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## GROUP DISCUSSION

### Our story to this point.

God approaches a man named Abraham and invites him into a relationship. God makes a promise or a covenant to bless the entire world through Abraham's family line.

Abraham's grandson Jacob (later named Israel) ended up with his sons living in Egypt to avoid a famine that devastated the land.

The family of Israel became slaves to the Egyptians for 400 years. Next, God uses a man named Moses to lead them out of Egypt and establish a new country or promised land for the family of Israel. During that time God reminds them of the covenant and lets them know if they will follow him and keep their end of the covenant given on Mount Horeb, He will be their God and king, and they will be his people.

### Four Stages of Biblical Covenant

#### OLD COVENANT (TESTAMENT)

Abraham's Covenant – (Gen 12:1-3) – Blessing to the world through one family  
Moses' Covenant – (Dt 28-30) – The family is rescued from Egypt and made into a nation  
David's Covenant – (2Sm 7:12-13) – The line of King David identified as blessing-carrier

#### NEW COVENANT (TESTAMENT)

New Covenant – (Jer 31:31-37) – Enablement of blessing (Jesus' Covenant)

### Moses' Covenant in a Nutshell

#### (Deuteronomy 28-30):

When you go into the Promised Land, follow God's law.

- Obedience: Blessing & Life (global leadership, the other nations will admire you)
- Disobedience: Punishment & Death (global enslavement, the other nations will rule you)
- Prediction: Moses says, "Based on what I've seen in the wilderness, y'all heading back to slavery eventually."
- Promise: BUT! ... good news! God won't break his promise to bring blessing to the world through you.

Unfortunately, they are not great at keeping the covenant and often look to other gods or leaders to help them. So, God allows them to set up a king over the people. The kings also don't do a great job following the covenant, but God remains faithful to his people and often sends prophets to remind the people of his love and put them back on course. They do not stay on course and God allows the people to be taken away into exile by Babylon. Eventually, they are allowed to return from exile to their home and rebuild. The prophet Malachi shows up about 100 years after they return from exile. For more context, you can read about the return in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

**Question:** Have you ever had a season where your expectations were high but not met? What were some of the emotions around that unmet expectation?

Because of the unmet expectations that God would move when the people expected him to move you see a lot of corruption called out in the beginning of the book.

#### ***Interpretive Key:***

The post-exilic community feels slighted by God. They expected covenant blessing but were receiving something that felt like continued punishment. Malachi explains why God is still faithful and calls the people to repentance, but ultimately highlights how the exile didn't actually change them and consequently is not over.

Now in Malachi, we will read a series of disputes between God and the people. What God says and what they say. Notice the pattern.

**Read:** Malachi 1:6-10

When we have unmet expectations, it is a human desire to try and get what we want or to lose focus on what we should be doing. There is an important lesson in the opening of Malachi.

**Question:** What stands out about this Malachi passage?

**Read:** Malachi 2:10-15

Here we see the men of Israel being accused by Malachi of divorcing their wives and marrying foreign women who worship other gods. God had called his people to be set apart to worship him alone and warned them in his previous covenants with Moses that if they married people from other lands, they were likely to worship the gods of those foreign lands.

**Thought:** Like any loving parent God wants what is best for his children, and because he is good, he is the best thing for them. That is why God does not want his children to pursue idols of other gods.

**Question:** How do you see our earthly parents' love as reflections of how a perfect God loves?

**Read:** Malachi 3:6-15

The continued pattern of what the people are failing to do is put in front of them and they continue to deflect. The job of a prophet was often uncomfortable, one of speaking God's law to an unwilling-to-listen audience. Today we often celebrate the phrase speaking truth to power. While the profits often did come before kings they also went to the people and plead with them to turn back to God.

**Question:** What is the difference between speaking truth to power and truth in love?

**Read:** Malachi 4:1-6

**Question:** What stands out in this passage?

**Read:** Luke 1:12-17

**Question:** How did Luke understand John's role in the greater story of Israel?

The covenants and the entire history of Israel culminate in Jesus's life.