

(Almost) The Whole Continuous Story of the Old Testament in Just 11 Books

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David Talley—Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies, and Chair of the Biblical & Theological Studies Old Testament Department at Biola University—has written a very helpful introduction to *The Story of the Old Testament*.

He points out that the majority of the OT story or narrative is found in the following 11 books:

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Numbers
4. Joshua
5. Judges
6. 1 Samuel
7. 2 Samuel
8. 1 Kings
9. 2 Kings
10. Ezra
11. Nehemiah

He writes:

If you were to read these eleven books, beginning with Genesis and reading them in succession to Nehemiah, you would read through almost the entire story of the Old Testament. The reason it must be stated that it is “almost the entire story” is because there are some additional stories isolated in parts of other books.

This is a really helpful pedagogical move, as it allows readers to distinguish between the main ongoing narrative and then to examine the way the other 28 books of the OT interpret, reinforce, and supplement this storyline.

Below is his summary of the story through these 11 books.

Genesis

Genesis begins THE STORY by providing the narrative of the beginning of the world in the first eleven chapters. In these chapters, the story progresses through 20+ generations of people. The goal is to get the story to Abram (Abraham). So these chapters cover a very long time period . . . and, as a result, can obviously focus on very few details. The remaining chapters of the book provide the narrative for the early beginnings of the nation of Israel through the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, and concluding with the family of Jacob in Egypt. Then THE STORY slows down, focusing on only four generations of people. The purpose is to provide a “skeleton” of information about the background of everything that leads up to Israel being in Egypt, awaiting the redemption of the Lord.

Exodus

Exodus picks up THE STORY from Genesis as evidenced by an overlapping connection with Joseph going down to Egypt, being used by God to preserve Jacob's family. After Joseph dies, Exodus continues the narrative by 1) recounting the nation's hardships in Egypt, 2) demonstrating God's miraculous work of judgment against Egypt and redemption of Israel in the exodus from Egypt to Mt Sinai, 3) providing the establishment of his covenant with Israel, and 4) explaining the building of the Tabernacle so that God can dwell in their midst. Whereas Genesis covers 24-plus generations, Exodus concerns only the life of Moses (his life actually continues to the end of Deuteronomy, the remainder of the Pentateuch). The family of Jacob grows into a nation with whom God makes a covenant. All of this is preparation for taking the nation to the Promised Land.

Numbers

Numbers continues THE STORY for us, narrating the developments taking place as Israel prepares to take the land. All of the contents occur in Moses' generation. After the completion of the Tabernacle, this book conveys the story of the organization of the nation, their departure from Mt. Sinai, and the subsequent disobedience of this first generation when they refuse to take the land. The resulting judgment is 40 years of wilderness wanderings, which is also found in this book though not in much detail. We do not have a lot of information about this 40-year time period because the focus of the book is to get us to the border of the

Promised Land. The book closes with the preparation of the second generation (after the exodus) in taking the land of Canaan.

Joshua

The book of Joshua connects to the previous books by beginning with a reference to Moses' death. (Recall, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of his sin when he struck the rock rather than spoke to it.) The leadership of the people for the task of entering the Promised Land is transferred and entrusted to Joshua. The narrative in this book continues THE STORY by providing the events of Israel entering the land by focusing on the conquest, division, and initial settling of the land of Canaan during the life of Joshua.

Judges

Judges continues THE STORY by overlapping with the end of the book of Joshua with its focus on the details of Joshua's death. Since the land has already been settled, this book provides a glimpse of the early years in the land when Israel was led by judges. This period marked by the rule of the judges is summarized by utilizing a similar cycle evidenced by each generation. The cycle is simple, yet disturbing. Each generation is characterized by eventual rebellion, followed by God's judgment, their crying out to the Lord, the Lord raising up of a deliverer, the actual deliverance, and a subsequent return to obedience for a period of time until the cycle repeats itself. Consequently, many generations are

covered as the author seeks to make it clear what this time period was like for Israel. When they are disobedient, there are consequences, but, when they walk in faithfulness, the Lord in his mercy restores them to a place of blessing.

1-2 Samuel

The era of the judges continues into the books of Samuel. Samuel is a judge, but he moves THE STORY from the period of the judges into the period of the kingdom. These two books include the transition from the leadership of the last judge (Samuel) to the beginning of (under King Saul's leadership) and establishment of (under King David's leadership) the kingdom. It is also the necessary foundation to the books that follow.

1-2 Kings

The books of Kings naturally flow out of the books that introduce the kingdom, especially with the overlap of the end of King David's life. Connecting to the end of the books of Samuel, the books of Kings begin with the latter years of King David's life, culminating in the transfer of leadership to Solomon as the new king and the story of King David's death. King Solomon is the focus immediately after King David's death, and, after his unfaithfulness and the subsequent division of the kingdom, the remaining pages summarize the lives of the kings of the divided (northern kingdom of Israel and southern kingdom of Judah) and the solitary kingdom (southern kingdom of Judah alone). THE STORY points to the "glory" of the kingdom (under King Solomon's leadership)

and the division of the kingdom into the northern kingdom, until this kingdom goes into exile, and southern kingdom, until this kingdom goes into exile, which is the seeming end of the nation as a whole.

{Exile}

At this point we have the exile. The nation is taken out of the land. There are many events that happen during this time, which are part of the growth and formation of the nation. The land is the focus in the Old Testament, so in many ways, and for our purposes, THE STORY takes a 70-year hiatus. But God is not done. His story continues.

Ezra and Nehemiah

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah continue THE STORY by reversing the removal of the people from the land. They now return. After the 70 years of exile are over, these books record the three returns to the land under the leadership of Zerubbabel (to rebuild the Temple), Ezra, and Nehemiah (to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem). The purpose of these returns is ultimately concerned with preparing for the coming Messiah and the restoration of the kingdom. However, each return also includes the many reforms that the people must make along the way. God is continuing his work.

So note very clearly that THE STORY of the Old Testament ends with the book of Nehemiah. Yes, Nehemiah. It is not that God is done with his people. It is just that God will resume his story with the coming of the Messiah, which

occurs in the gospels in the New Testament. The end of the Old Testament is one of anticipation, the anticipation of the good news of the gospel in the coming Messiah.

The prophets add to this anticipation as these books begin to fill in certain details about what God is up to, what he is going to do, and when it is going to happen.

The Old Testament is actually the “first testament” or the prelude to the New Testament. Both testaments contain God’s story.