

# Moses to David

## The Story so Far

So far we have learned that everything was created good, but cursed through mankind's first sin in the Garden of Eden. God then sets about reversing the curse, by choosing Abraham, and promising him **land** and innumerable **offspring**, who **enjoy his presence**. Although this blessing will initially be to the nation descended from Abraham, called Israel, it will ultimately spread out to **all nations**.

Unfortunately Israel finds herself enslaved in Egypt. God then sets about liberating them, to bring them back to the land, to multiply them, and most especially to restore and deepen his relationship with them. God defeats the mighty nation of Egypt, and begins the process which will see him fulfilling his promise to Abraham<sup>1</sup>.

## What About the Law?

Perhaps one of the greatest confusions for Christians is the role of the Law in the Old Testament. Many see the Old Testament as presenting a system of 'salvation by Law' which is then superseded by the New Testament system of 'salvation by grace'. Although this is not completely false, it is important for us to notice, as we have already seen, that the Old Testament is structured, not around law, but promise<sup>2</sup>. The Law, therefore, does not confer salvation in the Old Testament, rather it sets out how people who are already receiving the promise should live.

**The land** is a constant preoccupation in the Law. For instance:

Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, and so that you may live long in the land that the Lord swore to your forefathers to give to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Deuteronomy 11:8-9)

Many of the laws of Israel are to enable people to live in harmony with their environment.

The theme of **offspring** is developed through many laws that are focused on community and social ethics. Thus the Law is full of rules about employment, marriage and social justice. If God's people are to be a great community under his care then they must learn how to live together.

Israel is called to live **enjoying God's presence** and laws which focus on this are also numerous. The prohibition on idolatry, instructions for the tabernacle and worship are focused on maintaining and understanding their relationship with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Have a look at Psalm 105 if you want a summary written by a biblical author. Note that this author sees the Exodus in terms of faithfulness to the promises to Abraham (v. 42).

<sup>2</sup> This is the great misunderstanding of the Law which the apostle Paul addresses in many places in his letters. In particular Galatians 3:15-25 and Romans 4.

The law is also specifically intended to be a model for **the nations**. In Deuteronomy 4 we read

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

So the law is given to shape and regulate the nation of Israel in order for them to enjoy the blessings promised to Abraham<sup>3</sup>.

But there is a problem which the law exposes. Israel’s sin threatens the promise. In the short term there is the partial solution of sacrifice which atones for some sins<sup>4</sup>. However sacrifices are never really adequate and particularly do not deal with rebellious hearts. The book of Deuteronomy draws us towards a rather stark conclusion. In Deuteronomy 27 there is a solemn cursing ceremony which ends with the words

“Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.”  
Then all the people shall say, “Amen!” (Deuteronomy 27:26)

Thus a curse is pronounced on anyone who fails to obey the whole law<sup>5</sup>. Moses goes on to conclude that Israel will not long dwell in the land, and the final Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 is a savage indictment of Israel and a solemn assertion of God’s judgment and their exile.

However, completely unexpectedly Moses then promises God’s compassion<sup>6</sup> for no other reason than Israel’s helplessness and God’s character.

“See now that I myself am He!  
There is no god besides me.<sup>7</sup>  
I put to death and I bring to life,  
I have wounded and I will heal,  
and no-one can deliver out of my hand. (Deuteronomy 32:39)

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<sup>3</sup> For a fascinating exposition of Old Testament ethics see Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2004) Wright proposes an underlying paradigm which helps us understand the shape of Old Testament ethics. He proposes a three pronged matrix for Old Testament ethics of, God (the theological angle), Israel (the social angle) and land (the economic angle). In addition he points out that Israel was to be a model for the nations. Wright makes some effort to explore the connection with the promises to Abraham, but we should note from the perspective of these studies that his independent analysis actually fits perfectly with the fourfold promise – of land, offspring, relationship with God, for all nations.

<sup>4</sup> This is a major theme of the book of Leviticus which describes a range of sacrifices to indicate the range of problems associated with sin.

<sup>5</sup> This is taken up in Galatians 3:10 to explain why Christ died, as we will see in later studies.

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 32:36.

<sup>7</sup> This echoes back to God’s revelation of himself in Exodus 3, but also is taken up by Isaiah 41:4; 43:10, 13; 44:6; 45:6–7, 22; 48:12 to explain God’s determination to rescue his people through the suffering servant.

Finally Moses cries out “Rejoice, O nations with his people” because God himself will “make atonement for his land and people”<sup>8</sup>. In calling the nations, and promising to atone for both the land<sup>9</sup> and the people, God himself is ensuring that the promises to Abraham will be fulfilled despite Israel’s sin. However Deuteronomy gives no indication of how God could atone for our sins. Clarity on that only begins to come with the prophets, and the New Testament. We must wait to see that unfold.<sup>10</sup>

## Entering the Land

Returning to our story; after receiving the law in the desert, Israel finally enters the Promised Land. The book of Joshua describes the conquest in glowing terms, particularly describing settlement in the land in terms of ‘rest’ and reminding us that this was to fulfil God’s promise.

The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled. (Joshua 21:44-45)

The book of Judges, on the other hand, records the messiness of the conquest, and then records a series of leaders, or judges, who periodically rescued Israel as she languished. As the story progresses, the failings of each successive judge become more and more egregious. They may be used by God for a limited task, but they are not the One offspring who will fully realise the promise. The final chapters of the book portray Israel as sordid, irreligious and lost.

It is the book of Ruth which brings us back to the line of descent that Genesis sketched out so carefully. At the beginning of Ruth we are alerted that something significant is going on because we are reading about a family from the tribe of Judah<sup>11</sup>. Ruth does not actually even belong to Israel, she is a Moabitess, but her resilient faith in the God of Israel finally results in her bearing a son by Boaz, a member of this Judahite family. Then we discover the punch line of the narrative.

And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.  
This, then, is the family line of Perez:  
Perez was the father of Hezron,  
Hezron the father of Ram,  
Ram the father of Amminadab,  
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,  
Nahshon the father of Salmon,  
Salmon the father of Boaz,  
Boaz the father of Obed,

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<sup>8</sup> Deuteronomy 32:43.

<sup>9</sup> Hebrew: <sup>א</sup>דָּמָה. Cf Genesis 3:17 when the <sup>א</sup>דָּמָה was cursed, and Genesis 12:3 when the <sup>א</sup>דָּמָה was promised to Abraham’s descendants.

<sup>10</sup> For a scholarly study of Deuteronomy see J. G. McConville, *Grace in the End : A Study in Deuteronomic Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993)

<sup>11</sup> Ruth 1:1.

Obed the father of Jesse,  
and Jesse the father of David. (Ruth 4:17-22)

Perez was the son of Judah recorded in Genesis 38. Here we are brought back to the line of promise, traced now through Ruth and her son Obed, to king David. Alongside his other promises to Abraham, God was quietly preserving an unbroken line, from which one day the One offspring would arise. Could it be David?

## Samuel and Saul

From the family story of Ruth, the book of 1 Samuel plunges us back into the national politics of Israel. Samuel, (an Ephraimite<sup>12</sup>, and therefore definitely not the One) is the last judge of Israel. Though he is a good ruler, the people decide that they want to have a much more powerful leader with the title of king<sup>13</sup>. God is clear that this over-reliance on a dynamic leader is a rejection of him<sup>14</sup>, however he bows to their wishes.

Samuel appoints Saul as king, despite Saul's protest that his membership of the tribe of Benjamin does not make him a good candidate<sup>15</sup>. Saul's reign begins well but it is not long before he oversteps his authority, and is finally rejected by God as king<sup>16</sup>. Although Saul will remain on the throne for many more years, his authority is gone and he dies miserably.

Meanwhile Samuel seeks another king. God points him to Jesse, from the tribe of Judah, and after rejecting all the obvious members of his family, finally the youngest boy, who is tending the sheep, is chosen. His name is David.

## King David

Young David spends many years on the run from Saul, and only when Saul dies does he become king<sup>17</sup>. When he has established Jerusalem as his capital, David is determined that the ark of God, which represents God's presence should be brought into the city. After a false start the ark is finally brought into the city, and God is symbolically established at the heart of the nation<sup>18</sup>.

Later David conceives a plan to build a permanent temple for God, symbolising God's abiding relationship with his people. However, in 2 Samuel 7, God says that

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Samuel 1:1.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Samuel 8.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Samuel 8:7.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Samuel 9:21.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Samuel 15:23.

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly David is initially crowned only by the tribe of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin (Saul's tribe) and the ten other tribes headed by Ephraim all allied against him (2 Samuel 2). This reminds us of the ambiguities of inheritance amongst Jacob's sons, with Ephraim in particular representing Joseph. Jacob's prophecy, however, does come true and the tribe of Judah prevails.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Samuel 6.

he has always been mobile and has never asked for a permanent dwelling. Nevertheless there is a “house” he is interested in.

‘The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.’ (2 Samuel 7:11-16)

This passage uses an ambiguity in Old Testament language. In the Old Testament ‘house’ can mean either a physical building, or a family. God says that he will establish a ‘house’ for David: he will raise up a son after his death “who will build a house for my Name”. At one level he is clearly describing David’s son Solomon, who finally did build the Temple. God is quite clear that this son will be punished for any wrongdoing. But the promise goes beyond Solomon and the Temple to a kingdom and a ‘house’ which will last forever – “your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me”. Solomon and the Jerusalem Temple are just foreshadowing an eternal king and an eternal family.

From this moment on the hope of One offspring who will fully realise the promises to Abraham becomes fused with the Davidic royal line. The king is called the Anointed One, since all kings were anointed by God; set apart for their task. The Hebrew word for this is Messiah, and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament it becomes Christ. So in each generation the king of Israel is a messiah, and in each generation the question hangs in the air – “Is this *the* Messiah, the eternal king, the One offspring?”

But David’s reign is not all glorious. He becomes embroiled in adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. He is only brought to his senses by Nathan the prophet<sup>19</sup>. Nathan then delivers a devastating prophecy to him.

Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own. (2 Samuel 12:10)

This is actually the pivotal moment in the Old Testament story. Up to this moment there has always been faltering but clear progress towards realising the promises given to Abraham. The land has been conquered, the people have been multiplying, God’s relationship with his people has been growing, and the blessing of the nations seems to be approaching. Prospects for the future seemed to be even clearer when God made his bold promise to David that his house and kingdom will endure forever. But now this parallel assertion that “the sword shall never depart from your house” seems to ruin everything. Indeed, from this moment onwards the story of Israel is one of decay and violence and finally exile. As Matthew hinted in his summary of the Old Testament<sup>20</sup>, David came closer than anyone else in Israel to being the One but he was not. David’s illegitimate son dies as a result of his sin,

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<sup>19</sup> 2 Samuel 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> See Matthew 1:1-17 and the first study.

but if the sword is on all generations does this mean the eternal king will die? How could he die and yet reign forever? There are mysteries to be unfolded yet.

## David in the Rest of the Bible

David is perhaps the most prominent character in the Bible after Jesus<sup>21</sup>. He is mentioned a thousand times, and alluded to much more. In the Psalms both through his own writings and the writings of others we see the developing idea of the Messiah as a world ruler<sup>22</sup> who will suffer and be vindicated<sup>23</sup> indeed who will rise from the dead<sup>24</sup>. David sees clearly that, despite this Messiah being a descendant (and therefore in Old Testament tradition inferior in status to himself) he will be greater than David<sup>25</sup>. Indeed, in one fascinating Psalm the king for a moment gets addressed as “God”<sup>26</sup>. David is also prominent in the Prophets but that must wait to a future chapter.

In the New Testament all the Abrahamic hopes are funnelled through the person of David. The very title ‘Christ’ evokes the Davidic king, but it is explicitly promised that he will rule on the throne of David<sup>27</sup>, he is also born in Bethlehem, the town of David<sup>28</sup> and he is called the son of David<sup>29</sup>. His descent from David is affirmed as an important part of the gospel<sup>30</sup>, the formation of the church is a fulfilment of the promise to ‘rebuild David’s fallen tent’<sup>31</sup> and in John’s vision of the risen Jesus in Revelation he is described as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David”<sup>32</sup>. David shapes and enriches our anticipation of the One Offspring. The New

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<sup>21</sup> See M. L. Strauss, ‘David’ in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000) For longer expositions of biblical theology with David at the centre see Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1992) And T. Desmond Alexander, *The Servant King : The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1998)

<sup>22</sup> Psalms 2 and 72.

<sup>23</sup> Psalm 22, and 69

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 16:8-11. See particularly how Peter uses this verse to demonstrate that the Old Testament expected the Messiah to rise from the dead. Acts 2:22-32

<sup>25</sup> Psalm 110:1. Note how Jesus uses this verse to prove that he is of divine as well as human origin (Matthew 22:41-46, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 20:41-44) and how Peter uses this verse to prove that the Old Testament anticipated the Jesus would ascend to the right hand of God (Acts 2:34-35).

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 45:6. See how Hebrews 1:8-9 uses this as proof of the Messiah’s deity.

<sup>27</sup> Luke 1:32, 69.

<sup>28</sup> Luke 2:4, 11.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Matthew 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, 20:30-31, 21:9, 15, 22:42. Although “son of God” is the more usual term recorded. This too is Davidic in that God explicitly spoke of the future king as “my son” (2 Samuel 7:14). This is affirmed in Psalm 2 and becomes a standard way of speaking of the future Messiah.

<sup>30</sup> Romans 1:4, 2 Timothy 2:8.

<sup>31</sup> Acts 15:16.

<sup>32</sup> Revelation 5:5. See also Revelation 22:16 where he is the offspring of David.

Testament insists that if we understand all that is said in the Old about Great David's Greater Son, Jesus will come as no surprise to us.

## And on to Solomon

This section would not be complete without reference to Solomon. Under Solomon the decline of Israel, which had begun in David's lifetime, becomes established. At his death the kingdom will be divided, and will never again be reunited.

However, Solomon's reign also has many good attributes. Indeed under Solomon we find explicit acknowledgement that the promises to Abraham have come closer than ever to being fulfilled.

The promise of **land** and **offspring** as innumerable as sand on the seashore<sup>33</sup> are clearly alluded to in 1 Kings 4

The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life. (1 Kings 4:20-21)

The promise of **enjoying God's presence** is realised in solid form when Solomon builds the Temple<sup>34</sup>, which God fills with this presence.

When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. (1 Kings 8:10-11)

The promise of blessing for **all nations** lies behind the visit of the Queen of Sheba<sup>35</sup> – one of most distant, and greatest nations of the world. The Queen praises Solomon and his nation with some interesting words.

She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness." (1 Kings 10:6-9)

These words remind us of the promise in Deuteronomy 4:5-8 that obedience would result in the nations coming and saying "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" and praising God.<sup>36</sup> If only Solomon and his father had been fully obedient, perhaps the nations would have been blessed. However Solomon has an even greater appetite for forbidden women than his father. Solomon's many

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<sup>33</sup> See Genesis 22:17.

<sup>34</sup> See Leland Ryken et al., 'Temple' in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Ill. ; Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1998): p. 849 for a rich explanation of the significance of the Temple.

<sup>35</sup> 1 Kings 10:1-13.

<sup>36</sup> Deuteronomy 4:6.

foreign wives, and consequential idolatry<sup>37</sup> arouses God's anger, and makes the enslavement of Israel by the nations all the more inevitable. Just like Israel in Egypt, the nations are not blessed, rather she is oppressed by them.

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The story has now come a long way. The promises to Abraham have become focused first on the tribe of Judah and now on the family of David. The hope of Israel and the world now rests on a future great King who will rule the world, in one global community. The promise of a relationship with God has become focused on the Temple in Jerusalem. One further thing has been learned however. So far there has been no ruler who could come close to making these things happen – not even David. Could there ever be?

## Exercise

Examine Psalms 2, 16, 22, 45, 69, 72, 110 using a cross reference resource (ESV footnotes, or New Bible Commentary etc) to see how these Psalms are used in the New Testament. Try to summarise what the New Testament writers are pointing to in these Messianic Psalms.

## Questions

1. Paul says that “the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith” Galatians 3:24. Explain how the law itself points to that.
2. Should the judges be seen as heroes or villains in God's plan?
3. Read 1 Samuel 4-6. Why is this such a crisis in Israel?
4. What are the key ways in which the story of David deepens and enriches our understanding of Jesus?
5. Summarise what has become of the themes of “land”, “offspring”, “relationship with God”, and “all nations” in the reigns of David and Solomon. What attributes of the kingdom are lost if we use these four categories?

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<sup>37</sup> 1 Kings 11.