

God's
COVENANT
PLAN BIBLE
STUDY

Getting Started

Whether you're studying Scripture for the first time, looking to take your studies to a higher level, or whether you're ready for advanced training, you've come to the right place!

The St. Paul Center offers six free individual Scripture Studies. Each study contains a complete text, including cross-references and links to Scripture and other Church documents. In Addition, for each track of study we recommend books that will enhance your study and prayer and build your library of essential works in biblical theology and spirituality.

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How to Use Our Studies

The studies are designed for you to work at your own pace privately or with a group.

We suggest to use the individual Sacred Art pieces for *Visio Divina*. Similar to Lectio Divina, Visio Divina invites us to experience the divine mysteries of the Sacred Scriptures in a unique and powerful way through careful meditation and prayer while interacting with Sacred Art.

Tips for Learning

Read each lesson as well as the Bible passages and other resources the instructor recommends. Taking notes will help you remember what you read. Then answer the study questions.

In between lessons, review your notes, reread the lessons and continue to study and pray over the Bible passages cited by the instructor. Using a daily Missal, you may want to see how these passages are used and interpreted in the Church's liturgy.

Be sure you begin and end each study session with prayer.

We encourage you to study these lessons with friends or family. We do ask that if you duplicate these materials, please cite *stpaulcenter.com* as the source.

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Introduction

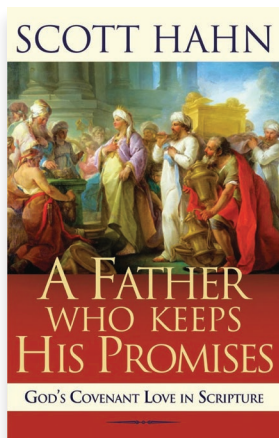
About the Study

What is the Bible, where does it come from and what is its purpose? How are Catholics supposed to read the Bible and what story does it have to tell? These are the questions we take up in this “big picture” survey course.

Following an introduction to Catholic teaching about divine revelation and Bible, we jump right in and begin reading. We start with the creation story and Noah’s ark, and trace the history of salvation as it unfolds in the series of covenants that God makes with His chosen people - from Abraham and the twelve tribes of Israel to Moses and finally to King David. We see how this history reaches its climax and fulfillment in Jesus and the Church. The aim is to give you a solid outline and overview of the story that the Bible tells, from Genesis to Jesus.

Objectives

- I. To learn the basic Catholic principles for reading Scripture.
- II. To learn about God’s covenants in the Bible, and to understand their significance for reading and interpreting the Bible.
- III. To learn the broad outlines of the books of the Bible and to understand their place in the story of salvation told in the Bible.



Materials

The primary text will be the Bible. And each lesson will provide links to biblical passages cited. In addition, the instructors recommend Scott Hahn’s *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*, which covers much of the material to be studied in this course.

LESSON ONE

HOW A CATHOLIC STARTS TO READ THE BIBLE

Lesson Outline

1. Course Introduction and Overview
 - I. Reading the Bible Cover-to-Cover
2. Going By the Book: How a Catholic Reads the Bible
 - I. Divine Revelation: How God Speaks to Us
 - II. Interpreting the Bible: The Three Rules
 - III. Scripture is Divine: Inspiration
 - IV. Scripture is Human: The Bible as Religious Literature and History
3. Salvation History: The Story the Bible Tells
 - I. Salvation History and Covenants
 2. The Old and New Testament
4. Starting in the Beginning: An Introduction to Genesis
 - I. The Story of Creation
 - II. The Word and the Sabbath
5. Study Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To learn how to read the Bible the way the Catholic Church has always read it.
- II. To understand the concepts of “salvation history” and “covenant” and their importance for reading the Bible.
- III. To learn the key points of the creation story in the Bible’s first book, Genesis.

SECTION I.

Course Introduction and Overview

Reading the Bible Cover-to-Cover

In this class, we're going to be reading the Bible from cover to cover. Pretty ambitious for a beginners, you say?

You're right. We won't be able to go in depth - you have a lifetime of Bible reading to do that. But we're going to give you the tools you need so that you can start that lifetime of reading. When you're done with this class, you'll be able to follow "the plot" of the Bible, keep track of all the characters, and know what the story's all about.

That may be news to some of you - that there's a single plot and story to the Bible. Well there is. It's not just a collection of individual books. All those individual books, when joined together and put in order by the ancient Church Fathers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, now make up a single book. And this book tells only one story. We're going to tell you what that story is and how to follow it through all the individual books of the Bible.

Before we do that, we're going to begin in this lesson with an overview of some basic principles of Catholic Bible-reading.



Section I. End

Going by the Book:

How a Catholic Reads the Bible

Divine Revelation:

How God Speaks to Us

Christianity is a religion of the Word, not of a book! The Word is a Person - Jesus Christ. He is God's "final word" on everything. Through Jesus,

God has revealed everything He wanted to reveal to us about who He is and what He intends for our lives. God's revelation of Himself comes to us in three ways:

Scripture (the Bible)

Tradition (especially the liturgy of the Church - the Mass and the sacraments)

The Magisterium (the Church's teachings, such as its dogmas and creeds)

The Holy Spirit is at work through all three channels - He inspires Scripture, animates the Church's living Tradition, and guarantees the teaching of the Church's Magisterium (Catechism, nos. 81-82).

Reading and Interpreting the Scripture:

The Three Rules

Because God's revelation comes to us through these three channels, we must remember three important criteria for reading and interpreting Scripture: *

The Content & Unity of Scripture:

Though Scripture is made up of different books, we can't read them as separate books. We have to read each one in light of the rest, keeping in mind that Jesus revealed that there is a unity in God's plan for the world, as that plan is revealed in Scripture.

St. Augustine used to say that: "The New Testament is concealed in the Old, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New." What he meant is that Jesus showed us how the things that God says and does in the Old Testament pointed to what He says and does in the New. In turn, what Jesus says and does in the New Testament sheds light on the promises and events we read about in the Old.

The Church's Living Tradition:

We must always read Scripture within the context of the Church's Tradition. That means that we should always see how the Church interprets certain Scripture passages, especially in the prayers and readings it uses for the Mass and for special feasts in the Church.

Analogy of Faith:

The same Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures also safeguards the Church's teaching authority. That means that if we're going to read and interpret Scripture properly - the way God intends it to be read - we have to make sure our interpretations don't contradict the interpretations found in the Church's creeds and other statements of doctrine.



Scripture is Divine: *Inspiration*

As you can tell by now, there's no other book like the Bible. The Church teaches that just as Jesus was "true God and true man," the Bible is truly a work of human authors and at the same time is truly the work of God as the divine author.

This is the mystery of the divine "inspiration" of Scripture (see 2 Timothy 3:16). The word "inspired" in the Greek, literally means "God-breathed." And that's a good way to think about the inspiration of Scripture. Just as God fashioned Adam out of the clay of the earth and blew the breath of life into him (see Genesis 2:7), God breathes His Spirit into the words of the human authors of Scripture and makes them the Living Word of God.

The way the Church explains it, it happened like this: The human authors used their literary skills, ideas and other talents in writing the pages of the Bible. But while they were writing, God was acting in them so that what they wrote was exactly what He wanted them to write (see Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*, scroll down to nos. 11-12; Catechism, nos. 105-107).

The human writers were "true authors" of Scripture, and so was God.

Because God is its co-author, and because God cannot err or make mistakes, we say that whatever we read in the Bible is true, free from "error" and has been put there for our salvation. This is called the "inerrancy" of Scripture.

This is a very complicated concept that we can't explain fully in this class. But it's important to always read the Bible on its own terms. The Bible doesn't set out to teach modern history, science or geography or biography. So we shouldn't try to compare what it says about the creation of the world, for instance, to what modern science teaches us.

That doesn't mean the Bible is ever wrong. The Bible, entire and whole, is true and without error - not only in what it teaches about faith and morals, but also what it says about historical events and personages. It will never lead us astray. But we have to interpret it responsibly - we have to understand that it is giving us history and natural events from a "religious" and divine perspective, and often uses symbolic language.

Scripture is Human: *The Bible as Religious Literature and History*

Practically speaking, the “divine-human” authorship of Scripture means we have to read the Bible differently than we approach other books.

When we read the Bible we must remember that it is the Word of God told in human language. It’s important that we understand the “human element” of Scripture. As we’ll see, this human element can’t really be separated from the divine element.

But it’s important when we read the Bible to remember that it is:

Literature: The Bible uses literary forms, devices, structures, figures, etc. We must look for the “literary” clues that convey a meaning.

Ancient: The Bible is ancient. Its not written like modern literature. It’s meaning is wrapped up with the way the ancients looked at the world and recorded history. Although they were interested in recording history, they were not interested in “pure history.” History was more than just politic, economics and wars - it had a deeper significance.

Religious: Today people think of religion in terms of personal piety. Not so for the ancients. The word “religion” comes from the Latin, “religare,” - “to bind together.” For the ancients everything - culture, history, the economy, diplomacy - was bound together by the religion. The Bible gives us history, but it is religious history. It is history from God’s perspective.



Salvation History:

The Story the Bible Tells

Salvation History and Covenants

With that brief background on how the Catholic Church understands the Bible, let's turn now to the Bible's "content."

The first thing to know is that the Bible gives us history from God's perspective. It shows us that all throughout time, God is working to bring us salvation. That's why we say that the Bible gives us "salvation history."

This salvation history, in turn, hinges upon the "covenants" that God makes with his people throughout the Bible. The great early Church Father, Irenaeus, recognized the need for studying salvation history in terms of the covenants: "Understanding ...consists in showing why there are a number of covenants with mankind and in teaching what is the character of those covenants" (Against the Heresies, Book I, Chapter 10, no. 3).

What is a covenant? Let's start with what it's not. A covenant is not a contract.

Contracts are deals where two parties make a promise that involves some exchange of goods or services or property. Usually they seal their contract by giving their "word" - their name - in the form of their signature.

When parties make a covenant, they swear oaths. Oaths are more than promises. Instead of swearing by their own name, they swear by the highest name, by the name of God.

You know the formula from all the courtroom dramas, you've seen on TV: "Do you swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" That's an oath formula. You ask for God's help to tell the truth ("so help me, God") and it's implied that if you lie, you're going to be punished by God.

Covenants involve, not an exchange of property, but an exchange of persons. You don't give somebody your services or goods when you swear a covenant oath - you swear to give them yourself.

Marriage is a good example. It's a covenant because in the exchange of vows, the woman gives herself to the man and the man gives himself to the woman.

As we will see in the next lesson, when God says to Israel, "You will be my people and I will be your God," that's a covenant. What's happening is that Israel is swearing an oath to God - to live according to God's law as His people, His children. In turn, God is swearing to be Israel's God, its divine parent. There are blessings for keeping the covenant and curses for breaking it.

In the ancient world, covenants made families. Even ancient treaty documents between nations used "father-son" imagery. Outsiders were "adopted" into a tribe through covenant oaths. So, when we study the Bible we need to see how the meaning of "covenant" is steeped in that ancient idea of family-making.

The whole Bible can be outlined as a series of family-making covenants.

That's the "point" of the whole Bible story - how God, through these covenants, reveals more and more of Himself to his creatures and asks them to enter into a family relationship with Him. St. Paul sums up God's intentions, this way: "As God said: 'I will live with them and move among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people?...I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' says the Lord Almighty." (see 2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

Throughout the salvation history told in the Bible God acts through His covenants to extend the Family of God. He starts small with just two people, Adam and Eve, and proceeds - through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David - until finally all nations are brought into the covenant through Jesus Christ.

The plan from the beginning was to make all men and women into His sons and daughters through the covenants, which are all summed up in Jesus' New Covenant, where God sends us "a Spirit of adoption, through which we can cry, Abba, 'Father!'" (see Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5-6).



The Old And New Testaments

We're getting a little ahead of ourselves! The point of what we've said so far is this:

The Bible tells the story of salvation history. Salvation history is the story of God's marvelous work, since the creation of the world, to make all men and women His children, to form from the family of mankind a family of God. He does this through a series of covenants that He makes with key figures at key points in the Bible.

These key covenants serve as the outline for reading the whole Bible. If we know them and understand them, we'll have a good working understanding of the "plot" of the Bible. And by the end of this Beginner's Class, you'll know the covenants and understand them!

There's only one more thing we need to know before we crack the cover on the Good Book and start reading.

We need to know why the Bible is divided into Old and New Testaments. Lots of Christians ignore the Old Testament because it was what happened before Jesus. But when you understand that salvation history began with the creation of the world in the Old Testament and progressed through the series of Old Testament covenants, then you realize why the Old Testament is so important. The division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments is much more than a literary or historical marker.

Remember, "testament" is just another word for "covenant." And what goes on in the Old Testament is all about preparing the way for and announcing what's going to happen in the New Testament. Christ and His cross, is like the "hinge" between the Old and the New Testaments. All the covenants that God made in the Old Testament find their fulfillment - their full meaning and purpose - in Jesus, in His "new Covenant."

Starting in the Beginning:

An Introduction to Genesis

The Story of Creation

We're ready now to start reading the Bible! We're going to start at the beginnings, with Genesis, Chapter 1.

The best way to begin is by reading Genesis, Chapter 1, right now. Then you'll be ready to read what follows.

Too often people read the story of creation in terms of a religion vs. science debate. Yet, that imposes our historical situation on the text and misses the literary clues that explain to us the "religious" meaning the story had for ancient Israel, and the religious meaning that God intends for us in the 21st century.

Genesis 1:1 tells us that in the beginning the world was "formless and empty." The plot proceeds by showing us how God sets out to fix this - first, by giving the world form and then filling it.

In Days 1-3, God creates the "form" or the "realms" of the world - the day and the night; the sky and the sea; the land and the vegetation.

In Days 4-6, God fills these realms with "rulers" or "governors" - the sun, moon & stars (which "rule over the day and over the night"; verses 14-19); the birds and the fish to fill the sky and the seas; and man and beast, which rule the land.

There's a perfect order to all this. First God creates the "structure" of the world, then He fills that structure with living beings. It's like He's making a house and then putting inhabitants into it. And the individual days match up, too.

On Day 1, God creates day and night. On Day 4, He creates the "rulers" for the realms of day and night - the sun the moon and the stars.

On Day 2, He makes the sky and the sea. On Day 5, the sky and the sea are given their "governors," the fish and birds.

On Day 3, the land and the vegetation are created. And on Day 6, animals and the first humans are given dominion, rule over that land.

After each day of creation, God sees that His work is "good." After the six "work days" are through, God sees that His work is "very good." The word "very" is used to mark the end of the creation cycle, since God had finished creating the realms and the rulers.



The Word and the Sabbath

Something also to note, as we read these first few verses of the Bible. How does God create? By speaking His Word. He says “Let there be...” and things come into being. We know by reading the Old Testament in light of the New Testament, that the Word of God by which He created the world is Jesus (see John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-17).

That’s something to remember - not only when you read the rest of the Bible, but everytime you go to Mass, too. God’s Word always does things. God’s Word does what it says it’s doing. When He says, “Let there be light,” His Word creates light, really and truly. God’s Word does what it says it’s doing.

This same power of the living Word of God is at work in the sacraments of the Church. When the priest speaks the Word of Jesus: “This is My Body,” the bread and wine at the altar become the Body and Blood of Christ. When the priest speaks the Word of Jesus: “I absolve you” or “I baptize you,” that Word creates the reality it speaks about.

The creative power of the Word of God is one of the most important things to learn from these early verses of Genesis.

One more interesting thing to point out. We may have a hint of the Church’s doctrine of the Trinity in these early verses of Genesis.

Notice that we have three divine actors here - there is God, there is the Word that He speaks, and there is the Spirit that’s describe hovering over the face of the deep (see Genesis 1:2). Note that the New American Bible translates this “a mighty wind.” But it’s more accurately translated in the Revised Standard Version: “The Spirit of God,” which follows the Vulgate, the Church’s official Latin edition (“spiritus Dei) and the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament (“pneuma Theos”).

Notice, too, that God appears to be talking to Himself in the plural: “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26-27). Why didn’t God say, “Let Me make man in My image, etc.”?

We don’t know. Scholars and saints have puzzled over this for years. We mention it here because it may be our first hint of what Jesus will later reveal - that God is three divine Persons in One: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:19).

On the seventh day, God rests and blesses His creation. Now we’re into the next chapter of Genesis (see Genesis 2:2-3). It’s not that God got tired. We should see this cosmic rest and blessing as the first of the cycle of covenants that we will see throughout the Bible.

God, by His act of establishing the Sabbath, is making a covenant with His creation, and especially with all of humanity, represented by the man He created in His own image. That seems to be what Jesus is getting at when He says: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28).

It makes sense, when you think about it: God doesn’t create the world for no reason - to be detached or somehow unrelated to Him. He creates the world, and the human family out of love. The Sabbath is the sign of that covenant and that love.

God explains this later when He gives Moses the Sabbath laws for the people of Israel. He says the Sabbath is “a perpetual covenant” (see Exodus 31:16-17). That’s why the Catechism calls the creation story the “first step” in God’s covenant-making and “the first and universal witness to God’s all-powerful love” (no. 288).

Also, the Hebrew word for “oath-swearing” is sheba, a word that’s based on the Hebrew word for the number “seven.” In Hebrew, to swear an oath, which is what you do when you make a covenant, is “to seven oneself” (see Abraham’s oath in Genesis 21:27-32).

So, what God seems to be doing here on the seventh day, is not resting, but binding Himself to His creation in a perpetual covenant relationship. And we’ll see this pattern of covenant continuing throughout the Bible.

By reading the creation story according to the “content and unity” of the entire Bible, we see something else that’s important about the story of creation.



We see that the creation account is describing God's creation of the world as the building of a temple, a holy place where God will dwell and meet His creatures. Like the Temple He later ordered to be built in Jerusalem, the "temple" of creation is a holy place where He will dwell and where men and women will worship and offer sacrifice.

We see this in the Book of Job, Chapter 38, where the creation of the world is described in terms of temple building.

In fact, if we compare the creation account with the accounts of the building of the tabernacle and the Temple, we'll see that both of these holy dwellings are described in terms very similar to those used to describe the creation of the world.

For instance, when Moses constructs the tabernacle, God speaks to Him 10 times ("The Lord said to Moses"). It's no coincidence that God spoke 10 times in Genesis 1 ("Let there be..."). And there are more parallels:

God beholds that His creation is good (Genesis 1:31). Moses beholds that his work has been done as the Lord commanded (Exodus 39:43). Compare also Genesis 2:1 and Exodus 39:32 and Genesis 2:2 and Exodus 40:33.

Also: God blesses and hallows the Sabbath when He is done and Moses blesses the tabernacle (Genesis 2:3; Exodus 39:43; 40:9). Finally, both accounts end with a declaration that the Sabbath is holy (Genesis 2:2-4; Exodus 31:12-17).

You'll see the same patterns in 1 Kings 6-8 which describes the building of the Temple. King Solomon consecrates the Temple in the seventh month, on the seventh day of a seven-day feast, offering seven petitions - another not-so-subtle allusion to the creation story.

As the Spirit "hovered" over the primordial waters, the Spirit of God fills Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 8:10), as it also did when Moses consecrated the meeting tent (see Exodus 40:35).

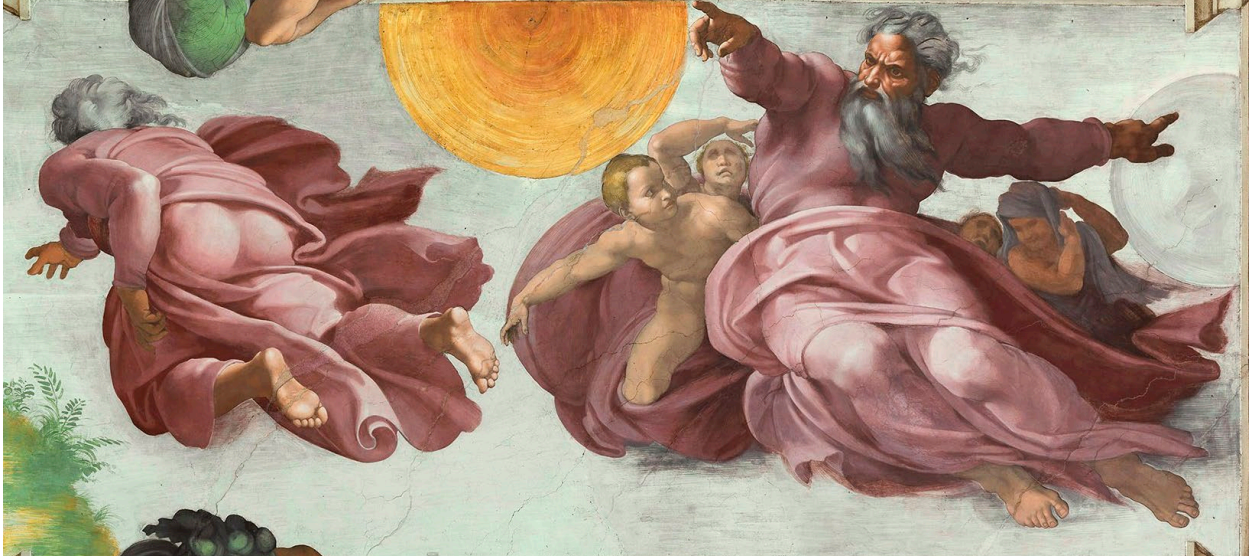
In the Temple, it was the "sanctuary," the "holy of holies" that was truly the dwelling place of God, the holiest of places.

And in the creation account in Genesis, the Garden of Eden, where God placed the man and the woman, is described in terms similar to those used to describe the inner precincts of the Temple.

The Garden was entered from the East, as was the Temple sanctuary. The cherubim posted by God at the entrance of the garden resemble those posted in the sanctuary of Solomon's temple (see Genesis 3:24; Exodus 25:18-22, 26-31; 1 Kings 6:23-29).

God "walks" in the garden (Genesis 3:8) as He is said to dwell in the Temple sanctuary (see Leviticus 26:11-12; Deuteronomy 14:23; 2 Samuel 7:6-7).

We'll see more parallels in our next lesson as we look more in-depth at the creation of man and woman and their "fall."



For prayer and reflection:

The Genesis creation story is the first of nine Scriptures that are read during the Easter Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday night. Read all the readings for the Vigil, the Responses and, if possible the prayers that go along with the readings. Ask God to help you see the pattern of salvation history that these readings unfold, using the prayer that's said during the Vigil after the reading of Genesis and the Psalm:

Almighty and eternal God, You created all things in wonderful beauty and order.
Help us now to perceive
how still more wonderful is the new creation
by which in the fullness of time
You redeemed your people
through the sacrifice of our Passover, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns forever and ever.

Amen.

The readings for the Easter Vigil are as follows:

Genesis 1:1-2:2 Response: Psalm 104:1-2,5-6,10-14,24,35
Genesis 22:1-18 Response: Psalm 16:5,8, 9-11
Exodus 14:15 -15:1 Response: Exodus 15:1-6,17-18
Isaiah 54:5-14 Response: Psalm 30:2-6,11-13
Isaiah 55:1-11 Response: Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6
Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4 Response: Psalm 19:8-10,11
Ezekiel 36:16-17, 18-28 Response: Psalm 42:2-5; 43:3-4
Romans 6:3-11 Response: Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23
Matthew 28:1-10 (Year A) or Mark 16:1-7 (Year B) or Luke 24:1-12 (Year C)

LESSON TWO

CREATION, FALL AND PROMISE

Lesson Outline

1. Review and Overview
2. Man and Woman: The Original Image
 - I. God's First-Born Son
 - II. Father of a Priestly People
3. Falling Down
 - I. Figures and Riddles
 - II. That Snake Adam Saw
 - III. Scared Unto Death?
 - IV. Left Holding the Fruit
4. A Test of Love - Failed
 - I. Sacrifice and Selfishness
 - II. Dying the Death Threat
 - III. New Covenant Bride
5. The New Adam and the New Eve
6. Study Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To read Genesis 1-3 with understanding.
- II. To learn God's "original intent" in creating man and woman.
- III. To understand the sin of Adam and Eve and understand God's promise of a New Adam and a New Eve.

Review and Overview



A First Reading

We pick up this month where we left off in our last lesson: God had just finished creating the world.

He started out with nothing and six “days” later He had fashioned, through His Word (“Let there be...”), a virtual “Temple” in which He would dwell with all that He created. On the seventh day, He made a “covenant” with the world - binding Himself to His creation for all time.

Now, we turn back to concentrate on the crown jewel of God’s creation - the human race. In this lesson we’ll be learning about our ancestors, the founding father and mother of the human family.

We’ve all heard this story a thousand times. But this time we’re going to read it as the start of salvation history, the start of God’s relationship with the human family.

SECTION II.

Man and Woman:

The Original Image

God's First-Born Son

God, we're told, "created man in His image...in the divine image...male and female" (see Genesis 1:26-28).

What does it mean that God created man in "the divine image"? It means that the human person is a child of God.

How do we know that? Remember what we said in our last lesson: the way a Catholic reads the Bible is to interpret the Old Testament in light of the New Testament.

So, we turn to the Gospel of Luke. There you'll find it explained that Adam is "the son of God" (Luke 3:38). We, see too, elsewhere in Genesis, that the phrase "image and likeness" is used to describe the birth of Seth, Adam's son (see Genesis 5:3).

In the language of the Bible, to be born in someone's "image and likeness," means to be that person's child. So, when God creates man in His image, He creates Him to be His son.

From the very beginning, then, we see that God intended people to be His children, His divine offspring.

Father of a Priestly People

Adam is created as God's first-born son. He's also conceived as a priest.

In our last lesson, we saw how the world was fashioned as a Temple and the Garden of Eden was depicted as the sanctuary of the Temple - the holy place where God dwells.

Well, you can't have a temple without a priest to guard it and keep it and to offer sacrifices. And that's the task that God gives to Adam. It's a "priestly" task. But you need to know a little Hebrew to understand it.

Adam is placed in the Garden "to cultivate and care for it" (see Genesis 2:15). Something important gets lost in the translation of those words.

In the original Hebrew text, the words used are 'abodah and shamar. And they are words associated with priestly service.

In fact, the only other places in the Bible where you find those two words used together are in the Book of Numbers, where they are translated as "service," and "charge," and used to describe the duties of the Levites, the appointed priests of Israel (see Numbers 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6).

The Levites were in charge of protecting the sanctuary and the altar. And Adam was given the duty of protecting, of caring for, the Garden. All this will become very important when we study Adam's disobedience and fall from grace.

For now, however, let's just note that Adam is described in Genesis as a first-born priest. We also note that he's given the command to "be fertile and multiply" (see Genesis 1:28). Adam is to be the first-born son of God and the father of a people. Since, he's also a priest, it follows that his people are intended to be a priestly people.

What we find, then, in Genesis' account of the creation of mankind is God's original intent for the human race - it is to be a family of God and a priestly people.

If you try to "listen ahead," you'll hear these echoes throughout the Old and New Testaments: Israel will be called God's first-born son and a priestly people.

When Jesus comes, He will be called the Son of God and the "new Adam" and the "first-born of many brethren" and the High Priest. The Church will be referred to as a priestly people.

We'll see all this in detail in future lessons in this class. But it all starts here with Adam, our father.

Section II. End

Falling Down

Figures and Riddles

How are we, sophisticated, 21st-century Catholics that we are, supposed to read the account of Adam and Eve's fall from grace in Genesis 3 - with its fable-like setting, its talking trickster snake, its gullible couple, oddly named trees, and forbidden fruit?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us some good advice here:

“The account of the fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man. Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents” (see no. 390).

What's the Catechism getting at here? First, the story in Genesis 3 is written in “figurative language” - it's more like poetry than journalism, more like a painting than a documentary film.

Nevertheless, the story “affirms” an actual event that indeed “took place” at the beginning of human history. What's more, that event, “the original fault” of Adam and Eve, forever “marked” human history.

We can't, then, read Genesis 3 like we're reading a newspaper. But we can't read it like it's a myth or a fairy tale or a fable - as if it's about something that never happened.

Scholars tell us that Genesis is best understood as an example of the ancient literary style known as *mashal* - “a riddle” or a “proverb” in which there are layers of double meaning.

And when we read Genesis 3 closely, we find the story turns on a number of tricky passages, and words filled with multiple meanings: life, death, wise, trees.

That Snake Adam Saw

Let's back up a few paces. Let's look at our characters. First, who's this “serpent”?

We're all used to the storybook Bible image of the long, thin snake slithering around the apple tree. But we might have to change our visual image of this scene.

The Hebrew word used to describe the “serpent,” *nahash*, implies something much more deadly.

Throughout the Old Testament *nahash* is used to refer to powerful, even gigantic, evil creatures. Isaiah calls the *nahash* a sea dragon, the great Leviathan (see Isaiah 27:1). Job also uses *nahash* to depict terrible sea monsters (see Job 26:13).

This is clearly the image the Book of Revelation has in mind when it describes “a huge red dragon” in the heavens, “the huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world” (see Revelation 12:3,9).

The Church, of course, has always interpreted the serpent in Genesis 3 as Satan, the Devil in slithering form (see Catechism, nos. 391-395). So we know, as readers, something that Adam probably didn't know - that this encounter with the serpent was a test against evil, a battle for the soul of mankind.

But we need to see what Adam saw. Once we appreciate that the serpent was a lot more than a little garden-variety snake, we begin to understand why Adam failed in his duties to “guard” his wife and Eden (see Genesis 2:15).

Scared Unto Death?

To put it bluntly: Adam was scared to death, scared of dying. He saw the serpent as a threat to his life.

We know that Adam understood what death was. How do we know that? Because God warned him that if he ate the fruit he would die (see Genesis 2:17). If Adam didn't know what death was, God's warning wouldn't have made any sense.

Adam was scared that if he didn't do what the serpent wanted he would be made to suffer and die.

This story, this understanding of Adam's failure, may be behind a passage we find in the Letter to the Hebrews. It says the Devil has "the power of death" and says also that "through fear of death," the human race had been held "subject to slavery" (see Hebrews 2:14-15).

That doesn't mean Adam didn't have any moral choice or responsibility in the matter.

He chose to save his life, but wound up losing it. He feared dying more than he feared disobeying the Father who loved him and gave him paradise. And in this he plunged the whole human race into slavery.

Left Holding the Fruit

Hold on, a minute. Why are we talking about Adam? Why is it his fault? Isn't the whole story about Eve?

After all, the serpent first addresses "the woman." In fact, the phrase, "the woman" is used four times in six verses and the man doesn't come into play until the very end, when it's mentioned that "her husband" was also "with her."

Clearly, it would seem, Genesis wants us to know that it's the woman's fault: She did all the work, negotiating with the snake, weighing the pros and cons, and finally taking the fruit. The man just ate the fruit the woman gave to him.

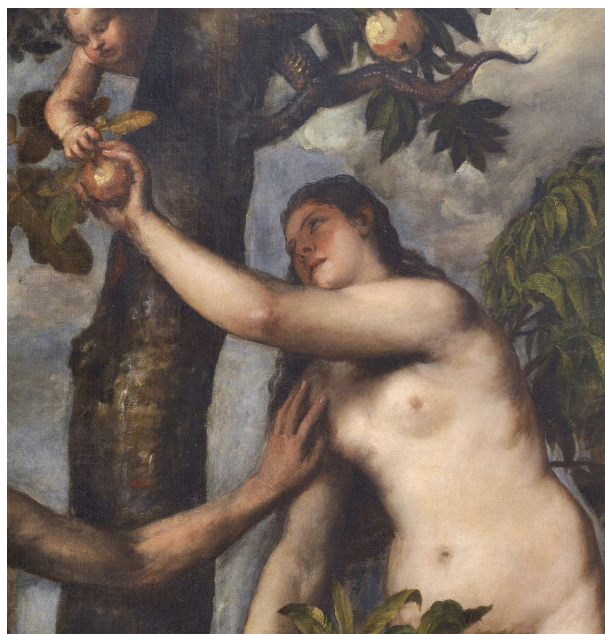
But is that really the point? Why does St. Paul and the tradition of Church teaching after him, understand this episode as depicting the sin of Adam (see Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45)?

First, we need to stress what the story only tells us at the end - that Adam was with her all along (see Genesis 3:6).

In fact, in the Hebrew, every time the serpent says the word "you" he's speaking in a tense that we don't have in English - something like "second-person-plural." He's saying, in effect, "you guys" or "y'all."

So Adam was on the scene the whole time. Why didn't he speak up, why didn't he take up the serpent's challenge?

That seems to be the point. In his fear for his own skin, Adam left his wife hanging, left her to fend for herself. He was "her husband," the text emphasizes. Husbands are supposed to stand up for their wives - even lay down their lives for them. That's what marital love is (see Ephesians 5:25).



A Test of Love - Failed

Sacrifice and Selfishness

What's going on here in the Garden? Adam failed a test of his love - not only of his love for Eve, but his love for God.

God gave Adam the responsibility of guarding the garden sanctuary, the dwelling place of God and man.

In the confrontation with the serpent, he failed in his duties. He didn't protect the garden or his wife or himself.

Why did God test him like this? Because covenant love requires total self-giving. Self-sacrifice is essential to fulfilling the obligations of the human relationship with God.

Remember what we said in the last lesson: A covenant means that God "gives Himself" to His people and the people, in turn vow to "give themselves" to God.

In the Scriptures, each of the covenants requires the people to make a symbolic offering of themselves to God.

There is no covenant without sacrifice. The sacrifice is offered by the people to symbolize their offering of "themselves" to God. The sacrifice is a kind of token of their commitment to the covenant, their commitment to give all that they have and all that they are to God.

Noah makes a sacrifice from each of the animals he took with him in the ark. Abraham is asked to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. The Israelites in the time of Moses are required to sacrifice an unblemished lamb in the place of their firstborn. And in the time of David's son Solomon, sacrifices were offered daily in the Temple.

Each of the covenants foundered and was only partially successful. Why? Because of a failure of love, a failure of sacrifice. The people refused to give themselves completely.

Noah, Abraham and the rest all did great things. But they also did dumb and terribly wrong things: Abraham took a concubine. Noah became drunk. Moses lost his temper in the desert. Israel worshipped the golden calf. David committed adultery with Bathsheba. His son, Solomon, built a harem in addition to building the Temple.

We see in Adam's failure the beginning of this pattern. In fact, because the human race was so weakened by Adam's original sin that no one could give himself completely to God. And because of Adam's sin, humanity lost its birthright - its divine inheritance, its membership in God's family.

Death Threats

But before we move from Adam to Jesus, let's look at the riddle of the story. God tells Adam and Eve not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. "The moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die," he warns (see Genesis 2:17).

In the Hebrew there is a "double death" threat here - literally "You shall die" or "die the death." Why the repetition of the word "die" Can you be more dead than dead?

The serpent directly contradicts God. He tells Adam and Eve: "You certainly will not die" (see Genesis 3:4). He says, too that they will be like "gods who know what is good and bad" (see Genesis 3:5).

And it's true that when they eat the fruit, they don't keel over and die. Instead, their eyes are opened just like the serpent said they would be (see Genesis 3:7). Even God has to admit, "See! The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (see Genesis 3:22).

Is the serpent right? Was God lying to the two? It certainly looks that way on the surface.



But of course it isn't that way.

Adam and Eve do die the moment they eat the fruit - spiritually. The truth in Satan's lie was this: Adam and Eve would not die a physical death once they ate the fruit. Adam and Eve lost something greater than natural life when they sinned; they lost supernatural life, the life of grace in their souls.

Seduced into trying to be like God without God, they died the death. Yes, they chose the fruit freely, like God they exercised free will. But their freedom only led them into slavery. Their eyes were indeed opened, and they discovered their nakedness and were ashamed.

We know that Satan has "the power of death" (see Hebrews 2:14-15). Adam and Eve should have listened to God, whose warning seems to echo in these words of Jesus: "And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna" (see Matthew 10:28).

Section IV. End

SECTION V.

The Second Coming of Adam and Eve

But even as His children have exiled themselves from paradise through sin, God promises them redemption, a homecoming.

He promises that throughout human history there will be an “enmity” between the serpent, Satan, and the woman, “the mother of all the living,” and between their offspring (see Genesis 3:15, 20).

The early Fathers of the Church called this the “First Gospel” (Proto-Evangelium).

God was promising, here in the first pages of the Bible, a new Adam and a new Eve, to undo the damage done by the first couple.

St. Paul called Jesus the “last Adam” or the New Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-49; Romans 5:14). And the tradition of the Church has always seen Mary as the “new Eve” (see Catechism, nos. 410-411). ;

As Adam called Eve “woman,” we see Jesus call Mary “woman” (compare Genesis 2:23 and John 2:4).

As Eve disregarded God’s commands, Mary offers herself freely to the will of God and says “Do whatever He tells you” (see Luke 1:38; John 2:5).

Finally, as Eve was the “mother of all the living,” Mary is given by Jesus to be mother of the people of God (compare Genesis 3:20 and John 19:26 and Revelation 12:17).

Jesus enters the world as the new Adam - the One who does what Adam was supposed to do.

He comes, not to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him. He comes to serve and to offer His life as a ransom for many (see Mark 10:45; John 15:13).

Jesus enters a garden and experiences the curses of Adam - the dread of death, falling to the dirt, sweating blood from his face in His agony (compare Genesis 3:17-19 and Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 22:44).

He is crowned in thorns and stripped naked (see Matthew 27:29, 31). And He is led to a “tree,” the Cross - which the early Church saw as a symbol of the Tree of Life in the Garden (see Acts 5:30; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24).

Yet on the Cross He was obedient, saying to God in prayer: “Not as I will, but as You will” (see Matthew 26:39).

He does not grasp at “equality with God” as Adam did (see Philippians 2:5-11), but lays down His own life in sacrifice for the sake of the “garden” - the world, for His bride, the Church.

Adam’s bride Eve was created from his side while he slept. The Church, the bride of Christ, was born from His side, which was opened by the soldier’s lance while he slept in death on the cross. His side issued forth blood and water, symbols of baptism and the Eucharist (see Genesis 2:21-22; John 19:34; Catechism, nos. 766; 1067).

Finally, the resurrected Jesus appears in a garden (“in the place where he had been crucified”) to a “woman” and is mistaken as a “gardener” - perhaps a reference to Adam’s task to be keeper of the garden of paradise (see John 19:41; 20:14-18).

All this God promises in the “first gospel.”

Section V. End



For prayer and reflection:

The Mass readings for the First Sunday of Lent (Cycle A) are
Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7;
Psalm 51:3-6, 12-14,17;
Romans 5:12-19;
Matthew 4:1-11.

Read the texts in order and pray for the Lord's help in hearing the connections that the Church wants us to hear. Pray, too, this excerpt from the Opening Prayer for the Mass:

Lord our God,
You formed man from the clay of the earth
and breathed into him the Spirit of life,
but he turned from Your face and sinned....
Bring us back to You
and to the life Your Son won for us
by His death on the cross.

But we have a long way to go before Jesus comes. We'll pick up our the story where we leave off in the Garden in our next lesson.

LESSON THREE

EAST OF EDEN, HEADED TO EGYPT

Lesson Outline

1. East of Eden, Before the Flood
 - I. Cain the Wicked
 - II. Seth the Righteous
 - III. Saved Through Water
2. After the Flood
 - I. Ham's Sin
 - II. To Make a Name
3. Our Father Abraham
 - I. Hebrews and Semites
 - II. Priest of the Most High God
 - III. 'Covenant in Your Flesh'
 - IV. Binding Isaac
4. 4. Age of the Patriarchs
 - I. Jacob the Younger
 - II. Joseph and Judah
5. Study Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To read Genesis 3-50 with understanding.
- II. To understand God's covenants with Noah and with Abraham and to see how these covenants look forward to, and are fulfilled in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ.
- III. To appreciate the key figures in the story of Abraham - Melchizedek, circumcision, the sacrifice of Isaac - as they are interpreted in the Church's tradition.

East of Eden, Before the Flood

Cain the Wicked

In our last lesson, we left our first family, Adam and Eve, on the outside of paradise looking in - exiled by their sin and disobedience, their failure to live up to the demands of God's covenant.

The chapters that follow (see Genesis 4-5) show us the "fruits" of Adam and Eve's original sin: We see that human seed now is mixed between the good and evil. The tension between the two seeds - already prophesied by God in the garden (see Genesis 3:15) - shapes much of the remainder of Genesis, especially the book's first 11 chapters.

The "first fruits" of Adam and Eve - their son Cain - is born of bad seed; his younger brother, Abel, of good. Cain kills Abel, becomes the world's first murderer. As Adam and Eve, the first children of God, rejected the Fatherhood of God, their bad seed rejects the family of man that God intended to create. This is symbolized in Cain's pitiless, spiteful words to God: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (see Genesis 4:9).

Cain's wicked line grows and one of his descendants becomes the first to take two wives - a perversion of the order of marriage God established in the garden (see Genesis 2:21-24) - and boasts of his murderous, vengeful ways (see Genesis 4:23-24).

Seth the Righteous

Then Adam and Eve produce a good seed - Seth. It's the children of Seth, born of Seth's son, Enosh, who first begin to develop a personal, prayerful relationship with God - they "invoke the Lord by name" (see Genesis 4:26). The word name in Hebrew is *shem*. Just remember that for now, it will become important later.

Chapters 4 and 5 of Genesis give us a kind of comparison of the "bad seed" and "good seed" of Adam. We read of the sons of Cain (see Genesis 4:17-24) and the sons of Seth (see Genesis 5:1-32). From the first, come the unrighteous sons and "daughters of man" and from the latter, the righteous "sons of heaven" (see Genesis 6:2).

But sin infects even the righteous. And Seth's descendants, seduced by the beauty of the daughters of Cain's line, take them as wives. Worse yet, they follow Lamech's example and take more than one wife - "as many of them as they chose" (see Genesis 6:1-4).

The fruits of the "intercourse" of the sons of Seth and the daughters of Cain were men of even more violence and wickedness - "men of renown," which Scripture elsewhere calls "proud giants...skilled in war" (see Wisdom 14:6; Baruch 3:26-27).

Finally, God is overcome with "sorrow" and "regret" at "how corrupt the earth had become, since all mortals led depraved lives" (see Genesis 6:5,7,12). Remember: God doesn't actually get sorry or repent or change His mind like humans do - this is just a figure of speech to tell us how awful things had become (see Numbers 23:19; Malachi 3:6).



Saved Through Water

In the flood, God totally obliterates the line of Cain, drowns it out. The line of Seth continues through Noah, who “walked with God” and “found favor” with Him (see Genesis 5:27-29; 6:9-10).

The story of the flood (Chapters 7-9) is told as a new creation story, with lots of subtle and obvious references back to Genesis 1. In the context of the entire book of Genesis, the flood story shows us God giving the world a new start, starting His family anew in the line of Seth.

Noah is like a new Adam. Like Adam, Noah is given authority over the animals (compare 1:26 and 9:2-3). He is also given the same command as God gave to Adam: “be fertile and multiply and fill the earth.” (compare 1:28 and 9:1). Finally, as He did with Adam, God makes a covenant with Noah and through him with all living beings (compare 2:1-2 and 9:13).

With this covenant with Noah, God renews the covenant He made with creation in the beginning. The rainbow sign is like the Sabbath, a symbol of God’s communion with His creation. We have here, the second of the major covenants that form the “organizational principle” of the Bible.

Remember what we said in our first lesson: The Bible is organized according to a series of family-making covenants. With each covenant God reveals a little bit more of Himself to us. In the covenant with Noah He gives the family of God the shape of a nuclear family - Noah and his wife and their children. We’ve moved beyond the husband and wife model that He revealed in the covenant of creation.

Remember what else we said about the covenants in the Bible: Each one points us toward the new and everlasting covenant of Jesus. The covenant symbolized by Adam and Eve pointed us towards the covenant bond between Christ and His Church, which is to be a marriage-like union (see Ephesians 5:21-33).

The covenant with Noah points us to the sacrament of Baptism, by which we become, like Jesus and Noah, beloved sons and daughters in whom God is well pleased (compare Genesis 6:4,8 and Matthew 3:17). The Baptism He brings, like the flood, will destroy sin, and bring us the gift of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove (compare Genesis 8:8-12 and Matthew 3:16).

As Peter tells us, the flood “prefigured Baptism.” In both the flood and Baptism, the human race is “saved through water” (1 Peter 3:20-21; Catechism, nos. 701, 1219).

Section I. End

After the Flood

Ham's Sin

Unfortunately, human history after the flood unfolds much as it did after creation.

As Adam (whose name in Hebrew literally means “ground”) was given a garden to till, Noah plants a vineyard and becomes “a man of the soil” (see Genesis 2:15; 9:20). And as the forbidden fruit of the garden proves to be Adam’s downfall, so the fruit of Noah’s vine - wine - becomes his. And like Adam’s fall, Noah’s exposes his sin and nakedness (see Genesis 3:6-7; 9:21) and results in a curse (see Genesis 3:14-19; 9:25).

What’s going on in the story of Ham uncovering “his father’s nakedness” (see Genesis 9:22)? In Hebrew, this phrase is a figure of speech used to describe incest (Leviticus 20:17; 18:6-18. Note: In other places besides the story of Noah and Ham, The New American Bible translates this phrase as “to have intercourse with.” The Revised Standard Version in all cases keeps the more literal translation “uncover the nakedness of.” See RSV-Leviticus 20:17; 18:6-18).

To uncover the nakedness of your father is to commit incest with your mother. To state it bluntly, in all its brutality - while Noah was drunk, Ham slept with his mother. We don’t know what Ham was thinking. It could be that he wanted to seize power from his dad and this heinous act was his way of insulting Noah and showing his total disrespect (see similar episodes in Genesis 29:32; 35:22; 49:3-4; 2 Samuel 16:21-22; 1 Chronicles 5:1).

But notice that Noah doesn’t curse Ham. He curses Canaan - the son born of this incestuous encounter. Why Canaan? It’s another hint in the text of what

Ham’s crime was. As we’ll see later, Canaan will be the founding father of a nation that will be known for its abominable practice of maternal incest (see Leviticus 18:3; 18:6-18; Exodus 23:23-24).

Canaan is the bad fruit born of Noah’s sin. But as Adam bore both Cain, the slayer of his brother, and Seth the righteous one, Noah too has a good seed: his firstborn son Shem, who had tried to “cover” his father’s nakedness (see Genesis 9:23).

As he curses Canaan, the bad seed, Noah blesses Shem: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem” (see Genesis 9:26) and says that he will prevail over the wicked spawn, Canaan.

It is interesting to note, too, that the only other episode of drunkenness in Genesis is also associated with incest - and the birth of immoral nations hostile to the people of God. That’s the story of Lot’s daughters, who ply Lot with wine and then lie with him in incestuous unions that are the origin of the Moabites and the Ammonites (see Genesis 19:30-38).

And so Genesis continues - telling the story of the conflict between the two seeds of Noah, the good and the bad. The descendants of Ham become the great national enemies of the people of God - Egypt (Genesis 10:6), Canaan (10:6), Philistia (10:14), Assyria (10:11), and Babylon (10:10).

To Make a Name

From this bad line, came the nations who tried to build the Tower of Babel in order “to make a name [Hebrew = shem] for themselves” (Genesis 11:1-9). In other words, they were trying to build a kind of “counter-kingdom” to stand against the name of God.

As an aside: it’s interesting to note that in Genesis there seems to be a connection between the “name” (shem) and a person’s relationship with God. The big sinners in Genesis - beginning with Adam and Eve who fall for Satan’s promise of being “like gods” - all seem to be trying to make a name for themselves, to exalt themselves, to live as if they don’t need God.

Think back to Cain. When he builds a city, what does he do? He “names” it after his son, Enoch (see Genesis 4:17). That’s all the builders of the Tower of Babel were doing. Trying to glorify their name, their works.

The righteous ones in Genesis don’t try to exalt their name. Instead, they rejoice in the blessings of God - they “call on the name of the Lord.” While Cain is glorifying his name, his righteous brother Seth is hallowing the Lord’s name, seeking His blessing (see Genesis 4:26).

We’ll see this pattern continue with the righteous Abraham (see Genesis 12:8; 13:4; 21:33) and with Isaac (26:25). It’s implied, too, in Noah’s blessing of Shem (9:26). By the way, that’s the first time in the Bible that God is associated with an individual, or where a person is identified by his or her relationship with God. He is “the God of Shem.”

This pattern, too, continues in next chapter of Genesis - as God promises to make Abraham’s “name” great. Abraham’s name is made great by being associated with the name of God. God will even refer to Himself as “the God of Abraham” (see Genesis 26:24; 28:3; Matthew 22:32; Acts 7:2-3).

Throughout the Old Testament, we’ll see that the righteous are those who praise the name of the Lord, and seek in that name their blessing and their help (see Deuteronomy 28:10; Psalm 124:8; 129:8; Proverbs 18:10; Joel 2:23; Micah 4:5; Zephaniah 3:12). This continues in the New Testament, where “every one who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (see Romans 10:13; Acts 2:21; 4:12).



Section II. End

Our Father Abraham

Hebrews and Semites

From the good seed of humanity, the line of God's righteous, Shem's line, comes the first of the great patriarchs, "Abraham the Hebrew" (see Genesis 14:13).

This is the first time the word "Hebrew" appears in the Bible and it's linked to the name of Eber, another son of Shem (see Genesis 10:21). This is why we refer to the chosen people the Hebrews. The descendants of Abraham are also known as "Shemites" or "Semites." Which is where we get our expression for hatred of Jews - "anti-Semitic," which means, hatred of the descendants of the righteous line of Shem.

With the story of Abraham we turn a page in salvation history. The remainder of Genesis (chapters 12-50) tells the story of the "patriarchs," the founding fathers of the chosen people. In Genesis 12-25:18, we'll read about Abraham and his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. In Genesis 25:19-36:43, we hear the story of Isaac and his two sons, Esau and Jacob. And the book concludes, in Chapters 37-50, with the story of Jacob's 12 children, founders of the tribes of Israel, and especially Jacob's son, Joseph.

For simplicity's sake, we're going to refer to him as "Abraham" throughout this lesson, even though he's called "Abram" until God changes his name in Genesis 17:5.

God is going to make a covenant with Abraham, and by that covenant He is going to re-orient human history, give it a new possibility, a new goal.

The covenant with Abraham has three parts, and it begins with three promises: to make Abraham a great nation (see Genesis 12:1-2); to give him a great name (12:2); and to make him the source of blessing for all the world (12:3).

God later "upgrades" these three promises - turning them into divine covenants. God swears not only make Abraham a great nation, He makes a covenant in which He promises to deliver Abraham's descendants from oppression in an alien land and give them a specific territory of land (see Genesis 15:7-21). Not only will his name be great, but God by a covenant oath swears to make Abraham "father of a host of nations," a royal dynasty - "kings shall stem from you" (see Genesis 17:1-21).

God elevates His third promise by swearing to make Abraham's descendants "as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore." In Abraham's descendants "All the nations of the earth shall find blessing" (see Genesis 22:16-18).

By these three covenant oaths, God points our eyes to the future of salvation history.

Abraham is made a great nation in the Exodus, when by the covenant He makes with Moses, God makes Abraham's descendants into a nation possessing the land promised to Abraham (see Genesis 46:3-4). We will read about this in our next lesson, when we look at the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy.

God's second oath is fulfilled when David is made King and promised with a great name (see 2 Samuel 7:9) and an everlasting throne (see Psalm 89:3-5; 132:11-12).

And finally, these covenants point us to Jesus. His New Covenant fulfills God's promise to make the children of Abraham the source of blessing for all the nations. That's why in the very first line of the New Testament we find the words "Jesus Christ...the son of Abraham" (see Matthew 1:1).

Priest of the Most High God

“There are three more scenes from the dramatic life of Abraham that we need to look at because they point us forward to the New Testament.

The first is Melchizedek, the mysterious king of Salem, who makes his appearance after Abraham defeats the warrior kings to free his nephew Lot (Genesis 14).

Notice that he appears out of nowhere. He has no genealogy and his capital, “Salem” isn’t mentioned before in the book. Salem, as we see later in the Bible, is a short form of the name Jerusalem (see Psalm 76:2-3).

Melchizedek brings out bread and wine and declares a blessing on Abraham. The Church Fathers, saw this is as foreshadowing the Eucharist. And the Church’s Liturgy reflects this tradition in its First Eucharist Prayer, which refers to “the bread and wine offered by your priest Melchizedek (see Catechism, no. 1333).

The Bible sees Melchizedek as a figure of the son of David, who is declared “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (see Psalm 110:4). He is also, in the New Testament, seen as a figure of Jesus, the eternal royal high-priest (see Hebrews 7).

‘Covenant in Your Flesh’

Circumcision is the sign God gives of His covenant oath to make Abraham’s descendants a royal dynasty. “Thus my covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting pact” (see Genesis 17:1-14). Jesus is circumcised to show that He is in the flesh a member of the people of the covenant (see Luke 2:21).

But circumcision is also a physical sign that points us to Baptism, the spiritual and sacramental sign by which we enter into the New Covenant, the royal family of God.

Already in the prophets, “circumcision of the heart” had become a sign of dedication of one’s whole being to God (see Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; compare Romans 2:25-29; 1 Corinthians 7:18-19). The prophet Jeremiah said that the law of the New Covenant would be written on the heart (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). This happens in Baptism which is the “circumcision of Christ” (see Colossians 2:11) and the true circumcision (Philippians 3:3).



Binding Isaac

St. Paul said that the story of Abraham's two sons - the illegitimate Ishmael born to the slave girl Hagar, and his heir Isaac born by God's promise to his wife Sarah - was meant to symbolize the difference between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant (see Galatians 4:21-31).

But there is an even more profound symbolism in the awful test that God gives to Abraham - to offer his only beloved son, Isaac, as a sacrifice.

Beginning in the Bible and coming to full flower in the writings of Church Fathers like St. Augustine, this story was seen as foreshadowing God's offering of his only beloved Son on the Cross at Calvary (see John 3:16).

God twice here praises Abraham's faithfulness - "You did not withhold from me your own beloved son" (see Genesis 22:12,15-16). St. Paul cites the Greek translation of these exact words when He talks about the Crucifixion - "He who did not spare His own Son but handed Him over for us all..." (see Romans 8:32).

There are other interesting parallels that Church Fathers saw:

For instance, the mountain where God tells Abraham to perform the sacrifice: Mount Moriah is in same place that Melchizedek came from - Salem. It's the site where one day Solomon will build the Lord's Temple (see 2 Chronicles 3:1). In fact, Jewish tradition says that the name Jerusalem comes from attaching Abraham's word of faith - God "will provide" (see Genesis 22:8; Hebrew = yir'eh or jira) to the word Salem.

Calvary, where Jesus was crucified, is one of the hills of Moriah. And as Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice, and submitted to being bound to the wood, so too will Jesus, "the son of Abraham" (see Matthew 1:1), carry His cross and let men bind Him to it. St. Augustine even saw in the ram caught in the thicket, an image of Christ crowned with thorns.

Even Abraham's words to his servants: "We will worship and then come back to you" (see Genesis 22:5) can be heard as a promise of resurrection. That's how these words are interpreted in The Letter to the Hebrews: "He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead, and he received Isaac back as a symbol" (see Hebrews 11:17-19). In fact, Isaac is spared "on the third day" (see Genesis 22:4).

As Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son was counted as a sign of his faithfulness, the sacrifice of Christ brings us "the blessing of Abraham" (see Galatians 3:14).



Section III. End

Age of the Patriarchs

Jacob the Younger

Isaac grows up to marry Rebekah. Like his mother Sarah, she's barren. But Isaac, as his father Abraham had before him, appeals to God to give them children (see Genesis 25:21;15:3).

While her twins are fighting in her womb, God tells Rebekah that each will be a nation, but the younger of the two, Jacob, will rule the older, Esau (see Genesis 25:23).

This is another sub-plot in Genesis. Notice that God chooses always the younger son, even though the way of the world is to grant privileges and pride of place to the older. Abel's offering is preferred to Cain's. Isaac over Ishmael. And Jacob's youngest son, Joseph, becomes the hero of the later books of Genesis, while Reuben, Jacob's first-born, fails to defend him against his brothers (see Genesis 37).

Why does God do this? It's as if the betrayal by God's "first-born" son, Adam, upset the harmony between the ways of the world and the ways of God. But God's plan will not be frustrated. He saves us despite ourselves, choosing the young, the weak and the sinful to show that salvation history is governed by His free grace and His love. St. Paul, interpreting this Scripture, says God chose Jacob over Esau "in order that God's elective plan might continue, not by works but by His call...So it depends not upon a person's will or exertion, but upon God" (see Romans 9:11-13).

We'll see this, too, throughout the Bible, especially in the story of David, the youngest son of Jesse, who God commands to be anointed king (see 1 Samuel 16:1-13). The youngest or last born are the engines of salvation history until the coming of Jesus, God's only begotten Son, the first-born of the new family of God. Jesus fulfills the promise of Israel, which, as we will see in our next lesson, is God's "first-born son" among the nations (see Exodus 4:22).

Don't be distracted by the drama and trickery of how Jacob secures Isaac's blessing. Esau had proven himself unworthy of the blessing, selling his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. As the Scripture says: "Esau cared little for his birthright" (see Genesis 25:29-34).

Jacob's deception is criticized by the prophets (see Hosea 12:4; Jeremiah 9:3), and he gets his "payback" in the text of Genesis. For instance, he will be tricked by his uncle Laban into marrying, not Rachel whom he loves, but Laban's firstborn daughter, Leah (Genesis 29:25). And later, when his son Joseph is sold into slavery, his other sons will deceive him by soaking Joseph's coat in goat's blood. The irony surely isn't lost on the narrator of Genesis - Jacob's deception of his father involved the use of goat skins (compare Genesis 27:15-16;37:31-33).

But Jacob's s lie serves God's purposes. God chose Jacob over Esau (see Malachi 1:3;Romans 9:13). Through Jacob, God will extend the blessing he gave to Abraham (see Genesis 28:3-4). God Himself confirms this in showing Jacob a ladder into the heavens (Genesis 28:10-15). Later, Jesus will apply this dream to Himself, revealing that in Him heaven and earth touch, the human and the divine meet. He is what Jacob called "the gateway to heaven" (see John 1:51; Genesis 28:17).

God changes his name to Israel after a mysterious all-night struggle. The name Israel means "He who contended with God" (see Genesis 35:10; Hosea 12:5).

Joseph and Judah

Jacob's twelve sons form the twelve tribes of Israel (see Genesis 47:27; Deuteronomy 1:1).

And in the story of Joseph and his brothers, we again see God choosing the youngest to carry out His plan of salvation.

Joseph foreshadows the sufferings and the salvation won for us by Jesus. He is the victim of jealousy and rejection by His brothers, the children of Israel, and is sold for twenty pieces of silver into slavery in Egypt. Still he forgives his brothers and saves them from death by famine.

Again, he shows us that what men plan as evil, God can use for the purposes of His saving plan (Genesis 50:19-21).

The Bible's first book ends with Israel on his deathbed giving his blessing to his children. To one - Judah, he promises a royal dynasty that will be everlasting (see Genesis 49:9-12). He will rule over all peoples of the world - a Scripture that the Church interprets as a promise of Jesus, the Messiah-King. The line of Judah is the line of the kings David and Solomon (see 2 Samuel 8:1-14; 1 Kings 4:20-21).

Jesus will come as the royal son of David (see Matthew 1:1-16) and the Lion of Judah (see Revelation 5:5).

God's family has wandered from East of Eden to Egypt. In our next lesson, we'll see how God fulfills the promise that Jacob makes to Joseph: "God will be with you and will restore you to the land of your fathers" (see Genesis 48:21).



Study Questions

- I. How does the covenant with Noah point us to the Sacrament of Baptism?
- II. What are the three parts of the covenant that God makes with Abraham?
- III. How, according to the Church's ancient tradition, is the sacrifice of Isaac similar to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross?
- IV. For Prayer and Reflection: The Church's Liturgy of the Hours has always included the Cantic of Zechariah (see Luke 1:68-79) in its Morning Prayers and the Magnificat (see Luke 1:46-55) in its Evening Prayers. Both prayers see the coming of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. Pray these biblical prayers of the Church and ask God to help you understand more fully "his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever."

NOTES

LESSON FOUR

ON THE WAY TO THE PROMISED LAND

Lesson Outline

1. Review and Overview
 - I. One Down, 72 to Go!
 - II. The Story So Far
2. Out of Egypt, My Son
 - I. Moses and Jesus
 2. God's First-Born Son
 3. Plaguing Pharaoh
 4. The Passover and 'Our Paschal Lamb'
3. Making of the Old Covenant
 - I. Images of the New Exodus
 - II. Testing in the Wilderness
 - III. "A Kingdom of Priests, a Holy Nation"
 - IV. The Golden Calf Affair
4. After the Golden Calf
 - I. Reading Leviticus
 - II. Numbering the Second Generation
 - III. A "Second" Law
5. Study Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To see the importance of the Queen Mother in the Davidic kingdom of the Old Testament.
- II. To understand the duties and privileges that came with the position of Queen Mother.
- III. To see how Mary fills the position of Queen Mother in the kingdom of Christ.

Review and Overview

One Down, 72 to Go!

It has taken us three lessons - half of this beginner's course - to read the Bible's first book. One down, 72 to go! How in the world are we going to finish the Bible in three more lessons?

Remember, we're taking a bird's-eye approach to Scripture in this course. We're trying to show you the broad themes that tie the individual books of the Bible together so that they become, in effect, "chapters" in a single book, a single "Word of God."

We've organized our course around the "peaks" of salvation history - the creation covenant with Adam, the flood and the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Abraham, the covenant with Moses at Sinai, the covenant with David and the New Covenant brought by Jesus Christ. If you understand well these "peaks," you'll be able to see how every book of the Bible "fits."

That's why we've spent so much time on Genesis and that's why we're going to devote this lesson to the experience of the Israelites as recounted in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

But go back and look at those first three lessons, you'll notice something you may not have noticed the first time through: We have been ranging all over the Bible to help us understand what we've been reading. We've shown how the various stories in Genesis have been understood and interpreted in nearly a dozen other Old Testament books, in each of the Gospels, in the New Testament Epistles and the Book of Revelation.

Be sure to look up the citations and references we make to other books of the Bible. First, it will give you a greater familiarity with the whole Bible. But secondly and more importantly, it will deepen your reading, helping you to read the Old Testament in light of the New and the New Testament in light of the Old.

In this lesson, too, be on the look out for these types of connections, especially in the Book of Exodus, where we're going to find images and ideas that turn up again and again in the Old and New Testaments - the figure of Moses, the idea of "the lamb of God," the Passover, and more.

The Mother as Teacher

By way of a quick review, here's how the story has gone so far:

God created the world out of nothing and created man and woman "in His image and likeness," as His children, to be rulers over His divine kingdom on earth. God made a covenant with them, promising to bestow His blessings upon them, and through them, upon the whole world.

But Adam and Eve broke that covenant, rejected their royal birthright as the first-born children of God. Growing up in exile from the original garden sanctuary, their offspring fill the world with blood and all kinds of wickedness.

So God created the world again, in effect, destroying the wicked and saving the just in a great flood. He started His human family again with the family of Noah. But Noah falls, too, and trouble again fills the earth, symbolized by the effort of all the nations of the world to build a tower to the heavens and glorify their name, not the name of God.

At Babel, God scatters the nations to the four corners of the earth, dividing the single human family into a multitude of languages and cultures, confusing their speech and making it impossible for them to understand and work together.



God again raises up a righteous man, through whom He hopes to establish the family of God He intended in the beginning. He makes a covenant with Abraham and promises to Abraham a line of descendants that would last forever, a line through whom God would bestow blessings on all the families and nations of the world.

At the end of Genesis, Abraham's family tree is a large one, consisting of twelve tribes, each headed by a son of Jacob, who was the son of Abraham's beloved son Isaac. Through many twists and turns, the chosen people of the God, the children of Abraham, now identified as the children of Israel (the new name God gave to Jacob), find themselves in Egypt.

In this lesson, we'll see how the family of God grows from a tribal network of patriarchs to a full-fledged nation, under the leadership of a divinely appointed savior and lawgiver, Moses.

Section I. End

Out of Egypt, My Son

Moses and Jesus

The start of Exodus should sound familiar to you. What other figure in the Bible is born under a threat of death, facing a tyrannical ruler who has decreed that all first-born Hebrew males are to be killed?

In the Christmas story, we see Herod dispatch troops to Bethlehem to kill all the first-born Hebrew boys (see Matthew 2:16). In Exodus Pharaoh hatches a more subtle scheme of forced infanticide - ordering Egypt's midwives to kill every Hebrew first-born male child (see Exodus 1:15-16).

Moses, incidentally, is saved by being placed in an "ark" (that's the literal word for what's translated "papyrus basket" in Exodus 2:3; the same word is used for Noah's ark in Genesis 6:14).

The infant Moses and the infant Jesus are saved by family members - Moses by his mother and sister (see Exodus 2:1-10) and Jesus by his mother and father (Matthew 2:13-15; Exodus 2:5-10). And both remained in exile until those who sought their life were dead (see Matthew 2:19-20; Exodus 4:18-19).

There are many more parallels we could trace between the Moses and Jesus - for instance, Jesus fasts for 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness, just as Moses did (see Matthew 4:2; Exodus 34:28) and just like Moses, Jesus goes to a mount and gives a covenant law to His people (see Matthew 5-7; Deuteronomy 5:1-21).

Moses is the prototype for all the men of God that we read about in the rest of the Old Testament and on into the New. The Gospel writers, especially St. Matthew, describe Jesus as a "new Moses," a new leader and king, savior and deliverer, teacher, wonder-worker and suffering prophet.

And the story of Moses - especially the Passover, the parting of the waters, the wandering in the desert, the daily bread from heaven - has a deeper, symbolic meaning for Catholic readers of the Bible.

God's First-Born Son

Moses is called by God to deliver the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt.

What motivates God to act? He was "mindful of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (see Exodus 2:24; Psalm 105:8-11). That's why He repeatedly identifies Himself to Moses as "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob" (see Exodus 3:6, 13,15; 6:2-8).

God had warned Abraham in a dream that they would be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years, but that God would deliver them (see Genesis 15:13-15). Now the Israelites had been in Egypt for 430 years - the first 30 years as privileged guests, relatives of the prime-minister Joseph, the last 400 years as slaves (see Exodus 12:40).

The time had come for Him to fulfill His promise to Abraham - to make His descendants a great nation and to give them a beautiful and bountiful land of their own (see Genesis 28:13-15).

God sends Moses to tell Pharaoh that "Israel is My son, My first-born" (Exodus 4:22; Sirach 36:11).

We see God here again trying to establish His holy family. We see this when He renews His promise to Moses: "I will take you as my own people and you shall have me as your God" (see Exodus 6:7). This anticipates the covenant He will make with them later at Sinai (see Exodus 19:5).

Watch the "character" of God throughout Exodus - what He says and does. He's not a detached "Creator."

God in Exodus truly reveals himself to be the divine Father of Israel (see too Deuteronomy 32:6). He saves His children (see Exodus 12:12-13; 12:29-31), clothes them (see Exodus 12:35-36), guides them (see Exodus 13:21-22), feeds them (see Exodus 16:1-17:7) protects them (see Exodus 14:10-29; 17:8-16), teaches them (see Exodus 20:1-17; 21:1-23:33), and lives with them (see Exodus 25:8; 40:34-38).

In short, He is a Father to them (see Hosea 11:1).

It's not that He is a Father only to Israel. Israel is His first-born not His only son. God is the God of all the nations - and He wants to be a father to all the other nations, too. But Israel is His first-born, His pride and joy. Israel is called out of Egypt to show the other nations the way to live as His children.

But Israel - and its leader - must be righteous before it can preach righteousness to the other nations. That is what's going on in that strange scene before the showdown with Pharaoh - where God tries to kill Moses (see Exodus 4:24-26).

God is serious about His covenant, no one can be exempt from its provisions. Moses was in violation of the covenant with Abraham. His son, Gershom, hadn't been circumcised as God had commanded (see Genesis 17:9-14). Moses' wife, Zipporah, takes matters into her own hands and performs the circumcision, and Moses' life is again saved.

Plaguing Pharaoh

Pharaoh is punished, his nation put under judgment, for failing to respect the rights of God's first-born son.

Pharaoh makes the big mistake of mocking the power of the Moses' God (see Exodus 5:2). In the ten plagues God visits upon him, He both punishes Pharaoh and executes judgment on the Egyptians' many gods (see Exodus 12:12; Numbers 33:4):

- * The Egyptian Nile god, Hapi, is rebuked by the plague of blood on the Nile (see Exodus 7:14-25).
- * Heket, the frog goddess, is mocked by the plague of frogs (see Exodus 8:1-15).
- * The bull god, Apis, and the cow goddess Hathor, are reviled by the plague on the livestock (see Exodus 9:1-7).
- * And the plague of darkness is a rebuke to the sun god, Re (see Exodus 10:21-23).

Scholars believe that each of the plagues can be linked to specific Egyptian deities. Even the final plague that strikes the first-born of Egypt can also be seen as an attack on the political gods of Egypt, because Pharaoh was worshipped as divine and his sons were "divinized" in special ceremonies.

By these divine actions, worked through Moses, God was demonstrating His power - establishing that Israel's God is "a deity great beyond any other" (see Exodus 18:11; 9:16; 11:9).



The Passover and 'Our Paschal Lamb'

Israel's first-born is "passed over" in the last plague, spared the fate of Egypt's first-born.

We have to read the story of the Passover carefully. This story has a great influence on the shape and the meaning of the rest of the Old Testament. It's also vitally important for understanding Catholic beliefs about the meaning of the Cross, the salvation won for us on the Cross, and the memorial of our salvation that we celebrate in the Mass.

The Passover story is one of the Old Testament's defining dramas. But more than that it points us ahead to the defining drama of all salvation history - the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.

Since the earliest days, the Church has understood the Crucifixion and Resurrection as "the Lord's Passover" (see The Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 557-559, 1174, 1337, 1364, 1402). The Eucharist, in turn, is the memorial of the Lord's Passover.

That's why during the Mass the priest presents the consecrated Host to us and declares: "This is the Lamb of God...Happy are those who are called to His supper." The Liturgy is yoking together two New Testament passages (see John 1:29; Revelation 19:9). But what made the New Testament writers talk about Jesus this way in the first place? The answer is the Passover story.

The Church's ancient belief is based on the interpretation of the Exodus story that begins with Jesus and the New Testament writers.

Let's read ahead to John's account of the Crucifixion (see John 19). As Christ is condemned, John notes that it was the "preparation day for Passover, and it was about noon." Why this detail? Because that was the precise moment when Israel's priests slaughtered the lambs for the Passover meal (see John 19:14).

Later, the mocking soldiers give Jesus a sponge soaked in wine. They raise it to him on a "hyssop branch." That's the same kind of branch the Israelites are instructed to use to daub their door posts with the blood of the Passover lamb (see John 19:29; Exodus 12:22).

And why don't the soldier's break Jesus' legs (see John 19:33,36)? John explains that with a quote from Exodus, telling us that it was because the legs of the Passover lambs weren't to be broken (see Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:21).

There are more parallels that we could draw in John's Gospel and in the other Gospel accounts. The Crucifixion is presented in the New Testament as a Passover sacrifice - in which Jesus is both the unblemished Lamb, and the High Priest who offers the Lamb in sacrifice. For the New Testament writers, what we're reading about here in Exodus is a sign that points us to Jesus.

In the Passover, Israel was spared by the blood of an unblemished sacrificial lamb painted on their door posts. The lamb dies instead of the first-born, is sacrificed so that the people could live (see Exodus 12:1-23,27). It is the same with the Lord's Passover, the Cross and Resurrection. The Lamb of God dies so that the people of God might live, saved by "the blood of the Lamb" (see Revelation 7:14; 12:11; 5:12).

"For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed," St. Paul says (see 1 Corinthians 5:7). On the Cross, St. Peter tells us, Jesus was "a spotless unblemished Lamb." By His "Precious Blood" we are "ransomed" from captivity to sin and death (see 1 Peter 1:18-19).

That's what's going on here in Exodus. The first-born sons and daughters of God are being "ransomed" or "redeemed" - bought out of captivity and slavery (see Exodus 6:6; 15:13; Psalm 69:18-19; Isaiah 44:24; Genesis 48:10).

The Israelites were instructed to remember the first Passover by each year eating the Passover lamb's "roasted flesh with unleavened bread." And in His last supper, eaten during Passover, Jesus instructs His followers to remember His Passover in the Eucharist, where we eat His flesh and drink His blood (see John 6:53-58).

Section II. End

The Making of the Old Covenant

Images of the New Exodus

God's great act of deliverance in the Exodus shaped the identity and imagination of the Israelites. We're going to find references to this Exodus throughout the rest of the Old Testament.

The Exodus was the one divine sign above all others that convinced the Israelites that they were God's chosen people. What other people could boast that God had personally delivered them in their time of trial?

We hear this faith in the song that Moses sings when they get to the other side of the Red Sea: "Who is like to You among the gods, O Lord?...In your mercy You led the people You redeemed...The nations heard and quaked...while the people You had made Your own passed over" (see Exodus 15:11,13,14,16).

The memory of God's mighty deeds here in Exodus become the foundation of Israel's identity as a nation and the basis for all of its hopes for the future.

Later in the Old Testament, when Israel through its sin has fallen into captivity and exile, the prophets will predict a "new Exodus," led by a Messiah, a new Moses, who would bring an even greater redemption and deliverance of God's people (see Isaiah 10:25-27; 11:15-16; 43:2,16-19; 51:9-11). This new Exodus, Jeremiah predicted, would mark the start of a "New Covenant" (see Jeremiah 23:7-8; 31:31-33).

In the New Testament, Jesus is the new Moses, leading a new Exodus, liberating God's people from the last enemy - sin and death. We will see all this in our last lesson, when we look at the New Testament in detail.

As we read the story of the crossing of the Red Sea and the testing of Israel in the wilderness beyond the sea, we need to keep in mind how these scenes are understood in the New Testament. There, and throughout the Church's tradition, these historical events are described as symbols foretelling the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist.

As the Israelites passed through the waters into freedom and a new identity as God's chosen people, so too the Christian in baptism is freed from sin and made a child of God. And as the Israelites received manna from heaven and water from the rock, the Christian is given the heavenly bread and spiritual drink of the Eucharist.

"Our ancestors...were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea," Paul wrote. "All ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ" (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

Testing in the Wilderness

Paul also said that we should read the account of Israel's testing in the wilderness "as an example...written down as a warning to us, upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Despite all the signs and wonders worked by God, the story of the Israelites' journey to Sinai after the Exodus is a story of stubbornness and shortsightedness, of the people's inability to trust that God was with them, that the God who delivered them would care for them along their way.

Right off the bat, they grumbled at Mara that the water was too bitter to drink - and God responded by giving Moses the power to make the water sweet (see Exodus 15:22-25).

A month later, they were grumbling for food in the Desert of Sin. God feeds them with manna from heaven, giving them their daily bread every day for 40 years (see Exodus 16). This is the manna that Jesus said was a symbol of the Eucharist (see John 6:30-59).

But even this wasn't proof enough for them. They were thirsty at Meribah and Massah and put God to the test: "Is the Lord in our midst or not?" (see Exodus 17:2,7). So Moses struck the rock, as God instructed, and waters poured out for the people.

Forty years later, in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses explained to the Israelites that God did all this "to test you by affliction and find out whether or not it was your intention to keep His commandments...You must realize that the Lord, your God, disciplines you even as a man disciplines a son" (see Deuteronomy 8:2-5).

Why does God test Israel if He knows everything already? The key is found in Moses' last line - His testing is a form of "fatherly discipline," by which He makes His child stronger.

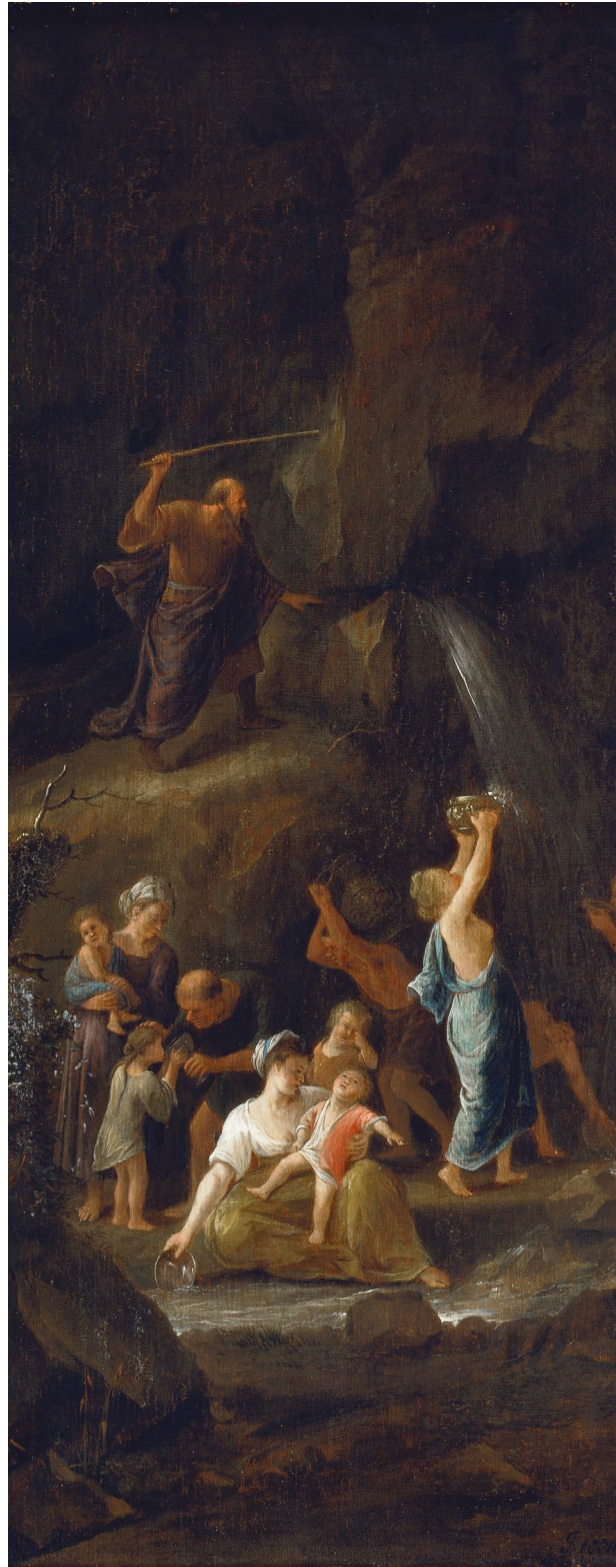
God does not test Israel to learn something that He doesn't already know. He tests to make Israel stronger, to teach the people what they don't know - how much they need God, how without Him they would be nothing. God tested them, Moses said, so that they wouldn't mistake their freedom and prosperity as the work of their own strength.

"Remember then," he told them, "it is the Lord, your God, who gives you the power to acquire wealth, by fulfilling, as He has now done, the covenant which He swore to your fathers" (see Deuteronomy 8:17-18).

'A Kingdom of Priests, A Holy Nation'

At Sinai, God reveals His full purpose for His chosen people, why He bore the people out of Egypt on eagle wings and brought them to Himself (see Exodus 19:4). God wants His first-born son, His own people, to be "to Me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (see Exodus 19:6).

In the covenant at Sinai, we reached a turning point in salvation history. Remember what we've been saying all along: When God makes a covenant, He is making a family, He is making people kin to Himself, His sons and daughters.





Remember, too, that the imagery in the Old Testament is rooted in ancient images of the family. In the ancient family, fathers were both “kings” - rulers, lawgivers and protectors of their family - and “priests,” leading the family in worship and sacrifice. The “first-born” son was the heir to the authority and the kingly and priestly roles of the father.

Since Adam, He has been looking for a “first-born” son worthy of His calling - to guard and keep creation, to offer Him sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, to be a light to all peoples, to dwell with Him intimately.

Adam was the founding father, made the lord of creation and given priestly functions to guard and keep God’s creation (Genesis 1:26; 2:15). Noah, too, was father of a family, and his family became the “first-born” from which God would populate the earth anew after the flood. God then chose Abram, whose name means “mighty father,” and made him Abraham - a name meaning “father of a multitude.”

Through all this history, however, we see that God is forced to pass over the first-borns in many instances because they prove too proud, too unjust and violent. We see that in the case of Cain, Ishmael, Esau, to name just three. Indeed, among the “first-borns” in Genesis, only the ancient line of Shem was faithful.

But God remained faithful to His plan - and His promise. With Israel, His first-born, He is again starting anew. They will be His family, his royal heirs. Already, Moses has instructed that the first-born of Israel be consecrated to God, dedicated to His priestly service (see Exodus 13:2,15; 24:5).

Here at Sinai, God reveals that He wants Israel to be for the family of nations what the first-born was in the ancient family system - priest and king.

God is making His family a nation - but not a nation like the other nations. Israel is to be “a holy nation,” set apart from other nations, an example of holiness and righteous living, an instrument by which God extends His salvation to all the nations.

His covenant at Sinai, as we’ve seen, is intended to fulfill His promise that through Abraham’s descendants, He will bless all the nations of the world. So Israel is being consecrated here at Sinai as a “light to the nations,” leading them in the ways of holiness (see Isaiah 42:6; 49:6).

But don’t miss the big “if” in all of what God is saying here at Sinai: “If you hearken to My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My special possession...a kingdom of priests” (see Exodus 19:5).

God's covenant is conditional. To experience its blessings, Israel must keep His covenant, obey its terms (which are spelled out in Exodus 20-23). If they don't keep His covenant, they may as well be "no people" at all, their number blotted from the face of the earth (see Deuteronomy 32:21; Hosea 1:9; 1 Peter 2:10).

Read the Ten Commandments as a covenant family law, a household code. These laws were primarily given to govern relationships within the growing national household of Israel - they cover how to resolve disputes, how to deal with slaves, how to treat acts of violence, how to make restitution for theft or property damage, and how to relate to God and human authority.

After listening to God's words, Israel swears to keep the covenant (see Exodus 19:8,24:3,7). And Moses builds an altar with twelve pillars, symbolizing that all of the tribes of Jacob had approved the covenant (see Exodus 24:4).

Then He takes the blood from the animals sacrificed and sprinkles it on the people, calling it "the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you" (see Exodus 24:8). Blood is a symbol of family relations. That's what this covenant does - it makes Israel the sons and daughters of God.

Jesus uses these same words at His last supper, but adds the word "New" - telling us that by His blood shed on the Cross for many, God is making a New Covenant (see Mark 14:24; Matthew 26:28).

This is a sign for us that what we're reading about here in Exodus "prefigures" the New Covenant - it is a partial fulfillment of God's plan. The ultimate fulfillment will come with Jesus.

This New Covenant will be "for many" (which means "for everyone"). In the New Covenant, Jesus promises, His twelve apostles will sit in judgment over the twelve tribes of Israel (see Luke 22:30) and as the altar at Sinai was built on the pillars of the twelve tribes, the Church of Jesus will be founded on "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (see Revelation 21:12,14).

All covenants are sealed with a ritual meal, which is why Moses and the 70 elders sit down to eat in the presence of God (see Exodus 24:9-11).

Later, when Israel is in exile as a consequence of breaking the covenant, the prophets will recall this intimacy with God - eating and drinking in His very presence - and teach the people to hope for the day of a new sacred banquet, when they will once again eat in His presence on His holy mountain (see Isaiah 55:1-3; Proverbs 9:1-6).

This hope, too, is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, who speaks of the Father calling a wedding banquet for His Son (see Matthew 22:1-14) and describes the kingdom of God as a great feast (see Luke 14:12-24).

The Golden Calf Affair

No sooner had Israel ratified its covenant with God, than the people fell into idolatry. Moses goes up to the mountain to receive the elaborate instructions about the building and furnishing of the ark, the dwelling for God (see Exodus 25-31) and the people down below create the golden calf and begin worshipping it.

The ancient rabbis used to say that what the forbidden fruit was to Adam the golden calf was to Israel. It is a second fall from grace. The calf is an image of Apis, the Egyptian fertility God and Israel's worship of it is a parody of the covenant at Sinai. As Moses did, they build an altar, rise early to offer sacrifices, eat and drink a ritual meal. They also, the Scripture says, "rose up to revel," which is a polite way of saying that they engaged in orgies associated with the cult of Apis (see Exodus 32:1-6).

God disowns Israel. Notice the shift in language. No longer does He speak of the Israelites as His special people (see Exodus 3:10, 5:1, 6:7). He tells Moses that the Israelites are "your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt" (see Exodus 32:7).

Moses intercedes for the people, even offering to bear the curse that the people deserve - to be blotted out of the book of life (see Exodus 32:31-32).



Though they deserve to die for violating the covenant - and 3,000 are slain by the Levites - the people are spared for the sake of God's covenant. But the condition of Israel is forever changed. Never again in the Old Testament is Israel spoken of as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Not until the coming of the Church will God's plan for a kingdom of priests be realized (see 1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6).

The first four chapters of Numbers tells us what happens immediately after the golden calf incident. Moses takes an elaborate census (from which the book gets its name as a book of "numbers") and establishes the authority of the Levites.

The Levites, the only tribe not to worship the golden calf and the only ones who answered Moses' call (see Exodus 32:26) are "dedicated" or ordained as priests for the nation (see Exodus 32:26-29). No more will the first-born sons in each family inherit the father's role as priest. The Levites are chosen in place of the first-born sons (see Numbers 3:11-13; 45).

For the first time, a distinction will be made between priest and lay people. Where as once every first-born was a priest (see Exodus 13:2,15; 24:5) now any non-Levite who performs priestly functions "shall be put to death" (see Numbers 3:10).

Section III. End

After the Golden Calf



Reading Leviticus

The whole character of God's relationship with His chosen people has been changed. God cannot dwell amidst his people. The Levites must stand between God and His people. That is what brings us to the end of Exodus and into Leviticus.

Leviticus is part of the renewal of the covenant made necessary by the golden calf rebellion. Israel's sin was so grave that it required what amounted to a second legislation.

The Ten Commandments had been a moral law, but this second law is judicial and ceremonial, involving the punishment of criminals and the rules for animal sacrifice. This second legislation deals with Israel's fallen condition after the golden calf affair. It takes the rest of Exodus (chapters 33-40), all of the Book of Leviticus and the first ten chapters of Numbers, to explain.

Keep that in mind as you read the chapters of Leviticus. It is the handbook for the Levitical priests. Prior to the golden calf, Leviticus would not have been needed. After the golden calf affair, Leviticus becomes necessary. As you read Leviticus, don't get hung up on all the ritual prescriptions and don't ignore the book because, as Catholics, we don't follow these elaborate codes. Keep in mind, too, that Leviticus is a continuation of the story of the Exodus of God's family.

Remember as you read about the kidneys and entrails and all the gruesome details of the sacrifices - God did not originally desire animal sacrifice. He has no need that millions upon millions of cows and goats be slaughtered. Instead, God wanted praise, a humble and contrite spirit and walking in His ways (see Psalm 50:8-14; Psalm 51:18-19;).

The sacrificial system is imposed as a kind of corporate penance upon the whole nation. The three animals that God had Israel sacrifice - cattle, sheep and goats - were all venerated as divine by the Egyptians.

God was dealing with Israel as if the people were addicted to idolatry. As we've seen, it was easier to take Israel out of Egypt than to take Egypt out of Israel.

The animal sacrifice requirements would be a daily reminder of their apostasy with the golden calf. Each day they would be forced to relive their sin and do penance for it, ritually slaughtering the "gods" they once worshipped. In this way, God hoped to free Israel's heart from slavery to idolatry (see Joshua 24:14; Ezekiel 20:7-8; Acts 7:39-41).

Numbering the Second Generation

The Levites were meant to assist Israel's second generation, to teach them in the ways of holiness, so that this generation wouldn't fall like the first generation. But the second generation didn't learn. We see that in the stories recounted in Numbers, beginning with the departure of the people from Sinai (see Numbers 10:11).

Numbers tells the story of the second generation of Israel's travails on the way to the promised land. The children of those who came out of Egypt are now more unfaithful than their parents. Finally they are condemned to wander forty years, "suffering for [their] faithlessness" (see Numbers 14:33-34).

Even amid their backsliding, God was giving us signs of the Redeemer He will one day send:

Moses hoists up the bronze serpent to heal the faithless Israelites, giving us a sign of the Cross (see Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14).

And the mercenary prophet, Balaam, sent to trick the Israelites, is used by God to deliver a prophecy that a star shall rise over Jacob and the staff of leadership will rise from Israel. We remember this prophecy in the Liturgy during the Christmas season, as we associate Balaam's star with that followed by the Magi (see Numbers 24:15-17; Matthew 2:1-12).

The unfaithfulness of the second generation, though, culminates on the eastern border of the Promised Land, in the plains of Moab. There Israel is seduced and worships Baal of Peor, a Moabite god (see Numbers 25).

Note the similarities between this story and the story of the golden calf (see Exodus 32). The worship of the false god is accompanied by ritual immorality and is punished with a mass slaughter of Israelites. In the golden calf incident, the Levites distinguished themselves by their swords and zeal. Here, a certain Levite, Phinehas, also takes up the sword in his zeal, slaying an idolatrous couple. He earns the line of high-priesthood - "the pledge of an everlasting priesthood" (see Numbers 25:13).

A Second Law

What the golden calf affair was to the first generation at Sinai, the Baal-Peor episode was to the second generation on the plains of Moab.

Numbers describes why Deuteronomy is needed. Written 40 years after the Exodus, Deuteronomy is literally "the second law" - meant to govern the 12 lay tribes. It is written immediately following the apostasy and sin of the worship Baal Peor.

Notice that it is a law given by Moses, not God. That's a big difference between the Law given at Sinai, which is presented as God's own words, delivered by God directly. Deuteronomy is the law of Moses, and as Jesus will explain, it is a law for hardhearted people (see Matthew 19:8).

Based on their track record since the Exodus, Moses knows the people can't possibly be expected to live up to the law of Sinai, let alone the standards of holiness set forth for the Levites. Deuteronomy is a law for wayward children. That explains why in Deuteronomy, Moses grants permissions found nowhere else in the Bible, permissions that seem totally at odds with the covenant at Sinai.

Among other things, Moses permits divorce and remarriage (see Deuteronomy 24:1-4); the taking of foreign slave wives (see Deuteronomy 21:10-14), and genocidal warfare against the Canaanites (see Deuteronomy 20:16-17). In every case, these concessions are "lesser evils." For instance, the people are instructed to slay the Canaanites because if don't they will likely fall into worshiping their gods.

This isn't God's holy law, this is Moses' concessionary legislation, his compromises with a stiff-necked people. As God will later explain through the prophet Ezekiel, "I gave them statutes that were not good, and ordinances through which they could not live" (see Ezekiel 20:25).

It wasn't that God had abandoned the idea that the people could ever be holy. By requiring Israel to make sacrificial offerings of firstlings from the herds and flocks (see Deuteronomy 15:19-20) at a central sanctuary (see Deuteronomy 12:5-18), Moses hoped to remind Israel of its call to holiness. But the standard for the people was far below that required for the Levites.

Scholars have noted that while the covenant in Exodus share similarities with “family covenants” in the ancient world, Deuteronomy resembles the kind of covenants that kingdoms would make with vassal states after conquering and enslaving them.

And Deuteronomy is a very hard yoke, put upon Israel like a burden, meant to break the people’s hardened hearts. But Moses predicts that this law won’t save them from the curses of failing to honor the covenant.

In fact, he prophesies that all the curses of the covenant would befall Israel someday (see Deuteronomy 30:1-10; 31:16-29).

First, he seems to suggest that the curses are conditional - “if you do not hearken to the voice of the Lord” (see Deuteronomy 28:15), and describes in grim detail punishments of exile, despoilment and the like (see Deuteronomy 28:16-68).

But two chapters later he says with assurance that all these curses will fall upon Israel. But when they do, Moses promises, God will once more save them, again show mercy “if you and your children return to the Lord, your God, and heed His voice” (see Deuteronomy 30:1-3).

The curses that Israel will undergo, Moses prophesies, will finally bring them to repentance. And at that point, He prophesies: “The Lord, your God, will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, that you may love the Lord, your God with all your heart and all your soul and so may live” (see Deuteronomy 30:6).

Notice that earlier, Moses had ordered the people to circumcise their hearts (see Deuteronomy 10:16). But here, at the end of Deuteronomy, he recognizes that Israel is incapable of that - that only the grace of God can change the hearts of the people.

This was the promise that the prophets taught Israel to hope for during its years of exile and captivity.

Ezekiel promises that God will give the people a new heart, taking away their hearts of stone (see Ezekiel 36:22-28). Jeremiah, in the only Old Testament passage that speaks specifically of a “New Covenant,” says that God will write His law upon the hearts of the people (see Jeremiah 31:31-33).

These promises will await the coming of Jesus Christ for their fulfillment. Moses had prophesied the coming of “a prophet like me” (see Deuteronomy 18:15). Jesus will be this prophet (see John 6:14; 7:40; Acts 3:22; 7:37).

But the book of Deuteronomy closes with a 120-year-old Moses dying atop Mount Nebo. The land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was within his sight, but not his to enter.

LESSON FIVE

TO KINGDOM COME

Lesson Outline

1. Review and Overview
2. Entering the Promised Land
 - I. Joshua at Jericho
 - II. Barbs and Thorns Remain
 - III. Judging By Their Weakness
 - IV. Born in Bethlehem
3. The Rights and Wrongs of Kings
 1. Hannah the Handmaid
 2. Making a Monarchy
4. Israel's Shepherd - Priest and King
 - I. The Lord's Anointed
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 - III. An Everlasting Covenant
 - IV. Abraham's Covenant Remembered
5. Entering the Kingdom
 - I. The Shape of Things Under Solomon
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6. Two Nations Under God
 - I. North-South Divide
 - II. Raising Prophets
 - III. Good Kings, Bad Kings
 - IV. Punished by Babylon
 - V. Writing in Exile
7. After the Exile
 - I. Restoration and Rebuilding
 - II. Persecution and Revolt
 - III. Hasmonean Times
 - IV. The Consolation of Israel
8. Study Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To finish reading the Old Testament (from Joshua to Malachi) and to read with understanding.
- II. To understand the broad outlines of the history of Israel in light of God's covenant with Abraham.
- III. To appreciate the crucial importance of God's everlasting covenant with David.

Review and Overview



Section I. End

Get ready: This is a long lesson. We're going to move from the Book of Joshua through to the Book of Malachi.

Don't try to tackle all the material in one sitting. But know that when you've completed this lesson, you'll have reached the end of the Old Testament. You will have read each Old Testament book in its historical context and according to the religious meaning given to that book by the Catholic Church.

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to see - in a broad outline - the entire sweep of salvation history as it's recorded in the Old Testament. After this lesson, you'll be ready for a far deeper understanding of the New Testament - which we will read in our next and final lesson.

Before we resume the story of Israel's journey to the Promised Land, a brief reminder of what we're hoping to accomplish in this Beginner's course:

We want to give you an outline - a roadmap - to help you find your way through the Bible. We aren't able to go verse-by-verse through every book. But if you study and re-study these lessons you'll have a good grasp of the key themes and issues that run through each book, and a good understanding of the "story" the Bible tells - from its first page to its last.

To get the most out of these studies, be sure you read along with your Bible open and take the time to either click-on or look up all the citations we provide. We've selected and arranged these citations so you'll see how the Bible is bound together by certain distinct themes and concerns, and so you'll see how these connect one book in the Bible to the another. If you simply read all of the citations in each study you will have read a significant portion of the sacred Scripture.

Now let's return to the story of our salvation.

Entering the Promised Land

Joshua at Jericho

We pick up the story with the career of Joshua, Moses' hand-picked successor (Deuteronomy 31:14-15,23; 34:9).

The Book of Joshua is a bridge between the Pentateuch (the name given to the five books of Moses - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) and the remainder of the Old Testament.

Joshua leads the people across the Jordan and, in a series of campaigns against the Canaanite kings (see Joshua 1-12), lays claim to much of the land God promised first to Abraham and again to Moses and the Israelites (see Genesis 17:8; Exodus 3:8).

His most famous battle was no battle at all - the siege of Jericho (Joshua 6). We all know the story: For six days the Israelites marched around the city with seven priests in the lead, carrying the Ark of the Covenant which God had ordered Moses to build at Sinai to



be with the people in their wanderings (see Exodus 25:10, 21-22; Numbers 10:22; 14:44). On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven final times, then blew a horn, gave a loud shout and watched as the walls of Jericho collapsed.

This was to be emblematic of the character of the Israelites' conquest of the Promised Land. At every stage, it was to be won, not by military might, but by priestly and religious means.

As the Israelites were led out of Egypt across the dry bed of the Red Sea, led by the pillar of cloud, the presence of God, so Joshua led the people across the dry land of the Jordan, behind the Ark of God's presence (see Exodus 12-14; Joshua 3:13-14). Their crossing takes place in the same month as the Exodus (see Joshua 3:15; 5:10) and - again as with Moses and the Exodus - they're circumcised and celebrate the Passover before crossing the waters (see Joshua 5).

The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord is crucial to the religious character of Joshua's mission. As you will notice throughout the books of Joshua, Judges, Kings and Chronicles, the Ark is a defining symbol of God's election of Israel as His chosen people.

The Ark contained signs of God's covenant with Moses - the tablets of the Law, the staff of Aaron, some manna from the wilderness (see Hebrews 9:4). It was God's dwelling place, the sign of His real presence among the Israelites.

But notice that already in Joshua, the Ark is not merely the sign of Israel's "tribal" or "national" deity. It is a sign of the Lord of the Universe, of the one God who wants to dwell with all peoples.

As Joshua says: "This is how you will know that there is a living God in your midst...The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of the whole earth will precede you into the Jordan" (see Joshua 3:10-11).

Barbs and Thorns Remain

Despite Joshua's victories, at the time of his death, Israel had conquered much - but not all- of the promised land (see Judges 1:27-36; 3:1-6).

This failure to secure the entire land will become a decisive factor in the subsequent history of the God's people.

God had ordered Israel to drive out all the inhabitants of Canaan and to destroy all their idols (see Numbers 33:50-52). If any Canaanites were permitted to remain, God warned, they would become "as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides....and I will treat you as I had intended to treat them" (see Numbers 33:55-56).

We're often troubled and find it difficult to comprehend how God could order or permit the Israelites to wage ethnic genocide against the peoples living in the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 20:16-17).

Mass murder, of course, is not God's way. What we see in these commands is an example of the divine Father's reluctant concession, His sorrowful accommodation to His first-born son's spiritual weakness.

Later, under the monarchy of David and Solomon and word of the prophets, Israel's true character will be revealed - a people living among the nations as a sign of God's providence and wisdom, a people sent to teach and convert the nations to the ways of the living God.

But at this early stage in their history, God knew that His chosen children weren't ready, spiritually or morally, to live among the idolatrous pagans across the Jordan. He knew they could never live among them without succumbing to idolatry themselves (see Deuteronomy 20:18).

Judging By Their Weakness

The history we read in the Book of Judges bears this out.

The “plot” of Judges pivots on the Israelites’ repeated fall into the snare of idolatry, their giving in to the worship of the gods of the Canaanites. The entire book, in fact, is built on this “testing” of Israel’s faithfulness to its covenant with God.

The narrator of Judges tells us that God allowed the pagans to remain in the Promised Land precisely to test Israel’s faithfulness to its covenant - “so that through them [the pagans left in the land] He might... put Israel to the test, to determine whether they would obey the commandments the Lord had enjoined on their fathers through Moses” (see Judges 3:1,4).

Joshua had foreseen Israel’s weakness. At the end of his life, like Moses, he called on Israel to renew its covenant with God (see Joshua 24:13-28). He told the people they must choose - “decide today whom you will serve - the gods your fathers served beyond the river [Jordan] or the gods of the Amorites in whose countries you are dwelling” (see Joshua 24:15).

But like Moses, Joshua also predicted they wouldn’t be able to keep the covenant (see Joshua 24:19; compare Deuteronomy 31:16,24-29).

He was right. Israel failed the test. That’s the message of Judges. That’s why the history we read there seems to repeat itself in a sad cycle of sin, punishment, repentance, forgiveness, and backsliding into sin again.

Born in Bethlehem

But even in the midst of the corruption and weakness of His people, God continued unfolding His saving plan. That’s what we learn from the Book of Ruth, a slice-of-life story from “the time of the judges” (see Ruth 1:1).

Ruth appears at this point in the canon of the Bible as if to remind us that, beneath the big political and military events of Israel’s history, God was still working quietly, in the hidden lives of ordinary people - non-Israelites even - to fulfill His covenant promises.

During Joshua’s conquest of the Promised Land, God used Rahab - a pagan and a woman and a harlot to boot - to ensure the success of His plan (see Joshua 2; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). And during the time of the judges, God again resorts to a pagan woman, the servant girl Ruth, to advance the objectives of His saving plan - in a way that also involves Rahab again.

Rahab had the faith to recognize the Israelites’ God as the true God (see Joshua 2:11;6:25). Similarly, Ruth vows herself to the Israelites’ God, using covenantal language - “Your people shall be my people and your God my God” (see Ruth 1:16).

Ruth marries Boaz, a righteous man from Bethlehem who, as it turns out, is the son of Rahab (see Ruth 1:1; 1:19, 2:1, 2:19-20; Matthew 1:5-6). Ruth bears Boaz a son, Obed, who will become the father of Jesse. “Jesse, as the last line of the book tells us, “became the father of David” (see Ruth 4:17,22).

This is the first mention of David in the Bible.



Section II. End

The Rights and Wrongs of Kings

Hannah the Handmaid

The establishment of the eternal kingdom of David, which occupies the rest of Bible - including the New Testament - is prepared by Samuel, the last of Israel's judges.

Samuel is born in a time of political and moral chaos best reflected by the refrain of Judges - "in those days there was no king in Israel - everyone did what he thought best" (see Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

Israel's infidelity, symbolized by the corruption of Eli's priesthood (see 1 Samuel 2:12-17,27-36; 3:11-14) is punished by the attack of the Philistines, who kill 4,000 Israelites, including Eli's wicked sons, Hophni and Phineas, and carry off the Ark of the Covenant. Upon hearing of the Ark's theft, Eli topples back in his chair and breaks his neck and dies (see 1 Samuel 4).

Eli is succeeded by Samuel, born in answer to a barren woman's prayers and consecrated to God (see 1 Samuel 1).

Samuel's faithful mother, Hannah, prepares the way for Mary, the mother of Jesus (see Catechism, no. 489). Three times, Hannah describes herself as the Lord's "handmaid," using the same term that Mary will use in vowing to bear Jesus (see 1 Samuel 1:11,16; Luke 1:38). In Mary's great song, the Magnificat, we will hear numerous echoes of Hannah's hymn of thanksgiving (compare 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Luke 1:46-55).

Making a Monarchy

Hannah's son Samuel grows up to be a good and holy man who succeeds in turning "the whole Israelite population" back to the Lord (see 1 Samuel 7:2-3).

But in his old age, the people demand that he appoint them a king "as the other nations have" (see 1 Samuel 8:5).

Israel's request is sinful, blasphemous. It shows that they still have not embraced their special character as God's chosen people, His first-born son.

"It is not you they reject," God tells Samuel. "They are rejecting Me as their king" (see 1 Samuel 8:7; 12:12,17,19-20).

Moses had predicted that the people would want a king. He even made provisions so that any Israelite king might truly serve God's purposes - requiring especially that the king copy the entire Law of God and read it every day for the rest of His life (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

The Israelites, however, aren't looking for a godly king. They tell Samuel they want one "to lead us in warfare and fight our battles" (see 1 Samuel 8:19-20). They don't mention God or worship and they seem to have utterly forgotten Israel's original charter to be a holy, priestly people (see Exodus 19:5-6).

In Saul, they get the kind of king they want, a man after their own heart - a warrior-king skilled in battle but with no concern for right worship or the commandments of God. Symbolically, during his first campaign Saul ignores Samuel's instructions and offers priestly sacrifices himself - something that God presumably didn't want His kings doing (see 1 Samuel 13:8-13).

Israel's Shepherd - Priest and King

The Lord's Anointed

The Lord rejects Saul as king, although He allows his reign to play out to its bitter end. In the meantime, he dispatches Samuel to quietly anoint a successor, “a man after [the Lord’s] own heart” (see 1 Samuel 13:14) - David, son of Jesse, grandson of Ruth’s son Obed, an anonymous shepherd boy living in Bethlehem.

The Spirit of the Lord rushes upon David at his anointing (see 1 Samuel 16:13) and through a series of seeming coincidences, he winds up in Saul’s court. David is brave, but also God-fearing, as we see in the famous episode with Goliath. He knows that, as he says, “the battle is the Lord’s” and that “it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves” (see 1 Samuel 17:32-51)

As First Samuel continues, David’s humility and meekness, his faithfulness to God, stands in sharp contrast with Saul’s growing paranoia and jealousy, which causes him to hatch murderous plots against David (see 1 Samuel 18:11; 19:9-17).

Given two chances to kill his sworn enemy Saul, David refuses. Why? Because, he says, no matter what a scoundrel Saul is, Saul remains “the Lord’s anointed” king (see 1 Samuel 24, 26).

When Saul and his sons meet their shameful end at the hands of the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 31), David mourns and turns to the Lord for the guidance (see 2 Samuel 1-2:4).

After routing the remaining forces loyal to Saul, David is anointed king by all the tribes of Israel who bind themselves to him with a covenant oath: “Here we are, your bone and flesh” (see 2 Samuel 5:1).

They call him God’s chosen shepherd-king (see 2 Samuel 5:2). This is the first time this image is used in the Bible to describe Israel’s leader. It will become an important image in later prophecies and in Jesus’ own self-understanding.

Capitalizing Jerusalem

As shepherd and king, David is a great political and spiritual leader.

Ordering his military power and strategy to religious purposes, he routes the Jebusites to establish his capital in Jerusalem.

How did he settle on Jerusalem? The Scripture doesn’t exactly tell us. Perhaps he recalled the story of Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem, who celebrated a liturgy with bread and wine on behalf of Abraham (see Genesis 14:17-23).

Perhaps he understood Moses to be referring to Jerusalem when he commanded the building of a central sanctuary in “the place which the Lord, your God chooses as the dwelling place for His name” (see Deuteronomy 12:4-5,11). Although Moses never mentions Jerusalem by name, Rabbinic lore held that the city of God’s name was the city that Melchizedek ruled, which the Psalms of David identify as Jerusalem (see Psalm 76:3).

In any event, David calls Jerusalem Zion and the City of David. Once he has captured it, he retrieves the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord which, as he says pointedly, “in the days of Saul we did not visit” (see 1 Chronicles 13:3).

Dressed in a priest’s ephod, David leads all Israel in a joyous religious celebration of the Ark’s return, offering sacrifices, blessing the people and breaking bread (see 2 Samuel 6:13-19; 1 Chronicles 15:25-29).

With the Lord having been established - “taken up his dwelling in Jerusalem” (see 1 Chronicles 23:25) - David then restored the priesthood. He made the descendants of Aaron to be “officers of the holy place and officers of the divine presence” (see 1 Chronicles 24:3,5,19).

He established the Levitical priests “to minister before the Ark of the Lord - to celebrate, thank and praise the Lord, the God of Israel” every morning and evening, and also on feast days (see 1 Chronicles 16:4; 23:25-32).

As he is portrayed in the First Book of Chronicles, especially, David is both a holy priest and a righteous and brave king.

In fact, you should read the two books of Chronicles alongside the books of Samuel and Kings. They tell the same story from two different perspectives. The Chronicles aren’t simply a rewriting of the political and personal dramas recorded in Samuel and Kings.

Beginning with Adam, the chronicler gives us a liturgical history of ancient Israel, showing us that from the start God intended His people to be a priestly people, offering praise and sacrifice and living by His decrees.

Chronicles describes David as God’s ideal leader - the priest-king, the righteous ruler who composes psalms, leads the people in worship, and is a teacher of God’s wisdom. In the Davidic Kingdom, we are given a glimpse of the world as God means it to be - a communion of the sacred and secular, of law and worship, religion and culture, Church and state.

An Everlasting Covenant

God makes His final covenant of the Old Testament with David. He promises to establish David’s kingdom as an eternal and everlasting dynasty, promises that David’s heirs will sit on his royal throne forever. He promises, too, that He will regard David’s heir as His own son.

Be sure to spend some time reading over this covenant oath (see 2 Samuel 7:8-16; 1 Chronicles 17:7-14). These are among the most important verses in all the Bible.

God’s promises here will give shape and direction, hope and drama of the remainder of the biblical narrative - all the way through the end of the New Testament.

If that sounds hard to believe, look ahead to the last page of the Bible. There you’ll hear Jesus talking about this covenant, saying that He himself is the fulfillment of that covenant: “I am the root and offspring of David” (see Revelation 22:16).

Why do we call it a “covenant” when God doesn’t use the word? Because David himself will later say that God here was swearing an “eternal covenant” with him (see 2 Samuel 23:5). David’s “covenant” is also celebrated in the Psalms of David (see Psalm 89:4-29; 132:12).

Let’s pull apart the several promises of this covenant, and review them in order:

1. The Lord will establish a house for you: “House” means royal dynasty, so this means that David’s kingdom will be a dynasty.
2. I will raise up your heir...and make his kingdom firm: David’s son will rule over his kingdom.
3. He shall build a house for my name: David’s son will build a temple for the Ark of the Covenant.
4. I will be a Father to him and he shall be a son to Me: The son of David will be adopted as God’s own son. This is the first time that the idea of divine sonship is applied to one individual. While God had referred to Israel as His first-born son, no one as yet in the Bible has been called “son of God.”
5. If he does wrong, I will correct him...with human chastisements, but I will not withdraw my favor from him: If David’s son breaks His Law, God will send punishments but will never disown him as He disowned Saul.
6. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever: David’s dynasty will never end. There will always be an heir of David seated upon his throne.

Abraham's Covenant Remembered

This covenant isn't simply a reward to David for his faithful service.

We have to understand this as the final in the line of covenants that God has been making with His people throughout the salvation history recorded in the Bible. In effect, it is a covenant enacted to fulfill the covenant God made with Abraham.

Remember why God liberated the Israelites from Egypt? For the sake of His covenant with Abraham (see Exodus 2:24; 6:5).

God promised to make Abraham the father of a host of nations, and promised further that kings would stem from Abraham's line of descendants. He promised that He would be their God and that they would be His people for all time, and that all the nations of the world would find blessing through his descendants (see Genesis 17:4-8; 22:15-18).

The Mosaic covenant, the covenant God made with Moses at Sinai, marked what we might describe as "the first stage" of God's plan to fulfill His covenant with Abraham (see Exodus 33:1; Numbers 32:11; Deuteronomy 1:8; 9:5; 30:20).

The covenant with David furthers God's covenant plan by which all the world would be made children of Abraham, blessed and beloved sons and daughters of God (see 2 Kings 13:23; Psalm 102:23; Jeremiah 33:25-26).

Notice the reasons that God gives for the covenant with David. It is not for David's sake but - as the Lord repeats three times- for the sake of "My people Israel" (see 2 Samuel 7:8,10,11).

This recalls the language God used throughout the story of Israel's liberation from Egypt (see Exodus 3:7,10; 5:1; 6:7; 7:17, 9:1; Leviticus 26:12).

Listen carefully also to David's prayer in response to the Lord's oracle. This is his vow of allegiance to God's covenant.

It's filled with echoes and quotations from Moses - all stressing that, as David says: "You have established for Yourself Your people Israel as Yours forever and You, Lord, have become their God" (compare 2 Samuel 7:22-25; Exodus 15:11-13,16-17; Deuteronomy 4:7,34; 7:6; 26:17-18; 29:12).

The covenant with David is a continuation of the great redemptive work of the Exodus, the establishment of God's holy people Israel - a saving work undertaken in fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Abraham.

As David says: "He remembers forever His covenant which He made binding for a thousand generations - which He established for Jacob by statute, for Israel as an everlasting covenant" (see 1 Chronicles 16:14-18).



Entering the Kingdom



The Shape of Things Under Solomon

The Davidic covenant is the climactic event in Old Testament salvation history. Of course, the fulfillment of God's plan awaits the coming of Jesus and establishment of the Kingdom of God, the Catholic Church.

But we can detect in the Davidic Kingdom, especially as it takes shape under the reign of David's son, King Solomon, the qualities and character that God intends for His family on earth - an intention that will only finally be realized in the Catholic Church.

Solomon's is a monarchy ruled over by God's son (see Psalm 2:7), who is both a priest and a king (see Psalm 110:1,4). At the right hand of the King is his mother, the Queen, who intercedes for the people with the king and is a trusted adviser to the King (see 1 Kings 3:19-20; Proverbs 31).

The day-to-day affairs of the Kingdom are administered by a prime minister, variously called the royal "vizier," the "superintendent" or "master of the palace." He is considered to be "a father to the inhabitants" of the Kingdom (see 1 Kings 16:9; 18:3; 2 Kings 15:5; 18:18,37; 19:2; Isaiah 22:22).

The Davidic Kingdom is an international empire, a worldwide kingdom, stretching to the ends of the earth and embracing all nations and peoples (see Psalm 2:8; 72:8,11).

In an echo of God's promise to Abraham and his descendants, the Scriptures tell us that by the Davidic King and Kingdom "shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed, all the nations" (see Psalm 72:17).

The Kingdom, with its capital in Zion, Jerusalem, will become the mother of all nations, "one and all born in her" (see Psalm 87:5), all made sons and daughters of God in a worldwide family.

It is a Kingdom that rules, not by military might, but through liturgy and prayer, wisdom and law. The liturgy and worship of the kingdom is shaped by the eternal presence of God in the Ark in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Solomon built the Temple on Mount Moriah (see 2 Chronicles 3:1). Recall that Mount Moriah was where Abraham was sent to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac (see Genesis 22:2). It is very interesting that these are the only two places in the Bible where Moriah is mentioned, and Calvary, where Jesus is crucified, is one of the hills in the Moriah range.

The Temple, atop the holy mountain of Zion, is the “dwelling place...[of] the God of gods” (see Psalm 84:2,8; 1 Kings 8:27-30). In His shrine, heaven and earth meet (see Psalm 78:68-69).

Another feature of the Kingdom is the “everlasting priesthood” that God promised to Phineas, the grandson of Aaron (see Numbers 10:13). Solomon restored this by making Zadok high priest and his sons “officers of the holy place and officers of the divine presence” (see 1 Kings 2:35).

The Temple was to be more than a shrine for the chosen people of Israel. It was to be a house of prayer for all peoples. This is what Solomon prayed for - that “all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, may fear You as do Your people Israel” (see 1 Kings 8:41-43).

A new form of worship characterizes Solomon’s Temple and the Davidic Kingdom.

Prayer in the Kingdom becomes a personal encounter with the living God: “Bring me to Your holy mountain, to your dwelling-place. Then I will go into the altar of God...I will give You thanks...thanking Him in the presence of my Savior and my God” (see Psalm 43:3-5).

The liturgy of Moses and Sinai required animal sacrifices and offerings for the people’s sin. In the liturgy of Zion, the people bring “a sacrifice of thanksgiving,” known in Hebrew as *astodah*, translated as *eucharistia* in Greek (see 1 Chronicles 16:4,7-37).

Passover, the feast that characterized the liturgy of Sinai, recalled God’s saving deeds in the Exodus. The *todah*, too, is a celebration of remembrance, often involving the offering of unleavened bread and

wine. It is a prayer in which the believer proclaims God’s saving deeds, gives thanks for God’s salvation, and swears himself or herself to a life of praise and self-sacrifice.

Echoes of the *todah* can be heard throughout the Book of Psalms, the royal prayers and songs of the Davidic Kingdom. For instance, in Psalm 116: “For He has freed my soul from death...To You I will offer sacrifice of thanksgiving...and My vows to the Lord...” (see Psalm 116: 8,17-18; 50:13-15; 40:1-12; 51:17).

In the thanksgiving sacrifices of the Davidic kingdom we see the true dimension of worship - the way God wanted men and women to serve Him from the beginning. Not in abjection and in servitude, not with the blood of animals, but with their whole hearts, their whole lives made a sacrifice of praise and thanks, their whole lives given over to the will and the heart of God:

“For You are not pleased with sacrifices, should I offer a holocaust, You would not accept it. My sacrifice, O my God, is a contrite spirit, a heart contrite and humbled” (see Psalm 51:18-19).

“Sacrifice or oblation You wished not, but ears open to obedience...Holocausts and sin-offerings You sought not...To do Your will, O my God, is my delight, and Your Law is within my heart!” (see Psalm 40:7-9).



Psalms and Wisdom

Look for this spirit of self-offering and thanksgiving as you read the Book of Psalms.

Traditionally associated with David, many of the psalms were doubtless written by him. All of them reflect his heart which, as we've seen, reflects the Lord's own heart (see 1 Samuel 13:14).

Prayed daily, even hourly, the psalms were intended to give God's covenant people a new heart - that heart of David, that heart of the Lord.

The psalms teach God's royal sons and daughters how to pray - how to praise, thank, petition, and pledge faithfulness to their Father. The psalms teach God's people the history of their salvation and of God's faithfulness to His covenant plan (see Psalms 78; 105-106;135-136).

Underlying all the varieties of psalms is the Father's desire to instill in His children a love for His ways and His Law: "You will show me the path of life, fullness of joys in Your presence" (see Psalms 16:11).

The psalms teach God's people to seek His wisdom in His Law (see Psalms 37:31; 90:12). In this, the psalms are closely tied to the other great spiritual legacy of the Davidic Kingdom - the biblical wisdom literature.

The Psalms are associated with David. The Bible's wisdom literature - the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, Wisdom and Sirach - is associated with David's son, Solomon, who traditionally is held to be the author of four of the books.

The wisdom of Solomon was a divine gift (see 1 Chronicles 1:7-12). And his reputation for being a wise man drew the Queen of Sheba and "all the kings of the earth" to seek audiences with him and to pay him tribute (see 1 Kings 10:1-13, 24-25).

Think of the wisdom books as recording the kinds of things that Solomon told the Queen and the kings of the nations.

Read in their place in the Bible, the wisdom books function as a sort of fatherly instruction - God the Father, through His divine son the king, teaching His

worldwide family how live. This is seen most clearly in Proverbs, which is presented as the advice of a father to his son (except for Proverbs 31 which is said to be a Queen Mother's teaching to her son, the king).

As you read the wisdom literature, understand that, like the psalms, these books are designed to instruct and to form the children of God's worldwide family.

This is the meaning of the strange passage in David's prayer of thanksgiving for His covenant - "This too You have shown to man" (see 2 Samuel 7:19). The phrase in Hebrew is "torah 'adam" - literally, "the law of mankind." This is what wisdom is - God's law, given through His king, for all men and women.

The Davidic Kingdom was established to be a universal, worldwide, eternal kingdom. The wisdom literature aims to effect the moral and spiritual formation of this kingdom. It is the charter of the new human family that God wants to create through His covenant with David.

The wisdom books are meant to instruct people like Job, a righteous non-Jew who, in his extraordinary sufferings, seeks saving knowledge and redemption: "Whence, then, comes wisdom" he cries, "and where is the place of understanding?"

He finally arrives at the answer: "The fear of the Lord is wisdom" (see Job 28:20,23,28).

This is the refrain you will hear running beneath all the practical counsel and advice found in these books: "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord" (see Proverbs 9:10)

Of course "fear of the Lord," doesn't mean cowering in fright before the Lord. It means reverence and awe, the loving trust of a child: "All wisdom is fear of the Lord. Perfect wisdom is the fulfillment of the Law" (see Sirach 19:17).

The Law given to Moses is seen in the wisdom literature as the perfect reflection of divine wisdom. At times, you will even see Wisdom depicted as divine Person - a communication of God, who "created her... poured her forth upon all His works" (see Sirach 1:7-8; Proverbs 8).

Two Nations Under God

North-South Divide

The Kingdom disintegrated after Solomon. Actually, the wise king himself had sowed the seeds of its destruction.

There was always a dark underside to Solomon's wisdom - his insatiable appetites for wealth, power, and women.

He overtaxed the Israelite tribes to finance great building projects and to build up a huge army (see 1 Kings 9; 12:3-4). He took in an extraordinary 666 gold talents every year (see 1 Kings 10:14). It's interesting to note that 666 is the number of the evil beast in the Bible's final book, which adds that "wisdom is needed" to understand what that means (see Revelation 13:17-18).

Like his father David, Solomon also had a weakness for women. Remember, that Solomon was born to Bathsheba, the wife David took after adultering with her and then having her husband killed to cover up his sin (see 2 Samuel 11-12:25).

Solomon's lusts far eclipsed his father's. Although God's law forbade intermarriage with non-Israelites, "King Solomon loved many foreign women" - he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. "And," the Scripture adds, "his wives turned his heart...to strange gods" (see 1 Kings 11:1-3).

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam refused the pleas of the tribes to lessen their tax burden. They rebelled. Ten of the twelve tribes, led by Jeroboam, split-off and established a Northern Kingdom, leaving Rehoboam to reign over two tiny tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the South.

The fracturing of the Davidic Kingdom is a crucial fact that you have to keep in mind as you read the remainder of the Bible, especially the prophets.

From this point out, when you read about "Israel," think: "Northern Kingdom" - the ten tribes who



succeded under Jeroboam. Sometimes Israel or the Northern Kingdom will be referred to as "Ephraim" or "Samaria" or "Joseph."

And when you read about "Judah" or "Benjamin," or the "House of David," think: "Southern Kingdom" - the two tribes that continued to worship in Jerusalem.

You will also read the phrase "all Israel," especially in Chronicles (see 1 Kings 12:1; 1 Chronicles 13:6,8; 15:3; 2 Chronicles 12:1; 18:16). This refers to the Kingdom as God established and intended it - before the division under Rehoboam - the kingdom of David that God promises He will one day restore.

“Thus,” the Scripture tells us, “Israel has been in rebellion against David’s house to this day” (see 2 Chronicles 10:19; 1 Kings 12:19).

That means that by Jeroboam’s schism the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) had severed themselves from God’s covenant with David - the covenant under which for all time David’s son was to be King of all Israel, and all Israel was to worship at the central sanctuary in Jerusalem.

The covenant with David didn’t justify Solomon’s outrageous and cruel behavior. God’s covenant was never meant to put the Davidic king above the Law of Moses.

David explained this to Solomon himself (see 1 Kings 2:2-4; 8:25; 9:4-5; Psalm 132:12). God’s promise was not a blank check. If Solomon or any Davidic king violated God’s Law he would be punished - although his kingdom would not be wiped out (see 2 Samuel 7:15-16).

Always true to His word, God punished Solomon’s sin by permitting Jeroboam’s rebellion (see 1 Kings 11:31-39).

The Northern tribes almost immediately went into apostasy. Jeroboam built altars to false pagan gods at Bethel and Dan. He even reenacted the great sin of the golden calf incident (see 1 Kings 12:28-29; Exodus 32:4).

Raising Prophets

Jeroboam’s idolatry, unfortunately, sets the pattern for the remainder of Kings and Chronicles. Don’t worry if you can’t follow the succession of kings and reformers in the remaining books of the Bible. Try to focus on the patterns of sin, punishment, and reform.

Notice that David is the measure for every king (see 2 Kings 16:2; 22:2).

And pay attention, especially, to how God still tries to “father” His family despite their weakness, their faithlessness and their disarray.

The period of the divided monarchy is when God begins to raise up prophets to speak His word to His people, to decry their violations of the covenant, to call them to repentance, to turn back to God. They

also play a vital role in helping strengthen the hope of the tiny remnant that remains faithful.

So we see Elijah prophesying in the Northern Kingdom, speaking against the wicked King Ahab and his idolatrous wife Jezebel, engaging in a dramatic showdown with the false prophets of Baal (see 1 Kings 17-2 Kings 1:16). His work is continued by Elisha (see 2 Kings 2-13).

Also in the middle of the eighth-century, around the time of the reign of Jeroboam II (see 2 Kings 14:23-29), Hosea decries “the calf of Samaria,” and scorns temple prostitution and other outrages of the Baal cult (see Hosea 4:14; 8:4-6; 10:5-6; 13:1-2).

Amos, too, during this period decries the infidelities and economic injustices in the northern Kingdom as well as the sins of the nations (see Amos 1:3-2:3).

Amos reminds us that even though Israel and Judah seem far away from Him now, God still desires to fulfill his Fatherly plan for “the whole family that I brought up from the land of Egypt” (see Amos 3:1).

The Northern Kingdom was destroyed in 722 B.C., overrun by the vicious Assyrians. An Assyrian document from the period describes the deportation of nearly 30,000 Israelites.

The Bible tells us why it had to happen: “This came about because the Israelites sinned against the Lord their God...because they venerated other gods... [and] they rejected the covenant which He made with their fathers” (see 2 Kings 17:7-18).

Good Kings, Bad Kings

While Israel fell, the Southern Kingdom of Judah enjoyed a brief period of relative peace and religious fidelity under good King Hezekiah, guided by the prophet Isaiah and the fiery preaching of the prophet Micah (see Jeremiah 26:17-19).

But both saw the moral and religious corruption of the North spreading in the Southern kingdom. When the Assyrians invaded Judah in 701 B.C., Isaiah saw them as God’s instrument - “My rod in anger against an impious nation” (see Isaiah 10:5-6).

Things actually did get as bad in Judah as in Israel. Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, built altars to false gods in the temple, "immolated his son by fire," and shed "so much innocent blood as to fill the length and breadth of Israel" (see 2 Kings 21:1-9,16; see also 2 Kings 16:3;17:17).

Because of Manasseh's sins, God vowed to "bring such evil on Jerusalem and Judah that, whenever anyone hears of it, his ears shall ring" (see 2 Kings 21:12).

Around this time, the prophet Zephaniah warned of "the day of the Lord," a punishment for the wickedness and the pagan practices that defiled Judah (see Zephaniah 1:4-6, 14).

But it would take a generation before that would happen.

Under the reign of the good king Josiah, "the book of the covenant" was found in the Temple (see 2 Kings 22:8). Read the story - so far have the people fallen, it's as if they had forgotten that the Law was ever given to their forefathers.

Josiah is zealous for reform and the people swear to live by the "terms of the covenant." He sets about cleansing the temple of cult prostitutes and other abominations. Finally, he orders the celebration of the Passover. Incredibly, it's the first time the feast had been celebrated since the time of the judges (see 2 Kings 23).

In all this, Josiah had the vocal support of one of God's great prophets, Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 1:1-6:30).

Things were looking up in Judah. So much so, that Nahum could prophesy the destruction of Judah's dreaded enemy, the savage Assyria, and issue this oracle: "Celebrate your feasts, O Judah, fulfill your vows! For nevermore shall you be invaded..." (see Nahum 2:1).

But as Jeremiah recorded in vivid detail, the reforms of Josiah were short-lived. Josiah's son Jehoiakim "did evil in the sight of the Lord - just as his forebears had done" (see 2 Kings 23:37). The spiritual state of Judah under Jehoiakim is well documented by the prophet (see Jeremiah 7-20).

Punished by Babylon

In 597, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon overran Jerusalem, executing God's judgment on Judah for the sins of Manasseh (see 2 Kings 24:3-4).

Before the invasion, the prophet Habakkuk had predicted that Babylon would be raised up by God to punish Jerusalem - "the city, rebellious and polluted.... Her priests profane what is holy and do violence to the Law" (see Habakkuk 1:6; 3:1,4).

After ten years of Babylonian occupation, Judah's King Zedekiah tried to mount a rebellion. Babylon responded with overwhelming brutality - crushing the city, destroying the Temple, and sending thousands off into exile (see 2 Kings 24-25; Jeremiah 52).

All of this too, Jeremiah records (see Jeremiah 34). A legend preserved in Scripture has it that Jeremiah hid the Ark of the Covenant so that it wouldn't be defiled by the Babylonians, prophesying that it would not be found again "until God gathers His people together again and shows them mercy" (see 2 Maccabees 2:4-8).

In its pathos and despair, the destruction of Jerusalem is also rendered poignantly by an eyewitness in Lamentations, a book traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah.

Among those carted off from Jerusalem were the prophets Ezekiel and Baruch, the latter being Jeremiah's secretary. Baruch sought to strengthen the exiles, promising an end to the exile and the restoration of Jerusalem (see Baruch 4:30-5:9).

Ezekiel, too, sought to comfort the afflicted, promising a future salvation for all Israel - prophetic promises we'll look at in greater detail below.



Writing in Exile

Although the prophecy of Daniel was written nearly 350 years later, the story it tells is set during the Babylonian captivity.

Daniel lives in Babylon and is a seer for Nebuchadnezzar and succeeding kings in Babylon. These parts of Daniel (see Daniel 1-6) are similar to three curious books included among the Bible's historical books - Tobit, Judith, and Esther.

In their place in the canon, these books become meditations on how Israel's faith and religious identity are to be preserved outside the Promised Land - in the exile, in the face of undeserved suffering, in the face of persecution. In each of these books, notice how it is ordinary Israelites - a widow, a blind man

and his son and young bride, a young virgin - who are the heroes, keeping the faith alive and saving the people.

For instance, Tobit is set among exiles from the North living in Ninevah circa 721. It shows how an Israelite family protects and nurtures the faith.

Tobit's long concluding hymn of praise, promises that God is a "Father and God forever" and that, though He has scourged the exiles for their iniquities, in His mercy He will restore them from among the nations where they've been scattered (see Tobit 13:4-5).

After the Exile



Restoration and Rebuilding

Jeremiah prophesied that the exile in Babylon would last 70 years (see Jeremiah 25:12;29:10). It actually lasted a little more than half that long. In 538 B.C. Babylon was defeated by the Persians, led by King Cyrus.

Cyrus issued an edict to let God's people return to Jerusalem and even helped fund the rebuilding of the Temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (see Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5; Isaiah 44:24,28; 45:1-3,13).

The remnant that returned to Jerusalem was not necessarily the most pious and God-fearing people. The prophet Malachi gives us a unique window on the spiritual state of the returning exiles - decrying the corruption of the priesthood and the moral laxity of the ordinary people.

The full story of the return of Judah and the restoration of Jerusalem is told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. If you want to reconstruct the history of this period, read the books in this order: Ezra 1-6; Nehemiah 1-7, 11-13; Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah 8-10.

The first order of business was rebuilding the Temple, which you will sometimes see referred to as the Second Temple, the first of course being the one that Solomon

built. Work on the new Temple was urged on by two prophets of the restoration era - Haggai and Zechariah (see Ezra 5:1-2; Haggai 2:1-9; Zechariah 1:16).

When it was complete, Ezra led the people in a solemn renewal of their covenant with God (see Nehemiah 8-10).

The ceremony includes a long prayer by Ezra that recounts the history of God's covenant love and His saving plan, beginning with the creation of the world (see Ezra 9:6-10:1).

Ezra's prayer gives us a keen summary of the message of the biblical history - "In Your great mercy You did not completely destroy them and You did not forsake them, for You are a kind and merciful God...O our God, great, mighty, and awesome God, You Who in Your mercy preserve the covenant....In all that has come upon us, You have been just, for You kept faith while we have done evil" (see Nehemiah 9:31-33).

This was a period of renewed national pride and optimism in Judah. The prophets Obadiah and Joel foresaw the exaltation of Zion and a coming judgment on the nations (see Obadiah 5 and Joel 4). The prophet Jonah preached the unthinkable - the conversion of Ninevah, the capital city of Israel's most dreaded foe.

Persecution and Revolt

The relatively benevolent Persian Empire was struck down in 331 B.C. by the Greeks under Philip of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great.

The Holy Land came under the control of a series of increasingly hostile foreign kings. The history of this period, which closes out the Old Testament period and takes us to about 100 years before Christ, is told in the two books of Maccabees.

Maccabees, like the other books in the Bible, aim to give a religious interpretation of the history of the period.

The message is a familiar one - how God uses foreign kings to mete out punishment upon Israel for violating the Law, and how Israel is saved by returning to the covenant faith of its fathers (see 2 Maccabees 6:12; 7:32-38; 1 Maccabees 2:20,27,50; 4:10).

The most notorious of the “Hellenistic” kings of this period was Antiochus IV, who rose to power in 175 B.C. He called himself “Epiphanes,” literally “God Manifest.”

Antiochus began a vicious persecution of the Jews under the guise of a false ecumenism - claiming to want to erase religious distinctions among the peoples of the kingdom, trying to make all “one people, each abandoning his particular customs.”

Antiochus desecrated the Temple - rededicating it to the Greek god Zeus and bringing in prostitutes to celebrate Greek fertility rituals. He burned any copy of the Law he could find, forbid the Israelites from observing the sabbath, made them eat and sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, and forced them to stop performing the ritual act of the covenant - the circumcision of newborn sons. The penalty for violating Antiochus’ edit was torture and death (see 1 Maccabees 1:41-50, 57, 61-62; 2 Maccabees 7:1-11).

In the face of hardship and persecution, many in Israel abandoned the covenant and the ritual laws. But many others refused to abandon God, preferring “to die rather than to...profane the holy covenant.” (see 1 Maccabees 1:11,14-15, 52).

Indeed, we see in the Maccabees the beginnings of a new definition of Israel - not according to ethnic or tribal identify, but according to faithfulness to the covenant: “Israel was driven into hiding, wherever places of refuge could be found” (see 1 Maccabees 1:53; Romans 9:6-8).

Not all who are of Israel are Israel. Israel was now made up of those who kept the faith - even if it meant dying for the faith.

The stories of the martyrdom of the 99-year-old Eleazar, and of the mother forced to watch her seven sons tortured before she herself was executed too for refusing to eat pork, are among the most moving in the Scriptures (see 2 Maccabees 6:18-7:42)



Hasmonean Times

The Israelites, led by the Judas Maccabeus, the son of an aged priest, staged a series of revolts and battles against Antiochus and later occupying powers.

Judas was a skilled warrior and a pious man. He purified the Temple, and taught the people to pray for the souls of the faithful departed, and to hope for the resurrection of the dead (see 2 Maccabees 10:1-8; 12:38-46).

Led by Judas and his brothers, the Maccabees - against all odds - ousted all foreign powers from Jerusalem.

Beginning with the high priest John Hyrcanus (see 1 Maccabees 16), Israel enters into a period of about 100 years of independence under the leadership of priests.

The period is known as the Hasmonean dynasty, named for the great, great grandfather of Judas Maccabees. During this period we see the rise of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, Israelite sects that will figure prominently in the Gospels.

Under the Hasmoneans, it seemed, the prayer that began the Maccabees' history - "May God bless you and remember His covenant with His faithful servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" - had been answered (see 2 Maccabees 1:2).

But there was a problem - actually a series of problems - with the Hasmonean dynasty.

Most critically: What happened to the promise God made to David? Did He grant David an everlasting throne or didn't He?

Just before Jerusalem fell, Jeremiah had again reaffirmed that God's covenant with David was eternal: It could no more be broken than the sun and moon could cease to shine, he said.

Jeremiah even said that David's descendants would outnumber the stars in the heavens and the sands of the sea, another echo of God's promise to Abraham (see Jeremiah 33:14-23,26; Genesis 22:17).

But that prophecy was nearly a half-millennium old by the time of the Hasmoneans. The Hasmonean

priests weren't kings and they weren't descended from the line of David or even the tribe of Judah. They weren't even descendants of Aaron, as the Law of Moses required for priests.

Early on, the people seemed to sense the problem. They agreed to live under this form of priestly, theocratic rule "until a true prophet arises" (see 2 Maccabees 14:41).

But as time wore on, and as the Hasmoneans sought to consolidate and legitimate their power, popular expectations of a new prophet had waned.

Still, in this period there were growing numbers who searched the Scriptures, recalled the writings of the prophets - the many powerful promises that they had made that seemed to have been only partially fulfilled.

Their search grew in intensity after Pompey invaded in 63 B.C. and claimed the Holy Land for the Roman Empire - historical events not recorded in the Bible.

There were numerous strands of prophetic expectation in the period between the Old and New Testaments, all reflected in the debates in the Gospels about whether Jesus was the Messiah.

Many looked forward to the fulfillment of Moses' ancient prophecy - that God would raise up a prophet like him (see Deuteronomy 18:15-19). But the interpretation of this prophecy and others always pointed back to God's promise to David.

As the New Testament period begins, the people were waiting for God to raise up a Son of David and restore the Davidic Kingdom (see John 1:21; 7:42).

The Consolation of Israel

The people were waiting on the promises of the prophets. They had taught Israel to hope for “a new David,” who would be their savior, their “Messiah” - “one anointed” as David had been with oil and the Holy Spirit (see 1 Samuel 16:13).

Isaiah, for instance, prophesied the coming of a son of David, a child born in the line of David, who would gather together God’s scattered people into a new kingdom that would rule the world from Zion, by the Law of God (see Isaiah 2:2-3; Amos 9:11).

Micah said a child would be born in Bethlehem, that he would be the ruler and shepherd who would lead all the return of all “the children of Israel.” Moreover, Micah said, the new king would rule “to the ends of the earth” (see Micah 5:1-4).

Daniel, in a prophecy written around the time of Antiochus’ persecution, saw a heavenly vision of the Davidic son ruling from on high: “He received dominion, glory and kingship - nations and peoples of every language serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away. His kingdom shall not be destroyed” (see Daniel 7:14).

Isaiah said that this son of David would be called “Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace” and would reign “from David’s throne...both now and forever” (see Isaiah 9:1-7; 7:14; 11:1-5,10; Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Ezekiel, too, had seen a great vision of the new David - a shepherd king who would rule over Israel forever in the land which God had promised to Abraham.

He said God would in those days make a new covenant with the people, an everlasting covenant of peace, and would dwell forever among them in the sanctuary.

“My dwelling shall be with them,” God promised through Ezekiel. “I will be their God and they shall be my people” (see Ezekiel 34:24-30; 37:23-28; 16:59-63).

Ezekiel was not alone in speaking of a new covenant, although only Jeremiah would use that actual term.

Isaiah looked forward to the day when God would “renew the everlasting covenant, the benefits assured to David.”

He even implied that the Messiah would himself be a new covenant, given the name “a covenant of the people” (see Isaiah 55:3-5; 42:6).

Hosea evoked the messianic images of the Song of Songs, predicting that the Messiah would come as a groom comes for his beloved, that a new covenant would be made that “espoused” Israel and God forever (see Hosea 2:18-25; Isaiah 5:1-7; 54:4-9; Jeremiah 2:32; Ezekiel 16:23; Song of Songs 3:2,11).

Finally, the prophet Jeremiah made this sweeping promise - that God would reunite the Northern and Southern kingdoms, gathering them from all the lands to which they had been banished:

“The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (see Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:36-41).

On the threshold of the New Testament, the devout and the righteous looked to these prophecies, awaiting the consolation of Israel - the coming of the new son of David, the resurrection of his fallen Kingdom (see Luke 1:69; 2:25,38; Mark 11:10; Isaiah 40:1; 52:9; 61:2-3).

LESSON SIX

INTO THE KINGDOM OF THE SON

Lesson Outline

1. Review and Overview
 - I. The Covenant Plan Fulfilled
 - II. Turning to the New Testament
2. The Birth of the Messiah
 - I. Annunciation and Visitation
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3. The Kingdom is at Hand
 - I. Baptizing the Beloved Son
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 - III. Blessings of the Kingdom
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4. New Exodus in Jerusalem
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5. The End of His Story
 - I. Beginning with Moses
 - II. Kingdom of the Spirit
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 - IV. Completing the Word of God
 - V. Revealing the End
6. Study Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To read the New Testament with understanding.
- II. To understand how the New Testament depicts Jesus as the fulfillment of the covenants of the Old Testament.
- III. To appreciate, especially, the importance of God's everlasting covenant with David for understanding the mission of Jesus and the Church as it is presented in the New Testament.

Review and Overview

The Covenant Plan Fulfilled

With the coming of Jesus, the story of God's covenant plan reaches its conclusion.

Jesus "fulfills" the promises of each of the five covenants we have been studying in this course - the covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David.

What do we mean by covenant fulfillment? Each of the earlier covenants was a pledge - an oath sworn by God to do certain things. For instance, in His covenant with Noah He swore not to destroy the world by water again; he swore to Abraham that by his descendants the nations of the world would be blessed.

However, if the Bible ended with the last book of the Old Testament (remember "testament" is just another word for "covenant") then it would appear that few if any of God's promises had been fully kept.

Certainly, by the end of the Old Testament, all the world's nations hadn't found blessing in the descendants of Abraham. In fact, the descendants of Abraham - the twelve tribes of his grandson, Jacob - could barely be identified. They had been scattered to the four corners of the known world.

God's final covenant, the one in which each of the earlier ones was to be fulfilled - the "everlasting covenant" with David - seemed hopelessly abandoned as we concluded the Old Testament in our last lesson.

To review: God had made an "eternal covenant" (see 2 Samuel 23:5) with David, promising that He would raise up a son of David to reign on David's throne forever (see 2 Samuel 7:8-16; 1 Chronicles 17:7-14), and that his kingdom would extend over all nations (see Psalm 2:8; 72:8,11). He had promised that this son of David would be His own son, the son of God (see Psalm 2:7), that he would build a Temple to God's name and be a priest forever, like Melchizedek, the priest who offered

the sacrifice of bread and wine for Abraham's victory over his enemies (see Psalm 110:1,4).

But after the reign of David's son, Solomon, everything had fallen apart. The kingdom was divided in two, and the people suffered corruption, invasion and exile. Even when the people were restored from exile, centuries continued to pass without any sign of the great Davidic king that God had promised.

At the time when Jesus was born, there was no kingdom to speak of, no Davidic heir in the wings. Still, the devout awaited the fulfillment of God's promises, awaiting the consolation of Israel - the coming of the new son of David and the resurrection of his fallen Kingdom (see Luke 1:69; 2:25,38; Mark 11:10; Isaiah 40:1; 52:9; 61:2-3).

Turning to the New Testament

But with Jesus comes the fulfillment of God's oath to David. As we will see, the New Testament shows us the image of Jesus as the "new David" and of His Church as the restored kingdom promised to David.

But we will also see how Jesus is depicted as fulfilling all of God's earlier covenant promises - He is the new Adam, bringing about a new creation, restoring humankind to the paradise promised in the beginning. He is a new Noah, bringing about a flood that saves, the waters of Baptism. He is the new son of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the world will find blessing. He is the new Moses, giving God's chosen people a new Passover, the Eucharist, and leading a new exodus, a deliverance from sin, by His Cross and Resurrection opening up the promised land of heaven.

We see three of these earlier covenants referred to in the first line of the New Testament:

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (see Matthew 1:1).

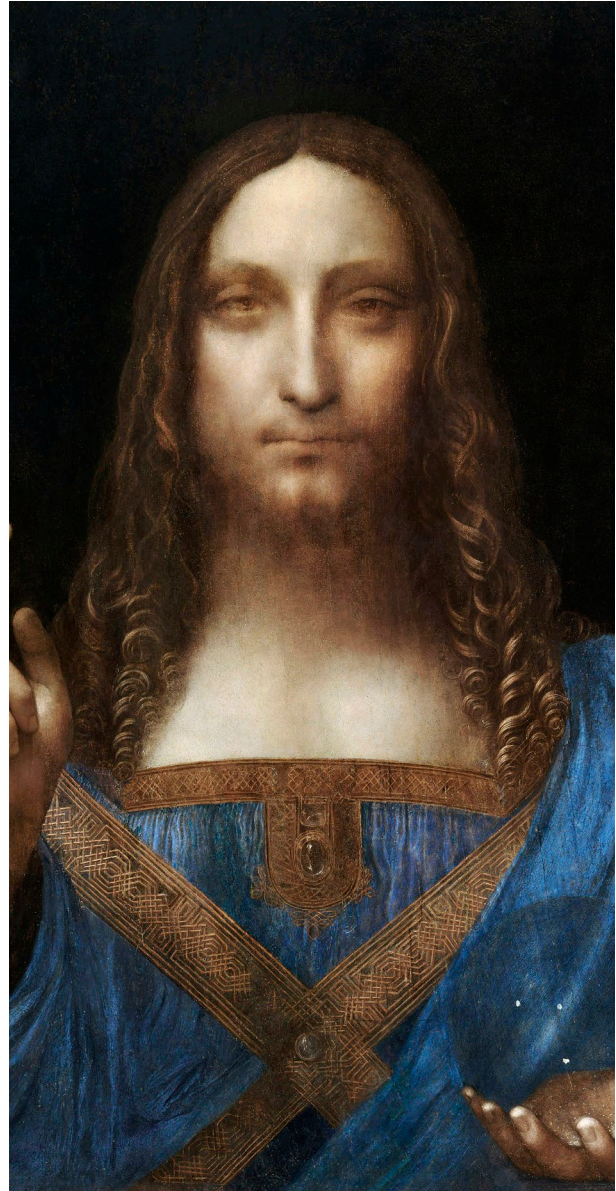
In its first words, the New Testament points us back to creation, to Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament. The word we translate “genealogy” is actually genesis, a word meaning “creation,” and of course, the name of the Bible’s first book.

We’re also referred in this first sentence to God’s covenants with David and with Abraham. Remember that Abraham’s covenant involved the gift of a son, Isaac, whose descendants were to be the source of blessing for all the earth (see Genesis 22:18).

Finally, Jesus is called “Christ,” the Greek word for Messiah or “anointed one.” This word points us to the covenant with David - the Messiah or Christ was the Davidic figure that many of Israel’s prophets said would be sent to deliver Israel and restore the kingdom to Israel.

So in the first sentence of the New Testament we have an allusion to three of the five peaks of salvation history that we have studied in our previous lessons - Adam, Abraham and David.

And in this sentence, so rich in Old Testament allusions, we have a summary of all that the New Testament will tell us about Jesus: The New Testament is the book about the new world created by Jesus, the Messiah, the promised son of David, in whom God fulfills His promise to Abraham - that in his descendants all peoples will be blessed.



Section I. End

The Birth of the Messiah

Annunciation and Visitation

Salvation history in the Old Testament reached its climax in God's covenant with David. We could say that the hope of Israel at the time Jesus was born centered on God's promises to David.

And we will see as the story of Jesus unfolds in the Gospels that much of the plot and the tension hinges on this question about Him: "Could this perhaps be the son of David?" (see Matthew 12:23; 20:30-31; 21:9,15; 22:44-45).

In all the familiar scenes of Jesus' life, we see the Gospels answering that yes, Jesus is the long awaited son of David, the son of God sent to restore the kingdom to Israel.

This is the message of the Annunciation, the announcement of His birth by the angel. Gabriel tells Mary that God will give to Jesus "the throne of David His father, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there will be no end" (see Luke 1:32-33).

What is the angel saying? That Jesus is the son of David, that he will rule over a restored kingdom of Israel ("the house of Jacob") for all time.

In Mary's Visitation of her kinswoman, Elizabeth, we again here echoes of the promises of salvation history.

Mary cries out in song that Jesus' coming is God's answer to all Israel's prayers, a fulfillment of "His promises to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever" (see Luke 1:55).

His Mother wants us to know that as the son of David, her Son will fulfill God's covenant promise to Abraham - that "in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing" (see Genesis 22:18).

This is stated even more forcefully in the song of Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, when their child, John the Baptist, is born (see Luke 1:67-79).

What's happening, Zechariah prophesies, is nothing less than God visiting and saving His people. He is making good on everything "He promised through the mouth of His holy prophets from of old."

In Jesus, Zechariah declares, God has "raised up a horn of salvation within the house of David...mindful of His holy covenant and of the oath He swore to Abraham."

Nativity and the Temple

The story of Jesus' birth or Nativity is also told in a Davidic key.

Luke tells us that Joseph and Mary went to "the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he [Joseph] was of the house and family of David" (see Luke 2:4). As we saw in our last lesson, it was in Bethlehem that David was born and anointed with oil by Samuel (see 1 Samuel 16:1-13).

Matthew, in his Gospel account of Jesus' birth, also wants us to know that He is the long-awaited "Messiah" and "King of the Jews" (see Matthew 2:2,4).

We see this in the answer the chief priests and scribes give to the ruthless Herod (see Matthew 2:5-6). They quote two Old Testament passages (Micah 5:1-2 and 2 Samuel 5:2) to tell Herod that the Messiah was expected from Bethlehem and that he will be a "shepherd" to God's chosen people.

Even one of our most familiar passages from the Gospel - "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall call him Emmanuel" (see Matthew 1:23) - refers to a promised son of David.

Matthew is recalling a prophecy of Isaiah who, in the period when the kingdom of Israel was divided, served as a prophet to “the house of David,” serving the heirs of the Davidic line (see Isaiah 6-7).

In a time of distress, Isaiah foretold the birth to a virgin of a savior-like king who would be born of David’s line and would be called “Emmanuel,” a name that literally means “God with us” (see Isaiah 7:13-14).

Many believed that this prophecy had been fulfilled in the birth of King Hezekiah, a great and righteous king (see 2 Kings 18:1-6).

Matthew, however, is telling us that the birth of Hezekiah was only a partial fulfillment of Isaiah’s promise. Jesus is the true and ultimate fulfillment.

We hear Isaiah’s voice again in the story of Jesus’ Presentation in the Temple, especially in the song of Simeon.

Simeon sees in Jesus, the “salvation” promised by God. Notice that the promise Simeon sees fulfilled is not only for the chosen people Israel. It is a salvation that is both “glory for Your people Israel” but also “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” - that is, a beacon for all the peoples of the world.

Simeon is invoking here the “universal” or world-wide promises made about David’s kingdom - that the restored kingdom of David would be an

international empire stretching to the ends of the earth and embracing all nations and peoples (see Psalm 2:8; 72:8,11).

In an echo of God’s promise to Abraham’s descendants, the Scriptures tell us that by the Davidic King and Kingdom “shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed, all the nations” (see Psalm 72:17).

Isn’t it interesting that the last two stories we have about Jesus’ childhood involve the Temple?

God promised not only that the son of David would be His son, but that this son would build a “house,” a Temple to the heavenly Father’s name. Of course, that promise was partially fulfilled when David’s son, Solomon, built the glorious Temple in Jerusalem.

As the new and true Son of David, Jesus too will build a “temple” to God’s name. That temple - will be His body and the Church (see John 2:21; Matthew 16:18).

We see this foreshadowed in the story about Mary and Joseph finding Jesus in the Temple. What does Jesus tell them? Like a dutiful son of David, he replies: “Did you not know that I must be in My Father’s house?” (see Luke 2:49).



Section II. End

The Kingdom Is at Hand

Baptizing the Beloved Son

The start of Jesus' "public life" is His baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist.

As you read this story, notice the words that are heard from the heavens: "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased" (see Mark 1:11). The words echo the promise that God made to David's son - that he will be God's son and that he will rule the nations (see Psalm 2:7-9).

Following His baptism, Jesus is driven into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Here, we see emerge another theme in the Gospel's presentation of Jesus. Jesus as the new Moses, the representative of the new Israel, the new "beloved son" of God (see Exodus 4:22).

This identification of Jesus actually starts early in Matthew's Gospel. If you look closely you will notice a lot of parallels between the early life of Jesus and the early life of Moses.

Herod kills all the Hebrew male children at the time of Jesus' birth. Pharaoh, at the time Moses was born, also had ordered the all Hebrew baby boys to be killed (see Exodus 1:15-16; Matthew 2:16-18).

Moses was rescued by a family member (see Exodus 2:1-10). So is Jesus, carried off by Joseph to - of all places - Egypt, where Moses, the first deliverer of God's people, was also raised (see Matthew 2:13-15; Exodus 2:5-10).

Like Moses, Jesus too is called back to his birthplace after a time of exile (see Matthew 2:20; Exodus 4:19).

Moses liberated the Israelites, leading them on an "exodus" from Egypt. Jesus' Baptism in the New Testament is the beginning of a "new exodus." Like Israel, he is declared God's "beloved Son" and is made to pass through water (compare Matthew 3:17 and Exodus 4:22; Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 42:1; Genesis 22:2).

Israel, after crossing the Red Sea, was driven into the desert to be tested for forty years. Jesus leaves the baptismal waters of the Jordan and is driven into the desert to be tempted and tried by the devil for forty days and nights (compare Matthew 4:1-2 and Exodus 15:25; 16:1; see also Deuteronomy 8:2-3; 1 Corinthians 10:1-5).

Is it just coincidence? Not a chance. Let's look carefully at the story of Jesus' tempting in the wilderness (see Luke 4; Matthew 4).

Tempting the New Moses

In the desert, Jesus faces three temptations. Just like Israel.

Like Israel, he is first confronted with hunger. He is tempted, as Israel was, to grumble against God (see Exodus 16:1-13).

Next, Satan dares Jesus to put God to the test, to demand that God "prove" His promise to care for Him. Israel underwent the same temptation when the people started fighting with Moses at Massah (see Exodus 17:1-6; Numbers 20:2-13; Psalm 95:7-9).

Last, Jesus is tempted to worship a false god, which Israel actually did in creating the idol of the golden calf (see Exodus 32).

Jesus answers each temptation with a quote from the Old Testament. But not just any quote. Each time he quotes Moses. And He doesn't quote Moses randomly.

Each of the quotes is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy - from the precise part of the book where Moses is explaining the lessons Israel was supposed to learn from its years in the desert (compare Matthew 4:4 and Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:7 and Deuteronomy 6:16; and Matthew 4:10 and Deuteronomy 6:12-15).

Blessings of the Kingdom

Jesus, then, is the son of David and the son of God, the Messiah long anticipated by the faithful of Israel.

He comes to His people as a liberator and savior - like the first liberator and savior of Israel, Moses.

Like Moses, Jesus fasts for 40 days and nights alone in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:2; Exodus 34:28).

Like Moses, He ends His fast by climbing a “mount” to give the people the law of God, delivering what we call the “Sermon on the Mount” (see Matthew 5-7; Deuteronomy 5:1-21; Exodus 24:12-18).

The Law given by Moses at Mount Sinai was a Law by which the people were to live in the “promised land.” The new law that Jesus gives in His Sermon on the Mount is the law for the new promised land, “the kingdom of heaven” (see Matthew 5:3,10).

Jesus insists that His new law doesn’t abolish the old Law of Moses or the teachings of the prophets. Instead, He says, He has come “to fulfill” the Law and the prophets (see Matthew 5:17).

Jesus makes the Law of Moses a law for all mankind, a law for governing the human heart, a law for a Kingdom of God that’s bigger than any one nation, a Kingdom that will stretch to the ends of the earth.

The kingdom teaching of Jesus is a “family law” really - a law given by a Father for His children.

The dominant theme in Jesus’ great sermon is the Kingdom. But the Kingdom He envisions is far more than a political institution. The Kingdom of God is the Family of God.

That’s why in the middle of this sermon, He teaches the people to pray to “our Father” and to ask “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done.” (see Matthew 6:9).

The “kingdom of heaven” or the “kingdom of God” was the center of all Jesus’ preaching and miracle working. It was the center of what He sent His Apostles out to teach (see Luke 10:9,11).

Jesus gives us many hints that when He says “kingdom” He means the promised Kingdom of David. For instance, He tells the people in His sermon that they will be “salt of the earth” (see Matthew 5:13).

Jesus is here recalling the reminder of Abijah - that God’s covenant with David was for all time: “Do you not know that the Lord, the God of Israel, has given the kingdom of Israel to David forever, to him and to his sons, by a covenant made in salt?” (2 Chronicles 13:5).

Matthew also says the new people of God are to be “the light of the world” and a “city set on a mountain” (see Matthew 5:14).

He is evoking here the prophecies of Isaiah about the restored kingdom, which was to be a “light to the nations” (see Isaiah 42:6; 49:6).

The spiritual capital of the city, Jerusalem (Zion), the city of David and of the Temple, set on the holy mountain, was to become the seat of wisdom for all nations (see Isaiah 2:2-3; 11:9).

Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom is accompanied by miraculous healings - again showing Him to be the expected Messiah.

He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak (compare Isaiah 35:4-5; Jeremiah 31:7-9; Mark 7:31-37). He gives eyesight to blind - who call out to Him: “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me” (see Mark 11:47,49).

The Good Shepherd

As David was a shepherd, and as the prophets foretold, Jesus the Messiah came as a good shepherd to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel (see John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20; Matthew 10:6; 15:24; see also Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24).

We see this most clearly in His feeding of the 5,000 (see Mark 6:34-44). The story begins with Jesus pitying the crowd “for they were like sheep without a shepherd” (see Mark 6:34).

Mark wants us to see Jesus as the good shepherd promised by Ezekiel and others.

But as we see past prophecies fulfilled in His miraculous feedings, the Gospel also wants us to look ahead - to the ongoing miracle of the Good Shepherd's care for His flock in the Eucharist.

Notice the precise actions of Jesus when He feeds the multitudes: He takes the bread; He blesses it; He breaks it; and He gives it.

Now flip ahead to the accounts of the Last Supper. What do we see Jesus doing? He takes the bread: He blesses it; He breaks it; and He gives it (Compare Mark 6:41 and 14:22; Matthew 14:19 and 26:26; Luke 9:16 and 22:19. See also 1 Corinthians 11:23,26).

The Good Shepherd not only seeks out His lost sheep, but He promises to feed and nourish them, to give them their daily bread.



The Keys to the Kingdom

As Solomon appointed 12 officers to rule administer his kingdom (see 1 Kings 4:7), Jesus appoints His 12 Apostles to positions of leadership in His kingdom (see Matthew 19:28).

He appoints, one, Simon, to a special post, changing his name to Peter. Peter is from the Greek Petros, which means “rock.” Jesus tells him, “On this rock I will build my Church” (see Matthew 16:18).

This may be a reference to Solomon, who built the Temple, the house of God, on a large foundation stone (see Isaiah 28:16).

Earlier, Jesus had made another reference to Solomon and the rock - saying that people who live by His new law are like “a wise man who built his house on rock.” Solomon was known for his wisdom (see 1 Kings 3:10-12) and built the Temple on a rock (see 1 Kings 5:17; 7:10).

My Church is the name that Jesus gives to the Kingdom He has come to announce.

And Jesus gives Peter supreme authority in His Kingdom, His Church. He gives Peter the “keys to the kingdom of heaven” and the powers to “bind and loose.”

The only other place in Scripture where such “keys” are mentioned is in a passage about the Davidic kingdom found in a prophecy from Isaiah (see Isaiah 22:15-24).

There, Isaiah prophesies God’s transfer of “the key of the House of David” from a corrupt “master of the palace” named Shebna to a righteous servant, Eliakin. Of Eliakin, the prophet says:

He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the House of Judah. I will place the key of the House of David on his shoulder - when he opens, no one shall shut; when he shuts, no one shall open.

This sounds a lot like what Jesus says to Peter:

I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

In Davidic Kingdom, the king appointed, in effect, a prime minister to handle the day-to-day affairs of the Kingdom. He was called the royal “vizier” or “major-domo,” the “superintendent” or “master of the palace.” He is considered, as Isaiah said, to be “a father to the inhabitants” of the Kingdom (see 1 Kings 4:1-6; 16:9; 18:3; 2 Kings 15:5; 18:18,37;19:2; Isaiah 22:21-22).

Jesus appoints Peter to be “prime minister” of the restored Kingdom of David, the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus proclaimed, the Church He called His own.

The “keys” are a symbol of the King’s power, authority, and control (see also Revelation 22:16; 3:7; 1:8).

Jesus’ reference to “binding” and “loosing” alludes to the authority of rabbis in Jesus’ time. The rabbis had the power to make “binding” and “loosing” decisions about the interpretation and enforcement of the Law - they could declare what is permitted and what is not permitted according to the Law.

As prime minister of the Kingdom, rock of the Church, Peter is, in effect, the chief rabbi, with ultimate teaching authority.

New Exodus in Jerusalem



With Moses and Elijah

Peter, along with James and John, are chosen to see Jesus “transfigured” in glory on a mountaintop.

The Transfiguration again evokes memories from earlier in salvation history. On the mountaintop, Jesus speaks with Moses and the prophet Elijah. It is a very visual reminder of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount - that He had come to fulfill the Law (of Moses) and the prophets.

What were the three talking about on the mountain? “His exodus that He was going to accomplish in Jerusalem” (see Luke 9:31).

The Greek word “exodus” means “departure.” But in this scene they are talking about more than some generic departure. The Gospel is deliberately referring us back to the exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt.

The prophets had foretold the raising of a “righteous shoot” or son of David, who would lead a new exodus that would gather all the scattered children of Israel into a new kingdom administered by God’s appointed shepherds.

As the first exodus led to the making of a covenant between God and Israel at Sinai, the new exodus, Jeremiah prophesied, would result in a “new covenant” (see Jeremiah 23:3-8;31:31-34).

What will happen to Jesus in Jerusalem - His Passion, death and Resurrection - will be that new exodus the prophets foresaw.

As the first exodus liberated Israel, the new exodus will liberate every race and people. As the first exodus freed Israel from bondage to Pharaoh, the new exodus will free all mankind from slavery to sin and death.

Making a King's Entrance

To begin the accomplishment of this new exodus, Jesus enters Jerusalem in a scene reminiscent of Solomon's crowning as King (see 1 Kings 1:28-40).

Jesus is proclaimed "son of David" (see Matthew 21:9,15) like Solomon (see Proverbs 1:1). He rides a colt into town (see Matthew 21:7) as Solomon rode King David's mule (see 1 Kings 1:38, 44).

As Solomon is declared king by the crowd in a tumult of rejoicing (see 1 Kings 1:39-40), the crowd greets Jesus with an Old Testament gesture of homage to a king - spreading their cloaks on the road before Him (see Matthew 21:8; 2 Kings 9:13).

Passover - Old and New

The night before the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, they ate a symbolic, ceremonial meal. It was more than a meal, it was to be a memorial - a ritual remembrance of that night for all time.

We're going to review here some material we covered in Lesson Four (see "The Passover and 'Our Paschal Lamb'"). But now we're in the position to see how Jesus, in celebrating His last Passover meal with His Apostles, revealed the full meaning of the Passover.

The Passover recalls the night when God destroyed all the first-borns of Egypt in order to rescue His "first-born son," Israel (see Exodus 4:22).

On that first Passover night, all Israelite families were ordered to sacrifice an unblemished lamb (see Exodus 12:5) and paint the lamb's blood with a hyssop branch (see Exodus 12:22) on their door posts (see Exodus 12:7). Then they were to eat the lamb's "roasted flesh" with unleavened bread (see Exodus 12:8).

When the Lord came that evening for the first-born of the Egyptians, He "passed over" every house with lamb's blood painted on the door posts (see Exodus 12:12-13,23).

The Israelites were instructed to remember this night forever, "as a perpetual ordinance for yourselves and your descendants" (see Exodus 12:24).

Each year, they would relive the night, as Moses had ordered, by reading the Scriptural account of the first Passover and eating the unblemished lamb with unleavened bread.

The Passover marked their birth as a people of God in the covenant He made with them at Sinai.

That covenant was ratified by the blood of animals offered in sacrifice. Sprinkling them with the blood, Moses said: "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you" (see Exodus 24:8).

Jesus had all this background in mind at His Last Supper, which was eaten as a Passover meal. It was celebrated on the night before His "exodus."

Jesus tells the Apostles that the bread is His body and that the wine is "My blood of the covenant" (see Mark 14:22,24).

Jesus is making a direct quotation of Moses' words at Sinai (see Exodus 24:8). In Luke's account of the Last Supper, the cup is even called "the new covenant in My blood" (see Luke 22:20).

In explaining the Eucharist, Jesus compared it implicitly with the Passover celebration - saying that people must "eat My flesh," as the Israelites had to eat the roasted flesh of the Lamb (see John 6:53-58).

In telling His Apostles to "do this in memory of Me" (see Luke 22:19), Jesus was instituting the Eucharist as a "memorial" of a new "passing over" and a new covenant.

We who believe in Jesus are to remember our salvation in a ritual meal - just as the Israelites commemorated their salvation from Egypt.

Our Paschal Lamb

The actual “passover” of Jesus takes place in His Passion, death and Resurrection.

Here, we see Jesus identified as both the Passover lamb and the priest who offers the lamb in sacrifice.

Early on, John the Baptist had identified Jesus by the curious label, “the Lamb of God” (see John 1:29).

When Christ is condemned, the Gospel tells us, it was the “preparation day for Passover, and it was about noon.” Why this detail? Because that was the precise moment when Israel’s priests slaughtered the lambs for the Passover meal (see John 19:14).

Later, the mocking soldiers give Jesus a sponge soaked in wine. They raise it to Him on a “hyssop branch.” That’s the same kind of branch the Israelites are instructed to use to daub their door posts with the blood of the Passover lamb (see John 19:29; Exodus 12:22).

And why don’t the soldiers break Jesus’ legs (see John 19:33,36)? John explains that with a quote from Exodus, telling us that it was because the legs of the Passover lambs weren’t to be broken (see Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:21).

Jesus also is reported to have been wearing a tunic that was “seamless, woven in one piece from the top down” (see John 19:23). This sounds a lot like the special garment worn by Israel’s high priest which was not to be torn (see Leviticus 16:4; 21:10). Note that the soldiers say, “Let’s not tear it” (see John 19:24).

These subtle details are put there to show us that what’s happening on the Cross is a new Passover.

In the first Passover, Israel was spared by the blood of an unblemished sacrificial lamb painted on their door posts. The lamb died instead of the first-born, was sacrificed so that the people could live (see Exodus 12:1-23,27).

It is the same with the Lord’s Passover. The Lamb of God dies so that the people of God might live, saved from their sins by “the blood of the Lamb” shed on the Cross (see Revelation 7:14; 12:11; 5:12).

“Our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed,” St. Paul says (see 1 Corinthians 5:7). On the Cross, St. Peter tells us, Jesus was “a spotless unblemished Lamb.” By His “Precious Blood” we are “ransomed” from captivity to sin and death (see 1 Peter 1:18-19).





Death of the Beloved Son

More than that, even, what's happening on the Cross is the fulfillment of the oath that God swore to Abraham back on the Mount of Moriah.

Here we want to recall what we said in Lesson III (see "Binding Isaac").

On the Cross, Jesus is "reenacting" the story of Abraham's sacrifice of His beloved son Isaac (see Genesis 22).

Calvary, where Jesus was crucified, is one of the hills of Moriah, the mountain range where the drama of Abraham and Isaac took place.

Recall the repetition of the words "father" and "son" in the Abraham and Isaac story, how Isaac is repeatedly referred to as Abraham's only and beloved son (see Genesis 22:2,12,16).

Jesus, too, is called a "beloved Son" at two crucial points in His life - in His Baptism and Transfiguration (see Matthew 3:17; 17:5).

As Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice, and submitted to being bound to the wood, so too Jesus carried His cross and let men bind Him to it.

Abraham had assured his son before binding him on the altar: “God himself will provide the lamb for the holocaust [sacrificial burnt offering]” (see Genesis 22:8).

And indeed God did - centuries later on the Cross at Calvary. There, God accepted the sacrificial death of His only beloved Son.

Abraham received his son back from certain death “on the third day” (see Genesis 22:4). And on the third day, God the Father received His Son back from the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:4).

In testing Abraham’s faith, God had been showing us the Cross in advance, had been revealing the mystery of His own Fatherly love, of His faithfulness to His covenant promises.

God twice praised Abraham’s faithfulness - “You did not withhold from me your own beloved son” (see Genesis 22:12,16).

When Paul talks about the Crucifixion, he uses the same exact Greek words to describe God’s faithfulness - “He who did not spare His own Son but handed Him over for us all” (see Romans 8:32).

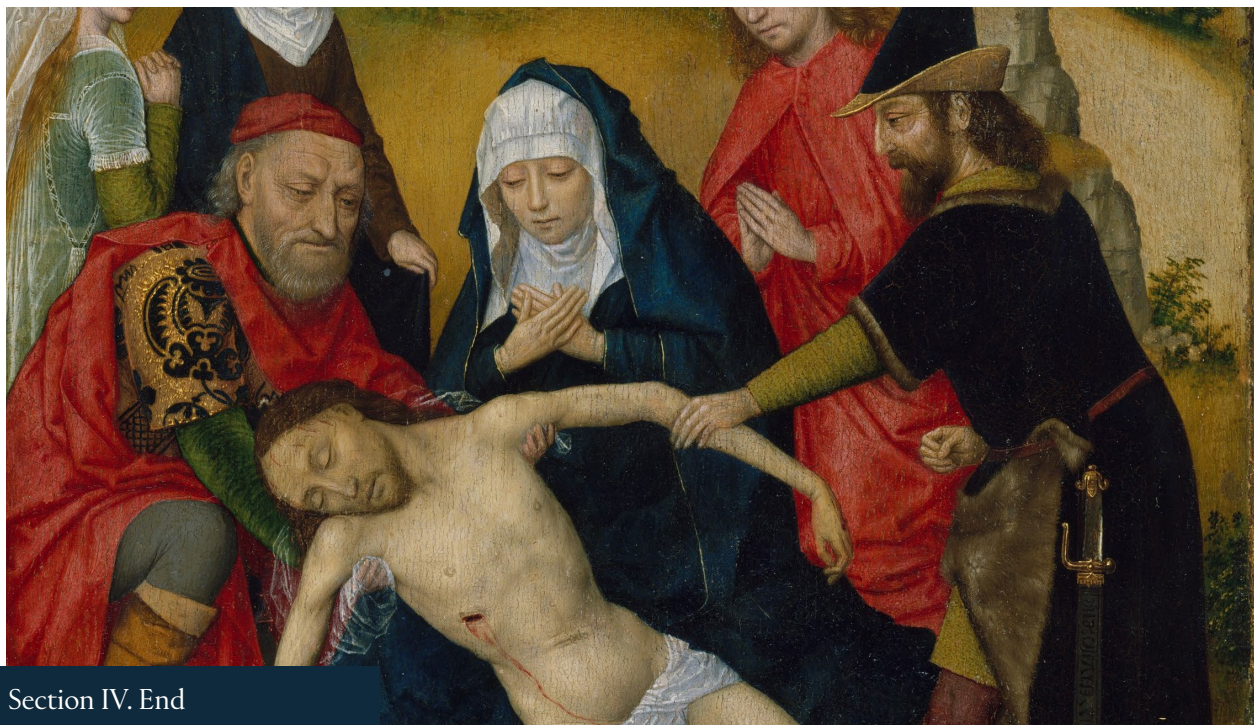
On account of Abraham’s faith, God swore a covenant oath - that Abraham’s children would be “as countless as the stars of the sky” and that through them God’s blessings would flow upon “all the nations of the earth” (see Genesis 22:15-18).

As we have said, this is the covenant that God was honoring at every turn in salvation history - in freeing the descendants of Abraham from Egypt (see Exodus 2:24); in establishing David’s kingdom as an everlasting dynasty (see 2 Samuel 7:8,10,11).

And on the Cross, that promise to Abraham is finally fulfilled. God, in faithfulness to His covenant promise to Abraham, in offering His only begotten Son, made it possible for all peoples to be made “children of Abraham” and heirs of the promised blessings.

As Paul said, the Beloved Son gave His life so that “the blessings of Abraham might be extended to the Gentiles” - that is, to all the peoples of the world, to all those who aren’t children of Abraham by birth (see Galatians 3:14).

By faith in the Gospel, by believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of David and the son of Abraham, all men and women are made “Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise” made by God to Abraham back on Moriah (see Galatians 3:29).



Section IV. End

The End of His Story

Beginning with Moses

How do we know all this? How can we be sure that this is the “right interpretation” of what was really happening on the Cross?

Because the Church, building on the testimony of the Apostles, has told us so. How did the Apostles know?

Because Jesus taught them how to find Him in the Scriptures.

On the third day, when He rose from the dead, what was the first thing He did? According to Luke’s Gospel, He appeared to some deeply saddened disciples making their way to Emmaus.

As He walked, He explained the Scriptures to them. “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them what referred to Him in all the Scriptures” (see Luke 24:27).

When He was done interpreting the Scriptures to them, He celebrated the Eucharist. Notice the same pattern we observed in the feeding of the multitudes and at the Last Supper. At Emmaus, “He took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them” (see Luke 24:30).

Later that first Easter night, He appeared to the Apostles. Again, He “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (see Luke 24:45).

By Scriptures, of course, Luke means the books of what we call the Old Testament. There were no New Testament writings just yet!

But Jesus was establishing something very important - that what He said and did, the meaning of His life, death and Resurrection, can’t be understood apart from what was written beforehand in the Old Testament.

He told them that God had foretold His coming in every part of the Old Testament, and explained to them “everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms” (see Luke 24:44).

Jesus taught His chosen Apostles how to interpret the Scriptures. And as He promised, He sent them “the Spirit of truth” to guide them “to all truth” (see John 16:13).

What they learned and continued to have revealed to them “in the breaking of the bread” is inscribed on every page of the New Testament and in the Liturgy of the Church.

Indeed, there is not a page of the New Testament that’s not infused with Old Testament quotations or allusions. Even relatively minor Epistles, like that of Jude, contain lessons drawn from the Old Testament.

Listen for the echoes of salvation history as you read the rest of the New Testament.

You will hear the Apostles doing just what Jesus taught them to do - interpreting the Old Testament, explaining how all the great words and events of the past pointed to Jesus, the Messiah, the Word of God come in the flesh (see Acts 8:26-39; John 1:14).

In the Acts of the Apostles, be sure to read the great missionary speeches of Peter (see Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 10:34-43); Paul (see Acts 13:16-41) and Steven (see Acts 7:1-51).

You will hear all the great stories we have looked at in this course - about God’s promises to Abraham, about Moses and the Exodus, the forty years in the desert, and more. More than any other figure, you will hear about David.

Kingdom of the Spirit

At the center of the Jesus' post-Resurrection teaching about the Old Testament was David and "the kingdom of God" (see Acts 1:3).

In the Church, God has "restore[d] the kingdom to Israel" (see Acts 1:6).

Jesus' Ascension to heaven is described as a royal enthronement - He is taken up to heaven to be seated at the right hand of God for all eternity (see Acts 2:22-36).

Seated on the throne of David, Jesus rules His Kingdom (see Acts 13:22-37). More than a heavenly king, Christ is "a great priest over the house of God" (see Hebrews 10:11-12).

The Davidic Messiah, we recall, was expected to be "a high priest forever" (see Psalm 110:4). And now Jesus is enthroned in the temple and sanctuary of heaven - "a high priest who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (see Hebrews 8:1; also Hebrews 7; Acts 7:56).

Jesus reigns now as King and High Priest over a kingdom that is both on earth and in heaven - a kingdom that is both temporal and historical and spiritual and eternal. It is a kingdom that was begun among the children of Israel, but now is to extend to the ends of the earth.

We see this already in the Acts of the Apostles. The progress of Acts shows the Church extending from Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), north to restore the former Northern Kingdom (Acts 8), and from there fanning out to all the nations beyond Israel (see Acts 10-28).

As you read Acts, notice that "the Kingdom of God" is a constant theme of the Apostles' preaching (see Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:31).

This Kingdom is the Church. And the Church is the destiny of the human family. In sending His Spirit down upon Mary and the Apostles at the Pentecost (see Acts 1:14; Acts 2), God announces the crowning of all His mighty works of salvation history.



The Jewish feast of Pentecost called all devout Jews to Jerusalem to celebrate their birth as God's chosen people, in the covenant Law given to Moses at Sinai (see Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-11).

The Spirit given to the Church at Pentecost seals the new law and new covenant brought by Jesus - written not on stone tablets but on the hearts of believers, as the prophets promised (see Jeremiah 31:31-34; 2 Corinthians 3:2-8; Romans 8:2).

In the beginning, the Spirit came as a "mighty wind" sweeping over the face of the earth (see Genesis 1:2). And in the new creation of Pentecost, the Spirit again comes as "a strong, driving wind" (see Acts 2:2) to renew the face of the earth.

God fashioned Adam, the first man, out of dust and filled him with His Spirit (see Genesis 2:7).

Jesus is "the New Adam" (see Romans 5:12-14,17-19).

Jesus underwent a temptation by the Devil, just as Adam did. He was tempted a final time, in a garden (see Luke 22:39-46), in "the time for the power of darkness," that is, the time for the Devil's last stand (see Luke 22:53).

The first Adam, by his disobedience, brought sin and division and death into the world.

By His obedience to God, by willingly emptying himself to come among us as a man and to offer himself in sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus restored our relationship with God (see Philippians 2:6-11).

We see this on the Cross. What does Jesus say to the good thief? "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (see Luke 23:42).

Paradise, as we learn later in the New Testament (see Revelation 2:7), is the "Garden of God," the place where salvation history begins and ends - with the human family once more worthy to eat of "the tree of life" (see Revelation 22:2,14,19).

"For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life," Paul said (see 1 Corinthians 15:22).

As Adam was made a living being by the Spirit-breath of God, the New Adam became a life-giving Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 15:45,47).

He breathed His own life and power into the Apostles after the Resurrection (see John 20:22-23). And beginning at Pentecost, like a river of living water, for all ages He will pour out His Spirit on His body, the Church (see John 7:37-39).

Sacraments of Childhood

The Apostles in turn pour out that Spirit upon the world - through the divine ministry of the sacraments.

The sacraments, as the Apostles explained them, continued the mighty works of God in salvation history - localizing them, making them personal, ensuring that all people would be joined to the saving work of Jesus until the end of time.

The sacraments - like everything in the New Covenant - were concealed in the Old and revealed in the new.

Baptism fulfills the covenant God made with Noah. No longer does water destroy the sinful. Now it saves the sinner, destroys the sin (see 1 Peter 3:20-21). But whereas the flood and the ark saved only eight people, in the saving waters of Baptism, in the ark of the Church, all humankind may find salvation.

The waters of Baptism are also likened to the miracle of the parted waters of the Red Sea. When Moses led the people through the waters of the Red Sea, fed them with spiritual food and drink, it was to show us an "example" of our life in the Church.

We will be saved in the waters of Baptism, guided by the Spirit, nourished by the Eucharist in the wilderness of the world (see 1 Corinthians 10).

Receiving the Spirit in Baptism, each man and woman is made a "new creation" (see 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). According to St. James: "He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of first fruits of His creatures" (see James 1:18)

This new birth is celebrated throughout the New Testament: “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God” (see 1 John 3:1).

This is why the Apostles, like Paul, called themselves spiritual “fathers” (see Philemon 10) and referred to their new converts as “children” (see 1 Thessalonians 2:11) and even “newborn infants” (see 1 Peter 2:2).

Remember, this was the purpose of salvation history in the beginning, the meaning and trajectory of every covenant - to make us children of God. This purpose is fulfilled in Jesus and the Church. In the Church, all are made part of what Paul calls “the family of faith” (see Galatians 6:10).

Completing the Word of God

In Jesus, we see the full disclosure of God’s “eternal purpose,” His plan from “before the foundation of the world” - to make all men and women His children by divine “adoption” (see Ephesians 3:11; 1:4-5)

Each of the Baptized has been given a “share in the divine nature” (see 2 Peter 1:4). Each has received “a Spirit of adoption,” making them “Children of God, and if children, then heirs of God” (see Romans 8:15-17) - heirs to the blessings promised at the dawn of salvation history.

Drinking of the one Spirit in the Eucharist (see 1 Corinthians 10:4), believers in the Church are the first fruits of a new, worldwide family of God - fashioned

from out of every nation under heaven, with no distinctions of wealth or language or race, a people born of the Spirit.

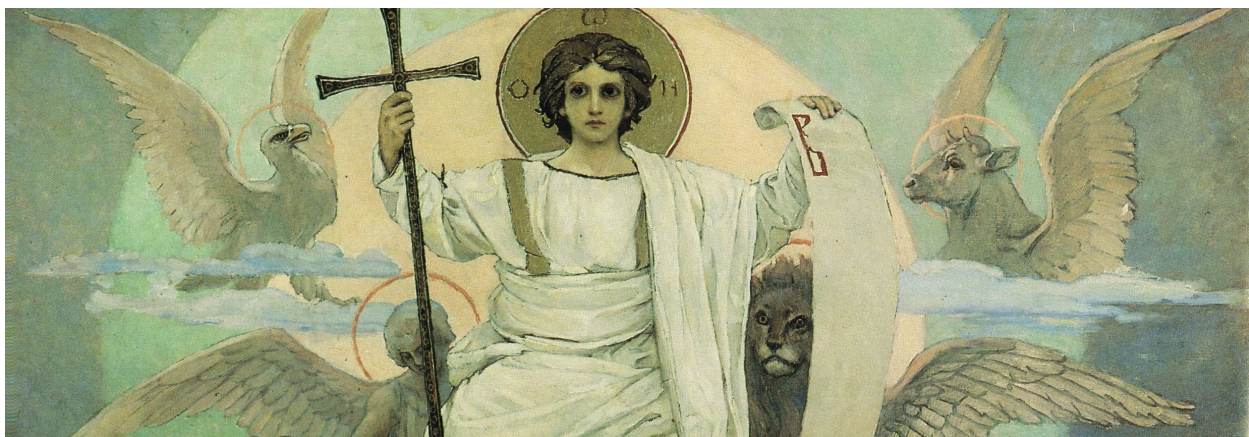
The Church, the restored Kingdom, “brings to completion...the Word of God, the mystery hidden from ages and generations past” (see Colossians 1:26).

In the Kingdom, in the Church, the Gentiles, the non-Jews, are “no longer strangers” but are made now “fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God” (see Ephesians 2:19: 3:5-6).

Much of the drama of Acts, the tension of Romans and Galatians, revolves around the growth and meaning of this Kingdom, how God’s saving purpose was to include the non-Jewish peoples, how the Gospel is to be preached “to the Gentiles that they may be saved” (see 1 Thessalonians 2:16).

And throughout the New Testament we see the Church growing as a visible institution:

- * under the leadership of Peter, teaching and interpreting the Scriptures with final and ultimate authority, guided by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 15:24-29);
- * writing inspired letters and handing on oral traditions (see 2 Thessalonians 2:15);
- * Baptizing and celebrating the Eucharist and other sacraments (see Acts 10:44-48; 2:42);
- * creating permanent institutions - priests, bishops and deacons - to carry on the work into the future (see Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-9; 4:14;



Revealing the End

The New Testament promises that the Kingdom now visible on earth will be consummated in the “heavenly kingdom” (see 2 Timothy 4:18).

And we see a glimpse of that heavenly kingdom in the Bible’s last book, the Book of Revelation.

The Bible began with the story of the creation of the world. It ends with the passing away of heaven and earth and the coming down of “a new heaven and a new earth” (see Revelation 21:1).

In Revelation, the Apostle John is “caught up in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (see Revelation 1:10) - that is, on a Sunday, possibly while celebrating the Eucharist.

What is revealed to him is the destiny of history, the “goal” or final end of God’s saving plan.

Jesus is unveiled as “the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David” (see Revelation 5:5;3:7; 22:16) - in other words the Son of David.

He is “a male child destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod” (see Revelation 12:5), born of a Queen Mother - “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (see Revelation 12:1).

He is revealed as “the Lamb that was slain,” now enthroned in heaven (see Revelation 5:6-14). He is clothed as a high priest and king (see Revelation 1:13) and He is called “the Word of God” (see Revelation 19:13) and “King of Kings and Lord of Lord” (see Revelation 19:16; 11:15).

Jesus is seen summoning people to worship, to enter into His kingdom, to eat with Him, to be enthroned with Him in heaven (see Revelation 3:20-21).

The Church is revealed as “a kingdom, priests for His God and Father” (see Revelation 1:6).

Recall that this was God’s purpose in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt and making them a nation (see Exodus 19:6). The Kingdom of the Church, born of the new exodus of Christ, now fulfills God’s purpose - to make a holy family of priestly people (see 1 Peter 2:9).

The Church is founded on “the twelve apostles of the Lamb” and open to the “twelve tribes of the Israelites” (see Revelation 21:12,14). It is made up of both Jews and Gentiles, as John sees it. There are 144,000 “marked from every tribe of the Israelites” plus “a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue” (see Revelation 7:7,9).

All are gathered before a great throne and the Lamb, and heaven is filled with the sounds and actions of worship. Revelation, in fact, is a picture of the eternal liturgy of heaven, a liturgy that very much resembles the Mass the Church still celebrates on earth.

Through all the visions John records, there are scenes of tribulation and warfare, as the Church struggles against Satan, the great ancient serpent “who deceived the whole world” at the beginning of salvation history (see Revelation 12:9).

The first creation ended with the frustration of God’s plan in the sin of Adam and Eve. The Bible ends with images of triumph and victory - “a new heaven and a new earth” (see Revelation 21:1).

All the Church is singing a great “alleluia” before the throne of God, joining in celebration of “the wedding feast of the Lamb” (see Revelation 19:6,7,9).

The Groom of the feast is the Lamb, Christ. The Bride is the Church - described as a “holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (see Revelation 21:2).

The Church, throughout the New Testament is referred to in female terms - as the “elect Lady” (see 2 John 1), as the bride made “one flesh” with Christ (see Ephesians 5:31-32), and finally as the “mother” of every Christian born in baptism (see Galatians 4:26).

In drawing these comparisons, Paul in particular, always pointed his readers back to the story of Adam and Eve. The Church is “one body” with Christ in the same way that Adam and Eve - and every married couple - are united as “one flesh” in marriage (see Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:30-32).

Remember that Christ is presented to us in the New Testament as a “New Adam.” The Church, His Bride, is the New Eve.

We see this image also on the Cross. In John's Gospel, just after Jesus entrusted His mother, Mary, to His beloved Apostle John (see John 19:26-27), a soldier pierces His side and "blood and water flowed out" (see John 19:34).

In this too, the early Church, saw an allusion to Christ as the New Adam. As God cast Adam into a deep sleep and then took out one of his ribs to form Eve, the Church believed that in the same way, God drew the Church, the New Eve, from out of the side of Christ as He hung in the sleep of death on the Cross. The blood and water symbolized the sacraments of the Church - Baptism and the Eucharist.

In the garden in the beginning, then, with the "marriage" of Adam and Eve, God was drawing for us an image of what things would look like in the end.

He was showing us that the relationship He desires with the human race is full communion, intimate love. The only human relationship that can compare is that of the union of man and woman in the marriage covenant.

In fact, throughout salvation history, God compared His Old Covenant to the marriage covenant (see Hosea 2:16-24; Jeremiah 2:2; Isaiah 54:4-8). This explains why Christ described Himself as a "bridegroom" in the Gospels and performed His first miracle at a wedding (see John 2; 3:29; Mark 2:19; Matthew 22:1-14; 25:1-13).

The New Covenant fulfills God's marital vows to His people. He has become "one body" with them in the Church. This covenant is renewed in each Eucharist, as we are joined intimately to His Body.

As He promised through His prophets (see Ezekiel 37:26-27), God has made His dwelling with the human race: "He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God himself will always be with them" (see Revelation 21:3).

This is the reality we live in now, according to the Bible's last book.

We are heirs to the victory won by Christ - a victory foreseen by God since before the foundation of the world.

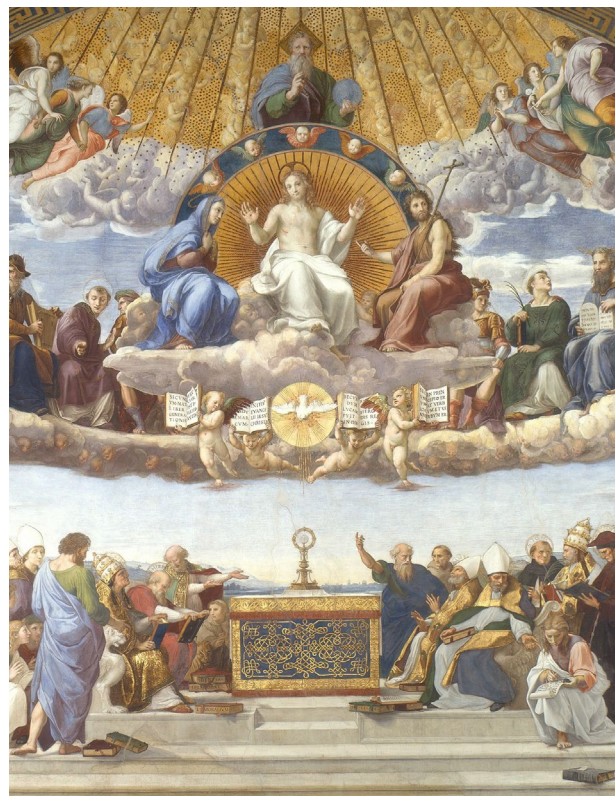
We are the spiritual children, born of the marriage of the Lamb and the Church, having received the divine gift of "life-giving water" in Baptism, having heard God say to each of us: "I shall be his God and he will be My son" (see Revelation 21:7).

By His power, we have been given the "right to eat from the Tree of Life that is in the garden of God" (see Revelation 2:7), the tree spurned by Adam and Eve.

We live in joyful hope waiting for the coming of the Lord again in glory, a coming we anticipate in every celebration of the Eucharist (see 1 Corinthians 11:26).

This is the story of the Bible. And as we have seen in this course, it is a story of God's covenant love, the story of a God's Fatherly ways, His saving plan since the beginning of time, to make each one of us a part of His family.

And the Bible is now a book, an oracle of God, that we can say we have read, with understanding, from cover to cover.



Section V. End

Study Questions

- I. Explain how the New Testament depicts Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of all God's promises in salvation history. Make specific reference to God's covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David.
- II. What does Mary mean when she says the Christ Child fulfills God's "promises to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever" (see Luke 1:55).
- III. How does the New Testament present Jesus as the promised Davidic Messiah in (a) His birth and early years; (b) His Baptism; and (c) His public ministry? Provide examples and quotations from Scripture.
- IV. How does the New Testament present Jesus as a new Moses in (a) His birth and early years; and (b) in His temptation in the wilderness?
- V. How is Jesus' death and resurrection a new exodus and a new passover? In what way is the Eucharist a memorial of this new passover and exodus?
- VI. Explain the similarities between Abraham's "sacrifice" of Isaac and the Crucifixion of Jesus. How does the event of the Cross fulfill God's promise to Abraham?
- VII. When and how did Jesus teach the Apostles how to interpret the Old Testament Scriptures?
- VIII. How does the New Testament present the Church as the restored Kingdom of David and a worldwide family of God?

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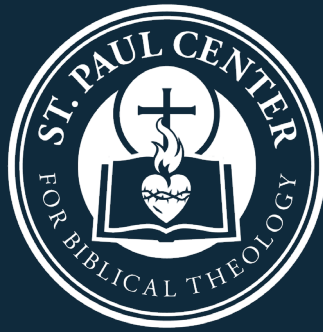
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