

THE  
DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Telling the Old Testament  
Story of God



**SESSION 12**

Synthesis: With a View to New Testament Fulfillment

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# Synthesis: With a View to New Testament Fulfillment

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**Divine Revelation in Human Context**

**New Testament Fulfillment of Old Testament Themes**

**Application**

**Exam**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- appreciate how God embraces humanity in all its frailty while empowering humans to right living.
- list major themes reflected throughout the Old Testament.
- describe ways in which Old Testament themes are brought to fulfillment in the New Testament.

## INTRODUCTION

This session attempts to draw together related themes and trace them through the Old Testament, with a view toward their fulfillment in the New Testament.

## DIVINE REVELATION IN HUMAN CONTEXT



### NOTES

#### THE HUMAN CONTEXT OF THE WORD

In the first session of this module, we emphasized the importance of recognizing God's revelation as it comes to us *in and through human history*. God's revelation is intimately involved with human life and history. God does not simply write out a message with a divine hand and send it to earth from some other realm. Rather, God inspires humans to write, and God acts within nature and human history to communicate God's Word.

The main purpose of divine revelation is twofold:

- To communicate the truth about God
- To communicate the truth about creation, especially humans

From the Scriptures, we learn who God is, how to relate to Him, and what His will is. In addition, we learn who we are and what God intends for humanity. God's decision to communicate within the human context highlights His concern for genuine relationships with people.

God is not interested in simply sending guidelines and instructions to the human race, for the purpose of directing us toward right living. Rather, God desires to share guidance through direct involvement in human history. This includes everything from inspiring humans to record the Word of God, to the miracle of coming personally in Jesus Christ. As a consequence of this approach, the Bible strongly reflects the human situation. That is why we say an important aspect of the main purpose of God's revelation is to communicate truth about creation, especially humans. God reveals who we are as humans and who He wants us to be (i.e., ultimately, Christlike).

#### RESULTANT TENSIONS IN THE WORD

There is a tension in the Bible between its revelation of who we are as humans and who God intends for us to be. It is normally easy in Christian communities to recognize God's desired direction for us as revealed in the Scriptures. We can readily point to the standards of the Ten Commandments, the proclamations of the prophets, and the Sermon on the Mount, for example.

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At times, however, we have more difficulty explaining why the Bible includes revelation of the more unacceptable aspects of human behavior. The Scriptures do not shy away from portraying the reality of human existence. Accounts in the Bible include descriptions of polygamy, adultery, murder, deceit, idolatry, and other forms of sin. David committed adultery. Solomon married foreign wives in direct violation of God's law. The list goes on and on.

In the cases in which such activities are clearly labeled sin and lead to punishment, or to some type of repentance and renewal, the Christian community can clearly see what is acceptable and what is not. However, in some cases the revelation is not so clear. For example, many Old Testament characters are depicted with more than one wife; Saul consults a spirit medium to contact Samuel; and various other practices associated with Israel's idolatrous neighbors are reflected in the Old Testament. Though such practices may appear in some texts without judgment or condemnation, they are clearly rejected in others.

For example, the legal material forbids sorcery. Solomon's downfall is attributed largely to the influence of his numerous foreign wives. Idolatry is repeatedly condemned by the prophets.

Some of these issues, seemingly overlooked as part of the ancient cultural norm, are addressed more explicitly in the New Testament (e.g., Paul's exhortation that a leader can have only one spouse). Sometimes, however, we can only recognize such practices as unacceptable for the Christian by their opposition to the intent of the law of God.

The intent of the law is to promote love of God and love of neighbor. Any practice that detracts from this purpose of the law must be deemed unacceptable. Such practices as sorcery, idolatry, and even ancestral worship direct one away from loving God. They place attention and reliance upon sources in opposition to, or in place of, loyalty to God. In a similar manner, such practices as adultery and polygamy obviously compromise one's love for neighbor. People are too readily hurt by compromised intimate affections.

## NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT THEMES



### NOTES

#### THEMATIC EMPHASIS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

A number of themes might be chosen, to be traced through the Old Testament and followed to fulfillment in the New Testament. However, the overall theme of covenant serves best to demonstrate the unity of the Scriptures. This theme serves so well because it is tied so closely to and draws with it many other significant themes.

The three major covenants of the Pentateuch (Noah, Abraham/Sarah, Sinai) reveal central concerns developed throughout the Bible. In relation to the first, Noah is identified as the one through whom God will preserve humanity, based on the characteristics of being “blameless” and “walking with God” (Gen. 6:9). Similar terminology is reflected in the second covenant. Abraham is called to “walk before God,” and be “blameless” (Gen. 17:1).

In the first covenant, God demonstrates an ongoing love for humanity by promising never to destroy the earth again by flood. At the same time, God has communicated the desire for relationships characterized by holy (blameless) lives, in close contact with the Lord (walking with God). The second covenant, with Abraham and Sarah, moves beyond mere preservation of the human race. God intentionally sets in motion a plan to “bless all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:3).

The third covenant (Sinai covenant, including the Ten Commandments) expands this plan. God calls the children of Israel to become a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The implication of such a call points to worldwide outreach. That is, if the entire nation is to function as priests, who represents the congregation? The answer is obviously the rest of the nations of the earth. Thus, as initiated with Abraham and Sarah, God intends to bless all the families of the earth, now, through all the children of Israel.

In the context of the Sinai covenant, God delivers the Law through Moses. The intent of the Law is the promotion of love of God and love of neighbor (another reflection of blameless lives walking with God). Similarly, the focus of the legal instructions regarding the sacrificial system is upon cleansing from sin and offering life to God.

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The historical books (Joshua through Kings) reflect the struggles of the nation of Israel in its attempts to fulfill its call from God. The focus on covenant and its related themes remains a central concern in this material. The texts from Joshua through Kings especially reflect aspects of the Sinai covenant as elaborated in Deuteronomy. Remember that Deuteronomy is instruction to God's people on how to follow the covenant in the Promised Land. The concern of maintaining right relationship with God remains primary for both individual and nation. The historical books serve to provide Israel with an explanation for the downfall of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (Israel and Judah) in terms of failure to keep covenant relationship with God.

Images or models of individuals functioning in right relationship with God can be seen as highlights throughout the historical books. Even King Saul, who tragically ends his reign in rejection, begins his kingship with a positive picture of submission to the Spirit of God. In a moment of crisis, the Spirit of the Lord comes mightily upon Saul (1 Sam. 11:6) to secure deliverance. When the crisis is ended, Saul acknowledges success was not accomplished through his own prowess, but through the power of the Lord (1 Sam. 11:13). This event echoes similar instances in Judges, in which the Spirit of the Lord came upon various judges of Israel to bring deliverance. Such accounts highlight the message that God's ideal for leadership is portrayed through one ruled by the Spirit of God and one who recognizes his or her role as an instrument of God.

The prophets proclaim the word of the Lord in an attempt to bring about necessary direction to a nation that has neglected the covenant with God. The oracles of the prophets often focus on judgment and renewal, aimed at restoring the covenant relationship with God. An important example can be seen in the attitude of the prophets toward the sacrificial system. The prophets did not reject sacrifices and festivals but proclaimed the importance of living out the intent of the entire system. Thus, they condemned the practice of going through the motions of sacrificial ritual and keeping the festive calendar, while behaving in a manner contrary to the meaning of such worship elements (e.g., oppressing orphans and widows, cheating in the marketplace, killing one's brother or sister for personal advantage, etc.).

Recall the aim of the sacrificial system is cleansing from sin and offering life to God. The prophets dramatically proclaimed the hypocrisy of offering a sacrifice while displaying actions of disobedience to God. Ideally, the worshiper who offers life to God through sacrificial ritual should then live in obedience to the Lord throughout the following week and year (even the rest of his or her life).

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Finally, the Poetic and Wisdom Literature provides expression of human responses to the ongoing struggle to maintain right relationships with God and neighbor, as well as practical insight into God's design. From the ecstasy of praise to the agonizing paralysis of guilt, the Psalms provide a full range of religious expression in relationship to God. These songs and prayers continue to reflect the themes of covenant and right relationship to the Lord.

The desire and struggle to remain faithful to the instruction of God and live in a manner pleasing to the Lord are evident throughout. The Wisdom Literature recognizes the grandeur of God's design in the universe and reflects both a positive and negative response. The positive approach affirms the blessings of God and recognizes practical principles for right living. The negative approach acknowledges aspects of life beyond human comprehension and explanation. In each case, however, the texts recognize the only fulfilling stance in life is one of dependence upon God.

### **CONSIDERING NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT**

The Old Testament themes are ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. Christ demonstrates a blameless life, walking with God, as no other before ever did. Christ becomes the source of salvation that brings blessing to all the families of the earth. Christ models love of God and love of neighbor through teaching and in practice. Christ offers life to God through daily living in obedience to God, and literally, through sacrifice in death. Finally, Christ provides cleansing from sin, fulfilling the intent of the sacrificial system.

The call to holy living is not only modeled and fulfilled in Christ but also proclaimed in the Epistles. The author of 1 Peter reflects the language of the Sinai covenant by exhorting his listeners to recognize their role as a "royal priesthood" and a "holy nation" (2:9). Paul reflects the concepts of the sacrificial system by urging his listeners to "present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1).

An emphasis on being ruled by the Spirit of God and serving as an instrument of the Lord is also brought to fulfillment in the New Testament. Jesus is clearly led by the Spirit as depicted at the outset of His ministry, when the Spirit descends upon Him as a dove and later leads Him into the wilderness. The significance of the Spirit's leading is clearly portrayed in the lives of the apostles, beginning especially with the scenes of Pentecost in Acts 2. The same emphasis appears in Paul's exhortations to live by the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-14; Gal. 5:18-25).



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The prophetic emphasis on a genuine walk with God, free from hypocrisy, is also displayed in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. This is most readily portrayed through Christ's encounters with the scribes and Pharisees. These groups often accused Jesus of neglecting the Law, especially in relation to keeping the Sabbath. In these instances, Jesus highlighted the importance of the intent of the Law over the letter of the Law.

Jesus emphasized the fulfillment of the Law in terms of loving God and loving neighbor, above the concern merely to perform proper ritual. This point is most dramatically made through Christ's use of hyperbole (exaggerated statements not meant to be taken literally) in the Sermon on the Mount. An example is Jesus' instruction to give one's undergarments when an enemy takes one's cloak. The point is not giving away of clothing, but of sacrifice in love for opponents. The author of James speaks with a similar prophetic tone by describing pure and undefiled religion as visiting orphans and widows in their distress (1:27).

Finally, the character of the Poetic and Wisdom Literature is reflected through the numerous New Testament quotes and allusions to the Psalms. It is also reflected through the honest and determined expression of those committed to following Jesus Christ, acknowledged as God's Messiah.

## APPLICATION

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**NOTES**

1. Write a 250-word essay that answers: In what ways is the Old Testament fulfilled in Jesus Christ? How does the theme of covenant with God find its fulfillment in God's Messiah?
2. Consider the character of God's revelation in the Old Testament. In relation to the idea that God has revealed God's Word "in and through human history," write a brief essay explaining your understanding of divine and human involvement in the writing of the Old Testament.
3. Reflect on the overall flow of the writings in the Old Testament. Identify and describe any common themes you see reflected and developed throughout all of the Old Testament.
4. Journal your reflections and thoughts. Choose and reflect on some of the praise Psalms.

## EXAM



### NOTES

1. God inspires humans to write, and God acts within nature and human history to communicate God's Word.
  - A. True
  - B. False
2. Which of the following purposes is NOT a purpose of divine revelation?
  - A. To communicate truth about God
  - B. To communicate truth about creation, especially humans
  - C. To communicate truth about correct worship practices
3. The theme of covenant plays a small part in Scripture.
  - A. True
  - B. False
4. God's decision to communicate within the human context highlights His concern for genuine relationships with people.
  - A. True
  - B. False
5. It is always easy to see what is acceptable and what is not in the Bible, because evil always gets punished.
  - A. True
  - B. False
6. There is a tension in the Bible between its revelation of who we are as humans and who God intends for us to be.
  - A. True
  - B. False
7. Which of the following is NOT a major Old Testament Pentateuch covenant?
  - A. Sinai covenant
  - B. Noahic covenant
  - C. Abrahamic covenant
  - D. Davidic covenant
8. In the first Old Testament covenant, God demonstrates an ongoing love for humanity by promising never to destroy the earth again by flood.
  - A. True
  - B. False

 **NOTES**

9. The intent of the Law is the promotion of love of God and love of neighbor (another reflection of blameless lives walking with God).
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
10. The prophets rejected sacrifices and festivals while proclaiming the importance of living out the intent of the entire system.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
11. The theme of covenant loyalty may be seen as being fulfilled in Jesus.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
12. The Old Testament themes are ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ.
  - A. True
  - B. False

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. It is said that God loves us just as we are. Is this true? If so, how does this love relate to God's calling for us to be a holy people?
2. What are the major themes reflected throughout the Old Testament? Think specifically about covenant. How is this theme carried forward with Jesus, and then in the Epistles?
3. What are the major Old Testament themes? How are they carried forward and brought to fulfillment in the New Testament?
4. How are you a part of the theme of covenant? What is your privilege in God's covenant? What are your responsibilities?