

The Structure of the Old Testament, Part 2
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Before we get started here, just want to explain something in the event that you are new to us, visiting, just been coming recently. The...this sermon and those around it, the sermons that we're doing here roughly around this time, are a bit different than the ones that oftentimes we have through the life of our church. Typically we love to be able to go into a passage of scripture and just work through it phrase by phrase or word by word, truth by truth, to see what it is that God has for us in this passage of scripture. And we work through scripture in that way. Every so often, though, we end up taking time and we step back, and we kind of pull ourselves out of being in a single passage, and we step back and we look at the big picture. We look at things that are going on, that God is doing through scripture as a whole, or a theme that He has that He traces throughout, or something that He is doing in and among His people outside of scripture. And so, if you're new to us, just know that that's something that's a little bit different. And just so...make sure that that's clear.

But what we're going to do is we're actually going to go ahead and jump into the sermon here. And this is actually kind of the second part of a two-part sermon in many ways. It's a continuation of what we talked about last week, looking at the structure of the Old Testament; and in particular, looking to answer to a basic challenge that is raised by a variety of people. Richard Dawkins raises it very well in "The God Delusion", and we looked at some of the aspects of this challenge last week. But we're going to focus in on one particular aspect of the challenge this week, and focus primarily on it. It's where he says that the Bible (in particular he's talking about the Old Testament), but the Bible is 'just plain weird, as you would expect of a chaotically cobbled-together anthology of disjointed documents.' What that is is just a fancy, wordy way of saying that the Bible makes no sense, ok? It makes no sense. You look at it, there's not a system, there's not a structure. It's just crazy and it makes no sense. Ok?

I really disagree with that, and we talked a bit about that last week, and we're gonna talk some more about it this week. What we see is that last week I pointed out that typically, if you wanna just take scripture, the Old Testament in particular, and structure it different ways, it makes sense in a number of different ways. In particular I highlighted three. Ok? The first is what I would call the structure of the Old Testament. Ok? It's those thirty-nine books, probably that you have, in the order in which they are structured...most likely in ninety-five plus percent of the Bibles that you have here right now. This is structure that is organized by classification or genre, and then within that genre by chronology. Ok? Talked a little bit about that last week. Also we see that you can structure it and this is a way that some Bibles are structured, where it's a chronological narrative. And basically it takes those same books, but it interweaves them in such a way that passages and chapters, or entire books, are interspersed and interwoven with others so that you have a single, chronological narrative with the different prophecies and writings interspersed appropriately.

Today going to take time and zoom in on the structure of the Tanakh, which is the traditional Hebrew scriptures in the way in which it's organized traditionally. What we see is that they're the same books, but chronology oftentimes is totally thrown out the window and they are structured and organized in a thematic way to bring thematic coherence. Ok? And so going to look at this. And I really believe that the Tanakh is structured with a certain set of intricate patterns that run throughout, and we're going to look at, so what is the key to understanding those intricate patterns that run throughout the Tanakh, and actually through these other two as well. So what we're going to do is we're going to look at the structure of the Tanakh and see if we can see these intricate patterns.

The Tanakh is actually divided into three sections, ok? Tanakh is actually an acronym; it's the TNK, ok? And so there's three sections according to the T, the N, and the K. The first is the Torah, the law. And you'll notice that it's Genesis through Deuteronomy. And so far, if you're familiar with the content, the table of contents of your Bible, you're probably lookin' and sayin', 'Ok, no difference.' Well, the big difference comes in the second section, the Nevi'im, the Prophets. Ok? It goes Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and then the Twelve (which are the minor prophets). Now at this point in time you're probably noticing that there's quite a bit of rearrangement, ok? And we'll talk through this a little bit in just a minute. The third section is what's known as the Writings, the Ketuvim. And this runs Psalms through Chronicles. Now if you come from a Jewish heritage you may notice that the order in which I have these are slightly different in a couple of books than most modern Tanakhs. The reason for this is because I'm going back to what we can tell is the most ancient structure of this, ok? And in

the past centuries some of the structure was rearranged for purposes of Jewish liturgy. Ok? So just in case you come from a Jewish background, that's the thought process here.

But what we're going to do is we're just going to look at this and see why in the world would it be structured this way. What do you pull from it? Is there any reason to actually have it structured this way, or does it make sense? Ok? And just wanna show some of the themes that run through here.

First of all what I'll point out is this is not a chronological structure by any means, ok? In fact, Jesus makes reference to this in two parallel passages...Matthew 23:35 and Luke 11:51. He's speaking to these people and He says that they are guilty of the blood of all the martyrs from Abel to Zechariah. Now, within this structure Abel was the first martyr, attributed as a martyr in the book of Genesis, and Zechariah was the last one in Chronicles. So Jesus is saying, 'And listen, you're guilty of all the blood from beginning to end.' The interesting thing is Zechariah was not the last martyr recorded, chronologically speaking, in the Old Testament, in the Hebrew scriptures. That, as far as I am aware, that 'privilege' or that position, so-to-speak, belongs to Uriah who was killed...his martyrdom was about two hundred years later, and it's recorded in Jeremiah 26:22-23. So this is not a chronological narrative. It's thematic, ok? So why would it be thematic? Well, let's look one instance of kind of some of the things that pull out here, and how there's intricate patterns woven throughout, ok? And then we'll try and figure out what's the key to these overarching patterns that run throughout.

Well, let's zoom in and look at a section of the writings. You have Psalms, then Job, Proverbs, Ruth. Why in the world would you have Job, which is an ancient book as best we can tell, and then you have Proverbs...which much of it was written by Solomon, followed up by the book of Ruth? And Ruth is about Solomon's great-great grandmother. It starts in the time of the judges and it ends up leading into the line of David, which is why we place it back there between Judges and Samuel, between the judges and David. Ok? Why in the world would it be structured this way? Well, I'll walk you through this real quickly and help you see how themes are used to tie this together. And I'll tell you it's something...you can't approach it necessarily from a modern, western...especially modern, western, atheistic, scientific mindset that Richard Dawkins approaches it with. You have to look at what is the scripture trying to tell us.

Here you have Job, ok? Job is the textbook man of wisdom. He is the perfect example of the man of wisdom in a very real way. Why? Well, it begins...Job 1:1...it tells us that Job was blameless and upright. He was one who feared God and turned away from evil, which in many ways is the definition of wisdom...that you know God and you follow after Him and you don't turn aside to other things that you shouldn't turn aside after. That's Job. He's also contrasted with his friends. Throughout the whole book he and his friends are going back and forth about who God is, what God's nature is, what's going on. And God ends up, at the tail of the book, at the conclusion of the book in Job 42:8, He tells Job's friends, 'You're wrong about Me. You don't understand, and you need to ask Job to pray for you.' And so He ends up saying in Job 42:8,

"My servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of Me what is right as my servant Job has."

What He's saying is 'You are fools. He is wise; he knows Me, he understands me. The two of you are very different. You need to listen to what he says and have him pray for you, because he knows Me.'

Now you go into Proverbs. Proverbs is the book of wisdom, right? And here at the beginning it starts it off before it starts going into all these bits of wisdom, of how you follow God and turn away from evil...it tells us at the beginning, in chapter 1 verse 7 that the beginning of wisdom, of knowledge, is the fear of the LORD. And it contrasts that with fools who despise wisdom and instruction. In many ways it's giving us a quick summary of Job and what just happened there, where you have these foolish people who won't listen to someone who knows and understands God speaking truth to them.

Ok, well where does Ruth go in? How many women out here...just see a show of hands...have read Proverbs 31? Ok, a fair amount. Ok. Now, most of the time when I talk to different women and this comes up, if this comes up, oftentimes there is a sense that the Proverbs 31 woman, the woman of excellence, the virtuous woman...it's translated different ways...is a totally unattainable goal. You look at this and it's like 'Wow! She is amazing! She does everything right. She's totally just the perfect wife, the perfect mother; she's the perfect everything. No woman could ever meet this standard.' And say some woman could meet this standard...what would she even look like? The cool thing is you go and you ask how many women have read the book of Ruth, or are familiar with the story of Ruth? Ok. The cool thing is I've talked to a lot of women; they love Ruth. As they've read it it's like, 'Oh, she's so...right there I can identify with that.' Here's the cool thing—Ruth is the Proverbs 31 woman. She is! There

are only two places in all of Old Testament scripture where that phrase “the virtuous woman”, “the woman of excellence”, is used. One is in Proverbs, the other is in Ruth where Boaz is saying 'You are...everyone knows you are that woman of excellence.' And so you look at it. If you wanna know how that plays out you look at Ruth. It's that...here...you don't...this seems unattainable? Let's tell you about a woman who exemplifies this. If this seems...just be like Ruth, ok?

So there's a thematic coherence throughout, but it's not there unless if you're...unless if you start looking at things and changing the way that you expect things to be arranged. Instead of chronologically sequentially all the time, oftentimes there's patterns that run throughout, that teach us theological and thematic truths. So I guess the question would be what's the thematic element, the intricate pattern; what's the key to it for the Tanakh, or the Old Testament scriptures, the Hebrew scriptures, as a whole?

Jesus had this idea, ok, that it was about Him, that He was the key to understanding it all. Ok? In Luke 24, at the end of Luke, He's walking on the road to Emmaus with some of His disciples; and then following after that He's talking with some of His disciples. And both times it mentions, and hints at, and even states, that Jesus seems to think that He was the key to the Old Testament scriptures. On the road to Emmaus it says that

Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them [these disciples] in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24:27

Not only that, but later He directly tells His disciples that 'everything written about Me in the law of Moses (the Torah), the Prophets (the Nevi'im), and the Psalms (meaning the writings, the Ketuvim)...everything written about Me in the Tanakh must be fulfilled.' He seems to have this idea that guess what? This is all intended to point to Him in one way or another. Ok?

So what we're going to do is, in the few moments ahead, I want to just take some time and look and see if we can just highlight and look at some of the intricate patterns that run throughout. Ok? And just in some ways crack the door open a little bit where we can see the cohesive beauty of the scriptures, even when you structure it this way where it's not classified by genre and chronology; there's a beautiful coherence to it. So what we'll do is we'll start off by looking at the end of each section, ok? The last...how each section, each of these three sections finish out. How does it end?

Well, in each section what we find is that at the last chapters...actually the last chapter...God's people are waiting. They are left waiting at the end of each of these sections. So what are they waiting for? Well, in the Torah, in Deuteronomy, in the book of Deuteronomy, the end of the Torah, we have God's people waiting outside of the Land; and they are waiting for Yeshua (Joshua), ok, which means 'the LORD's salvation', the salvation of the LORD. They're waiting for Yeshua to bring God's people into the land of God's Sabbath rest. It leaves 'em hanging...a cliffhanger...are they gonna be brought in? Yes or no? It all hinges on Yeshua. Ok? You look at what happens at the end of the Twelve. At the end of the Twelve, which is those minor prophets...Malachi is the last one...and this is the end of the section on the prophets, what are God's people waiting for? Here Malachi closes out with God's people waiting for this one, Elijah, who's name means, 'the LORD saves', ok? This one. Different than the prophet Elijah that we read about in Kings, and it's a different one. But it's one who will have that same sort of power. Waiting for Elijah, 'the LORD saves', to come and usher in the Day of the LORD and deliver God's people.

And something...I'm just gonna pause here before we go and look at Chronicles, the ends of the Ketuvim, the writings... Let's just look and see...there is a recurrent theme actually that runs through Prophets. Because if we want to know a little bit about who this person is and what we should expect, what...just a little bit about Him, we probably find it in the prophets. Here's just a few things...if you run through it, there dominating characters that run throughout the prophets. In Joshua, which is at the beginning, the first book of the prophets according to the Tanakh, the primary character goes by two names—Hosea, which means 'to cause salvation', ok; that's Joshua, that was his given name when he was born. And then he is later renamed by Moses Joshua (Yeshua), and that means 'the salvation of the LORD'. So you have Hosea-Joshua in the first book. In Kings you have Elijah and Elisha, which...both of those names, they're the same name but they mean 'the LORD saves'. And then in Isaiah, his name, Isaiah, means 'the LORD saves'. And then in the Twelve you end up having Joshua-Yeshua pop up again, and this time this name is a picture of the Messiah, the One to come who will be a priest, a king, interceding on behalf of His people. Not only that, but you have the prophet Hosea again, and finally it wraps up with Elijah, 'the LORD saves'. All of these names are actually just variants of the same name, Yeshua. They are all variants of the same name; and it just keeps popping up...Yeshua, Yeshua, Yeshua, Joshua. Which, if you were to say it in Greek, would be Jesus. Just a thought.

You wrap up here, at the end of Chronicles, at the end of the writings. And here we see that God's people are waiting. There is a decree from Cyrus, and Cyrus is calling anyone...a person, a man...who is Elhan-Imman, 'God with him'. Who is God with? Elhan-Imman, which is the same variant...it's a variant of Immanuel, ok? Waiting for Elhan-Imman to go up to Jerusalem and rebuild the LORD's temple. And that is how the Tanakh ends, waiting and expecting for Elhan-Imman to come and rebuild a temple of praise for the LORD, the true temple. So there's this underlying pattern, an intricate pattern, that runs throughout.

The cool thing is you look at Matthew chapter 1. Is it any wonder why Matthew, which is the most Jewish of the gospels, written specifically to Jews who were well-grounded in the Tanakh...is it any wonder why he starts out with the genealogy that says Jesus comes from the exact line that He needs to come from to be the Messiah, Ok? And this Jesus, this Yeshua...and he ends up saying in verses 19-25 that Joseph, Jesus' father, was a righteous man. Remember Joseph, the righteous man? Once again pointing towards Yeshua? Ok. Joseph was a righteous man, and an angel of the LORD appears to him and says that she, Mary, will bear a son,

“...and you shall call his name Yeshua, for He will save His people from their sins.” And all of this took place to fulfill what the LORD had spoken... “that they shall call His name Immanuel” (which means God with us). And Joseph called His name Yeshua.

At this point in time, if you are someone who is well-grounded in the Tanakh, all kinds of warning bells should be going off, saying 'Wait a second! Maybe is this the One that we have been waiting for to deliver God's people this whole time? We're always left waiting. Is this finally the One? Is this the Yeshua, is this the Elijah, is this the Elhan-Imman who is going to come and rebuild the temple of the LORD's praise?' And it sets the stage where you were just waiting to see what happens with Christ.

We're gonna flip around, because...and look at the other end of these sections here. And I wish we could go in depth way more, because there is so much beauty here, and so much truth. Ok. But let's look at the beginning of this. At the beginning of each of these sections, at the beginning of the Torah in Genesis what do we see? We see an ever-fruitful tree, the Tree of Life, which continually bears its fruit and gives life to those who eat of it. And not only that, but it's in the midst of this garden, this perfect garden where God's presence is, and God literally comes and walks and has His presence literally with humanity—every day. And from the middle of this garden where the Tree of Life is, there is this river that flows out of it, bringing life to the land surrounding it.

And so what do we see going on at the beginning of Joshua? At the beginning of the Prophets and the book of Joshua, what we see is Yeshua, Joshua, ok, who is described as a successful priest-king. He is someone who both intercedes for his people and he is also someone who leads. He does not hold the title of king. He is not, ultimately, either a priest or a king; but he fills many of those roles. And he intercedes for his people and he leads them into the land of their deliverance. And he's commanded to be successful by meditating on the law day and night. 'Don't let God's word depart from you. Don't turn to the left or to the right. Meditate on it day and night and you'll be successful, Yeshua.'

What do we see at the beginning of the Psalms? What we end up seeing is that in Psalms 1 and 2 the blessedness of the man, ok...the blessedness of the man who brings both of these together. It's this messianic vision of who the Messiah will be and what He will be like. It describes a man who meditates on the law day and night. Not only does He meditate on the law day and night, but He delights in it. And He never, ever, turns to the left or to the right. He always perfectly follows the law. He's sinless. And not only that, but He is described as being someone who is able to heal His people, and He is placed as a king over all nations. And not only that, but He is described as the tree that is continually bearing its fruit, at whose base the river of life and the streams continually flow. In many ways, it's pulling both of the images of the beginning of Genesis and the beginning of Joshua together and saying this Yeshua, this one, the one that he...it's pulling it together and it's setting it up.

And the thing that's beautiful to me is look at how Revelation ends, the very last chapter of Revelation. Once again we have a perfect place where God's presence is felt. In fact, His presence is there, and there is no temple. Why? Because no temple is needed—we are in God's presence! There is no more temple because God, the One seated on the throne, *is* the temple! His presence is there! And once again we see that there is the Tree of Life, continually bearing its fruit, bringing life, from whose base the river of life flows, bringing life to everyone and to all that is contained within. And it's not only that, but it's described as being there at the throne, the seat of the Lamb, the One who was sacrificed for us—Yeshua, who is both the priest, the sacrifice, the One interceding on behalf of His people, and He is the King seated on the throne. And the whole thing is intended to prepare you for Christ, who died on a tree to bring life forever, for eternity, for those who would trust in Him, those who would take Him into themselves, and from whose base the river of life, His blood, flows. The whole thing is intended to point to Christ,

to Jesus. And the thing is, you can run throughout the Old Testament and you see this running throughout. There's these beautiful, intricate patterns of grace. It's not some disjointed anthology of documents just kind of thrown together in a haphazard motion and manner. No! There's a system, and it's all intended to point to Jesus.

We'll just wrap up by reading, or sharing with you something that I heard Timothy Keller...he pointed this out in a talk that he was giving back in 2006. But he's talking about how, throughout the Old Testament we see Jesus as the continual theme. He is that key to the intricate patterns of the Old Testament, and how all of it ultimately points back to Him. And he points out that Jesus is the true and better Adam, who passed the test in the garden and whose obedience is imputed to us. Jesus is the true and better Abel, who though innocently slain, has blood that cries out now not for our condemnation but for our acquittal. Jesus is the true and better Abraham who answered the call of God to leave all the comfortable and familiar, and go out into the world not knowing whither he went to create a new people of God. Jesus is the true and better Isaac, who was not just offered up by his father on the mount, but is truly sacrificed for us. And when God said to Abraham "Now I know you love Me because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love, from Me," now we can look at God taking His Son up the mountain and sacrificing Him, and say, 'Now we know that You love us, because You did not withhold Your Son, Your only Son, from us.'

Jesus is the true and better Jacob, who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserve so that we, like Jacob, only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and to discipline us. Jesus is the true and better Joseph who, at the right hand of the king, forgives those who betrayed and sold him, and uses his new power now to save them. Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between the people and the LORD, and who mediates a new covenant. Jesus is the true and better rock of Moses who, struck with the rod of justice, now gives us water in the desert. Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer who then intercedes for and saves His stupid friends. Jesus is the true and better David, whose victory becomes His people's victory even though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves. Jesus is the true and better Esther who didn't just risk losing an earthly palace but lost the ultimate and heavenly one, who didn't just risk losing His life but gave His life to save His people. Jesus is the true and better Jonah who was cast out into the storm so that we can be brought in. Jesus is the real rock of Moses, the real Passover Lamb, innocent, perfect, helpless, slain, so that the Angel of Death will pass over us. He's the true temple, the true prophet, the true priest, the true king, the true sacrifice, the true lamb, the true light, the true bread!

The Bible is not about you! It's not about how you can have a better life. It's all about Him! And the sooner we see that, the sooner we will begin to see the intricate patterns of His grace woven throughout, and the sooner we can turn and point people to those and we can help them to come to see Yeshua, the One who actually truly has truth and grace, the only One; the One who died on a tree so that rivers of life in His blood would flow out to all who are willing to accept Him.

I ask that you'd stand.

[Congregation sings the prayer song.]

Thank you, and go in God's grace.