

**CASKET EMPTY:**  
**God's Plan of Redemption Through History**  
**Small Group Discussion Guide**

Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series

Pastor David Palmer

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“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:  
that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,  
that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”

**1 Corinthians 15:3-4**

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil,  
to give you a future and a hope.” **Jeremiah 29:11**

**OVERVIEW:** This fall we begin a new sermon series entitled CASKET EMPTY: God's Plan of Redemption through History. We will survey the great narrative of Scripture in order to bring the many pieces of our life together. Although God inspired sixty-six different books, in three distinct languages, over thousands of years, the Bible is one redemptive story from Genesis to Revelation. The unity of the Bible is found in the revelation of the identity and character of God and his saving plan for humanity in Christ. CASKET EMPTY will help us to see this.

We need the unity of Scripture because we live in an increasingly broken and incoherent world. Many cultural voices insist that life is chaotic, random, and without meaning. In his essay “How the World Lost Its Story,” Robert Jenson explains that “it is the church's task to tell the biblical narrative to the world in proclamation and to God in worship. It is the church's mission to tell all who will listen that the God of Israel has raised his servant Jesus from the dead, and to unpack the soteriological and doxological import of that fact.” CASKET EMPTY will help us to do this.

The acronym CASKET will guide us this fall through the Old Testament that begins at CREATION and continues with the call of ABRAHAM and the covenant God makes with his descendants at SINAI. God's redemptive purpose advances in the period of KINGS when the monarchy is established and David is promised everlasting kingship. Despite the judgment of EXILE, God's plan remains certain during the period of TEMPLE as the Old Testament concludes with a partial restoration and a vivid picture of future hope. The acronym EMPTY will guide our journey in the spring through the New Testament as Israel's EXPECTATIONS are realized in the life, death, and resurrection of the promised MESSIAH. The Holy Spirit is poured out at PENTECOST so that the TEACHING of Christ may spread throughout the world. The church offers new life in Christ to all who believe as we wait for Him who is YET-TO-COME. God's plan of redemption reveals His identity and our own. His purpose provides meaning and coherence to our lives. His eternal actions will guide our daily decisions and compel us to join His mission in the world today. CASKET EMPTY will help us to live this.

The cover images of the CASKET EMPTY Bible series draw our attention to the death and resurrection of Christ as the center of God's saving purpose for all of humanity. The cross of Christ is the place where God and humanity are reconciled. His substitutionary death provides atonement for sin and everlasting righteousness for all who believe. The empty tomb of Christ radiates with the dawn of God's new creation. All who believe are filled with the Holy Spirit to walk in newness of life and become part of God's mission in the world.

In our discussion guide for this series, we will first offer a brief summary of the main point of each letter. There will be some optional Bible study questions at the conclusion of each section drawn from the study guide. However, the main questions that we encourage you to use and discuss together will be four repeated questions throughout the study. These questions are helpful for almost any Bible study. These questions should be asked and discussed with reference to the specific text portions from this week and the topic under discussion in our CASKET EMPTY study. Try not to range around the Scripture but look closely at the passages before us. Each passage has treasures to bestow and supplies nourishment for the soul. Every verse has an important contribution to the whole counsel of God.

Here are the four questions we will ask for each week:

1) **Who is the LORD revealed to be in this portion of Scripture?** Remember that the Scripture is about God. Each passage has something to yield. We should discipline ourselves to keep God at the center of the story. He is the subject of the first verb and the first speaker. God is the main actor in the narrative. We should train ourselves to look at what He is doing and why. How does God act and what is He like?

2) **What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?** The Bible reveals that God's saving purpose is realized in the creation of a people. They are made in His image and designed to know and respond to Him in praise. They ultimately are a diverse people from every nation who will one day be conformed to the image of Christ. They are distinct from this world and yet have a mission to this world.

3) **What does God require of us from this section?** Once we see who God is and who we are, then we are in a good position to ask what God expects from us in a given passage. Is there an explicit instruction or command? Are there warnings or promises? What does it mean to obey or disobey God in our lives and what is the result?

4) **How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?** Jesus says that the Scripture bears witness to him (John 5:39). He opened the minds of his disciples to see all that was written of Him (Luke 24:27). Paul writes that the death and resurrection of Christ are *according to the Scriptures* (1 Cor. 15:3-4). When we learn the Old Testament, we can rightly ask: how does this portion of Scripture point us to the New Testament fulfillment in Christ? When we read the New Testament, we can rightly ask: how does the Old Testament anticipate this fulfillment in Christ?

## “CASKET EMPTY: C is for Creation”

Sermon Text: Genesis 1:26-28 and Psalm 8

Theme: We are created in God’s image to display His glory

**SMALL GROUP:** *CASKET EMPTY: Old Testament Study Guide*, Chap. 1: Creation, pp. 1-14.

**SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:** Genesis 1-11; Psalms 8, 29, 93, 96-98

### CREATION Simply Explained

The first period of the Old Testament is entitled CREATION because the opening pages of the Bible describe God’s creation of the world by his word. The name of the God who creates the world and living creatures is Yahweh, which is translated as LORD in our English Bible. Since the LORD God is the one who brings the creation into being and gives life to all, he alone is to be worshiped and praised. Special attention is given in the first chapter of the Bible to the creation of human beings, who are made in God’s image and likeness. Human beings, both male and female, are to rule over God’s creation as his representatives. Under the blessing of God, they are to multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. God places the man and the woman in the garden that he has planted. Two trees are located in the center of the garden: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God commands Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, warning him that he will surely die if he eats from it. This command is central to life with God. Human beings are to trust in God and obey his voice; in doing so, they honor him as God.

But the serpent enters the garden. He lies to Adam and Eve, telling them that they will not die if they eat from the prohibited tree and that they will become like God by partaking of its fruit. Eve is deceived and listens to the creature rather than the Creator. She gives the fruit to her husband, who is with her, and he eats. Adam becomes a transgressor of God’s law, since he is given God’s command directly. Death comes as a result of Adam’s disobedience, not only to Adam, but to all human beings who have their identity in him. Adam and Eve are banished from Eden, but the effects of sin are evident in Adam’s son, Cain, who murders his brother. Humans continue to multiply, but sin does as well. The human heart turns away from the Creator God, devising that which is evil in his sight. God is grieved over his creation; he decides to wipe out human beings. In an act of grace, however, God warns Noah ahead of time of the impending judgment. This is not because Noah is good, but because God is gracious. God plans to send a flood to wipe out humanity, but in his mercy, he tells Noah to build an ark. In order to do this, Noah must believe in the unseen that the flood waters will come as God has spoken. By faith Noah obeys God’s command and he is therefore declared righteous by God. Noah is permitted to enter the ark along with his family and salvation comes to him and his household. After the flood waters subside, God makes a covenant with Noah and all humanity. He promises never again to send another flood to wipe out his creation, even though the human heart has not changed. The human story continues, therefore, because a gracious God promises to withhold his punishment. The rainbow is a sign of this covenant.

**Key people** The key people for this period are Adam and Eve, and their three sons, Cain, Abel, and Seth; Enoch; Noah, and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; and Ham’s son Canaan.

Biblical books for the period of CREATION. The period of CREATION is described in Genesis 1-11.

Two trees represent CREATION. It is important that you locate on the timeline the picture of two trees that represents the period of CREATION. The theological significance of this picture is summarized on the back of the timeline, and reads as follows:

The picture of two trees represents the period of CREATION. God commands Adam not to eat from one of the trees, but Adam disobeys God, resulting in banishment from God's presence and death. Since these two trees are at the very center of life in the garden, and since eating from one of them marks the entrance of sin into the world, this picture will remind you of this key event that takes place in the period of CREATION.

1. How is the LORD revealed in this portion of Scripture? (You may ask: Who is He and What is He like? Remember that the primary purpose of Scripture is to introduce us to our heavenly Father and his plan for us)
2. What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?
3. What does the LORD require of us from this section?
4. How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?
5. Close in prayer for one another

Optional Bible Study Question:

1. Read Genesis 1-2 and Psalm 8. Make five observations about God's creation of human beings in Gen. 1:26-28. What are the tasks that are given to them?

**“CASKET EMPTY: C is for Creation (part 2)”**

Sermon Text: Genesis 3:1-24

Theme: Sin and death enter the world through disobedience

**SMALL GROUP:** *CASKET EMPTY: Old Testament Study Guide*, Chap. 1: Creation, pp. 14-25.

**SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:** Genesis 1-11; Psalms 8, 29, 93, 96-98

1. How is the LORD revealed in this portion of Scripture? (You may ask: Who is He and What is He like? Remember that the primary purpose of Scripture is to introduce us to our heavenly Father and his plan for us)
2. What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?
3. What does the LORD require of us from this section?
4. How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?
5. Close in prayer for one another

Optional Bible Study Questions:

1. Read Genesis 3-4. What is so appealing about the words of the serpent? What does this teach you about human nature?
2. Read Romans 5:12-21. How does Paul describe the sin of Adam in Rom. 5:12-21? What is the solution to sin and death? Compare the first man, Adam and the last Adam, Jesus. What are some of the differences? What impact does each one have on humanity?
3. Read Genesis 6-7 and Hebrews 11:7. What is God’s assessment of humanity before the flood (Gen. 6:5-7)? What does Noah “find” in Gen. 6:8? Explain why this is important for the flood story. Noah builds the ark “by faith” and is declared righteous by God in

Gen. 7:1 (Gen. 6:9 anticipates this verdict). How is Noah's faith demonstrated in these chapters? Why is faith important to God?

4. Read Genesis 6:9-9:28. The flood story underscores that the sin that caused the flood (Gen. 6:5) continues after the flood (Gen. 8:21). Since human nature has not changed (it will take more than water to change the human heart), how does the covenant (a "binding agreement") God makes with Noah enable the creation to continue. What does this teach you about the character of God?
5. Read Genesis 10-11:9. Why do you think God brings judgment against the tower builders? Why do humans want to build a name? How does God's judgment impact humanity?
6. Read Genesis 11:10-26, along with Genesis 5:1-32. Trace the genealogical line from Adam to Terah. Why are these genealogies important? How does Shem's genealogy lead to Abraham? The name Shem means "name" in Hebrew. How is the writer showing that God has a plan to build his name through Shem's line (see Gen. 12:2), which is in contrast to the builders trying to make their name great?

## “CASKET EMPTY: A is for Abraham”

Sermon Text: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-20

Theme: The life of the believer is one of committed service to God’s call

**SMALL GROUP:** *CASKET EMPTY: OT Study Guide*, Chap. 2: Abraham, pp. 27-54.

**SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:** Genesis 12-50

### ABRAHAM Simply Explained

The second period of the Old Testament is entitled ABRAHAM because when God calls Abraham out of Ur, it marks a turning point in the story of redemption in the Bible. God calls an idolatrous man named Abraham with his wife Sarah out of a city called Ur in Mesopotamia. God tells him to leave his family and hometown and go to the land of Canaan. By faith Abraham and his family embark on this journey. God makes a number of wonderful promises to Abraham: he is to have many descendants, a relationship with God, his own land, God’s presence with him, all the nations will be blessed in him, he will be the father of many nations, and kings will come from him. These promises are foundational not only for the book of Genesis but for the entire Bible, as they are central to God’s plan of redemption through history. Yet when God promises Abraham that he will have many descendants, this is humanly impossible because Abraham and his wife Sarah are both elderly; in addition to this, Sarah is barren. In spite of these circumstances, Abraham believes that God will accomplish what he has promised. Even though Abraham is ungodly at this time,

God counts his faith as righteousness. Abraham is therefore acceptable before God because he believes in him. Abraham’s faith in God is central to our study of the Bible because we learn from the story of Abraham that sinners can be in right relationship with God by faith alone. The God whom Abraham believes is surely able to fulfill what he has promised. Several years later, in accordance with the promise, Isaac is miraculously born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. God makes a covenant with Abraham that will be established with his son Isaac and with his grandson Jacob, who is renamed Israel. Jacob’s extended family of seventy moves to Egypt because of a famine, but God preserves his people by raising up Joseph to a position of leadership in Egypt. The book of Genesis concludes with Jacob’s descendants living outside the promised land of Canaan; they will be enslaved in Egypt, but God will be faithful to fulfill what he has promised. This period of ABRAHAM covers the origin of the people of Israel, or the Israelites, who are later named after Abraham’s grandson, Israel (originally named Jacob).

**Important dates** The dates for this period are c. 2100–1450 BC. The first date of 2100 BC is the approximate date when Abraham is called out of Ur (the birth of Abraham is usually dated to 2166 BC), and the second date of 1450 BC is the approximate date when God delivers the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt (more precisely, 1446 BC). The period of ABRAHAM covers the events in the lives of Abraham and his family for four generations, which includes a few hundred years of slavery in Egypt. This period concludes with the exodus from Egypt, which marks the beginning of the next period.

**Key people** The key people for this period are Abraham and his wife Sarah, along with their son Isaac; Sarah’s Egyptian maidservant Hagar and her son Ishmael; Abraham’s grandsons, Jacob,

whose name is changed to Israel, and Esau; and Israel's twelve sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph and Benjamin, who become known as Israel, or the Israelites.

Biblical books for the period of ABRAHAM: The period of ABRAHAM is described in Genesis 12-50.

The gift represents the period of ABRAHAM. It is important for you to notice that the picture which represents this second period is a gift. The theological significance of this picture is summarized on the back of the timeline, and reads as follows:

This picture represents the period of ABRAHAM. In spite of Abraham's old age and Sarah's barrenness, he believes that God will perform what he has promised. God justifies Abraham, an ungodly person, on account of his faith (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4). The picture of a gift underscores that justification is a gift of God by his grace.

1. How is the LORD revealed in this portion of Scripture? (You may ask: Who is He and What is He like? Remember that the primary purpose of Scripture is to introduce us to our heavenly Father and his plan for us)
2. What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?
3. What does the LORD require of us from this section?
4. How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?
5. Close in prayer for one another

Optional Bible Study Questions:

1. Read Genesis 12:1-3, 13:14-18, 15:7-21 and 17:1-8. Summarize the promises that God makes to Abraham. Briefly explain why these promises are central to the Old Testament.
2. Read Genesis 15:1-6, 17:16-21, 18 and 21. How are the two sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, different? Why is Sarah's old age and barrenness important for the story (Gen. 11:30;

18:11)? Explain what it means for Isaac to be a child of promise.

3. Read Romans 9:6-8 and Galatians 4:21-31. The Apostle Paul, some 2,000 years later, states that the children of Abraham are those born according to promise. Explain how the promise of many children is being fulfilled in the New Testament. Why is this important for us today? How are the children of Abraham identified?

4. Read Genesis 12:3, 22:18; 26:4, 28:14. These passages remind us that God's purpose in blessing Abraham was that through him the nations (known as Gentiles in the New Testament) would be blessed. God's intention from the very beginning was that people from all nations would come to know him through Abraham's "seed." How is this promise fulfilled according to Galatians 3? To what extent does God's mission impact the way you live?

5. Read Genesis 17:4-5 and Rom. 4:11-18. God promises Abraham that he will be the father of many nations. His change of name from Abram to Abraham points to this promise. Explain how this promise is being fulfilled in the New Testament. Since Abraham is the father of both Jew and Gentile, what implications does this have for the church today? In what ways have you embraced the multi-ethnic family of God?

6. Read Genesis 15:1-6 and Romans 4:1-25. What are the circumstances that Abraham is facing and how does he respond to God's promise? We could say that Abraham has "resurrection faith" since he believes that God can bring life out of that which is dead. Explain how this kind of faith is seen in the life of Abraham.

7. Read Romans 4:1-25, 5:12-21 and Ephesians 2:1-10. What does it mean for Christians to be saved by faith rather than by works? How is salvation understood to be a gift of God rather than something you earn? What does it mean for an ungodly person like Abraham to be justified? How is Jesus' gift of righteousness related to our justification?

## “CASSET EMPTY: S is for Sinai”

Sermon Text: Exodus 12:1-27

Theme: God redeems his people from slavery to worship him

**SMALL GROUP:** *CASSET EMPTY: Old Testament Study Guide*, Chap. 3: Sinai, pp. 55-74.

**SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:** Exodus 1-29, 32-34, 40; Psalms 19, 105-106

### SINAI Simply Explained

The third period of the Old Testament is called SINAI because God delivers the Israelites out of Egypt in the Exodus and brings them to a place called Mount Sinai. Having been redeemed by God from slavery, the descendants of Israel are to become a great nation and a holy people. The LORD God thus calls his redeemed people to worship and serve him alone. God gives Moses the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai and makes a covenant with the Israelites called the Mosaic covenant. The Israelites agree to keep God’s laws, which are the stipulations of the covenant; thus they say, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” God agrees to bless his people if they obey his laws, but curse them if they disobey them. In this period God also instructs Moses to build a tabernacle so that he might dwell with his people. While Moses is up on the mountain receiving God’s law, however, the Israelites build an idol in the form of a golden calf and worship it, thereby forsaking the LORD their God. But Moses intercedes on behalf of the people. God in his grace and mercy withholds his anger, revealing his character as “the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” This becomes the defining moment in the life of Israel both in terms of Israel’s idolatrous heart and the revelation of God’s gracious character, which is identified with his name Yahweh. The covenant is renewed due to God’s grace, and he continues to dwell with a stubborn and stiff-necked people. During this period the priesthood and sacrificial system are established in order that a holy God might dwell in the midst of a rebellious people. Under the leadership of Moses, the Israelites journey towards the promised land, but because of their unbelief, entrance into the land is delayed for forty years. The people are judged, and as a consequence they wander in the wilderness, until the unbelieving generation dies out.

Moses then expounds the law to the new generation on the plains of Moab, as recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. After the death of Moses, Joshua becomes the new leader; he brings the Israelites into the promised land in further fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. Instead of being set apart from the nations, however, the Israelites join them in their worship of idols. God raises up judges to deliver his people, but the cycle of idolatry continues throughout this period. Yet even within this context of repeated unfaithfulness, God is providentially at work through a family living in Bethlehem from the tribe of Judah. Hope emerges from death and tragedy as Boaz marries Ruth and they bear a son named Obed, who is the ancestor of King David. The period of SINAI concludes, therefore, with kingship on the horizon.

**Important dates** The dates for the period of SINAI are c. 1450–1050 BC. The first date, 1450 BC, marks the approximate date of the Exodus from Egypt. According to this date, the pharaoh of the Exodus would be identified as Amenhotep II (1450-1424 BC), who reigned during Egypt’s eighteenth dynasty (Other scholars date the Exodus during the reign of Rameses II). The

second date, 1050 BC, marks the beginning of the monarchy; Saul is Israel's first king.

**Key people** The key people for this period are Moses and his brother Aaron, the Levites, Joshua, the 12 judges, and Boaz and Ruth.

**Biblical books for the period of SINAI.** The period of SINAI is described in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. These books are in chronological order.

The Ten Commandments represent the period of SINAI. It is important that you locate on the timeline the picture of the Ten Commandments. The theological significance of this picture is summarized on the back of the timeline, and reads as follows:

The picture of the two stone tablets represents the PERIOD OF SINAI. The Ten Commandments are the "stipulations" of the Mosaic covenant (Exod. 20; Deut. 5–6). God's people were required to keep these commandments; failure to keep them constituted "breaking" the covenant. This picture will remind you that the Law is given in this period and is central to God's covenant with Israel.

1. How is the LORD revealed in this portion of Scripture? (You may ask: Who is He and What is He like? Remember that the primary purpose of Scripture is to introduce us to our heavenly Father and his plan for us)
2. What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?
3. What does the LORD require of us from this section?
4. How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?
5. Close in prayer for one another

Optional Bible Study Questions:

1. Read Exodus 3, 14-15. God reveals himself to Moses at the burning bush. How does God identify himself? How do the promises God makes to Abraham help us understand the Exodus from Egypt? How important is the presence of God in these chapters? Explain.

2. Read Exodus 19-20, 24. God makes a covenant with the Israelites when they arrive at Sinai. This is foundational for the entire Old Testament. It is called the Mosaic covenant because Moses is the mediator. The Ten Commandments are the stipulations of the covenant. What do they reveal about the character of God? How do these commands summarize God's commitment to us and our commitment to Him? Describe the covenant ritual in Exodus 24. What do the Israelites agree to do in this covenant?

3. Read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28. These chapters provide important information about the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant. They list the blessings and curses of the covenant that provide a key background for understanding the Old Testament. What kinds of things will happen to Israel if they obey God's laws and what will happen to Israel if they disobey them?

4. Read Exodus 32-34. While Moses is up on the mountain receiving God's law, the people ask Aaron to make an idol in the form of a golden calf. Describe what takes place in these chapters. What is the motivation for making an idol? When God reveals his name Yahweh, what does he reveal about his character? This description of God's name is the key to understanding the Old Testament story. We will learn that Israel will continue to exist only because God is gracious and compassionate.

**“CASKET EMPTY: S is for Sinai (part 2)”**

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 6:1-12; Joshua 1:1-9

Theme: God brings His people from the mountain to the promised land

**SMALL GROUP:** *CASKET EMPTY: Old Testament Study Guide*, Chap. 3: Sinai, pp. 75-91.

**SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:** Deuteronomy 1-13, 17-18, 20-21, 25, 27-32, 34; Joshua 1-8; Psalms 119, 134-136, 145-146

1. How is the LORD revealed in this portion of Scripture? (You may ask: Who is He and What is He like? Remember that the primary purpose of Scripture is to introduce us to our heavenly Father and his plan for us)
2. What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?
3. What does the LORD require of us from this section?
4. How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?
5. Close in prayer for one another

Optional Bible Study Questions:

1. Read Deuteronomy 4-6. The Israelites are on the plains of Moab, ready to enter the land promised to Abraham. In the opening chapters of Deuteronomy, Moses recalls the history of God’s people and expounds the law to the new generation. Why does Moses give so many warnings to Israel? What does he warn them about?
2. Read Deuteronomy 8-9. What are the Israelites to do when they enter the land and what are they to keep in mind? Explain why obedience to God’s laws is so important for the Israelites. What will happen if they do not obey them?

3. Read Deuteronomy 29-30. The Mosaic covenant is renewed at this time and Moses gives further warnings. What does Moses say to the Israelites? What does it mean for the Israelites to “choose life”?
4. Read Deuteronomy 31-32. These chapters record Moses’ final words to Israel. What does God reveal to Moses about Israel’s future? How do these chapters help us understand the storyline of the Old Testament, particularly what is ahead?
5. Read Joshua 1. After the death of Moses, Joshua is appointed to lead God’s people into the promised land. He is charged to keep God’s word central. How does Joshua summarize God’s dealings with his people in chapters 23-24? What does it tell you about the character of God?

## “CASKET EMPTY: K is for Kings”

Sermon Text: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Theme: God appoints David as a man after His own heart

**SMALL GROUP:** *CASKET EMPTY: Old Testament Study Guide*, Chap. 4: Kings (United Monarchy), pp. 93-119.

**SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:** 1-2 Samuel; Psalms 2, 16, 21-24, 32-34, 40

### KINGS Simply Explained

The fourth period of the Old Testament is entitled KINGS because kings rule over Israel during this period. It begins with the Israelites asking a man named Samuel, who is both prophet and judge, to appoint them a king like the nations. God gives them a king named Saul according to their request, but he does not obey God, so his kingdom is taken away from him. Saul is from the tribe of Benjamin, but God’s chosen king will come from the line of Judah, according to God’s promise of kings to Abraham. God tells Samuel to go to Jesse’s house in Bethlehem to anoint one of his sons as king. Samuel anoints the youngest son, David, to be king. He is from the tribe of Judah. God makes a covenant with him, promising to establish his throne and kingdom forever. After David dies, his son Solomon becomes king. Solomon builds a massive temple in Jerusalem, which is filled with God’s glorious presence. The Israelites become settled in the land and enjoy rest from their enemies. God later pronounces judgment against Solomon, however, because he marries foreign women and worships their gods.

The first section under KINGS is called the united monarchy because one king rules in Jerusalem over the twelve tribes. This is to be distinguished from the divided kingdom that begins in 930 BC. Three successive kings rule in Jerusalem during the united monarchy: Saul (1050– 1010 BC), David (1010–970 BC) and Solomon (970–930 BC). After Solomon dies, his son Rehoboam becomes king. Shortly thereafter, civil war breaks out, resulting in the division of the kingdom. Ten tribes move to the north under the leadership of a military man named Jeroboam, and two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, remain in the south in Jerusalem, along with the tribe of Levi. The division of the kingdom in 930 BC is the direct result of God’s judgment against Solomon for his idolatry. From this time onwards, there are two concurrent kingdoms, known as Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

**Important dates** There are several dates that you need to keep in mind for the period of KINGS. The date 1050 BC marks the beginning of Saul’s reign. The date for the division of the kingdom is 930 BC. The northern kingdom begins therefore in 930 BC, but it comes to an end in 722 BC. The southern kingdom comes to an end in 586 BC. This means that the dates for the period of KINGS are 1050 BC to 586 BC.

**Key people** The key people for this period are: Eli the priest; the prophet Samuel; King Saul and his son Jonathan, along with his son Ishbosheth; King David and his wife Bathsheba; David’s sons, Absalom and Amnon, and his daughter Tamar; the prophet Nathan, King Solomon; and the prophet Ahijah.

Biblical books for the period of KINGS: united monarchy The events relating to the united monarchy are recorded in 1 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1 11, 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles 1 9. A number of Psalms are attributed to King David, and a number of Proverbs are attributed to King Solomon. Solomon may have written Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon as well.

The blue crown represents the period of KINGS The blue picture for this period is a blue crown. The theological significance of this picture is summarized on the back of the timeline, and reads as follows:

The crown recalls God's promise of kings to Abraham through Judah and represents the continuation of the royal line of Judah through David (Gen. 49:10; 1 Sam. 16; 2 Sam. 7). Since the birth of King David is anticipated in the book of Ruth, the picture of a blue crown next at the end of the section on SINAI shows that kingship is already on the horizon as God is providentially at work to bring about his purposes.

1. How is the LORD revealed in this portion of Scripture? (You may ask: Who is He and What is He like? Remember that the primary purpose of Scripture is to introduce us to our heavenly Father and his plan for us)
2. What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?
3. What does the LORD require of us from this section?
4. How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?
5. Close in prayer for one another

Optional Bible Study Questions:

1. Read 1 Samuel 8, 13 and 15. Why does Israel ask for a king? What is wrong with their request? Describe what happens in 1 Sam. 13 and 15. How does Saul's counting his army and his failure to wait for Samuel indicate that he is not trusting in God? Why does God bring an end to his kingdom?
2. Read 1 Samuel 16. 1,000 years earlier God had promised Abraham that kings would come

forth from him (Gen. 17:6); this promise was to be fulfilled through the line of Judah (Gen. 49:8-12). Where does David live and why is this important? Does it surprise you that God's call of David is not based on family birth order? Consider other examples in the Old Testament that underscore this principle.

3. Read 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89:1-4, 19-37. These chapters describe the Davidic covenant. Summarize the promises that God makes to David and to his descendant. Why are these important for God's redemptive plan in the Bible?

4. Read 1 Kings 8-9. After Solomon becomes king and consolidates his kingdom (1 Kgs. 1-3), he spends seven years building the temple in Jerusalem. What does Solomon's prayer of dedication tell you about the character of God? Why does God give Solomon such a stern warning?

## “CASSET EMPTY: K is for Kings (Northern Kingdom)”

Sermon Text: 1 Kings 18:17-40

Theme: God requires single minded devotion for our own good

**SMALL GROUP:** *CASSET EMPTY: Old Testament Study Guide*, Chap. 5: Kings (The Northern Kingdom), pp. 121-152.

**SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:** 1 Kings 12-22; 2 Kings 1-17; Hosea 1-14

### The Northern Kingdom Simply Explained

The northern kingdom begins in 930 BC when ten tribes move to the northern region of Israel under the leadership of a military man named Jeroboam, whom God raises up to be king. Having established Shechem as his place of residence, Jeroboam is concerned that the people will return to Jerusalem when they offer sacrifices there, so he makes two idols in the form of golden calves. He presents them to Israel as the gods who brought them out of Egypt. Jeroboam sets up one idol in Dan and the other in Bethel, thereby establishing places for idol worship in the northern kingdom. These actions constitute a grave breach of the covenant relationship established at Sinai. Tragically, the golden calves will be worshiped for the next 200 years, as every northern king continues in the sins of Jeroboam until the kingdom finally comes to an end in 722 BC. This period is also characterized by the worship of a Canaanite god named Baal. The worst northern king is the infamous Ahab, who marries the foreign princess Jezebel and builds a temple for Baal at the capital city of Samaria.

God sends the prophets Elijah and Elisha to Israel in the ninth century BC, and Hosea and Amos in the eighth century BC. These prophets are God’s messengers who speak to the kings and to Israel, calling them back to God’s laws and warning them of God’s judgment if they do not repent. Hosea exposes Israel’s covenant unfaithfulness, seen in their worship of foreign gods. Amos denounces Israel’s lack of justice and mercy, seen in their attainment of wealth through the abuse of the poor and the needy. God also sends the prophet Jonah to the Assyrians in Nineveh in the eighth century. The non-Israelites in Nineveh repent when they hear God’s word through the prophet, yet the Israelites in the north do not give heed to the prophets Hosea and Amos, in spite of God’s warnings through them. The people continue to rebel against God’s law, worshiping idols and forsaking righteousness and justice. God’s judgment finally comes in 722 BC when the Assyrians defeat the north, at which time many of God’s people are uprooted from the land and scattered afar, and the northern region is repopulated with foreigners. This marks the end of the northern kingdom.

Important dates: The dates for the northern kingdom are 930–722 BC.

Key people: There are nineteen northern kings: Jeroboam I, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea. The most important kings are Jeroboam, Ahab and Jehu. The prophets Elijah and Elisha are 9<sup>th</sup> century northern prophets, and the prophets Hosea, Amos and Jonah are 8<sup>th</sup> century prophets.

The red crown represents the northern kingdom. As we learn about the northern kingdom, it is important for you to notice that the picture which represents this kingdom is a red crown. The theological significance of this picture is summarized on the back of the timeline, and reads as follows:

The red crown represents illegitimate kings who are not from the line of Judah.

1. How is the LORD revealed in this portion of Scripture? (You may ask: Who is He and What is He like? Remember that the primary purpose of Scripture is to introduce us to our heavenly Father and his plan for us)
2. What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?
3. What does the LORD require of us from this section?
4. How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?
5. Close in prayer for one another

Optional Bible Study Questions:

1. Read 1 Kings 11:26-40, 12:25-33, 13:1-10, 14:1-20 and 15:29-30. Jeroboam (930-909 BC) is the first northern king. His actions set the scene for the kingdom because the idols he makes continue to be worshiped for the next 200 years. What does Jeroboam do when he becomes king? How does God judge him?
2. Read 1 Kings 16:29-34, 18 and 21. King Ahab (874-814 BC) is an important northern king; he leads Israel into further idolatry. Summarize what takes place during Ahab's reign. How widespread is Baal worship? How does Elijah demonstrate that the LORD is the true God?
3. Read 2 Kings 9:7-10, 33-37 and 10:1-17. What does Jehu (841-814 BC) do when he becomes king? How does he execute God's judgment against Ahab? What does this tell you about the kind of judgment that sin deserves?

4. Read Hosea 1, 5 and 6. Hosea is a northern prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC). Hosea is to marry a prostitute, for his marriage to Gomer exemplifies the “harlotry” (a metaphor for idolatry) of Israel in the north. Identify Hosea’s three children in chapter 1. What do their names communicate about Israel’s future? How would you describe the sins of Israel? Why do you think God’s people keep turning idols?

5. Read Amos 2:6-8, and 3:5. The prophet Amos is a northern prophet and a contemporary of Hosea. Amos rebukes Israel for their failure to follow God’s laws, as seen in their lack of justice and their failure to uphold God’s righteous standards. Describe the sins of Israel as portrayed by Amos. How are they different from the sins that Hosea describes?

6. Read Hosea 1:9-10, 2:14-23, 14:1-9 and Amos 9:11-15. As is characteristic of the prophets, both Hosea and Amos announce that God will restore his people after the judgment. How do they describe the future restoration? When does it take place?

7. Read 2 Kings 17. The northern kingdom comes to an end in 722BC when it is defeated by the Assyrians. God’s people are dispersed into a variety of cities and foreigners are resettled into the northern cities of Israel. Why does God judge the northern kingdom? Given that Israel has broken the covenant for 200 years by worshiping the golden calves, why doesn’t God destroy the kingdom sooner? What does the history of the northern kingdom teach us about God who is “slow to anger”?

## “CASKET EMPTY: K is for Kings (Southern Kingdom)”

Sermon Text: Isaiah 1:1-20

Theme: God calls for righteousness in all the earth

**SMALL GROUP:** *CASKET EMPTY: Old Testament Study Guide*, Chap. 6: Kings: The Southern Kingdom (part 1), pp. 153-183.

**SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:** 2 Chronicles 10-36; Isaiah 1-11; Micah 1-7

### The Southern Kingdom Simply Explained

We begin our study of the southern kingdom by recalling the events surrounding the division in 930 BC. After King Solomon dies, his son Rehoboam becomes king. God had told Solomon that he would tear his kingdom away from him because he had married foreign women and worshiped their gods. This comes to pass during the days of Rehoboam when civil war breaks out. The kingdom is torn away from him when ten tribes move north under the leadership of Jeroboam. It is not completely torn away, however, for the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remain in the south, along with the priestly tribe of Levi. When Rehoboam becomes king, he establishes pagan practices just like the surrounding nations, including the worship of foreign gods and the establishment of cult prostitutes; thus Judah does evil in God’s sight, more than their forefathers. This is not a promising start to the southern kingdom. While there are a few kings in the south who serve God faithfully, such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, most southern kings do that which is evil in God’s sight. Thus while there are periods of religious reform, especially during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah, we will encounter many dark periods where sin flagrantly abounds, especially during the reigns of Ahaz, Manasseh, Jehoikim, and Zedekiah.

God sends many prophets to the southern kingdom, calling the kings and people to turn from their evil ways, and pronouncing that judgment will come if they do not repent. God raises up prophets such as Isaiah and Micah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and less well known prophets such as Zephaniah, Joel, and Habakkuk. Jeremiah and Ezekiel in particular expose Judah’s sin in painstaking detail. They even describe Israel in the north and Judah in the south as two “sisters” who are “harlots” because they have foreign gods as their lovers. These two prophets come to the remarkable conclusion that Judah’s harlotry in the south makes her sister, Israel, in the north seem righteous! In view of what has taken place in the northern kingdom for 200 years, this is no small matter! Even though the southern kingdom remains for over 300 years, it will finally come to an end in 586 BC, for God’s people will break the Mosaic covenant through their rebellion and disobedience. God will unleash the curses of the covenant, using the idolatrous Babylonians as an instrument of his judgment. Thus in 586 BC the temple is destroyed, Jerusalem is burned with fire, the last king Zedekiah goes into exile blinded, many people are slaughtered, and others go into exile to Babylon, so that only the poor remain in Jerusalem. The monarchy officially comes to an end at this time, for there is no longer a king ruling on the throne of David in Jerusalem.

Important dates: The dates for the southern kingdom are 930–586 BC. There are three other important dates that relate to the southern kingdom: 605 BC: Nebuchadnezzar defeats Egypt;

first deportation; Daniel goes to Babylon 597 BC: Second deportation; Jehoiachin and Ezekiel go to Babylon. 586 BC: Final deportation; Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem and temple.

Key people: There are nineteen southern kings and one queen: Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah (queen), Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. It is important to keep in mind that the southern kings are all from the chosen line of Judah, which recalls God's promise of kings to Abraham (Gen. 17:6; 49:10). Thus kingship in the south entails dynastic succession and testifies to the continuation of Judah's genealogical line.

There are a number of prophets in the southern kingdom, with the most important ones being Isaiah and Micah (8<sup>th</sup> century), Jeremiah (7<sup>th</sup> century), Daniel (6<sup>th</sup> century) and Ezekiel (6<sup>th</sup> century). The other southern prophets are: Nahum, Habakkuk and Joel.

1. How is the LORD revealed in this portion of Scripture? (You may ask: Who is He and What is He like? Remember that the primary purpose of Scripture is to introduce us to our heavenly Father and his plan for us)
2. What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?
3. What does the LORD require of us from this section?
4. How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?
5. Close in prayer for one another

#### Optional Bible Study Questions:

1. Read 1 Kings 12 and 14:21-31. Rehoboam (930-913 BC), son of Solomon, is the first southern king after the division in 930 BC. Summarize what events lead to the division of the kingdom. How is God at work in these events to accomplish his word? What does this tell you about the sovereignty of God?

2. Read 2 Chronicles 17, and 19-20. Jehoshaphat (872-848 BC) accomplishes major religious reforms at this time. Explain how Jehoshaphat defeats the Moabites and Ammonites. Why is trust in God so important and how do these military battles provide an opportunity for kings to trust in God? Give other examples of battles in the Old Testament when a king is outnumbered.

What is God seeking to teach his people through these circumstances? In what areas in your life do you find it difficult to trust in God? What is going trying to teach you?

3. Read 2 Chronicles 28 and Isaiah 7:1-9. King Ahaz (735-715 BC) is an important southern king. Describe what events take place during his reign. Who does Ahaz turn to for help when he is being attacked? What does this teach us about the function of idols in the ancient world? God wants his people to seek his help in all things. Who or what do you turn to in a difficult situation?

4. Read Micah 1, 3, 6 and 7:18-20. Micah is an eighth century southern prophet. The name Micah means “Who is like God?” (see 7:18). What aspect of God’s character makes him incomparable? How does the litany of sins described by Micah serve to underscore Gods’ character, as outlined in Micah 7:18 20?

5. Read Isaiah 1, 5:1-7, and 6:1-13. Isaiah is an eighth century southern prophet and a contemporary of Micah. What are some of the characteristics of God’s people, as outlined in the book of Isaiah? What does Isaiah’s call entail?

6. Read Isaiah 42 43:1-13, 44:9-24 and 46:1-13. We learn from the book of Isaiah that God’s people continue to worship other gods, and that they have become blind and deaf like their idols. What will God do with his people? How will he save them?

7. Read 2 Kings 18-19 and Isaiah 37:14-20. Hezekiah (729-686 BC) is an important southern king. During his reign, there are major religious reforms. How does Hezekiah’s response to the Assyrians compare with Ahaz’s? Why is prayer an indicator that a person is trusting in God rather than an idol? Reflect upon the role of prayer in your own life.

**“CASKET EMPTY: K is for Kings (Southern Kingdom, part 2)”**

Sermon Text: 2 Kings 22:1-20

Theme: God will vindicate his Word in judgment and mercy

**SMALL GROUP:** *CASKET EMPTY: Old Testament Study Guide*, Chap. 7: Kings: The Southern Kingdom (part 2), pp. 185-212.

**SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:** 2 Kings 22-25; 2 Chronicles 10-36; Jeremiah 1-39

1. How is the LORD revealed in this portion of Scripture? (You may ask: Who is He and What is He like? Remember that the primary purpose of Scripture is to introduce us to our heavenly Father and his plan for us)
2. What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?
3. What does the LORD require of us from this section?
4. How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?
5. Close in prayer for one another

**Optional Bible Study Questions:**

1. Read 2 Kings 21:1-18, 23:26-27, and 2 Chronicles 33:10-20. Manasseh (696-642 BC) is one of the worst southern kings. Describe the sins of Manasseh and the state of Judah during this period. How does Manasseh respond when God brings him to Babylon? What does this tell you about the character of God?

2. Read 2 Chronicles 34 and 35:18-27. Josiah (640-609 BC) is one of the best southern kings. Covenant renewal takes place in 628 BC and again in 622 BC when the law is found. Summarize the reforms that take place during Josiah's reign. Explain why Josiah is so distraught when he hears the words of the law. What are its implications for God's people in the near future?

3. Read Jeremiah 1-3 God calls the prophet Jeremiah in 627 BC while Josiah is on the throne. His prophetic ministry extends to the period of the exile and beyond. Make three observations about Jeremiah's call to ministry. How would you describe the situation facing the prophet at this time?
4. Read Jeremiah 7, 10:1-16, 11:1-7, and 16:1-13. Describe the punishment that will come upon God's people. Can you recall which Old Testament passages describe the curses of the covenant? How does the 586 BC judgment connect to the earlier books of the Bible? How does this help you understand the storyline of the Old Testament?
5. Read Romans 3-4 and Galatians 3. Many years later the Apostle Paul explains that the law brings wrath and that no one is justified by the works of the law. Explain how the story of Israel in the Old Testament helps us to understand this. If people are not justified by the law, how are sinners able to stand righteous before a holy God? Why is God's justification of Abraham in Gen. 15:6 important? Explain why Jesus' death on the cross lies at the center of the redemptive plan of God.
6. Read Jeremiah 31:27-40 and 32-33. Describe what will take place when God restores his people after the judgment. What are some of the features of the new covenant and how is it different from the Mosaic covenant? When does the new covenant begin?
7. Read 2 Chronicles 36 and Lamentations 1. Describe what takes place in 586 BC. Why does it happen? How would you explain the 586 BC judgment to someone else? Describe what happens to the last Davidic king, Zedekiah. How does the storyline of the Old Testament show us our need for a Savior and a Righteous Son of David?

## “CASKET EMPTY: E is for Exile”

Text: Daniel 1:1-21

Theme: God protects His people in exile and promises a glorious future

**SMALL GROUP:** *CASKET EMPTY: OT Study Guide*, Chap. 8: EXILE, pp. 227-262.

**SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:** Daniel 1-12; Ezekiel 1-24, 33-37

### EXILE Simply Explained

The fifth period of the Old Testament is entitled EXILE because in 586 BC Jerusalem is destroyed and Judah is brought into exile to Babylon. We must backtrack a few years to recall the first deportation in 605 BC, when leading citizens and nobility are brought to Babylon, including Daniel and his three friends. You will recall that the second deportation takes place in 597 BC when Nebuchadnezzar brings another group of Judeans to Babylon, including King Jehoiachin and the prophet Ezekiel. 586 BC marks the official beginning of the exile; it is partially resolved in 539 BC when the Persian king Cyrus defeats the Babylonian Empire and allows the exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. However, as we will see, only a portion of God’s people return to the land. The great prophetic hope of restoration remains unfulfilled, for Israel lives in the land under foreign rule. The reality of exile stretches forward, therefore, and forms one of the most important pieces to hold in view when we encounter the New Testament.

The prophet Ezekiel, who is from a priestly family, begins his ministry shortly after the second deportation of 597 BC. While living in Babylon with the exiles, Ezekiel is summoned by God through a dynamic and overwhelming vision of the glory of the LORD. In 593 BC, just a few years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, God calls the prophet to speak God’s word to the house of Israel, yet as we are now painfully aware, God’s people are stubborn and rebellious; thus the prophet is told that they will not listen to him. God gives Ezekiel visions of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the temple because of the abominations that are being committed by the house of Israel. As the prophet reviews the history of God’s covenant people, he highlights their ongoing rebellion against God and their failure to follow his laws. With Israel’s sin in full view, Ezekiel has a vision of God’s glorious presence, which departs from the temple. This is a devastating confirmation that God will indeed allow his own house to be destroyed. The departure of God’s glory marks the most tragic event in Israel’s history, yet the prophet also speaks of the restoration of God’s people after the exile and the return of the divine presence. The book of Ezekiel ends with eight chapters that describe a glorious future restoration of the temple with the climactic final declaration that “Yahweh will be there.” God will again act for the sake of his reputation: he will cleanse Israel from their sins, give his people a new heart and a new spirit, cleanse them from their idols, raise up a righteous Davidic king, and his glorious presence will fill the restored temple!

While Ezekiel is speaking God’s words in Babylon, both before and after the 586 BC destruction, the prophet Jeremiah continues to minister in Jerusalem for several years after the Babylonian attack of 586 BC. He is in Jerusalem when the Babylonians invade the city. He sees firsthand God’s wrath being poured out against Jerusalem, which is recorded in the book of Lamentations. But he also travels to Egypt, along with the stubborn and rebellious remnant of

Judah, who refuses to listen to Jeremiah's words. The prophet thus announces judgment against the remnant of Judah in Egypt, and God's judgment against Babylon and other neighboring nations. The prophet Obadiah explains that the Edomites are not exempt from God's wrath either, for they have delighted in Judah's demise.

While Jeremiah is in Jerusalem (and later Egypt), and while Ezekiel is in Babylon, God also calls the prophet Daniel to speak to King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel is taken to Babylon in the first deportation in 605 BC and is educated for service in Nebuchadnezzar's court. God gives him wisdom and insight to interpret dreams and give understanding to King Nebuchadnezzar that Yahweh rules over the kingdoms of the earth. Daniel receives a series of visions pertaining to coming kings and their kingdoms. He sees that God has ordained four successive tyrannical kingdoms followed by the arrival of God's kingdom. The kings of the earth are represented by four beasts, whereas the king reigning over God's everlasting kingdom is depicted as a human being. God shows Daniel his sovereign intention, that after the rise and fall of these earthly kingdoms, Yahweh will establish the Son of Man on his throne and give him an everlasting dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

Important dates: The dates for the period of EXILE are 586-539 BC. This period begins in 586 BC with the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah to Babylon and concludes with the first return from exile in 539 BC. In addition to these dates, you will want to remember that Daniel is brought to Babylon in 605 BC and Ezekiel in 597 BC.

Key people The key people in this period are Jeremiah (whose ministry extends into this period), Ezekiel, Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Cyrus.

The bird of prey represents the period of EXILE. The picture which represents this period is a bird of prey. The theological significance of this picture is summarized on the back of the timeline, and reads as follows:

This picture of a bird of prey represents the curses of the Mosaic covenant the period of EXILE. God makes a covenant with Israel, promising to bless them if they obey his laws, but curse them if they disobey them (Lev. 26; Deut. 27-28). In 586 BC God's curses are poured out on Judah because they have disobeyed his laws (Jer. 7:11).

1. How is the LORD revealed in this portion of Scripture? (You may ask: Who is He and What is He like? Remember that the primary purpose of Scripture is to introduce us to our heavenly Father and his plan for us)
2. What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?
3. What does the LORD require of us from this section?

4. How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?

5. Close in prayer for one another

#### Optional Bible Study Questions:

1. Read Ezekiel 1-3. The prophet Ezekiel is deported to Babylon in 597 BC and begins his ministry in 593 BC. How would you describe the opening vision? Summarize Ezekiel's call to ministry and the task before him. Why does God sometimes call people to difficult areas of service?

2. Read Ezekiel 9-10 and 11:21-25. When God brings Ezekiel to Jerusalem in a vision, what does he see? What is the significance of the departure of God's presence? Briefly trace the theme of the divine presence in the Old Testament. How is God's presence manifest today?

3. Read Ezekiel 16 and 23. Ezekiel announces that Judah's sin in the south is worse than Israel's in the north. What metaphor does he use and why? In view of Judah's sin, why has God allowed the southern kingdom to remain for the past 300 years? Describe how our study of the character of God in the Old Testament has impacted you personally.

4. Read Ezekiel 20 and 22. Ezekiel is to make known to Jerusalem all her abominations. Describe the kinds of abominations that have been taking place. In view of the Mosaic covenant arrangement that was established at Mt Sinai, why has God not poured out his wrath on his people sooner according to Ezekiel 20? Is God still concerned about his name today? Explain.

5. Read Ezekiel 36-37. What things will take place when God restores his people? The prophet Joel a few years earlier had spoken about the centrality of the Spirit in the restoration (Joel 2:28-29). What role does God's Spirit play in Ezekiel's vision of the restoration? Why is the Spirit so vital for the renewal of God's people? Reflect upon the role of the Spirit in your own life.

6. Read Daniel 1-2 and 7. Daniel is brought to Babylon in 605 BC to serve in Nebuchadnezzar's court. God reveals to him that there will be four successive kingdoms, yet during the fourth kingdom God will establish his everlasting kingdom. What images are used in these chapters to describe the four kingdoms? How does Daniel depict God's everlasting kingdom in each chapter? When does this kingdom begin?

7. Read Daniel 5 and 9. The Persians defeat the Babylonians in 539 BC, with Cyrus as the conqueror. At this time Daniel confesses the sins of Israel (Daniel 9), remembering God's promises to restore his people many years ago (Lev. 26:40-46). What do you notice about Daniel's prayer? Have you seen God answer prayer in your own life?

## “CASKET EMPTY: T is for Temple”

Sermon Text: Ezra 1:1-11

Theme: Israel returns from exile and God closes the OT canon in hope

**SMALL GROUP:** *CASKET EMPTY: OT Study Guide*, Chap. 9: Temple, pp. 247-274.

**SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT READINGS:** Ezra 1-10; Nehemiah 1-13; Malachi 1-4

### TEMPLE Simply Explained

The last period of the Old Testament is entitled TEMPLE because during this period God’s people return from exile and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. God raises up the Persian king Cyrus, who is God’s anointed shepherd, called to carry out his plan of restoration. In 539 BC King Cyrus defeats Babylon. He then issues an edict allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem. In 538 BC, the first group of Jews returns with Sheshbazzar, governor of Judah. Temple construction begins under the leadership of Zerubbabel, grandson of King Jehoiachin, and Joshua, the high priest, but there is opposition, so rebuilding comes to halt. In the second year of the Persian king Darius, in 520 BC, God calls two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who encourage God’s people to finish rebuilding the temple. The people are despondent over their adverse circumstances, but the prophets announce that God’s glorious presence will once again fill God’s house and Jerusalem will become a place of blessing to all nations. It will be a time of great rejoicing when God’s anointed Davidic king comes to Jerusalem, humble and mounted on a donkey. There will be a time of conflict, but God will reign victoriously. The temple in Jerusalem is completed in 516 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua; thus the Davidic and priestly offices work harmoniously together. But there is no sign of the return of God’s presence, and the restoration promised by the prophets is far from a reality.

A number of the exiles continue to live in Babylon and in other Persian cities. During the reign of the Persian king Xerxes (486–465 BC), a young woman of Israelite descent named Esther becomes queen. Haman, a high-ranking official, plans to kill the people of God living in Susa because Esther’s relative, Mordecai, refuses to pay homage to him. Yet God is providentially at work protecting and preserving his people; the feast of Purim commemorates their deliverance.

Another group of exiles living in Babylon return to Jerusalem in 458 BC under the leadership of Ezra, a priest and scribe. The Persian king Artaxerxes, who reigns from 465–424 BC, gives assistance to Ezra, enabling him to return safely to Jerusalem along with the other exiles. Ezra is devoted to the study and teaching of God’s word, and when he finds unfaithfulness in the covenant community, he calls God’s people back to obey God’s laws. While these events are taking place in Jerusalem, a man named Nehemiah is living in Susa. He is serving as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. When Nehemiah hears that the walls of Jerusalem are in disrepair, he is greatly distressed. He turns to God in prayer and then makes a request of Artaxerxes, asking the king to grant him permission to return to Jerusalem. His request is received favorably because God is with him, so in 445 BC Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem. After completing the repair work with God’s help, the walls are dedicated. It is a time of great rejoicing and thanksgiving.

Ezra joins with Nehemiah to lead God's people into the renewal of the covenant as they confess their sins and commit themselves to follow God's laws. Nehemiah remains in Jerusalem for twelve years, but returns to Susa in 433 BC. He subsequently travels back to Jerusalem at a later time, but discovers upon his return that God's people are not following his laws. Thus, the religious reforms established under Ezra have had no lasting effect.

The last prophet in this period is Malachi. He ministers during the final years of the Old Testament. The sober reality is that the glorious restoration promised by the prophets has not come to pass: rain is scarce, crops are failing, the land is not providing sufficient produce, the wicked seem to be prospering, and God's people remain an enslaved people, living in the land of Israel but under Persian rule. These disappointing and adverse circumstances cause Israel to question God's love and justice. Some conclude that it is vain to serve the LORD. Malachi responds by testifying to God's faithfulness and unchanging love for his people. He contends that the problem is not God's justice but Israel's unfaithfulness. Malachi makes known to the covenant community their sins, exposing the failings of the priests in particular, who have not followed God's laws. God's return has been delayed, therefore, because his coming will entail judgment in view of Israel's sin. Malachi thus announces that God will surely return, but he will come with a refining judgment rather than with blessings. Prior to his coming, however, God will send his messenger, Elijah, who will prepare the way of the LORD.

Important dates: The dates for the period of TEMPLE are 539 BC to 430 BC. The first date marks the first return from exile in 539 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, and the second date marks the approximate time when the Old Testament comes to an end. The other important dates in this period are as follows: 516 BC: The temple is rebuilt under Zerubbabel and Joshua. 458 BC: The second return from exile under the leadership of Ezra. 445 BC: Nehemiah, cupbearer of Artaxerxes begins to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Key people: The key people for this period are: Zerubbabel, along with Joshua the priest; the prophets Haggai, Zechariah; Ezra the scribe; Nehemiah; and Malachi the prophet. The most important Persian kings are Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes.

Biblical books for the period of TEMPLE The books for this period include both the historical books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, and the prophetic books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The temple represents the period of TEMPLE The picture which represents this period is a temple without a cloud over it! The absence of the cloud underscores that the return of God's presence is not fully realized at this time. The picture will remind you that God's people are waiting for God to fulfill what he has promised. The theological significance of this picture is summarized on the back of the timeline, and reads as follows:

This picture represents the period of the TEMPLE; it recalls both the tabernacle (Exod. 25-40) and the temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 6-8). The temple was destroyed in 586 BC by the Babylonians, but rebuilt after the exile and completed in 516 BC (Ezra 6).

1. How is the LORD revealed in this portion of Scripture? (You may ask: Who is He and What is He like? Remember that the primary purpose of Scripture is to introduce us to our heavenly Father and his plan for us)
2. What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?
3. What does the LORD require of us from this section?
4. How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?
5. Close in prayer for one another

Optional Bible Study Questions:

1. Read Ezra 1, 3 and 5:1-5 and 6:13-22. What events take place after the first returnees arrive in Jerusalem? Temple building comes to a halt, but it is completed under the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah. Notice that there is no sign of the return God's glorious presence, as there was when the temple was completed under Solomon. Why do you think this is the case?
2. Read Haggai 1 and Zechariah 1-2, 8 and 9:9-10. Haggai and Zechariah begin prophesying in 520 BC, a few years prior to the completion of the temple. What kind of future restoration are they describing? What are some key features of the restoration? Does this suggest that something beyond the rebuilt temple of 516 BC is in view?
3. Read Ezra 9 10. Ezra, the priest and scribe, returns to Jerusalem in the second return from exile in 458 BC (Ezra 7-8). Describe what takes place after Ezra returns. Why do you think God's people are again breaking God's commandments? Is God's law able to change the human heart? Explain. What is the solution to the human condition?
4. Read Nehemiah 8 9. Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city (Neh. 1-4). After the wall is completed, Ezra reads God's law, and the people confess their sin. The history of Israel is recalled in this wonderful prayer of confession. What are some of the recurring themes? What does the story of the Old Testament as recounted in this prayer tell you about the character of God? Is this your view of God? Explain.

5. Read Nehemiah 13. Nehemiah returns to Susa to serve in the court. While he is away, things decline yet again. Describe what takes place. The period of the Old Testament ends on a low point. How does this prepare us for the coming Messiah? Describe a time in your own life when you realized that your best efforts failed.

6. Read Malachi 1-2. Malachi is the last prophet in the Old Testament. Describe the situation facing the prophet in these final days of the Old Testament. Do you think renewal of the Mosaic covenant has any long-lasting impact on the human heart? What is the solution to Israel's failure?

7. Read Malachi 3-4, Luke 1:5 25, 57-80, and Matt. 11:1-15. God promises that he will return to his temple, but before his coming he will send Elijah the prophet to prepare the way. How does the birth story of John the Baptist, along with his preaching a baptism of repentance, continue the story of the Old Testament? What kind of Messiah does Israel (and humanity!) need? Why?