

I'm sure that many of you have heard the phrase, "you can't see the forest for the trees". It's another way of saying that sometimes the details get in the way of seeing the big picture. As I prepared for this message, I was reminded of how we can miss important truths because we simply get caught up in the details. It can be this way in our study of scripture. As we read our Bibles, we can easily lose sight of the big picture, that scripture it is a single story of God's redemption of man. At Clearcreek, we regularly see this on display as we work through Old Testament books such as Genesis and our current series on Exodus. As we work through the details of these books, we are constantly pointed to Christ and pictures of redemption. It is one of the precious things about the teaching here; that we have men who can take us to scripture and ensure that we see both the forest and the trees.

I came across a funny story that illustrated how we can sometimes miss the obvious. As the story goes, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went off one evening on a camping trip. After a fine dinner and a glass of wine they lay down in their tent for the night, and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend. "Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see." Watson replied, "I see millions and millions of stars." Holmes asked, "What does that tell you?" Watson pondered for a minute. "Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Theologically, I can see that God is omnipotent and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. "I say, what does it tell you?" Holmes was silent for a few seconds and then he spoke. "Watson, you meathead. Someone has stolen our tent."

This morning we are going to intentionally and purposefully fly over the details so that we can take a good look at the big picture. Specifically, we drop in on various points in structure and story of the nation of Israel as a community and see the many ways in which it contains the promise of the community of believers. We will find that there is a definite and intentional foreshadowing of the new covenant community within the old covenant community of Israel. There are patterns of redemption and pictures that point to our community as a church. To understand the relationship between these two communities we will need to cover a number of passages. So, just as we did last week, be ready for another Bible drill of sorts as we look for the promise of community in the nation of Israel.

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As a song in the Sound of Music says, "Let's start at the very beginning, it's a very good place to start." The promise of community starts in humble beginnings of the nation of Israel in the choosing of Abram and God's promise of blessing. In Genesis 12:1-3 we find the choice that started a nation. *"Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* God's choosing of Abram and his promise to him were not based on greatness or and form of merit. Rather, they were based in Abram's unlikely position and lack of status or merit in order to demonstrate God's greatness and to ensure that the glory would be to God alone. This is a theme that plays out over and over again in Scripture.

Along with the Genesis 12:3 blessing to Abram is the promise of blessings to all people that was ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Christ and His death and resurrection. The promise that began the national community of Israel brings forth a universal community of believers. The promise that began a chosen nation brings forth a chosen people for His own name's sake. The promise that made Abraham the father of a nation brings forth the true sons of Abraham who have received an inheritance in Christ as Sons of God. Galatians 3:29 point back to Genesis and re-establishes this truth reminding us that those who are Christ's are also Abraham's children and heirs to the same promise. This is an amazing truth; that God's sovereign plan has been fulfilled through the nation of Israel and will be ultimately realized by the Church in glory.

The nation of Israel was a community formed by God and called for his purpose and pleasure. **Israel was a community with a calling.** Deuteronomy 7:6 declares of Israel, *"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."* The promise of community in Israel is that the church will also be called to be a holy people and a treasured possession; but much more so for those who are in Christ.

In Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel we first see the promise of a community of faith. It is seen clearly in Romans 4 speaking of Abraham, who being fully convinced that God would fulfill His promises, had a faith that was credited to him as righteousness. This passage goes on to refer to Abraham as *"the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well"*. In Abraham's faith is the promise that all who believe and trust wholly in the Lord will be saved. We also see this promise in the people of Israel who were also to be marked by a faith that believed in God alone and lived in obedience to Him. They were to be a community with a belief or exclusive faith in God and in Him alone. This is seen in the commandments to love the Lord and to have no other Gods before Him.

In Mark 12 Jesus is asked which of the commandments was the greatest of all. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:4-5 where Israel was commanded to love God and love others. Later in this chapter, Israel is given the reason given for the meaning of testimonies, statutes, and rules God gave the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy 6:25. *"And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us."* The problem for Israel is that they failed in following after God and they replaced faith with a system of rules and works. The Israelites were to demonstrate their faith through a love for God and acts of obedience. Despite their failure, we see the promise of the community that was to come; a community that would place its faith exclusively in Christ alone for a righteousness apart from works; a righteousness that could never fail. Just as Israel was called to be a community of faith, so it is with the Church.

As the community of Israel emerge out of Egypt God forms a nation as a community set apart and gives them a series of laws and commands that governed life, relationships, and worship. One of the purposes of these laws and commands was to preserve Israel as a holy people, set apart both for God's pleasure and to be different from other nations. We see this in Isaiah 62:2-3. *"The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God."*, and later in verse 12 which says, *"And they shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken."*

Similarly, the community of believers is to be a holy people. Peter quotes Leviticus 11:44-45 in his first epistle Chapter 1 verses 15-16 when he writes, *"but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."* Peter is clearly connecting the call to the nation of Israel for holiness to the pattern of the Church. Just as Israel was to be set apart and different from the nations around it, so the Church is to live in a way that distinguishes it from the world. When we read through the laws and commandments for the nation of Israel, it is easy to get caught up in the details of an unfamiliar culture. But we should keep the bigger picture in mind and let it remind us of need to be holy and set that Christ has fulfilled the law and as Paul reminds us in Romans 4:25 that He was delivered up for our sins and raised for our justification.

In Genesis 12 God makes a covenant with Abram to bring him to a promised land, to give him and heir that would one day be a great nation, and that we would both be blessed and be a blessing. This covenant is affirmed and passed on to his descendents who were the nation of Israel. **So Israel is a not only community with a calling, but they are a special community created for a covenant.** We hear the echoes of the Abrahamic covenant as Moses instructs the people before they are ejected from Egypt in Exodus 6:7-8. Moses says *"I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession."*

This special promise of God to His people came with its demands. Demands for obedience to follow the laws they had been given. These demands are communicated in various places through Israel's leaders, priests and prophets. Jumping back to Deuteronomy 7:12-13 we clearly see the connection between these demands and the covenant. *"And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. He will love you, bless you, and multiply you."* Israel was to obey the commands and follow the patterns of sacrifice God had given. Obedience brought the promise of blessing. Disobedience to the covenant meant national punishment. But the demands of the laws were impossible to keep and required constant sacrifices to cover their sins.

Even in its imperfections, the demands of that covenant pointed to its promise of something better to come. For those in the community of believers, the demands for perfection are met in Christ who is our righteousness. And in the sacrifices of lambs and bulls we see the promise of a final sacrifice of the Lamb that covers our sins once and for all. The promises of Abrahamic covenant point us along redemptive to the promises for the Church. The Promised Land points us to the promise of our rest in Christ and the joy of an eternity in heaven. The promise of a great nation points and a seed points us to Christ and His body the true sons of Abraham. And the promised blessing to all nations points us to the cross and resurrection of Christ who blessed all nations by conquering sin and death to redeem a people for himself. In the light of scripture we see that Christ is the focal point of these promises. And as we read and hear these promises to Israel we are humbled and thankful for the work of Christ who is our redeemer.

Just as we have the promise evident in the choosing of the nation of Israel, we also see promises of the community to come in its nature. By its nature, I mean to observe the structures and functions of its community that point us to the community of Christ. Just as in the choosing of the community of Israel, there are distinct patterns that parallel the nature of their community found in the body of Christ.

One aspect of its nature is to look at the nation of Israel as a people. First, we can see that Scripture provides several references to the nation of Israel as a people of God. Moses commanded the Pharaoh in the name of the Lord to "let His people go." Later Moses speaks to the nation of Israel for the Lord in Leviticus 26:12 saying *"And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people."* Similarly, the New Testament refers to the community of believers as people of God. 1 Peter 2:10, tells us that *"Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."* Even more prevalent in scripture are references to the community of believers as children of God. For example, in John 1:11-12 we read that *"He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"*. In Israel's nature as a people of God contains the promise that the community of believers are not only people of God, but His children as well.

As a people, Israel often found themselves as aliens, a community surrounded by an unfamiliar, unfriendly, and even hostile world. In scripture we find them wandering through the desert for 40 years alone as a people away from the Promised Land or as a people in slavery waiting upon the Lord to redeem and restore. In fact, the Israelites were commanded to take in and love strangers because they knew what it was like to be strangers. Just as the Israelites were far off from Canaan, so as believer we were once separated and far off from Christ. But we have been redeemed and according to Ephesians 2, are no longer strangers and aliens but are now fellow citizens and part of the household of God. In Israel's alienation and wandering as a community we see the promise that all of us were aliens wandering in a life of rebellion. And just as Israel was to welcome the stranger and sojourner, so should we be a welcoming community to those who are lost and spiritually hungry. We must not forget what it was like to be alone and hurting outside the community of faith so that we will gladly offer the Gospel to those in need.

Another part of Israel's nature as a people is seen throughout scripture in that they are a nation. This seems obvious as it was part of their identity. Indeed, it is at the heart of the promise God made to Abraham. But in their national identity, there is a promise of the community of believers as a nation unto God. Not in the national sense that we are used to. But in spiritual sense as a special and chosen people we find our identity in Christ and pledge to Him our allegiance. 1 Peter 2:9 carries this sense when it says, *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, **a holy nation**, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* The community of believers is a holy nation, set apart for the glory of God that we may live for him and proclaim it forevermore.

One last part of their nature as a people is that of a kingdom. With David, God gives Israel its king and blesses his rule. This sense is recorded in 2 Samuel 5:12 where we read, *"And David knew that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel."* The progression of Israel as a community flows from the family of Abraham, to the people of Israel and that grows to be a nation, and finally to a mighty kingdom.

No less real is the kingdom that is made up of the community of believers. While in a broader sense, the kingdom of God is about more than just its people, within its realm and rule, we as a community, dwell now and forevermore in the kingdom of God. Listen to how John greets the seven churches at the beginning of Revelation in this way. *"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and **made us a kingdom**, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever."* Paul as well picks up this language when he speaks of Christ in Colossians 1:13-14. *"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and **transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son**, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* The kingdom nature of the nation of Israel should remind us that Christ is our deliverer and has transferred us to more glorious kingdom; the eternal kingdom of Christ.

The nation of Israel also holds several amazing promises for our community in its nature under its leaders. The structure and role of leaders mirrors roles that are clearly visible in the Church. The first of these is seen in Moses' appointing Elders over Israel. As Moses struggles with overseeing the people of Israel, the Lord provides a solution. We find this in Numbers 11:16-17. *"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone."* This appointing of officers over the people bears the structure and role of Elders as office bearing leaders to oversee within the community of believers.

There is a promise seen in its Elders of Israel's community and there is a dual promise seen in its priests. While the nation of Israel had the Levitical tribe and system of priesthood, the Church is a community of priests under Christ who is our High Priest forever. Peter speaks to our status as priests in 1 Peter 2, verses 4 and 9, where he describes believers as a holy and royal priesthood able to offer our spiritual sacrifices through Christ. We are no longer bound by the inferior system of constant sacrifices offered by priests, but as a holy people, clothed in Christ's righteousness we boldly approach the throne of God and offer our acceptable sacrifices and worship to Him. Moreover, the human institution of a high priest holds the greater promise of Christ who is the perfect High Priest of Hebrews 9. The high priest of the new covenant is Jesus Christ who is our mediator and hope so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. Jesus is the mediator and High Priest for the community of believers. Jesus Christ, our High Priest, who did not spill the blood of others, but spilled his own as the final sacrifice for sins.

So there is a promise of community in Israel's elders and priests, and there is a promise in its kings. Just as God allowed the nation of Israel to become a kingdom, he did so by providing them with kings. David is the first of the line of Kings promised to come out of the line of Judah to rule the kingdom of Israel. But in God's promises to provide a King over Israel, is the promise to provide a greater and better King. And out of David's lineage comes the Jesus Christ, who becomes the servant King of a new community, the Church. This is the King of Glory of whom John tells us in Revelations 19:16, *"On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."* In the kings of Israel we are to remember the coming King, the Lion of Judah who is also the risen Lamb, who would conquer sin and death and redeem His people for the glory of the Father. This is Christ, our King, who is to be worshipped and adored both now and forevermore.

We have looked at the promises of community in the choosing of Israel and its nature. In the last part of this message, we will look how this promise is reflected within their community in several important ways. At the essence of their community is a relationship between a people and their God. This relationship not only defined their community, its expression provides patterns that should point us to Christ and the community of believers.

**First, the promise of community is reflected in their purpose.** Israel as a nation was set apart to make great the name of the Lord among the nations around them. This is seen in their humble beginnings as a community, their preservation through hardships, the many battles that are won by God's hand alone, or their slow destruction as they rebel and fall away from Him. God's purpose for Israel gives Him glory both in their heritage and history as a nation and as fulfillment of the promise of a "seed" that would bless all nations. In a similar vein, the community of believers also exists to make great the name of the Lord among the nations. This is reflected in our humble beginnings in Christ, our preservation in Christ, spiritual battles won by Christ alone, and the terrible outcome for those who rebel against Christ. We are to be an obedient people, not out of a system of laws, but out of grace and gratefulness. All that we do is to be done for the Lord and His glory. This is the greater purpose of our community that we are to see in the life and living of Israel.

**A second promise reflected by Israel's community is seen in their redemption.** This is first seen in their salvation from slavery under the hands of the Egyptians. In coming out of Egypt, God provides a picture of a salvation that is clearly of His doing alone. God's people are preserved and His enemies destroyed. Another picture of salvation is seen in God saving a remnant out of all of Israel after He allows the nations of Israel and Judah to be destroyed. Both pictures of redemption reflect the promise of God's saving grace to the community of believers in providing a salvation that is of God alone. Just as God preserved a remnant of the nation of Israel, there is a sense in which we are a remnant of people preserved by grace from all the nations. In Israel's salvation we are to see the promise of salvation that is to come.

**Another promise of community is reflected in their worship.** Israel as a nation gives us many examples of great worship as the story of the nation unfolds. We see in several passages that God had provided gifted musicians to bring praise to God. Among these were Asaph to whom many of the Psalms are credited. I wonder what it must have been like to hear the worship as David brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem. 1 Chronicles 15:16 says that "*David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brothers as the singers who should play **loudly** on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy.*" This is echoed in Psalm 150:5 which reads, "*Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with **loud** clashing cymbals!*" If Israel, who had only the shadow of the coming glory brought praise in this way, how much more so should we, who have the Spirit of Christ within us, bring joyful and loud praise to God.

The last promise reflected we will look at is in God's presence with His people. As we have seen in Exodus, God's physical presence among the people of Israel was made evident in the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night that did not depart from among them. As the pillar moved, so did the people of Israel, and they were guided through the wilderness into the Promised Land. God's presence with Israel is also seen in the tabernacles. The first being a tent and then later, Solomon's majestic temple. Both of these contained the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. Both of these were constructed and used in a way that points us to the presence of God with His people. But again, these are but a dim image of what is now a reality in Christ where God indwells His people with His presence by the Spirit.

Read Hebrews 9:23-28 with me. *"Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."*

This is the ultimate hope of those who are truly a part of the community of Christ; that what is represented in earthly pictures, are copies of what is true in the heavenly realms. God's presence within us is the guarantee that we will be present within Him for all eternity. And it is in that hope that we eagerly wait for Christ's second coming and rejoice in worship at the thought of that day.

Let me wrap this up. While we have covered the larger promises of community seen in Israel, we have done so at a high level. We could have gone deeper and broader, but by intention, my goal was to make the overall theme evident so that we would appreciate the fullness and beauty of God's plan in Israel's community. As we move through Exodus in the series Russ is preaching, there will be many opportunities to see these promises. If you are reading through the Bible, it is my hope that you will see many of these patterns of community repeated throughout pages of scripture.

It is also my hope that we would marvel at God's sovereignty in the course of history. Who but God could have orchestrated the structure and function of a nation so that it contains promises of a community that would come? Who but God could create these communities that match the patterns of community whose source is the Trinity, as we saw last week? Who but God could ensure that the community of Israel would bring forth the promised seed for a new community? One that would be superior to the old and bring about a permanent and eternal community saved and secured in Christ.

So in conclusion, let us make some applications that will help us see these things. First, let us work hard at seeing the patterns and promises of community in our hearing and reading of the word. Whether it is from the pulpit, in our daily reading, or personal study, let our seeing of these promises cause us to magnify the God who is a community maker.

Second, let Israel's redemptive themes remind us of all that God has done for us. He has brought us out from slavery to sin, saved us in Christ, and is preparing us for an eternal kingdom. He is our deliverer that has brought us to the Promised Land. A land of spiritual blessing that will be ultimately fulfilled when we shall be present with Him in heaven.

Third, let these promises of community remind us of other the lessons of lesser and greater found in Israel. What is true in the sense of community is true in every aspect of the old and new covenant. Just as the community of Christ is superior so are the many other pictures, patterns, and types that point to Christ.

And finally, for the community gathered at Clearcreek Chapel, let us be reminded to keep Christ at the center of our community. He is the reason we are gathered together and it is for His purposes that we have come together. Whether it is to worship, to study, to fellowship, or to have fun together, we can never forget the underlying purpose of our community. If we forget Christ in our midst, then we are just another country club or social gathering; no different from the rest of the world. **The spiritual reality of our community together may not be visible, but it must be evident to all.** So let our community always be about encouraging one another, helping one another, and deepening our love for the Lord that we may reflect the character and community of our God for all to see.

[Pray]