming upon flawed characters, and working in them and through them. We can see the Acceptance of God of the repentant man no matter his sin. God has revealed Himself to us through His Holy Scripture. He speaks to us through His words, but we must read and study and understand and meditate on them, in order to hear His voice.

Let's look at the Historical Context for the time period we will study during this Fast, starting from the beginning in Genesis. For some of you, this might be review; for others, it might be brand new. In any case, if you have any questions, please feel completely free to ask! We are learning together, growing together, and encouraging each other that we may inherit the Kingdom together.

In the book of Genesis, we read about the patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob has twelve sons who become the fathers of the twelve tribes. Jacob and his family go to Egypt during the famine while his son Joseph had become vizier or second-in-command to Pharaoh.

In Exodus, we read that the Israelites were prosperous and multiplying in Egypt. And when a new Pharaoh came, who did not know Joseph, he saw them as a threat and enslaved them. They were in Egypt about 400 years when the Lord sent Moses to deliver them from Egypt. And this is the meaning of the word Exodus. In Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the Israelites receive the Law from God, build the Tabernacle, and are wandering through the desert for about 40 years until they reach the Promised Land. Then, in the book of Joshua, Joshua (the disciple of Moses) leads them to take conquest of the land and to distribute it among the twelve tribes.

In the book of Judges, the key verse that is repeated several times is that "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The Israelites would fall into idolatry or sexual immorality and be taken by another tribe like the Midianites or the Philistines or the Ammonites. Then God would raise up for them a Judge - typically, someone who could lead their military to victory. And they would come out and give thanks to God and promise not to fall again... and then promptly fall again. And the cycle would repeat. This lasted about 400 years and gave us Judges like Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Jephthah and culminated with the last judge - Samuel the priest and the prophet.

In the time of Samuel, the Israelites ask for a king. Samuel doesn't like the idea and tells them - you have a King... God is your King. But they request someone to lead them "like the other nations." This is when we go from a Theocracy to a Monarchy. King Saul is anointed as the first king, and he starts off pretty good. But he did not honor God and did not obey God's commandments. He offers a sacrifice in place of Samuel, although he is not a priest. When God instructs him to wipe out the Amalekites, he keeps their king (King Agag) alive. He makes rash decisions.

The Lord chooses David to be anointed as the next king and to replace King Saul. King David is described by the Lord as "a man after My own heart." King David is not perfect. He falls into sins like adultery and murder - but he is repentant. He spends years in tears of repentance and this is exemplified in many of the Psalms that he authored. Every king after him would be compared to him; he becomes the gold standard. Good kings will have something like "because he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done." Or "He walked in the earlier ways of his father David." Evil kings are described as "he was not wholly true to the Lord his God as was the heart of his father David." King David conquered Jerusalem and made it the capital of the Kingdom, and purposed in his heart to build a Temple for God there. But because he had blood on his hands, the Lord did not allow him to build the Temple - instead, his son Solomon would build it.

When King David died, his son Solomon became king. Solomon is famed for asking the Lord to give him wisdom - and the Lord gave him wisdom. Solomon built the Temple of God, and reigned over Israel with wisdom. He authored books like Proverbs, Song of Songs and Wisdom. Israel became a great nation and a wealthy nation. People came from all over the world to hear the wisdom of Solomon and the Lord Jesus will later on reference the visit of the Queen of Sheba. But Solomon fell for foreign women and their gods and his heart turned from the Lord. He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines; women from the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites and a daughter of Pharaoh. And the women turned his heart from God to their gods. And the Lord responded to this by saying "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen." (1 Kings 11) This servant of Solomon is called Jeroboam. The prophet Ahijah tells him of God's plan and warns him: "Then it shall be, if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you." Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam but Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt and stayed

there until the death of King Solomon. Before his death, the Tradition tells us that King Solomon repented and the Book of Ecclesiastes is what he wrote in his repentance.

That is the background of what we will start reading this week.

On Monday, we will read the account of the split of the Kingdom and the beginning of idolatry in the Northern Kingdom. We will focus on the Northern Kingdom for three weeks, until we reach its fall and captivity to Assyria in Week 4. Then, for three weeks, we will focus on the Southern Kingdom until we reach its fall and captivity to Babylon in Week 7. The important part of our study will not be just the history and the stories, but the words of the Prophets. The Lord never left His people without a witness to His word. He always had a prophet there to remind them to turn back to the Lord. He always had a prophet there to remind them of the consequences and what would happen if they did not. Even in the stories we already discussed; the prophet Samuel revealed to King Saul what the Lord commanded; the prophet Nathan is the one who rebuked King David when he committed adultery and murder; the prophet Ahijah told Jeroboam how the Lord would give him ten tribes and keep two to Solomon.

This week, we will be introduced to the prophets Elijah and Elisha who prophesied in the early days of the Northern Kingdom. We just selected a couple of passages that exemplified that Elijah and Elisha were men of God. They did wonders and signs, even raising the dead. And Elijah was taken up by a chariot of fire to the heavens. Let us see what messages and lessons we can glean from them, while familiarizing ourselves with their stories and the story of the Northern Kingdom.

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