

**EAST AFRICA BIBLE COLLEGE**

# **Old Testament Survey**

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**EAST AFRICA BIBLE COLLEGE (IPHC)**

**ELDORAT, KENYA**

# East Africa Bible College

## Old Testament Survey

Certificate Level

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### **EABC Mission Statement:**

To provide Biblical and theological training for the equipping of men and women for the work of Christian ministry.

### **EABC Vision Statement:**

To be a Christ-centered Bible college training men and women to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations of Africa.

### **EABC Motto:**

Training to Reach the Unreached

### **Course Description:**

This is a survey of the Old Testament. It consists of an introduction to the Old Testament from a historical and thematic perspective. The course seeks to familiarize students with the origins, structure, and importance of the Old Testament. The course will also examine the cultures and literary divisions of the Old Testament.

### **Course Goals:**

At the conclusion of this course, the students will:

1. Possess a general understanding of the contents and importance of the Old Testament.
2. Be able to list and explain the Old Testament covenants.
3. Understand the general structure and timeline of the Old Testament.
4. Know key people and events from the Old Testament.

### **Resource Texts:**

The following texts were used in the writing of this material:

- A. Albert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).
- B. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).
- C. Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: Baker, 1977).
- D. Other texts are cited in the notes.

# Introduction to the Bible

## I. The Holy Bible

### A. Bibliology

1. Bibliology is the study of the Bible.
2. The word “Bible” comes from the Greek term *biblia* which means book.

### B. The Bible is Special Revelation from God

1. Revelation is information given by God about himself and his mission in creation.

2. There are two types of revelation:

#### i. General Revelation

- a. Information revealed by God about himself through his creation. God’s communication available to all people through natural means.
- b. Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:18-20

#### ii. Special Revelation

- a. Information revealed by God through supernatural means. Not available to all through creation but meant for everyone through evangelism.
- b. There are two primary forms of Special Revelation. All other forms of revelations must be confirmed by God’s primary Special Revelation:
  1. Jesus in the Flesh (Incarnate)- Jesus is called the Word of God in John 1:1-4, 14; Colossians 2:9)
  2. The Bible (the Word of God given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit).
- c. Special Revelation was Progressive until Christ
  1. God did not reveal everything at once. Rather, God progressively revealed himself to humanity beginning with Adam and culminating in Jesus.
  2. Christ represents the pinnacle of God’s special revelation. Thus, there is nothing added to our Bible after the New Testament. Everything that God has intended for us to have has now been given and the work of progressive revelation is over. God, through the Holy Spirit, now illuminates what has already been revealed.

## II. IPHC Doctrine of Scripture:

- A. Article 5 of the *IPHC 14 Articles of Faith* expresses our belief concerning the Bible. The text of that article is below:
- B. We believe in the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, known as the Bible, composed of sixty-six books and divided into two departments, Old and New Testaments. We believe the Bible is the Word of God, the full and complete revelation of the plan and history of redemption.

## III. Understanding our Doctrine of Scripture

- A. This IPHC Doctrine is not unique to the IPHC. It represents an evangelical framework for understanding the Bible.

### B. The Books in the Bible

#### 1. 66 books divided into two divisions

- i. The Old Testament (39 books)
- ii. The New Testament (27 books)

#### 2. Protestant churches in general (including the IPHC) do not accept the Apocrypha as Scripture.

- i. The Apocrypha is a collection of Jewish writings composed between the Old and New Testament periods (called the intertestamental period) which include primarily historical writings and some poetry. Some branches of Christianity (Catholic and Orthodox churches) accept these books as equal to the rest of Scripture.
- ii. Martin Luther led the way in separating the Apocrypha from the Biblical text in the early 1500s. Like Luther, we affirm the value of the Apocrypha for understanding historical context but these writings do not rise to the level of Scripture.
- iii. Some include a study of the Apocrypha in Old Testament studies but we will not address the content of the books in this course. Some of the content will be helpful and discussed in New Testament survey.

### C. Verbal and Plenary Inspiration

#### 1. Inspired

- i. Inspired describes the Bible as having supernatural origins, it was given by God.
- ii. Even though the individual books were physically written by humans, those humans wrote under the guidance and leadership (inspiration) of the Holy Spirit, so that God's Words were communicated through human hands (2 Timothy 3:16).

## 2. Plenary

- i. The word “plenary” means full and complete.
- ii. Plenary inspiration means that the entire Bible is inspired. The inspiration of God is not only seen in a few places, but in each and every portion of the Bible. Although we do read the Scriptures differently according to genre, we do not classify any text as less inspired than others.
- iii. We are sometimes tempted to regard the New Testament as more important than the Old Testament. While we do interpret the Old Testament in light of the New Testament, we do not consider the Old Testament to lack the level of importance or inspiration contained in the New Testament, they are both equally and superiorly inspired. The New Testament is a fulfillment of the Old Testament but we need to know the Old Testament to understand the New Testament.

## 3. Verbal

- i. Here, verbal refers more to wording than speaking.
- ii. The Holy Spirit guided each writer concerning which words to write, not only what concepts to consider.
- iii. The Bible is not just the ideas of man; it’s the Word of God. Even the actual words are inspired by God. While the words of Jesus are often printed in red, this does not mean that the other words are less important.

## D. Word of God

1. As suggested above, the Bible did not originate with man, it is inspired by God. God may have used human hands to write the books and human minds to form the words, God was guiding the hands and influencing the minds of those authors to convey His message.
2. Even though Jesus is called the “Word” in texts like John 1:1, the Bible is also the Word of God since both are special revelation from God.

## E. Full and Complete Revelation of the Plan and History of Redemption

### 1. Revelation

- i. Knowledge given by God
- ii. While General Revelation testifies to the world that there is a God, we cannot know the true character and nature of God without Special Revelation. The Bible serves as that special revelation. Because of the Bible we can know about God and even know God personally.

## 2. Full and Complete

- i. Since the Bible was created through verbal and plenary inspiration, it contains everything God intended for it to have.
- ii. There is not some great unknown that ultimately hinders us from knowing God, everything He intended for us to know and everything we need to know is in the Bible.

## 3. Plan and History of Redemption

- i. Redemption refers to the salvation of mankind from sin and the reconciliation of mankind with God.
- ii. All humans need redemption.
- iii. The Bible contains God's plan for redemption beginning in Genesis 3:15. This is not just a New Testament concept.
- iv. The Bible then shows us redemption history, evidence that God has already set his plan of redemption into motion.

## F. Evangelical Terminology Associated with the Bible:

1. Infallible - without mistake
2. Inerrant – without error
3. Inspired – originated with God
4. Sufficient – all we need for determining God's will
5. Revelation – the supreme source of theology
6. Authoritative – the supreme standard by which God's people must live
7. Relevant – applicable to all people, at all times, everywhere

G. Summary: The Bible is a unique book. First, it is a revelation from God to man. We cannot find out what God is like by ourselves. God has shown Himself to us in the sixty-six books of the Bible. In the Bible we see God's picture. We see God at work. We hear God's voice from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation. Secondly, God inspired certain men to write the books of the Bible (Matthew 5:17, 18; 1 Corinthians 2:13). Thus the Bible is a God-inspired book which reveals God to man. In its original form, it is perfected, true and without errors, because God Himself inspired it. Therefore, the Bible has divine authority. We must believe what the Bible says, and obey its teachings.

## IV. Origins of the Bible

A. The Bible was written over a period of 1,400 – 1,600 by more than 40 different authors.

1. The first books of the Bible to be written were the Pentateuch and Job.
2. The last book of the Bible to be written was most likely Revelation.

- B. The books of the Bible reflect both the Jewish origins of Christianity and the early church age of Christianity.
- C. The word “Testament” in the Bible refers to “covenant.”

V. Summary of the Old Testament

- A. Originally written in Hebrew with some portions written in Aramaic.
- B. The books of the Old Testament were written over a long period of time and gradually recognized by the Jewish religious authorities as scripture.
- C. The Old Testament as we know it today was finalized and placed together around 250 BC.
- D. Shortly after this, the Jewish religious leaders translated the Old Testament into Greek in order to help those Jews living in the diaspora (outside of Israel) to know their scripture and remain connected to their religion and culture. This Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures is commonly known as the Septuagint (often abbreviated as LXX). The name refers to the 70 translators who worked to produce the document.
- E. The books of the Old Testament are organized primarily according to genre:
  - 1. The word “genre” is a literary term which means type of classification of literature. These literary divisions will be discussed further later in this course.
  - 2. Within the literary divisions of the Old Testament, the books are further organized based on chronology and size.
  - 3. The literary divisions of the Old Testament are as follows:
    - i. Books of Law – Pentateuch (Genesis is not primarily a book of law but it was written in conjunction with the Pentateuch and serves as an introduction to both the Pentateuch and the Bible.)
    - ii. Historical Books
    - iii. Wisdom and Poetic Literature
    - iv. Prophetic Books
      - a. Major Prophets (classified as “major” in reference to size, not importance.)
      - b. Minor Prophets (classified as “minor” in reference to size, not importance.)
- F. The Importance of the Old Testament
  - 1. We must consider the importance of the Old Testament from our perspective as New Testament believers because the New Testament does and should influence our understanding of the Old Testament.

2. The Old Testament is important for New Testament believers because:

- i. It is the Word of God – God did not begin speaking in the New Testament. He has communicated with his creation through special revelation from the very beginning. The Old Testament includes all special revelation given by God before the incarnation of Christ and must be honored and studied as possessing an equal level of inspiration as the New Testament.
- ii. It is the Foundation of the New Covenant (Testament) – Even though the Old Testament is equally inspired, it does not represent the totality of what God desired to communicate to his creation. Thus, the New Testament represents the continuation of God’s divine communication. The New Testament does not exist in opposition to the Old Testament or divorced from the Old Testament. The New Testament is built upon the Old Testament. Thus, a clear and proper understanding of the Old Testament is necessary to fully understand, appreciate, and live out the New Testament. In the same way, a full embrace of the New Testament is necessary to properly honor the Old Testament.
  - a. We do not build a foundation and call it a complete structure. Nor do we remove the foundation from the house once we finish construction. A foundation anticipates and expects the rest of the structure while the structure depends upon the foundation.
  - b. That the Old Testament anticipates and expects the New Testament is found in passages such as Jeremiah 31:31-34.
  - c. That the New Testament depends upon the Old Testament is found in the continual references in the New Testament to Old Testament passages, people, and events. For example, Hebrews 11 alone references over 20 different Old Testament characters.

VI. The New Testament – more will be discussed in the “New Testament Survey Course.”



# Old Testament Covenants

## I. Introduction

A. God often chose to express his plan for relationship and salvation with humanity through covenants. F. Charles Fensham writes that “covenant was the vehicle that had given expression to the relationship between the Lord and his people since the time of the patriarchs.”<sup>1</sup>

B. We will first discuss the Old Testament in terms of the five major covenants that both set up and establish what we now know as the Old Covenant. These covenants include:<sup>2</sup>

### 1. The Common Grace Covenants

- i. The Adamic Covenant (Creation Covenant)
- ii. The Noahic Covenant (Recreation Covenant)

### 2. The Special Grace Covenants

- i. Abrahamic Covenant
- ii. Mosaic Covenant (Sinai Covenant)
- iii. Davidic Covenant

C. The concept of a covenant in Scripture was not borrowed from pagan cultures but originated in the heart of God as his exclusive means of engaging with humanity. This is an expression of God’s genuine love towards us. God could have rightfully engaged with humanity in a number of less beneficial ways. He was not obligated to make covenants with humanity but he chose to do so for our benefit.

## II. The Adamic Covenant (Creation Covenant)

A. Scripture: Genesis 1-2

B. Contents

1. Describes the special relationship between God and humanity.

- i. Creation is an act of grace. God created mankind, and the world to sustain mankind, not out of necessity but out of love. God created us to experience his love and worship him.
- ii. Although mankind was created last, being made in God’s image shows that mankind was not the least in creation but the pinnacle of creation.

2. Establishes the way of life intended by God.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Charles Fensham, *NICNT: The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Here I am using the terminology most recently put forward and described by Jeffrey Neihaus in *Biblical Theology Volume 1*.

- i. Love/Relationship
  - ii. Trust
  - iii. Obedience
3. Illustrates the free will with which man was created.
- i. Able to make decisions
  - ii. Free from sin but also able to sin. Not sinning was to be the result of a genuine choice, not a forced action.

### C. Major Issue in the Creation Covenant

#### 1. The Creation of Humanity

- i. Created by God
  - a. Formed from the dust of the ground (finite beings).
  - b. Received the breath of life directly from God breathing into him. (Genesis 2:7).
- ii. Described as Existing in the Image of God (Imago Dei)
  - a. This means humans are not only material creature but also spiritual beings.
  - b. This characteristic describes the possibility for relationship with God and special worship of and interaction with the Creator.
  - c. This make human beings of greater value than any other part of creation.
  - d. Humans are representatives of God in creation. Humans are not gods, but God has entrusted humanity with his image to represent God both in testimony and action.
    - 1. An image reflects the original.
    - 2. Humans were given the responsibility to rule over creation from God, the ultimate ruler of all.
    - 3. Humans were given the ability and responsibility to produce life from God, the ultimate life giver. We were also given the task of preserving life as caretakers of the garden (God's creation).
    - 4. Our presence on the earth is for God's glory.
  - e. Sin marred the image of God in humanity but redemption (in the New Testament) has renewed the possibility of living as God intended humanity to live. Thus, Christian maturity includes (by necessity) growing more into the image of God

and increasingly reflecting God. Persistent resistance to the image of God to which we were created and called to live is sin. When Adam and Eve acted in a way contrary to God's nature, they lived outside the image of God and broke their covenant with God.

- iii. Possessing Free Will
  - a. Genesis 2:16-17
  - b. We have the power to choose and make decisions.
  - c. We are able to sin.

## 2. Humanity in Covenant Relationship with God

- i. Free from sin and its corruption
- ii. Free to have unhindered relationship with God.
- iii. Free from Death
- iv. Special Dominion over the Earth
  - a. Mankind was given special dominion or authority over the animals as seen in man's power to name the animals (Gen. 2:19).
  - b. Animals did not harm or attack mankind (Genesis 2:19; 3:15)
  - c. Mankind was given special dominion or authority over the land as seen in man's power to live in and from the garden which he worked (Genesis 2:19).
- v. Able to work and not grow tired (Genesis 3:17-19).
- vi. Women Had Painless Childbirth (Genesis 3:16)

## 3. Humanity in Broken Covenant Relationship with God (Genesis 3)

- i. Guilt and Shame (Genesis 3:7-10)
- ii. Separation from God (Genesis 3:8)
- iii. Fear (Genesis 3:10)
- iv. Death (Genesis 2:17)
  - a. Immediate Spiritual Death (Ephesians 2:1-3)
  - b. Eventual Physical Death
- v. Punishment
  - a. Women
    - 1. Pain in childbirth
    - 2. Loss of independence
  - b. Men
    - 1. Pain in Work
    - 2. Must Toil for Sustenance

c. Universal Consequences

1. The fall and corruption of the whole human race. Sin nature (original sin) is passed on to all people and thus, all people have desires to sin.
2. Humanity continues to exist as God's condemned enemies and separated from God until we find redemption and salvation. Humanity is aware of that broken relationship and feels the need for personal forgiveness and restoration.

D. Lasting Significance

1. Explains the origin of all creation and the original intention of God:
  - i. God is the source of all creation.
  - ii. Creation was designed to support humanity and humanity was created to be in a loving relationship with God.
2. Illustrates the inadequacies of life lived out of harmony and relationship (covenant) with God. See Hosea 6:7 and Romans 5:12-21.
3. Illustrates the mercy of God. God's mercy is not just New Testament concept. Sometime we call the Old Covenants the "covenant of works" and the New Covenant the "covenant of grace." Yet we see from the very beginning how God has always acted with mercy and grace towards his creation. The special grace we enjoy now is made available by Jesus yet mercy and grace were extended by God to all people beginning with Adam and Eve.

III. The Noahic Covenant (Recreation Covenant)

A. Scripture:

1. Genesis 8:15 - 9:17
2. Genesis 6-8 also shows God both affirming the Adamic Covenant and preparing the Noahic Covenant.

B. Contents

1. This covenant demonstrates God's desire and commitment to redeem humanity and all creation.
2. Affirms the role of humanity to be God's representatives on the earth.

C. Major Issues in the Covenant

1. Similarity with the Adamic Covenant:
  - i. Both the Adamic and Noahic Covenants were made between God and the seed of humanity.

- a. Adam and Eve were the seed of all humans before the fall.
- b. Noah's family was the seed of all humanity after the fall.
- ii. Similar in language – even some direct quotes from the Creation/Adamic Covenant can be found in the Recreation/Noahic Covenant.

## 2. Covenant Soon Broken

- i. Just as we saw in the original Adamic covenant, the Noahic covenant is soon followed by human disobedience and covenant breaking behavior.
  - a. Genesis 9:20-23
  - b. Genesis 11:1-9
- ii. Humanity progresses deeper into sin and disobedience in spite of God's salvation and covenant renewal.

## D. Lasting Significance

1. The entire incident illustrates God's attitude toward sin. Even though God is committed to redemption, God hates sin. We need to hold these two in balance: God's hatred of sin and God's commitment to human redemption.
2. God's love for life and the value he places on life is a recurrent theme in both the Creation covenant and the Noahic covenant. This will continue to be revealed in the unfolding of the Old Testament.
3. The rainbow (which often appears after a rain) serves as a everlasting reminder of God's eternal promise.

## IV. The Abrahamic Covenant

### A. Scripture: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-27

### B. Contents:

1. God will give Abraham a direct descendant and innumerable future descendants.
2. God will raise up the descendants of Abraham into a great nation.
3. God will give the descendants of Abraham the land of Canaan for their homeland.
4. God will protect the descendants of Abraham.
5. God will use the descendants of Abraham to bless the whole of humanity and creation.

### C. Major Issues in the Covenant

1. Particular rather than General

- i. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God's immediate focus narrows from all humanity to a choice human.
  - a. With Adam and Noah, God made a covenant that generally included all humanity.
  - b. With Abraham, God made a covenant was that particular and included only Abraham and his descendants.
- ii. In God's mind, all humanity would be impacted by this covenant, but not all humanity would directly bound to the covenant. The universal blessing would not require all humanity to adhere to the covenant but only the descendants of Abraham. Humanity would be blessed if Abraham's descendants kept the covenant. The Covenant was immediately applicable to Abraham but would be eventually beneficial to all mankind.

## 2. The Role of Faith

- i. In each of the three passages that describe the Abrahamic Covenant, God places emphasis on Abraham's faith – his belief and trust in God:
  - a. In Genesis 12, God asks Abraham to demonstrate his faith by leaving his country and going to a strange and unknown place. Abraham obeyed, but more importantly, Abraham has the faith to believe and trust before he made the first step.
  - b. In Genesis 15, Abraham was challenged by God to trust God for a descendant. Abraham had the promise of a child and a nation yet as Abraham grew old, neither came to pass. In a moment of exasperation, he expressed his concern to God but still chose to believe "and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). This became a key verse for Paul in his understanding and explanation of salvation by faith in the New Testament.
  - c. In Genesis 17, Abraham started the tradition of circumcision not only as a sign of God's covenant, but also as a demonstration of his faith in God's ability to keep his promise in spite of seemingly impossible circumstances. Abraham's faith wavered and Ishmael was born as a product of sin. However, Abraham reaffirmed his faith by practicing

circumcision and later by being willing to sacrifice Isaac to God (Hebrews 11:11-19).

- ii. Faith is not only a New Testament concept. Faith has always been the means by which God desired humanity to respond to his initiatives. God has always looked for humanity to respond (and obey) by faith.
  - a. In the Adamic Covenant, Adam and Eve demonstrated faith by not eating the forbidden fruit. A rejection of faith led to disobedience and breaking the covenant.
  - b. In the Noahic Covenant, Noah demonstrated faith by building the ark. His family demonstrated faith by repopulating the earth. Their lack of faith resulted in God's plan not being fulfilled and the covenant being broken once more.
  - c. In the Abrahamic covenant, the role of faith becomes even more clear.
    - 1. Obedience is not an alternative to faith, obedience is the fruit of faith. Abraham was able and willing to obey because he has faith and believed.
    - 2. Disobedience reveals a lack of faith.
  - d. In covenant relationship with God, God is primarily concerned with our faith in him. Works can (and should) demonstrate our faith but we are not judged by the amount of works we accomplish but rather by the faith (trust and belief) we possess.

#### D. Lasting Significance

- 1. Establishes the chosen people of God.
  - i. God called the children of Abraham (later called Israel) out of all the people and nations of the world to be his special people.
  - ii. Israel would receive special treatment, blessings, and knowledge from God but it was for the purpose of serving and representing God (called a kingdom of priests - Exodus 19:6) and blessing all peoples as promised from the very beginning of the Abrahamic Covenant.
  - iii. Israel generally failed to live out the purpose for which it was called and set apart (as did humanity in the earlier covenants). Eventually, however, this covenant and calling would be fulfilled by and through Jesus.

2. The remainder of the Old Testament will continue to follow the story of Abraham's descendants.

- i. Israel, now set apart, will be the primary people group of the Old Testament.
- ii. The remaining Old Testament covenants will be made with Abraham's descendants.

3. God reveals more of His plan for redemption.

- i. As we saw above, Abraham's descendants would become a key component in God's plan to redeem all humanity and creation.
- ii. The plan of God becomes clearer and looks forward to fulfillment when the covenant with Abraham is made.
- iii. Christopher Wright summarizes that God's choice of Abraham and his descendants (Israel) was not "a rejection of the nations but explicitly for their ultimate benefit."<sup>3</sup>

V. The Mosaic Covenant (sometimes called the Sinai Covenant)

A. Scripture:

1. Main Texts: Exodus 19-24; Deuteronomy 4-30
2. Much of the material in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy is covenantal material

B. Contents:

1. The observation that God had kept his promises from the Abrahamic Covenant.
2. The expectations of God for Israel as they prepared to enter into the promised land and set up their geographical and political nation. The expanded descriptions of God's Law.

C. Major Issues in the Mosaic Covenant

1. Establishment of the Sacrificial System (Leviticus 1-10)
  - i. Sacrifice was involved in every covenant:
    - a. Genesis 3:21 in the Adamic Covenant
    - b. Genesis 8:20 in the Noahic Covenant
    - c. Genesis 15:9-10
  - ii. However, only in the Mosaic Covenant do we see the full description and necessity of animal sacrifices.
  - iii. Animal sacrifice was instituted in anticipation of humanity breaking the law of God and disrupting covenant relationship with God. God

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<sup>3</sup> The Mission of God, 329.



gave Israel a temporary remedy for sin. The blood of certain slaughtered animals could provide for up to one year of atonement. In light of Israel's habitual sin, the sacrificial system was continuous and necessary for all the people.

## 2. Established the Temple

- i. A temple, or dedicated place of worship, was foreshadowed in the Adamic Covenant like animal sacrifices. Eden, the garden, was the temple.
- ii. In the Mosaic Covenant, God instructed Israel to build first a mobile tabernacle and eventually a permanent temple where the presence of God could dwell among the people.
- iii. God desired not only to be in relationship with his covenant people but also to be in community (dwell among) his covenant people.
- iv. However, because of sin, certain barriers did exist between God and the people even though God dwelled in their midst:
  - a. Priests were designated to be intermediaries between the people and God. Because of sin, people rarely interacted directly with God.
  - b. Physical barriers were established in the temple to make known the spiritual reality that sinful humanity could not enter the presence of God. Only one person, once in a year, could cross the barrier and stand directly in the presence of God on behalf of Israel.

## 3. Established the Nation of Israel

- i. God promised that Israel will conquer and occupy the Promised Land. The covenant promises and provides a plan for taking the Promised Land.
- ii. Although Israel still had to struggle for their promised land, the giving of this covenant both anticipates the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant for the nation and prepares the people to form and administer the nation.
- iii. The nation of Israel continued to develop and change politically but the Law of God would form the foundation of the nation's laws and mission.
- iv. There is a strong connection between the land, the covenant, and the law which is stressed in Deuteronomy. However, the blessings of the

Mosaic Covenant are conditional on obedience to the Old Testament law. Deuteronomy stresses that obedience to the covenant will bring about blessing but disobedience will bring about curses.

#### 4. Established the Law of Israel

- i. 613 individual laws were given including the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17) as a summary of the laws and the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) as the heart of God behind the laws.
- ii. The laws addressed all aspects of Jewish life including:
  - a. Civil Responsibilities (community life)
  - b. Religious Practices (spiritual life)
  - c. Morals and Ethics (personal life)
- iii. Legal Categories:
  - a. The “civil” laws applied to the government of the nation of Israel, this was the country’s legal system.
  - b. The “ceremonial” laws applied to the religion of Israel (before Jesus). These laws addressed temple worship, priests, sacrifices, festivals and other aspects of the Jewish religion. Many of these laws were fulfilled in Christ.
  - c. The “moral” laws conveyed the universal principles of God, how God expected his people to behave in local community and in the greater world.
- iv. Each Old Testament law (moral, civil, and ceremonial) contains a universal truth that is applicable to all of God’s people, everywhere, at all times. Even though we do not follow the specific law today, we are responsible to consider and uphold the Godly principle or motivation behind the law. The law reveals the heart of the lawmaker.
- v. The 10 Commandments serve as an introduction or summary of the Law:
  - a. The first four commandments address man’s relationship with God.
  - b. The last six commandments address man’s relationship with other people.

#### D. Lasting Significance

1. Demonstrated to Israel and the world that human effort alone is not enough to stand righteous before God.

- i. Generations of Jews attempted to obey the Law of God for centuries yet they did not produce even one person who perfectly kept God's commands (Psalm 53:1-3; Romans 3:10-12; Hebrews 10:1-4).
  - ii. Israel produced many people of faith (Hebrews 11) but no perfect people . . . until Jesus (who was not actually the product of Israel but came into the world through the line of Israel).
2. Provides the most extensive Old Testament picture into the heart of God. Although the Covenant at Sinai is viewed today through the lens of the New Covenant, it provides an abundance of insight into God's standards for his people.

## VI. The Davidic Covenant

A. Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:8-29

B. Contents:

- 1. Promise to establish an eternal kingdom of Israel
- 2. Promise that David's descendant will rule on the throne of Israel forever.

C. Major Issues in the Covenant

1. The exaltation of the line of David.

- i. Although Saul was the first king of Israel, God promised that his family would continue to rule (1 Samuel 15:10-11; 17-29). David was chosen and became the favored king of Israel and God promised that David's descendants would always be attached to the throne (rule) of Israel.
- ii. Although David had sinned (2 Samuel 11), his humility was a better response than Saul's arrogance. Thus, God put an end to Saul's line and forever anointed David's line.
  - a. Saul's arrogance – 1 Samuel 13:8-13
  - b. David's humility - 2 Samuel 12:13-17

2. Clear Description of God the Father

- i. Although the common use of Father as a title for God does not arise until the New Testament, here we see a clear indication that God does want to be identified as Father.
- ii. God promises to be in relationship with the line of David as a father is in relationship with his son. This includes both:
  - a. unconditional love (blessing)
  - b. unwavering righteousness (discipline)
- iii. David uses this father/son language in the Psalms

- a. Psalm 2:7
- b. Psalm 68:5
- c. Psalm 103:13

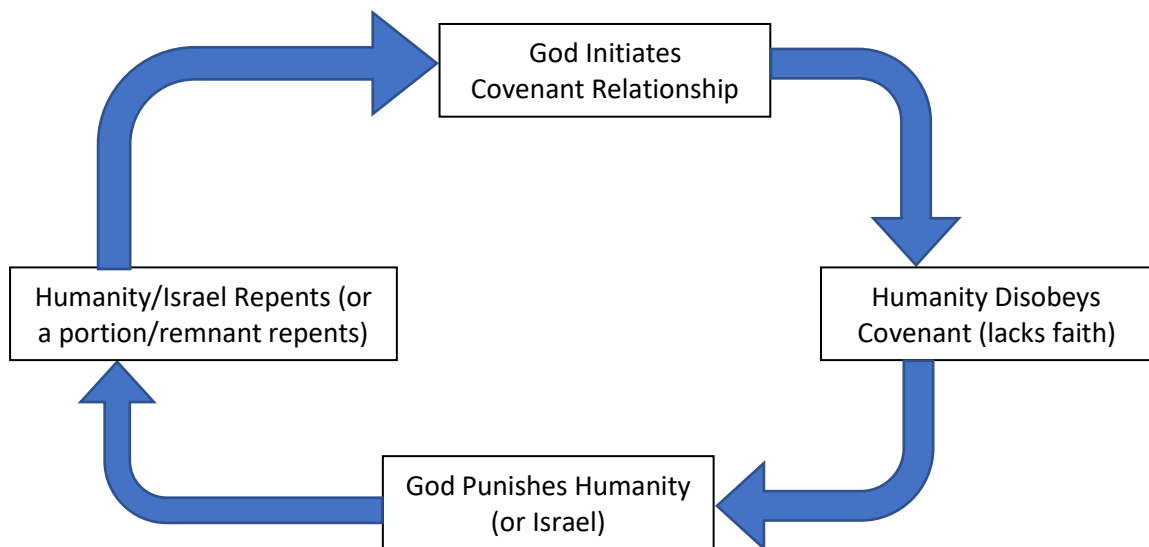
D. Lasting Significance

1. Gives Israel Hope

- i. David’s son Solomon would enjoy a glorious reign over Israel as it prospered under his rule but Israel would soon be headed for division, disobedience, and destruction.
- ii. As Israel suffered under defeat and foreign rule, the promise of God to David would provide hope that God would redeem Israel once again.
- iii. The David Covenant opened the way for the promise and expectation of the Messiah:
  - a. Isaiah 11:1-9
  - b. Jeremiah 33:17-22

2. Looks forward to Jesus – this is continued and expanded by the prophets.

VII. The Old Testament Pattern of People in Covenant with God (see diagram below)



## Timeline of the Old Testament

**Note: Based on the Biblical record, we are not able to definitively give a date for the creation events. We will start our timeline with Abraham since there is greater certainty there.**

- I. 2100 – 2000 BC
  - A. Abraham Called by God – Abrahamic Covenant
  - B. Abraham's Children are Born
    1. Ishmael
    2. Isaac
  - C. Isaac's Children are Born
    1. Jacob
    2. Esau
- II. 2000 – 1900 BC
  - A. Abraham Dies
  - B. Jacob Starts his Family and 13 sons are born including Joseph
- III. 1900 – 1800 BC
  - A. Joseph Sold by Brothers and Sent to Egypt
  - B. Isaac Dies
  - C. Joseph Promoted in Egypt
  - D. Famine Comes to the World
  - E. Joseph Reunited with Family
  - F. Jacob's Family Settles in Egypt and Jacob Dies
- IV. 1800 – 1700 BC
  - A. Joseph Dies
  - B. Jacob's Descendants Continue to Live in Egypt
- V. 1700 – 1600 BC – Israel Enslaved in Egypt
- VI. 1600 – 1500 BC
  - A. Moses is Born
  - B. Israel Prays for Deliverance
- VII. 1500 – 1400 BC
  - A. Moses Delivers Israel from Egypt
  - B. The Establishment of the Mosaic (Sinai) Covenant
  - C. Israel Wanders in the Wilderness/Prepare to Enter Canaan
  - D. The Pentateuch is Written and Put Together (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)
  - E. Job Possibly Written
  - F. Moses Dies and Joshua Leads Israel into Promised Land
  - G. Battles to Take Promised Land Begins

- VIII. 1400 – 1300 BC
  - A. Battles to Take Promised Land Continues
  - B. Israel Practices Idolatry and Enemies Advance
  - C. Othniel Leads Israel to Victory and Becomes Judge
- IX. 1300 – 1200 BC
  - A. Ehud Leads Israel to Victory and Becomes Judge
  - B. Israel Continues to Conquer Promised Land
- X. 1200 – 1100 BC
  - A. Deborah Leads Israel to Victory and Becomes Judge
  - B. Gideon Leads Israel to Victory and Becomes Judge
  - C. Samuel Born
- XI. 1100 – 1000 BC
  - A. Jephthah Leads Israel to Victory and Becomes the Leading Judge
  - B. The Rise and Fall of Samson
  - C. Israel Asks for a King and Saul is Anointed by Samuel
  - D. The Tribes of Israel Join to Form the United Kingdom of Israel under King Saul
  - E. Book of Joshua Written
- XII. 1000 – 900 BC
  - A. David Becomes King of United Israel
  - B. Davidic Covenant Established
  - C. Solomon Becomes King of United Israel
  - D. Judges Written/Completed
  - E. Ruth Written
  - F. The Temple is Completed
  - G. Psalms Written by David and others
  - H. Solomon wrote Song of Solomon, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes
  - I. Solomon Dies and Israel Divides over Leadership Problems
    - 1. Rehoboam, son of Solomon, reigns over the Southern Kingdom of Judah
    - 2. Jeroboam, Solomon's high-ranking servant, reigns over the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
- XIII. 900 – 800 BC
  - A. The Divided Kingdoms Continue in Time of Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness
  - B. 1 and 2 Samuel Written
- XIV. 800 – 700 BC
  - A. The Ministry of Jonah the Prophet
  - B. The Ministry of Amos the Prophet

- C. The Ministry of Hosea the Prophet
  - D. Isaiah's Ministry Begins (and continues into the next century)
  - E. The Northern Kingdom Falls to the Assyrian Empire
  - F. Northern Kingdom Exiled and Foreigners Imported (the origins of the Samaritans)
- XV. 700 – 600 BC
- A. Isaiah the Prophet's Ministry Concludes
  - B. The Babylonians Overcome and Absorb the Assyrian Empire
  - C. Jeremiah's Ministry Begins (and continues into the next century)
  - D. The Ministry of Obadiah the Prophet
  - E. The Ministry of Micah the Prophet
  - F. The Ministry of Zephaniah the Prophet
  - G. The Ministry of Habakkuk the Prophet
  - H. The Ministry of Nahum the Prophet
  - I. Daniel is born
- XVI. 600 – 500 BC
- A. The Southern Kingdom of Judah Falls to the Babylonian Empire
  - B. The Southern Kingdom Exiled in Babylon and Other Regions
  - C. Jeremiah's Ministry Concludes
  - D. Lamentations Written
  - E. The Ministry of Daniel the Prophet
  - F. The Ministry of Ezekiel the Prophet
  - G. The Ministry of Haggai the Prophet
  - H. Some Exiles Allowed to Return to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel (almost 50 years after the exile)
  - I. 1 and 2 Kings Written
  - J. Ministry of Joel the Prophet
- XVII. 500 – 400 BC
- A. The Ministry of Zechariah the Prophet
  - B. More Exiles Return to Jerusalem with Ezra
  - C. The Ministry of Malachi the Prophet
  - D. The Last of the Exiles Return to Jerusalem with Nehemiah
  - E. Second Temple Built (to replace Solomon's Temple destroyed by the Babylonians)
  - F. 1 and 2 Chronicles Written
  - G. Ezra Written
  - H. Nehemiah Written
  - I. Esther Written

# Pentateuch Overview

## I. The Pentateuch

### A. Name:

1. Also known as the Torah (meaning law or teaching), the title “Pentateuch” is derived from the Greek for “five scrolls” (penta teuchos).
2. The five works in the Pentateuch include Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

### B. Importance

1. The first portion of God’s Word to be written down.
2. Herbert Wolf writes that the Pentateuch is “foundation to all of Scripture.”<sup>4</sup>

## II. Authorship

A. Although the writer does not explicitly identify himself, there is both textual clues and accepted traditions that inform our understanding of authorship. Both point to Moses as the primary author.

1. In some places, it is clear the writing is coming directly from Moses and his interactions from God (Exodus 17:14; 34:27).
2. In other portions (mostly in Genesis), it is clear that Moses is writing down the oral tradition that had been passed down through the generations.
3. Thus, Moses is both an author and compiler of the Pentateuch. It is a collection of oral traditions preserved by Moses and direct divine messages conveyed through Moses with his notes and commentary.
4. Moses also wrote with the help of a team as seen in Numbers 11:16-17 and Deuteronomy 34:5-12.

### B. Support for Moses as the author:

1. Jewish tradition identified Moses as the author. This tradition was accepted by the early Christian church:
  - i. Mark 12:26
  - ii. Romans 10:5
  - iii. 2 Corinthians 3:15
2. Moses had a unique level of education among all the other descendants of Israel. In Exodus 2:10 we see that Moses was brought up in the household of Egyptian royalty which would have given him access to the best education. This education would qualify Moses above all other Israelites to compose the Pentateuch.

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<sup>4</sup> Herbert M. Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1991, p. 17.



3. As a critical leader among the descendants of Israel, Moses was in the unique position to take on the task of receiving and compiling this information. Herbert Wolf writes that Moses “was the key figure at Mount Sinai in the establishment of the nation as God’s special people bound in covenant to Him. If anyone was concerned that the nation not forget their roots nor their commitment to God, it was Moses.”<sup>5</sup>
4. There are scenes within the Pentateuch of Moses writing, for example see Deuteronomy 31:9-24.
5. The work was complete shortly after Moses’ death indicating that the writing did take place mostly during the lifetime of Moses. See Joshua 8:30-35.
6. Other Old Testament works describe Moses as the author:
  - i. Ezra 6:18
  - ii. Nehemiah 13:1
  - iii. 2 Chronicles 25:4

### III. Genre (type of literature)

#### A. Old Testament Law

1. Even though the Pentateuch is considered the books of the Law, the Law itself is found mainly in four books:
  - i. Exodus
  - ii. Leviticus
  - iii. Numbers
  - iv. Deuteronomy

#### B. Narrative

1. Genesis and portions of the other books are written in narrative form.
2. A narrative is a story told by a narrator. In many cases, the narrator is Moses or his scribes/assistants.

### IV. Primary Contents:

#### A. Creation’s origin story

#### B. The fall of humanity and the beginning of the plan for redemption

#### C. God’s Law

1. There are actually 613 individual laws recorded in the Old Testament given by God to describe how God’s people should live in covenant relationship with Yahweh.
2. These Laws are often divided the law into three categories:

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 52-53.

- i. Civil Law – These laws describe how the people should live within the geo-political boundaries of Israel. These laws reflect the principles and ideals that God holds for governing a nation.
- ii. Ceremonial (Religious) Law – These laws describe how the people of God should practice right worship of Yahweh. These laws reflect the principles and ideals that God holds for living in proper relationship with Yahweh.
- iii. Moral Law - These laws describe how all people should live morally and ethically. These laws reflect the principles and ideals that God holds for right living.

### 3. Proper Application of Old Testament Law

- i. Some of God’s Law from the Old Testament is specific for Jewish culture in Canaan during that time. In such cases, the literal law may not be applicable. Rather, we should seek to find the principle upon which the specific law is based and live out that principle in our cultural and historical context.
- ii. Some of God’s Law from the Old Testament is specific for Jewish religious ceremonies that are finally fulfilled by the actions of Jesus in the New Covenant. In such cases, the literal law should not be practiced. Rather, we should study the law to understand the mission and significance of Christ’ work on our behalf.
- iii. Other laws are fundamental moral and ethical standards that are directly applicable to all people at all times in every place.
- iv. In each and every law, we look for the heart of God behind the law or passage. God’s Law conveys God’s heart.

## V. Major Cultures/Nations Found in the Pentateuch

### A. Egypt

- 1. Egyptian culture, people, and government appear early and often in the Pentateuch (beginning in Genesis 12:10). The Egyptians appear more than any other secular/pagan nation in the Bible.
- 2. With the benefits of the Nile River, Egypt came together early as one of the oldest kingdoms on record and Egypt holds a place of great significance in Scripture. It seemed to be a well established nation by the time of Abraham who visited Egypt in Genesis 12 (the first mention of Egypt in the Bible).
- 3. M. G. Easton describes Egypt as consisting “geographically of two halves, the northern being the Delta, and the southern Upper Egypt, between Cairo

and the First Cataract. In the Old Testament, Northern or Lower Egypt is called Mazor, "the fortified land" while Southern or Upper Egypt is Pathros, the Egyptian Pa-to-Res, or "the land of the south" (Isaiah 11:11). But the whole country is generally mentioned under the dual name of Mizraim, "the two Mazors."<sup>6</sup>

4. Easton reports that, "The civilization of Egypt goes back to a very remote antiquity. The two kingdoms of the north and south were united by Menes, the founder of the first historical dynasty of kings. The first six dynasties constitute what is known as the Old Empire, which had its capital at Memphis, south of Cairo, called in the Old Testament Moph (Hos 9:6) and Noph. The native name was Mennofer, "the good place." The Pyramids were tombs of the monarchs of the Old Empire, those of Gizeh being erected in the time of the Fourth Dynasty. After the fall of the Old Empire came a period of decline and obscurity. This was followed by the Middle Empire, the most powerful dynasty of which was the Twelfth. . . The capital of the Middle Empire was Thebes, in Upper Egypt. The Middle Empire was overthrown by the invasion of the Hyksos, or shepherd princes from Asia, who ruled over Egypt, more especially in the north, for several centuries, and of whom there were three dynasties of kings. They had their capital at Zoan or Tanis (now San), in the north-eastern part of the Delta. It was in the time of the Hyksos that Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph entered Egypt. The Hyksos were finally expelled about B.C. 1600, by the hereditary princes of Thebes, who founded the Eighteenth Dynasty, and carried the war into Asia. Canaan and Syria were subdued, as well as Cyprus, and the boundaries of the Egyptian Empire were fixed at the Euphrates."<sup>7</sup>
5. Egypt worshipped multiple gods (polytheism). Some of the chief gods included Ra (the sun god) and Isis (the mother goddess). William Smith observed that "There were three orders of gods—the eight great gods, the twelve lesser, and the Osirian group [gods of underworld, the dead]."<sup>8</sup>
6. The descendants of Abraham were warned about the dangers of Egypt in several places in the Old Testament beginning with Genesis 26:2. Egypt is often associated with sin and rebellion in association with the people of God. This was not simply metaphorical but indicated Egypt's actual condition.

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew George Easton, *Easton's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Egypt.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Smith's Bible Dictionary: Egypt

## B. Canaanites

1. The Canaanites were the various ethnic groups that lived in Canaan before the descendants of Abraham acquired the land.
2. They are listed in several places but the longest list is found in Genesis 15:18-21.
3. Each people group had various beliefs and traditions but in general the Canaanites were polytheists who intertwined their religious beliefs with agriculture, sexual activity, and government. Some even practiced child sacrifice to Molech, a fertility god and Baal, a storm god (see Leviticus 18:21; 20:1-5 and Numbers 25:1-3 for example).
4. Some Canaanites have established fortified cities while others were nomadic.
5. Israel was to drive these people out of the land in order to obtain their promise.

## C. Philistines

1. The Philistines immigrated to Southern Palestine in large numbers around 1200 BC and occupied the southern coast lands by the Mediterranean Sea.
2. This people group became persistent enemies of Israel after they obtained the promised land, from the time of the Judges to King David. They established cities and were well advanced in their iron work that gave them advantage in making weapons.
3. The Philistines were also polytheistic. They are often seen worshipping Dagon, a fertility god (see Judges 16:23 and 1 Samuel 5 for examples).

## VI. Geography of the Pentateuch:



# Historical Books Overview

## I. The Historical Books

### A. Introduction

1. The Old Testament Historical books tell the story of Israel from the time they entered the Promised Land under Joshua to the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians and the eventual return under Persian oversight.
2. The Historical Books include Joshua through Esther.
3. The Historical Books contain the majority of the Old Testament's narrative material. It is a much easier read than the law heavy Pentateuch.
4. D. M. Howard writes, these books "contains much more than delightful or strange stories . . . They are an important repository of God's revelation of Himself."<sup>9</sup>

### B. Timeline

1. The Conquest and Judges (1400–1021 B.C.):
  - i. Joshua
  - ii. Judges
  - iii. Ruth
  - iv. 1 Samuel 1-8
2. The United Kingdom (1021–931 B.C.):
  - i. 1 Samuel 9-31
  - ii. 2 Samuel
  - iii. 1 Kings 1–11
  - iv. 1 Chronicles
  - v. 2 Chronicles 1-9
3. The Divided Kingdom (931–722 B.C.):
  - i. 1 Kings 12 – 22
  - ii. 2 Kings 1 - 17
  - iii. 2 Chronicles 10–28
4. The Kingdom of Judah - After the Fall of the Northern Kingdom (722–586 B.C.):
  - i. 2 Kings 18–25
  - ii. 2 Chronicles 29 – 36:15
5. The Exile and Return (586–433 B.C.):

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<sup>9</sup> David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1993, p. 15.

- i. 2 Chronicles 36:15–23
- ii. Ezra
- iii. Nehemiah
- iv. Esther

## II. Old Testament Narratives

A. The Historical Books (and portions of the Pentateuch and the Prophets) contain literary material we call “Narrative.”

1. In literature, narratives are stories or collections of stories told to communicate a truth or message.
2. Nearly half of the Old Testament is narrative. The vast majority of the historical books is narrative material.
3. Other Old Testament books that have majority or significant narrative materials include:
  - i. Genesis
  - ii. Exodus
  - iii. Numbers
  - iv. Daniel

B. Characteristics of Old Testament Narrative: Biblical narratives have:

1. A definite sequence of events (timeline)
2. A plot – the sequence of events that connect to tell a story
3. A setting
4. Characters
5. Truth (not myths but actual historical facts based on real events, settings, and people.)
6. A narrator, most likely the author of the book within which the narrative is contained. The narrator tells the story and shares information needed to understand the story. The narrator shares information that is both known and unknown to the characters. Thus, the reader often knows something that the character does not.
7. Theological Meaning (universal principle)

C. Finding Theological Meaning in Narratives

1. The narratives of the Old Testament are more than just interesting stories. They convey God inspired principles and important knowledge for every generation.
2. Narratives are not myths or legends. They contain true, factual, historical information. Yet Biblical narratives are also more than just history. They

are recorded for the purpose of teaching us about God. For this reason, they are called theological histories.

3. Thus, meaning is not determined by the reader. The meaning of the text is found in the words and intent of the author (both heavenly and earthly authors).
4. Meaning within narratives is primarily found within the actions and responses of the characters (even God is a main character in many narratives).
  - i. Pay close attention to the response of God to the actions of people.
  - ii. Duvall and Hayes write that, “Rather than telling us how to live or how not to live, the narrative shows us how to live or how not to live by the actions of the characters.”<sup>10</sup>
  - iii. Examples: 1 Kings 11:1-14 and 1 Kings 18:16-46
5. The IVP Bible Background Commentary states that by giving us the Historical Books, “God took it upon himself not only to act but to provide an interpretation of his acts, communicating why they were done and what purpose they served.”<sup>11</sup>

### III. Authorship and Content

#### A. Authorship

1. Some of the Historical Books are compilations or collections of historical records rather than just the writings of one historian. Thus, authorship is not easy to pinpoint and actually was not a major concern for the Jewish community. Jewish religious scholars accepted the historical books as genuine and authoritative. The early church adopted that stance as well even when there were questions concerning authorship.
2. Among the books, we can make the following assessments concerning authorship:
  - i. Joshua
    - a. Jewish tradition accepts that Joshua wrote the majority of this book. He almost certainly used assistants as well since he had the very large task of overseeing the settlement of the promised land and since the last chapter explains the death and burial of Joshua (Joshua 24:29-30).

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<sup>10</sup> Scott Duvall and Scott Hayes, *Grasping God’s Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998)

<sup>11</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), p. 212.

- b. We can infer that this book was finalized during the time of Joshua because of Joshua 6:25 where the writer reveals that Rahab is still alive at the time of writing.
    - c. Joshua means “the Lord saves” and it was the origin of the name Jesus.
  - ii. Judges – It seems that Judges was compiled and placed together over time by Jewish historians and religious leaders without the lead of one primary author or editor.
  - iii. Ruth – Most likely composed by scholars in the royal court of David or Solomon since the story involves a beloved and positive story from the royal family history. The writers, though unknown, wrote with excellence as Ruth is considered one of the best developed narratives in the Bible and often described as a literary masterpiece.
  - iv. 1 & 2 Samuel
    - a. Jewish tradition and a reference in 1 Chronicles 29:29 indicate that Samuel himself did write (or lead the writing) of portions of these works. However, a significant portion of the material takes place after Samuel’s death in 1 Samuel 25:1.
    - b. Due to the amount of detail and demonstrated in the books, it seems that officials (historians, scribes, secretaries, or religious leaders) within or closely connected to the royal court continued the work began by Samuel. Nathan, the prophet, has been suggested by some.
  - v. 1 & 2 Kings
    - a. It is clear that these books actually contain a compilation of various prophets and court officials who wrote at different times in Israel’s history. The compiler and editor has sometimes been identified as Jeremiah in Jewish tradition.
    - b. That Jeremiah gathered the sources, edited, and compiled these books is supported by some by pointing to similarities in these books to the book of Jeremiah:<sup>12</sup>
      - 1. 1 Kings 11:4; 8:25; 9:5 and Jeremiah 33:17
      - 2. 1 Kings 13:13; 17:24; 2 Ki. 10:8, with Jeremiah 22:8
      - 3. 2 Kings 17:13 with Jeremiah 7:13

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<sup>12</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D., *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Bible Text* (Vol. 2). London; Glasgow: William Collins, Sons, & Company, page 19.



4. 1 Kings 21:12 and Jeremiah 19:3
  5. 2 Kings 24 25 and Jeremiah 52
- vi. 1 Chronicles & 2 Chronicles
    - a. The author is never mentioned but it is likely that several writers worked together to compile and edit the information contained in the Chronicles. There seems to be a consensus that it is the work of Levites.
    - b. Some have suggested Ezra as the final editor and that would with the book of Ezra as Ezra begins where 2 Chronicles ends. Ezra and the Chronicles also seems to share similar vocabular and style which may suggest a connection.
    - c. In many studies, the author or the Chronicles is often simply called “the Chronicler.”
  - vii. Ezra
    - a. Many portions of Ezra are direct quotes or speeches from Ezra (see Ezra 7:27-28; 8:1-34; and 9:1-15 for example. This has led many to consider Ezra as the author of the whole book and the book itself as Ezra’s memoirs or records.
    - b. It is not unlikely that Ezra also used scribes or assistants to aide in writing this and other documents.
  - viii. Nehemiah
    - a. Like Ezra, many portions of Nehemiah are direct quotes or speeches from Nehemiah (see Nehemiah 1:1 - 7:5; 12:27-43; and 13:4-31 for example. This has also led many to consider Nehemiah as the author of the whole book and the book itself as Nehemiah’s memoirs or records.
    - b. It is also noted that Nehemiah seems less edited or polished than Ezra indicating that is more of a raw record of events.
  - ix. Esther – the author is unknown but Josephus claimed that Mordecai wrote the book.

## B. Content

1. Joshua – A record of “the period in which Israel entered and settled in the land promised to Abraham and his descendants”<sup>13</sup> and a testimony to the faithfulness and power of God. Joshua also show the cycle of sin and repentance among the people of Israel.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 61.

## 2. Judges

- i. “A series of independent episodes, all joined by a common motif of Israel’s apostasy and God’s faithfulness; the overall impression is one of near chaos in Israel’s political and spiritual life, salvaged only by God’s repeated intervention and provision.”<sup>14</sup>
- ii. Fee and Stuart note that the emphasis of Judges is “Israel’s repeated lack of covenant loyalty.”<sup>15</sup>

3. Ruth – A contrast to Judges. While the numerous stories in Judges describe and unfaithfulness of Israel and the disastrous consequences of breaking the covenant, this narrative describes the blessings found in covenant faithfulness and obedience.

## 4.1 & 2 Samuel

- i. Howard writes that these books “deal with the establishment of kingship in Israel and its theological significance. The books begin with Israel still under the decentralized system of the judges period and end with the Israelite monarchy firmly in place.”<sup>16</sup>
- ii. The separation of 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel is mostly due to the size of the material. The whole narrative could not fit on one standard size scroll so it was divided and written on two scrolls for the sake of space. This is also true for Kings and Chronicles.

## 5.1 & 2 Kings

- i. R. B. Chisholm writes that “1 and 2 Kings trace Israel’s history from the accession of Solomon to the Exile, covering a time span of over four hundred years. The story is mainly a tragic one, as Israel violated the demands of their covenant with the Lord and experienced the consequences of disobedience. David’s son and successor, Solomon, planted the seeds of idolatry and forfeited most of the kingdom, seemingly jeopardizing God’s covenant with David. The kingdom divided, with David’s dynasty ruling over only Judah and Benjamin.”<sup>17</sup>
- ii. The book is divided for similar reasons as 1 & 2 Samuel as seen above.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> Howard, 141.

<sup>17</sup> Chisholm, R. B., Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (D. M. Howard Jr., Ed.) Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006, p 112.

## 6.1 & 2 Chronicles

- i. The material found in these two books cover the history of Israel from Adam to the Persian King Cyrus. Thus, these books cover the longest span of time in the historical books. The focus of the books however is on the “progress of God’s kingdom as it was represented by the David kingdom in Israel (initially) and Judah (later).”<sup>18</sup>
- ii. David Howard writes, “The books of Chronicles intent to retell the story of God’s people for an audience late in their history, several decades after the Exile, with special emphasis on the Davidic Covenant, the proper place of worship, and the certainty of God’s punishment.” Judah is especially emphasized as a primary “vehicle of God’s outworking of His promises.”<sup>19</sup>
- iii. Fee and Stewart write that the chronicler uses “Samuel and Kings as his basic narrative [but] adds other materials – genealogies, lists, psalms, speeches – to present the continuous story of Israel (especially Judah) from Adam to the decree of Cyrus, which brought the exile to its official end.”<sup>20</sup>
  - a. 50% of the material in the Chronicles is drawn from the writings of Samuel and Kings.
  - b. The chronicler then supplemented the writings of Samuel and Kings with additional stories and reports. In fact, as early name for Chronicles was *paraleipomenon* which means “things left out.”
  - c. The Chronicles were compiled at around 100 years after the Samuel and the Kings were completed.
- iv. In the Hebrew Bible it is placed after the prophets and Ezra making it the last book of their canon.
- v. 1 Chronicles begins with extensive genealogies. The IVP Bible Background Commentary give a summary explanation: “Though most of the material of Chronicles covers the history of the preexilic period, it is written for those who returned from the Babylonian exile in the sixth and fifth centuries and reestablished themselves in the land. Genealogies to them represented the charter of their identity.

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<sup>18</sup> Howard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1993, p. 231.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 236.

<sup>20</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), p. 99.

Their covenant with the Lord had established them as an elect people of God living in the land promised by Him. Their family lineage was their certificate of membership. It was their heritage and their legacy.”<sup>21</sup>

- vi. Chronicles is also more theological in nature than the other historical books. Although all the historical books convey teaching about God, the chronicler seems to be keenly intent on communicating theological principles through his story telling. He also focuses heavily on how to rightly worship God. Howard writes, “In the process of presenting this history of God’s kingdom, the author introduces many important truths about God Himself, about His workings in the world, and about proper ways to relate to God.”<sup>22</sup>

## 7.Ezra

- i. Who was Ezra?
  - a. Ezra was a shortened form of the name Azariah with means “the Lord has helped.”
  - b. He was a priest. He was a Levite and a descendent of Aaron.
  - c. He was an expert in the Jewish law and religious practices.
  - d. He was a scribe or secretary in Babylon. While in Babylon he also led the Jewish community there in terms of religious activities.
  - e. He was sent to Jerusalem in 458 BC to assist the returning Jews in relaunching their temple practices and worship. He was also a teacher of the Law for the inhabitants.
- ii. The book of Ezra describes the initial return of Jews from exile in Babylon under King Cyrus. Cyrus was a Persian king who overthrew the Babylonian Empire and allowed displaced peoples to return to their homelands most like for the purpose of both gaining their favor and using them as allies and shields against bordering nations or powers.
- iii. The Jewish people saw this time as a both a fulfillment of specific prophecies regarding the Jews returning from exile and God honoring His covenant with Israel.

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<sup>21</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), p. 413.

<sup>22</sup> <sup>22</sup> Howard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1993, p. 232.

- iv. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart observe that in Ezra, “the main focus is on rebuilding the religious community in and around Jerusalem in the midst of a conflict surrounding intermarriage, which is recognized as a main source of going astray after other gods.”<sup>23</sup>
- v. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are combined and form only one book. Together, they record the last events recorded in the Old Testament. Fee and Stuart remind us that we “will do well to read them together since they do in fact tell one story, not two.”<sup>24</sup>

## 8. Nehemiah

- i. Who was Nehemiah?
  - a. A Jew living in exile in Babylon. Possibly among those carried away from Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar or shortly after the fall of Jerusalem.
  - b. He was most likely from the tribe of Judah.
  - c. He held a position of authority in Babylon and worked closely to the Persian kings who ruled after the fall of the Babylonian Empire.
  - d. Fensham summarizes that Nehemiah “arrived in Jerusalem in 445 [BC] as governor of Judah, appointed by Artaxerxes. As governor he has authority over all the Jewish activities . . . He succeeded in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem despite the hostility of neighboring nations, he reorganized Judah economically.”<sup>25</sup>
- ii. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart observe that in Nehemiah, the main focus is on “the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem despite intense opposition by various groups, including even some Jews who had resettled or remained in the land.” They identify the “high point of the narrative” as the covenant renewal ceremony described in Nehemiah 8-10.<sup>26</sup>
- iii. Ezra had left Jerusalem but returned during Nehemiah’s time in Jerusalem to help him carry out religious activities and reforms.
- iv. David Howard concludes that Ezra and Nehemiah were written “to show that God was still faithful and gracious to His people and that

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<sup>23</sup> Fee and Stuart, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Fee and Stuart, 108.

<sup>25</sup> Fensham, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Fee and Stuart, 109.

this people, who had their origin centuries earlier, still was alive and attempting to continue in the faithful traditions laid down by Moses.”<sup>27</sup>

## 9. Esther

### i. Who was Ester?

- a. A Jewish girl from a segment of the Jewish community who chose not to return to Judah but they remained in Babylon and the Persian Empire.
- b. Her Hebrew names was Hadassah. Esther was a Babylonian name most likely connected to the Babylonian goddess of love names Ishtar.
- c. She was chosen to be a wife for Xerxes and thus a queen for Persian (she was possibly one of several wives).
- d. David Howard summarizes that Esther was valued for “her presence and advice. She succeeded in bringing about a reversal of the Jews’ fortunes in the book, but to do so she risked her own life. She received true authority from the king and was able to act with this authority.”<sup>28</sup>

### ii. The story revolves around the plans of Haman to eradicate the Jews from Persia by genocide and the work of Mordecai who is both faithful to the king and to his people as he works behind the scenes to thwart Haman’s plans with the help of his relative and the queen, Esther.

### iii. Interesting notes on this book:

- a. God is never mentioned in this book. Esther is the only book in the Bible that does not mention God. Nevertheless, Fee and Stuart write that the author “expects his intended readers to see God at work at every turn in the story.”<sup>29</sup>
- b. In Esther we see the establishment of the Jewish feast of Purim. It’s the only Jewish feast not established in the Pentateuch.

## IV. Major Pagan Cultures in the Historical Books

### A. The Assyrian Empire

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<sup>27</sup> Howard, 274.

<sup>28</sup> Howard, 316.

<sup>29</sup> Fee and Stuart, 116.

1. The empire arose from the city of Asshur on the Tigris river in modern-day northern Iraq.
2. The Empire began to take shape around 1700 BC as it exerted independence from its Babylonian masters. It went on to subdue and absorb its neighbors in a quest for regional dominance.
3. M. G. Easton records that in regard to the early history of the Assyria Empire “little is positively known. In 1120 Tiglath-pileser I., the greatest of the Assyrian kings, “crossed the Euphrates, defeated the kings of the Hittites, captured the city of Carchemish, and advanced as far as the shores of the Mediterranean.” He may be regarded as the founder of the first Assyrian empire. After this the Assyrians gradually extended their power, subjugating the states of Northern Syria.”<sup>30</sup>
4. Eventually, the Assyrian capital moved to Nineveh (near the modern-day city of Mosul in northern Iraq) about 1,200 kilometers northeast of Jerusalem.
5. The Assyrians were known to be a brutal military force who conquered its neighbors and plundered their nations or cities. They soon become Israel’s worst enemy. Assyrian battle tactics were designed to terrorize and frighten people into submission. Some were recorded in the writing of the Assyrians themselves and include:
  - i. Live dismemberment
  - ii. Head parades (marching through the streets carrying the heads of their victims on poles.)
  - iii. Skinning people alive
  - iv. Burning people alive
  - v. Gouging out eyes
  - vi. Building tower of bodies by mixing dead and live people together in a roadside heap.
6. In 738 BC, the Assyrians, led by Pul, invaded Israel, and imposed heavy taxed and payments (2 Kings 15:19). In 722 BC, the Assyrians finally embarked on a three-year siege of Israel and put an end to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, carrying the people away into captivity. (2 Kings 17:1–6, 24; 18:7, 9). The policy of forced migration was a tactic widely used by the Assyrians to weaken local populations to prevent any rebellion.

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<sup>30</sup> Easton, M. G. (1893). In Easton’s Bible dictionary. New York: Harper & Brothers.

7. In 727 the Babylonians rejected the rule of the Assyrians and rebelled against them. Assyria finally fell to the Babylonians between 625 and 612 BC as prophesied in Isaiah 10:5–19, Nahum 3:19, and Zephaniah 3:13.

## B. The Babylonian Empire

1. After Babylon overthrew the Assyrian Empire, they would continue to be the dominant force in the region until the Persian Empire expanded and overthrew the Babylonians around 539 BC.
2. The Babylonian Empire extended west to the Mediterranean sea, south to the Egyptian border, north to the eastern edges of what we now call Turkey, and east towards the Persian Gulf.
3. The capital city of Babylon was possibly the largest city in the world during the time of Jewish exile. It was located south of modern-day Baghdad, Iraq on the Euphrates River. The exact population size is unknown and debatable but the number may have been around 200,000 people. The city was said to hold one of the seven ancient wonders of the world: the hanging gardens of Babylon built by Nebuchadnezzar for his wife.
4. Babylonian King Nabopolassar led in the overthrow of the Assyrian Empire when he defeated the city of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, in 612 BC. His son, Nebuchadnezzar, eventually became the leader of the Babylonian military. Under Nebuchadnezzar's military leadership and then under his royal leadership, Babylon overthrew the Southern Kingdom of Judah as well as other nations.
  - i. Stephen R. Miller writes, "Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest ruler of the Neo-Babylonian period and one of the most competent monarchs of ancient times. He brought Babylon to the zenith of its economic affluence and political power. . . . Nebuchadnezzar played a large part in biblical history. With the possible exception of the pharaoh of the exodus, more is said of Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament than of any other foreign ruler."<sup>31</sup>
  - ii. Nebuchadnezzar appears in:
    - a. 2 Kings 24-25
    - b. 1 Chronicles 6:15
    - c. 2 Chronicles 36
    - d. Ezra 1-2 & 5-6

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 101-102.



- e. Nehemiah 7:6
  - f. Esther 2:6
  - g. Jeremiah 21-22, 24-25, 27-29, 32, 34-35, 37, 39, 43-44, 46, 49-52
  - h. Ezekiel 26, 29-30
  - i. Daniel 1-4
- iii. His name means “Nabu, protect my firstborn son.”
- a. The Babylonians were religiously polytheistic, they worshipped numerous gods.
  - b. Nabu was worshipped as a god among both the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Nabu was considered a god of wisdom and he is often seen holding tablets and writing instruments. Even his temples and offerings incorporated images and instruments of writing. He was considered to be especially at work among scribes.
  - c. This false god is mentioned in Isaiah 46:1 and Jeremiah 48:1 and is discussed in Daniel.

5. The beginning of the Jewish exile to Babylon in 605 BC is described in Daniel 1:1-2, 2 Kings 24:1, and 2 Chronicles 36:15-21. Eventually the Southern Kingdom of Judah would be completely defeated by the Babylonian Empire in 587 BC.

### C. The Persian Empire

1. The Persian Empire arose when the Persians overthrew and absorbed the kingdom of the Medes around 550 BC.

- i. The Medes
  - a. The Medes were a people of an established kingdom who arose somewhat parallel to the Babylonian Empire in the East after the fall of the Assyrian Empire. They became the dominant power of their region and their capital was Ecbatana in what is now Northwest Iran.
  - b. Cyrus, a relative of the Median royal family, rebelled against the Medians with the help of the Babylonian empire and overcame the Medians in 550 BC to create the Medo-Persian Empire which would eventually overcome and absorb Babylon as well.
- ii. The Persians

- a. The Persians would rise up under Cyrus to become “the largest Empire the world had known” stretching from India to Egypt and Asia Minor.
  - b. The Persian Empire defeated the Babylonian Empire in 539 BC. Many Babylonian territories and people welcomed the advance of the Persian Empire and even aided Cyrus due to their rejection of the Babylonian leadership over religious and administrative issues. Cyrus was seen as a liberator from bad governance who would restore traditional Babylonian religious practices. Thus, the city of Babylon and much of the territory came under the Persian Empire without a fight or destruction of infrastructure. The city of Babylon became Cyrus’ winter home and headquarters.
  - c. Cyrus portrayed himself as being led and enabled by the Babylonian god Marduk as a way to gain the support of the Babylonian people.
2. Cyrus allowed many exiled peoples to return to their homelands, including the Jews. For Cyrus, this was not primarily an act of mercy but an strategic move to strengthen his borders and defenses against hostile territories.

# Old Testament Poetry and Wisdom Literature

## I. The Nature of Old Testament Poetry and Wisdom Literature?

### A. Poetry

1. In literature, poetry is colorful and stylistic language used to appeal to the human emotions and often paint a picture with words in order to convey a message with impact.
2. In the Old Testament, poetry is found in over one third (33%) of the content.
3. Poetry is found in the following books:
  - i. Psalms (entirely poetry)
  - ii. Job (majority poetry, some narrative)
  - iii. Proverbs (mix of poetry and wisdom)
  - iv. Song of Songs (mostly poetry)
  - v. Lamentations (mostly poetry)
  - vi. Prophetic Books (contains some or much poetry in each book)
  - vii. Every Old Testament book has some poetry within it.

### B. The Nature of Old Testament Poetry

1. Old Testament poetry appeals to human emotion rather than logic.
2. Old Testament poetry uses a great amount of imagery to convey its message.
3. Old Testament poetry uses a great amount of literary devices and figures of speech that demand analysis and study for the modern reader to properly understand.
4. Old Testament poetry uses a minimum number of words. Unlike narratives, poetic texts are made of short, compact lines of verse with few words. The words, however, are chosen carefully to convey the message with great impact.
5. Old Testament poetry has a unique structure.
  - i. As you read poetry you will find that the text is structured around poetic lines of verse rather than around sentences or paragraphs. Therefore, to read poetry you have to read line by line rather than sentence by sentence.
  - ii. Old Testament poetry is usually grouped into two or three lines placed together to express one thought. This literary tool is called parallelism (for example, see Psalms 3:1-2).

- iii. Often in the NIV study Bible you will find helpful footnotes that give you more information about the structure of the poem/psalm in the Hebrew.

#### 6. Old Testament poetry uses a large amount of figurative imagery.

- i. The poems of the Old Testament are often intended to paint a picture in your imagination.
- ii. The authors are conveying real thoughts, literal events, and actual emotions in figurative (symbolic, metaphorical) expressions. The interpreter must strive to grasp the reality being described by the figurative expression.
- iii. Popular figures of speech used in Old Testament poetry include:
  - a. Simile (example in Psalm 42:1)
  - b. Metaphor (example in Proverbs 17:22)
  - c. Indirect Analogy - This is a comparison that is not directly stated but assumed (example in Psalm 22:13).
  - d. Hyperbole (example in Psalm 42:3)
  - e. Personification - attributing human features or human characteristics to nonhuman entities (example in Psalm 24:7).
  - f. Anthropomorphism – the representation of God with human features or human characteristics (example in Psalm 19:4).
  - g. Zoomorphism - the representation of God with animal or nonhuman features or animal or nonhuman characteristics (example in Psalm 91:4 and Psalm 18:2).
  - h. Cause and Effect (example in Proverbs 19:13).
  - i. Representation – the substitution of a representative part of a whole for or instead of the whole thing itself (example in Psalm 122:2).
  - j. Addressing people not present or the self (example in Psalm 2:10; 42:5).
- iv. Most of this figurative speech is not meant to be taken literally but we are to ask, “what is this verse really trying to convey about to the reader by using this unusual language or descriptions?”

#### 7. More Inspirational than Theological

- i. While poems are based on universal/theological principles, their primary intent is not to teach theology as the letter or the narrative might.

- ii. Instead, the poems are intended to demonstrate appropriate responses to the theological/universal principles.
- iii. Robert Chisholm writes that the poems “give us inspired models of how to talk and sing to God.”
- iv. According to Walter Brueggemann, the poems often address three aspects of human life:
  - a. Seasons of well-being and blessing that evoke gratitude.
  - b. Seasons of anguish, hurt, rejection, suffering, and death that evoke despair.
  - c. Seasons of surprise and being overwhelmed with the goodness and gifts of God that evoke joy and excitement.
- v. In all these cases, the Psalms and poems of the Bible give us a model for communicating with God. They teach us that we can and should be honest with God about our emotions and experiences.

#### C. Wisdom Literature

- 1. Writings that describe and give advice for everyday life.
- 2. Wisdom Literature is Found in:
  - i. Proverbs
  - ii. Job
  - iii. Ecclesiastes
  - iv. Song of Songs (also called Song of Solomon)

#### D. Nature of the Wisdom Literature

- 1. Purpose
  - i. Wisdom literature seeks to help develop the character of the reader.
  - ii. These books ask the reader to think critically about life issues.
- 2. Content:
  - i. These books are a collection of valuable insights into Godly living. When the advice of the books is followed, Godly character will develop and certain benefits will usually follow. (However, Job teaches us that even when we live a Godly life, bad things can and will happen to us.)
  - ii. Each contains information that help us live as Godly people in the real world, both then and now (when we look at the principles in the actual proverbs/instructions).
- 3. The books should be taken as a whole because each give a different viewpoint:

- i. Proverbs deals with the instructions and benefits of Godly living
- ii. Job deals with suffering that comes despite (or because of) our Godly lifestyle.
- iii. Ecclesiastes deals with the questions and sometimes doubts that we have in life.
- iv. Song of Songs deals with the sexual relationships. Even though the wisdom literature forbids wrong sex it promotes right sex.

#### 4. Wisdom literature contains proverbs.

- i. In literature, proverbs are short, easy to remember sayings or statements that teach practical wisdom about life.
- ii. These proverbs are not universal principles themselves. They are usually true but not always true. The principles behind the proverbs, however, are always true. Our job is not just to do what the proverb says but find the universal principle behind the proverbs and apply it to our life today.

E. Summary: C. Hassel Bullock states that the wisdom and poetic books of the Old Testament “focus on man’s reflections on God and His response rather than on God’s search for man. Yet the divine Spirit hovers over man’s effort to understand, to figure out his world, to fathom the meaning of his relationship with God.”<sup>32</sup>

## II. Authorship and Content of Old Testament Poetry and Wisdom Literature

### A. Job

#### 1. Authorship

- i. Jewish tradition holds that this story was told verbally as a Jewish teaching long before it was written down.
- ii. Most likely, Moses put the story in writing during the writing of the Pentateuch.

#### 2. Content

- i. This story affirms the truth that even the righteous will experience suffering in the world. This suffering is not the result of sin in your life but the results of evil in the world. God does not always prevent this suffering but can use the suffering to teach his people and reveal himself to the world. Ultimately, we are to trust God without regard to our present, physical circumstances.
- ii. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart indicate that Job affirms that “wisdom is ultimately found in God alone, human wisdom cannot on

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<sup>32</sup> C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 19.

its own fathom the ways of God.” They also see in Job that “God it not obligated to fallen humans to explain all things.”<sup>33</sup>

- iii. Fee and Stuart summarize that “Job has an important place in the biblical story, not only by calling us to total trust in God even in the most trying situations but also by preparing the way for Jesus Christ, who as the incarnate God gives the ultimate answer to Job’s questions by assuming the role of innocent sufferer – only in his case to bear the sins of the entire world.”<sup>34</sup>

## B. Psalms

### 1. Authorship

- i. The Psalms are a collection of the hymns or Israel.
- ii. Many written by David (see 2 Samuel 23:1 and 1 Chronicles 15:16-24 for examples of David’s musical abilities).
- iii. Other contributors include “the Sons of Korah,” Asaph, Solomon, Moses, Heman, Ethan, and unknown or unidentified writers.

### 2. Content

- i. These were instruments of worship in Israel. Some were adapted prayers while others were composed songs, but all were to be used in worship and praise to God. They were compiled to lead Israel in worship by giving the people a method to use in speaking to or approaching God.
- ii. Bullock writes that “the Psalms capture the qualitative essence of man and God, and lay them out in juxtaposition, thus revealing the insufficiency of the one and the all-sufficiency of the other.” He also recognizes that the Psalms “have a therapeutic value.”<sup>35</sup>
- iii. Bullock says that at frequent theme of the Psalms is that “human fulfillment is found only in relationship to God.”<sup>36</sup>

## C. Proverbs

### 1. Authorship

- i. Like the Psalms, this is a collection of sayings and some poems written primarily by Solomon but also includes contributions from various others.
- ii. The compiler of these sayings and teachings is not clearly stated.

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<sup>33</sup> Fee and Stuart, 121.

<sup>34</sup> Fee and Stuart, 129.

<sup>35</sup> Bullock, 111, 131

<sup>36</sup> Bullock, 130.

## 2. Content

- i. Bullock concludes that “Proverbs is an instruction manual” with the intent of communicating “right conduct and essential attitudes towards life, aimed at producing lives in conformity to the divine will. The immediate object was to train and educate for the preservation of the family unit, and social stability of the society as a whole. Therefore, prominent in wisdom was the recognition that fulfillment of God’s will is actualized in the personal and social conduct and institutions of His people.”<sup>37</sup>
- ii. Bullock also points out that the Proverbs are very individually focused where other parts of scripture are group/community focused. For example, Bullock writes “Whereas prophecy worked from the nation downward to the individual, wisdom worked from the individual upward to the nation.”<sup>38</sup>

## D. Ecclesiastes

### 1. Authorship

- i. The book seems to indicate that Solomon was the author.
- ii. It is believed by many that someone wrote down Solomon’s teaching later with some edits, perhaps at Solomon’s request or in order to preserve this teaching from the king. Ecclesiastes 12:9-14 seems to indicate this.

### 2. Content

- i. The name of the books suggests it was material designed for sharing in a gathering such as a classroom. It is like a teacher’s lecture notes or textbook for a course.
- ii. The material is advice for how one should live in the world when you both fear/trust God but have serious questions about life and purpose. Ultimately, the reader is encouraged to remain faithful to God in every season of life, especially in times of frustration and confusion.
- iii. Some have seen Ecclesiastes as a genuine expression of the unfulfillment felt by those grappling with living successfully under the Old Testament’s religious system. It is the expressed desire for what many have found in the New Covenant.

## E. Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)

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<sup>37</sup> Bullock, 152

<sup>38</sup> Bullock, 149.



1. Authorship: As with Ecclesiastes, we see Solomon is the source of the writing but another may have compiled this during or after Solomon's life.

2. Content

- i. This is the description of a passionate love relationship. It illustrates how romance and sexual desire can and should exist within and among the people of God in Biblically affirmed relationships.
- ii. Many have chosen to interrupt this work allegorically:
  - a. Many in Israel saw this an extended metaphor to describe the relationship between God and the Jewish people.
  - b. Many in the church see this an extended metaphor to describe the relationship between God and the New Covenant body of believers (the bride of Christ as described in Ephesians 5:25-27 for example).
  - c. We can certainly draw illustrations from Song of Songs about how God loves his people but this is most likely not the primary purpose of the book.
- iii. Fee and Stuart conclude that this book reminds us "that the sexual love [God] created is good and should be embraced with godly fidelity and delight."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Fee and Stuart, 165.

# Old Testament Prophetic Literature

## I. Old Testament Prophetic Literature

- A. Old Testament prophetic literature is primarily the sermons or spoken messages of the Old Testament prophets to the nations of Israel or Judah (and sometimes their neighbors). The messages are from God and contain visions, narratives, and other literary devices. They are often proclamations of judgment, calls to repentance, or messages of hope for the future.
- B. C. Hassell Bullock describe the Old Testament prophetic books as “collections of various kinds of utterances made on different occasions and called forth by varying circumstances.”<sup>40</sup>
- C. Fee and Stuart describe the prophets as “God’s appointed spokesmen, they call Yahweh’s people back to their covenant roots, announcing both the curses and blessings for covenant disloyalty or loyalty. . . . At the heart of the prophets’ message, therefore, is deep concern that Israel reflect God’s character by walking in his ways and keeping covenant with him.”<sup>41</sup>
- D. The Old Testament has two divisions of prophetic books: Major and Minor Prophets. They are called major and minor because of their size and not their importance.
  1. The Major Prophets include:
    - i. Isaiah
    - ii. Jeremiah/Lamentations
    - iii. Ezekiel
    - iv. Daniel
  2. The Minor Prophets include
    - i. Hosea
    - ii. Joel
    - iii. Amos
    - iv. Obadiah
    - v. Johan
    - vi. Micah
    - vii. Nahum
    - viii. Habakkuk
    - ix. Zephaniah

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<sup>40</sup> C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986),

<sup>41</sup> Fee and Stuart, 171 - 172.

- x. Haggai
- xi. Zechariah
- xii. Malachi

## II. Timeline of the Prophetic Books

- A. As seen above, in our Bible the Prophetic books are organized based on size and not based on when the prophets operated in time.
- B. The Old Testament prophets arise and operate from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to the 5<sup>th</sup> century, a span of around 300 years.
- C. Although we do not know with certainty when each prophet lived and operated, we are able to determine the general time period in which they lived and have placed the prophetic books in the timeline given previously in class (see pages 24-27). Please refer to this historical outline to know roughly when each prophet operated.
- D. Generally, the Old Testament prophetic books are divided into three time periods:
  - 1. Prophets who operated during the Assyrian crisis and the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
    - i. Isaiah
    - ii. Amos
    - iii. Hosea
    - iv. Jonah
    - v. Micah
  - 2. Prophets who operated during the Babylonian crisis and the fall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
    - i. Jeremiah/Lamentations
    - ii. Ezekiel
    - iii. Habakkuk
    - iv. Zephaniah
    - v. Nahum
  - 3. Prophets who operated during the post-exilic period and Persian rule.
    - i. Daniel
    - ii. Haggai
    - iii. Zechariah
    - iv. Joel
    - v. Obadiah
    - vi. Malachi

## III. The Nature of the Old Testament Prophetic Literature

- A. Old Testament Prophecy includes two aspects:

1. Foretelling (describing the future)
  2. Forthtelling (addressing the present)
- B. Only a small account of the Old Testament prophecies deals with future events.
1. Fee and Stuart in *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* write, “Less than 2% of Old Testament prophecy is messianic. Less than 5% specifically describes the New Covenant age. Less than 1% concerns events yet to come.”<sup>42</sup>
  2. The vast majority of the Old Testament prophecy addresses the disobedience of the original audience (Israel, Judah, or neighboring nations) and the coming judgment of God for that disobedience.
- C. The messages of the prophets are usually very clear and direct unless they are describing future events. Descriptions of future events are often vague and complicated. Usually, foretelling was concerned with God fulfilling his promises and covenant. Bullock observes that “the prophets’ interest in future events was tied to the concerns of the present.”<sup>43</sup>
- D. Prophetic literature is some of the most emotional literature in the Bible so we need to pay close attention to emotional terms and find why they were used. The writers often use explicit language in their descriptions of the horror of the coming judgment of God. They were also very harsh in their language towards the societies, leadership, and religious communities they addressed.
- E. Prophetic messages were almost always given in a time of crisis. Fee and Stuart point to three major crises that are found in the context of most of the prophets:<sup>44</sup>
1. Significant political, military, economic, and social upheaval in their region.
  2. A very high level of unfaithfulness and disregard for the Mosaic covenant among the covenant people.
  3. Major shifts in the balance of power on the international scene, empires rising and falling.
- F. The structure of the prophetic books is unique:
1. Usually the books are a collection of prophecies or sermons by the prophet.
  2. The books contain somewhat shorter, more independent sections than do the narratives or letters.
  3. These shorter units are not usually arranged in order of time or length.

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<sup>42</sup> Fee and Stuart, 172.

<sup>43</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Fee and Stuart, 172.

4. Sometimes an overall theme will connect the passages but usually the theme is different in each passage.
- G. There is much repetition in the prophetic books.
1. Many of the prophecies found in the books were compiled at the end of the prophet's life and not given/written all at once. Thus, the repetition is mostly likely the result of reoccurring themes in the prophet's messages over many years.
  2. Later Biblical prophets also quoted or cited early Biblical prophets. This also a reason why repetitive statements or passages appear across multiple books. As C. Hassell Bullock writes, the Old Testament prophets "saw themselves in a line of succession and were aware of the tradition they had received from their predecessors."<sup>45</sup>
  3. Israel was often guilty of the same sins. Repetition of sins called for repetitions in prophetic messages.
- H. Prophetic messages were bold. Bullock describes the Old Testament Prophets as people who "were pawns of no power structures and represented no vested interests – except the irresistible power of God and the vital interests that He has vested in Israel since the Sinai covenant."<sup>46</sup>
- I. The Prophets often used intentional or symbolic actions to dramatically demonstrate a point or message. We must remember that these were specific commands to individuals. Our task is not to repeat the actual action but to learn the lesson God intended from the action. Some examples of prophetic intentional or symbolic action include:
1. Isaiah 20:1-4 – Isaiah walked around naked for three years.
  2. Jeremiah 27:1-2 – Jeremiah made and wore a yoke.
  3. Ezekiel 3:1-3 – Ezekiel ate a scroll.
  4. Hosea 1:1-3 – Hosea married a prostitute.
- J. Both genuine and false prophets "were often identified as madmen."<sup>47</sup> Their usual methods and messages generated this attitude towards them.
- K. The messages of the prophets were often rejected. The prophets themselves, especially those who prophesied before and during the fall of Jerusalem, were not

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<sup>45</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 11.

<sup>46</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 18-19.

<sup>47</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, & Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 582.

believed or accepted until many years or generations later. As Bullock points out, “History became their vindicator.”<sup>48</sup>

- L. Although the Prophets were often found to be in relationship with the government of Israel, they were primarily concerned with Israel’s relationship with God. They called the people back to right covenant relationship but sometimes had to do this directly to political leaders since these leaders were influencing Israel away from Yahweh. Bullock writes the prophets were “basically religious, calling for the purge of pagan elements from the national religion. They were politically inclined but religiously motivated.”<sup>49</sup> In many cases, the prophets sought to bring about national repentance and faithfulness from the bottom, up rather than from the top, down.
- M. Most of the prophetic books were produced using an editor or compiler. Sometimes they worked directly with the prophet and sometimes after the prophet had died. Bullock notes that usually these editors were “close associates or disciples”<sup>50</sup> of the prophets who wanted to ensure that the prophets’ messages were preserved and the prophets themselves were vindicated in history. The compilers of the prophetic material did not organize the material according to strict chronology. Thus, the individual events or prophecies in the books may do not always occur is sequentially

#### IV. Literary Devices or Tools in the Prophets

##### A. Oracles

1. The literary term for messages from God delivered to or through the prophet (prophecy proper).
2. The majority of the content in the prophet books is oracles.
3. Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas have identified four broad categories of oracles found in the prophets:<sup>51</sup>
  - i. Indictment oracles – proclaimed what the people had done wrong.
  - ii. Judgement oracles – proclaimed God’s intended response to the people’s wrongdoing.
  - iii. Instruction oracles – proclaimed how the people needed to respond (such as repent, change attitudes, change actions, etc.).
  - iv. Aftermath oracles – proclaimed God’s plan for the future, mostly after judgement had come.

##### B. Visions

1. An image or dream with divine origins.

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<sup>48</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 34.

<sup>51</sup> Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 583.

2. These are dramatic forms of communication from God and do not occur often in the prophetic books.

C. Poetry

1. The prophets often included poetry in the delivery of their messages (in Hebrew poetic form).
2. See previous notes on Poetic Literature for more information.

D. Biography - Narrative material describing the life of the prophet or other figures of interest written by the compiler or editor of the book.

E. Autobiography - Narrative material describing the life of the prophet written by the prophet himself.

V. The Basic Message of the Prophets<sup>52</sup>

A. Old Testament Prophetic books are often structured around three main points:

1. You have broken the covenant and need to repent.
2. If you do not repent you will face judgment.
3. There is hope beyond the coming judgment for a glorious restoration in the future.

B. Point 1: You have broken the covenant and need to repent. The covenant was broken in three ways:

1. Idolatry – Bullock writes that “Idolatry summed up all that was wrong with Israel.”<sup>53</sup>
2. Social Injustice and Moral Failure – Idolatry led to the abandonment of the moral and ethical standards established by Yahweh in the Mosaic Covenant.
3. Hollow Religious Ritualism (Hypocrisy) – Many became worshippers of Yahweh out of habit or obligation rather than love. They were fulfilling a mandate rather than living in a covenant.

C. Point 2: If you do not truly repent you will face judgment. Judgment took several forms:

1. The fall of the nations to foreign powers.
2. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple
3. Captivity
4. The loss of the promised land
5. Cut off from divine blessings

D. Point 3: There is hope beyond the coming judgment for a glorious restoration in the future. This hope also took several forms:

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<sup>52</sup> As presented by Scott Duvall and Scott Hayes, *Grasping God's Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998)

<sup>53</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 23.

1. The restoration of the nation of the nation of Israel.
2. The rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple
3. Freedom
4. The coming of the Messiah
5. A New Covenant
6. God dwelling with mankind.
7. Forgiveness and peace
8. Relationship restoration
9. Gentile salvation

## VI. Overview of the Major Prophets

### A. Isaiah

#### 1. Prophet

- i. Isaiah was a prophet from Jerusalem.
- ii. Tradition says he was related to the royal family. Bullock notes that Isaiah's Father, Amoz (2 Kings 19:20), was reported to be the brother of Judean King Amaziah.<sup>54</sup>
- iii. Isaiah had access to the leaders of Israel. This indicates that he may have been an official in the royal court in Jerusalem.
- iv. He was well educated and possibly trained as a scribe (2 Chronicles 26:22).
- v. He was married but we know very little about his wife (Isaiah 8:3). They had at least two sons. He gave them symbolic/prophetic names:
  - a. Shearjashub – meaning a remnant will return (Isaiah 7:3)
  - b. Maher-shalal-hash-baz – meaning the spoil speeds, the prey hastes (Isaiah 8:3-4).
- vi. Isaiah is regarded as a model or supreme prophet. Bullock writes, "The vast spiritual and mental resources represented by this prophet are unsurpassed by any other persons or prophetic vintage."<sup>55</sup>

2. Date of Prophetic Activity: 740 – 687 BC (though there is much debate on the dates of composition for Isaiah).

#### 3. Content

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<sup>54</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 126.

<sup>55</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 128.



- i. Chapters 1–39 primarily address “Jerusalem during the period of the Assyrian threat, but at the end Isaiah prophesies the future threat of exile in Babylon.”<sup>56</sup>
- ii. Chapters 40–66 address “the future of Israel and Jerusalem toward the end of the Babylonian captivity and beyond, climaxing with the hope of a new heaven and new earth.”<sup>57</sup>
- iii. Isaiah also included much theology in his work making him a theologian as well as a prophet. He seems to focus on the following:
  - a. The holiness of Yahweh, including his supreme moral standard.
  - b. The designation and purpose of Israel as Yahweh’s holy people, a covenant people.
  - c. The presence of God in Jerusalem.
  - d. Right worship, both individually and in Jerusalem.
  - e. God’s desire for the nations (Gentiles) to be included in his Kingdom.
- iv. Many of the Messianic prophecies around found in Isaiah. In fact, Isaiah is the most quoted prophet in the New Testament.

## B. Jeremiah

### 1. The Prophet

- i. Jeremiah was from a small town just northeast of Jerusalem called Anathoth.
- ii. He was a Levite and from a priestly family. He was most likely well trained in the religion of Israel.
- iii. His father was Hilkiyah. He was possibly related to Eli.
- iv. He was well educated and able to write and speak with great ability. He was also assisted by Baruch, a faithful helper.
- v. He was instructed by God to not marry (Jeremiah 16:1-4).
- vi. His prophetic calling extended beyond Israel and Judah. He was designated “a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). Bullock points out that Jeremiah “not only spoke about the foreign nations but spoke to them.”<sup>58</sup>

### 2. Date of Prophetic Activity

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<sup>56</sup> Fee and Stuart, 175.

<sup>57</sup> Fee and Stuart, 175.

<sup>58</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 186.

- i. 627 – 585 BC
- ii. It is very helpful to read Jeremiah alongside the historical information included in 2 Chronicles 34–36 and 2 Kings 22-25. Jeremiah is a work during these historical events and directly addresses the situation in Judah during those times.

### 3. Content

- i. Fee and Stuart write that Jeremiah declared that “Judah’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh will end in its destruction [but] in keeping with the promises of Deuteronomy, God has a bright future for his people—a time of restoration and a new covenant.”<sup>59</sup>
- ii. Chapters 1–25: Oracles and symbolic actions that proclaim the coming judgement and destruction of Judah and Jerusalem for habitual sin and rebellion. Fee and Stuart point out that “a large part of this material appears in the form of conversation/dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh.”<sup>60</sup>
- iii. Chapters 26–36: Oracles and narratives which proclaim hope and future restoration.
- iv. Chapters 37–45: The Fall of Jerusalem
- v. Chapters 46–51 Oracles and that proclaim coming judgement and destruction of other nations for habitual sin and rebellion.
- vi. Chapter 52: An epilogue added by the compiler (Jeremiah 51:64) to vindicate the prophet Jeremiah with historical data.
- vii. Fee and Stuart write, “Jeremiah was given a most unenviable task, namely, to stand in opposition to the royal house of David and to the prophets, priests, and people by announcing the coming destruction of Jerusalem and urging them to accept exile in Babylon if they wished to live and have any future at all.”<sup>61</sup>
- viii. Theological emphases for Jeremiah
  - a. The universal sovereignty of Yahweh – his love and law are confined by no geographical or cultural boundaries.
  - b. Right worship – Jeremiah preached against syncretism which is combining elements of pagan religion with worship of Yahweh.

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<sup>59</sup> Fee and Stuart, 186.

<sup>60</sup> Fee and Stuart, 186.

<sup>61</sup> Fee and Stuart, 188.

### C. Lamentations

1. Author – Jewish tradition describes Jeremiah as the author this book.

2. Date Written – Shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 – 530 BC.

3. Content

- i. Five laments (expressions of grief) regarding the fall of Jerusalem. This is not purely a prophetic book but express the grief of the prophet regarding the judgement of God on his homeland and the temple. Fee and Stuart describe this book as the communication of “the deep personal suffering and spiritual agony experienced at the fall of Jerusalem [but also] the justice of God in carrying out the overthrow of Zion.”<sup>62</sup> However, the author is hopeful in God’s character to keep his covenant.
- ii. It is helpful to read Lamentations along with 2 Kings 25 for the historical context. This was the biggest crisis imaginable. The identity of the Jewish people (God’s chosen people) was closely connected to their land and Jerusalem. Now, it had all been taken away from them. Thus, they were forced to both confront their sin and its consequences and return to God with humility for redemption.
- iii. The author uses personification by giving Zion (Jerusalem) a voice which speaks out in the book.
- iv. There is some notable similarity between Lamentation and Psalms 74, 79, and 89.

### D. Ezekiel

1. The Prophet

- i. Ezekiel describes himself as a priest in Ezekiel 1:3 and demonstrates extensive knowledge of Temple practices in Ezekiel 40 – 48.
- ii. He was carried away to Babylon with many of Jewish people by order of Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC, about 10 years before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 BC. He was most like carried away as a young man and never fully served as a priest in the Jerusalem temple.
- iii. He was married but his wife died around 587 BC and it seems that they did not have any children (Ezekiel 26:16-27).

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<sup>62</sup> Fee and Stuart, 166.

- iv. Although he was known for his strange ways of communicating, he was respected by the Jewish community both in exile and back in Jerusalem.
  - v. He loved Temple and long to see it and Israel restored.
2. Date of Prophetic Activity - 593 – 571 BC
3. Content
- i. He is described as the interpreter of Judah’s fall. He vividly explained how sin and rebelling among the Jews provoked the wrath and judgement of God.
  - ii. The Fall of Jerusalem was not because Yahweh was unable to protect his city and Temple. Rather, Yahweh’s people was unable to keep their covenant with Him. Yahweh did not lose Jerusalem, he handed it over to Babylon (Ezekiel 7:21-22, 11:9-12; 16:27; 21:31).
  - iii. He explained theologically and practically the departure of God’s Spirit from the Temple (Ezekiel 9-11).
  - iv. Fee and Stuart write, “Through a variety of visions, prophetic actions, and oracles, [Ezekiel] announced over and over again that Jerusalem would soon be destroyed and that Yahweh would depart from his temple. This was both as unbelievable to the exiles in Babylon as it was excruciating for Ezekiel. But he also saw clearly that all of the best of the past was to be renewed in the future: king, land, people, covenant, and presence – which was eventually realized in Christ and his new-covenant people.”<sup>63</sup>

## E. Daniel

### 1. The Prophet

- i. Carried away with many other high ranking Jewish people in exile to Babylon in 605 BC in the early days of Babylon’s invasion of Judah. These people were taken “to train them in Babylonian ways for political and propaganda purposes.”<sup>64</sup> This was the plan of the Babylonians but God was able to take that terrible situation and use it for good. Those kidnapped for evil became ministers for good.
- ii. He was a member of the Jewish nobility. Whether or not he was a member of the royal family is debated but he must have ranked

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<sup>63</sup> Fee and Stuart, 197.

<sup>64</sup> Tremper Longman III, *The NIV Application Commentary: Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 47.

among the noble class to be taken to Babylon to serve the king (Daniel 1:3).

- iii. He was a healthy young man:
  - a. He had not physical defect (Daniel 1:4)
  - b. He was noticeable healthier than others of his own age and background (Daniel 1:15).
- iv. He was intelligent:
  - a. Had demonstrated great education from his previous life in Judah as well as an ability to learn further in Babylon (Daniel 1:4)
  - b. Able to serve a king – familiar with a royal court and duties (Daniel 1:4)
- v. He was a man of great integrity. Bullock describes Daniel as “a man of impeccable character.”<sup>65</sup>
- vi. He was very faithful to God. Again, Bullock describes him as an example of “the loyalty of the laity to the Mosaic law.”<sup>66</sup>

## 2. Date of Prophetic Activity – 605 – 536 BC

### 3. Content

- i. The overall purpose of the book was to encourage Jews living in the exile and remind them that even in the aftermath of defeat that God is still sovereign. We also see repeatedly how God rewards faithfulness (and punished unfaithfulness both in Jerusalem and in Babylon).
- ii. Tremper Longman writes that “the overall message of the book is uniform: In spite of present appearances, God is in control.” He continues, “God is all-powerful, and this narration and demonstration of his power has one important purpose: the encouragement of a beleaguered people.”<sup>67</sup>
- iii. Daniel 1-6 is more narrative than prophecy, telling the story of Daniel and the other Hebrews who were with him in Babylon. In spite of their refusal to participate in all the pagan practices of Babylon, they succeeded in their situation and rose up in the Babylonian and Persian kingdoms. The Persians overcame Babylon during Daniel’s lifetime and service in Babylon. In these stories the

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<sup>65</sup> Bullock, 279.

<sup>66</sup> Bullock, 280.

<sup>67</sup> Longman, 21.

sovereignty of God over the nations and the love of God for his people is clearly expressed.

- iv. Daniel 7 – 12 is more prophetic in nature. Although Daniel’s prophetic ability is demonstrated in the first half of the book, his visions and prophecies are mostly contained in the last half of the book (this was the work of the editor in organizing the material).
- v. Fee and Stuart describe Daniel’s prophecies as “a series of apocalyptic visions about the rise and fall of succeeding empires”<sup>68</sup> until the coming of Christ and his future and eternal kingdom.

## VII. Overview of the Minor Prophets

### A. Hosea

#### 1. The Prophet

- i. His name comes from the same root Hebrew word as Joshua and Jesus. These names are pointing to God’s salvation.
- ii. He ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israel
- iii. He was most likely a farmer and often uses farming imagery in his prophecies.
- iv. He prophesied with a poetic form. George Robinson describes this book as “both a prophecy and a poem.”<sup>69</sup>

#### 2. Date of Prophetic Activity

- i. 758 – 722 BC
- ii. It is helpful to read Hosea alongside 2 Kings 14 – 18 for the historical context.

#### 3. Content

- i. Much of the book is about Hosea’s marriage to Gomer. She was unfaithful to her husband and committed both adultery and idolatry. This difficult marriage became a symbol or metaphor for describing the relationship between God and his covenant people, Israel. Israel’s idolatry was like the sin of adultery.
- ii. Robinson writes, “Delicately and without self-consciousness he tells the tragic story of his domestic life. It burned two ideas into his soul: Jehovah’s loving faithfulness to Israel, and Israel’s thankless unfaithfulness to Jehovah.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Fee and Stuart, 204 – 205.

<sup>69</sup> George L. Robinson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 16.

<sup>70</sup> Robinson, 19.

- iii. Though Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea, Hosea was very faithful to Gomer. Thus, the book stirs up both sorrow and hope. Hosea proclaims grief for Israel's sin but remains hopeful for Yahweh's redemption.

## B. Joel

### 1. The Prophet

- i. Little is known about Joel. He was from Judah, possibly from Jerusalem.
- ii. His name means "Jehovah is God."

### 2. Date of Prophetic Activity

- i. The book gives us no definite time or clues concerning when this prophecy was given.
- ii. It is suggested that the prophecy came sometime after 590 BC.

### 3. Content

- i. Joel is very concerned with warning Judah about the coming judgement of God and the need to repent. He calls the day of judgment "the Day of the Lord" where God will punish his people for their persistent and unrepentant sins. Nevertheless, Joel calls the people to repentance and proclaims the mercy of God towards his covenant people.
- ii. George Robinson summarizes the book as this: "The first half of the book begins in gloom and closes in light; the second begins with judgement and ends with victory."<sup>71</sup>
- iii. Joel focuses on judgement, repentance, and redemption. By using the tragedy of a locust invasion and subsequent events, he explains how God demonstrates justice and grace. Joel explains how the nature of true repentance and how God responds with mercy. He also gives hope for a future, eternal redemption.
- iv. Joel is especially important for Pentecostals as a portion of his prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and his book was used for the preaching of the first sermon in the freshly Spirit-filled church by Peter. Joel foresaw the New Covenant outpouring and activity of the Holy Spirit. As Hassell Bullock observes, "Joel

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<sup>71</sup> Robinson, 31.

finally envisions a people open to the voice of God . . . with every social rank of society responsive to His revelation.”<sup>72</sup>

## C. Amos

### 1. The Prophet

- i. Amos was a farmer and shepherd from Tekoa which was about 10 kilometers south of Bethlehem in Judah. He was most likely from a poor family.
- ii. His name refers to burdens or bearing a burden.
- iii. Though he was from the Southern Kingdom, he prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

### 2. Date of Prophetic Activity

- i. Based on information found in the prophecy, we can say this was given around 760 BC.
- ii. Amos was one of the earliest prophets among the Prophetic books.
- iii. For historical context surrounding the prophecy of Amos, see 2 Kings 14:23 – 15:7 and 2 Chronicles 26.

### 3. Content

- i. Amos delivered messages of judgement to Israel and the nations.
  - a. Israel was being unfaithful to God in economic, social, and religious practices. Israel had become greedy and selfish. Their religious practices were also hollow (outward but not inward) and mixed with pagan ritual and idol worship. Israel worshiped God with in word but had turned away from God in their hearts.
  - b. The other nations were idolators and evil-doers who failed to turn to Yahweh.
- ii. Amos prophesied of the total destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel which happened by way of Assyrians defeating and conquering Israel around 722 BC.
- iii. Amos reminds us that God does not desire outward worship only but only inward devotion. Our hearts must be given to God above all else. A heart given to God produces good works and worship pleasing to God.

## D. Obadiah

### 1. The Prophet

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<sup>72</sup> Bullock, 333.



- i. Very little of known of this Obadiah. Several men named Obadiah are mentioned in Scripture but it is unclear if this Obadiah is same man as any of those mentioned.
- ii. His name means “worshipper of Yahweh”

## 2. Date of Prophetic Activity

- i. This seems to happen just after the fall of Jerusalem, perhaps 586 BC.
- ii. See Jeremiah 49 and Psalm 137 for the historical context of this prophecy.

## 3. Content

- i. The shortest of the prophetic books and the shortest book in the Old Testament.
- ii. The prophecy is mainly about the nation of Edom.
  - a. Edom is connected to the descendants of Esau in Genesis 36.
  - b. Edom did not give support to Israel during their return from Egypt in Numbers 20 and was seen as a historical enemy of Israel fighting against both Saul and David (1 Samuel 14:47 and 2 Samuel 8:13-14). Israel tried to destroy the Edomites in 1 Kings 11:14-25.
  - c. During the time of the Divided Kingdom, Edom was still a separate, often hostile, neighboring nation ruled by a Edomite king.
- iii. After the fall of Jerusalem, the Edomites took advantage of the defeat of Judah to plunder what was left in and around Jerusalem. Rather than helping the suffering remnant, Edom exploited and wounded them further. Obadiah announced the anger and coming judgement of Edom by Yahweh. Edom would be destroyed but Jerusalem would have hope for a future.
- iv. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart summarize the prophecy of Obadiah in three points:<sup>73</sup>
  - a. God will judge Edom for its sins against God’s people.
  - b. God deals harshly with the arrogant
  - c. God’s people will ultimately be delivered and restored.

## E. Jonah

### 1. The Prophet

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<sup>73</sup> Fee and Stuart, 228.

- i. Little is known of Jonah. He is only mentioned once outside of the Book of Jonah in 2 Kings 14:23-25.
- ii. He was from Gath Hepher, about 7 kilometers from Nazareth, the future hometown of Jesus. This was in the region of Galilee in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
- iii. His name means “dove.”

## 2. Date of Prophetic Activity

- i. Jonah most likely prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam who ruled Israel (the Northern Kingdom) from 793 BC to 753 BC.
- ii. Most likely the book of Jonah was written down by other writers or scribes many years after the story took place.

## 3. Content

- i. The story of God’s judgement and forgiveness of Nineveh.
  - a. Nineveh was located near the current city of Mosul in northern Iraq, about 1200 kilometers northeast of Jerusalem. During Jonah’s time, the city was about 12 kilometers long and had a population of at least 120,000 people.
  - b. Nineveh rose to be a large, prominent city around 740 BC and became a capital of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian Empire was the dominant force in the region until the Babylonians overthrew them along with the city of Nineveh in 612 BC.
  - c. The Assyrians were known to be a brutal military force who conquered its neighbors and plundered their nations and cities. Assyria had begun to attack and plunder Israel in Jonah’s younger days and earlier. They would become a primary enemy of Israel. Assyrian battle tactics were designed to terrorize and frighten people into submission. Some were recorded in the writing of the Assyrians themselves and include:
    - 1. Live dismemberment
    - 2. Head parades (marching through the streets carrying the heads of their victims on poles.)
    - 3. Skinning people alive
    - 4. Burning people alive
    - 5. Gouging out eyes

6. Building tower of bodies while mixing dead and live people.
- ii. Jonah was called to these brutal enemies of Israel and did not want to preach to them. He did not fear being killed by the Assyrians. Instead, he feared that the Nineveh would repent and God would forgive them. Jonah wanted to see Nineveh destroyed and he determined to withhold God's word from them so that would not never repent and only be destroyed by God.
- iii. The message of God to Jonah reiterates a common Old Testament theme – that God is gracious and compassionate, even to his enemies. He is slow to anger and abounding in love. He desires to see people saved, not destroyed. If people truly repent, even if they are extremely wicked, God will forgive.

## F. Micah

### 1. The Prophet

- i. Micah was from Moresheth, a town in the Southern Kingdom of Judah about 40 kilometers south of Jerusalem.
- ii. Micah was a shortened form of a Hebrew name which meant “who is like Yahweh?”

2. Date of Prophetic Activity - Based on the content of the book, we see this prophecy was given between 740 and 686 BC.

### 3. Content

- i. Micah proclaims messages from God to both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms. Micah 6:8 describes the responsibility of mankind. Our duty to other “grows out of Yahweh's gracious love expressed in His covenant relationship to mankind.”<sup>74</sup> Micah explains how Israel has broken these commands of God. God will bring judgement but also offer redemption.
- ii. Micah emphasized the need to obey God over sacrificing to God. He was particularly concerned about social responsibility (caring for the needy). George Robinson describes Micah as a prophet who “fearlessly uncovered sin and pointed to Christ. He was preeminently a prophet of the poor and a friend of the oppressed.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Bullock, 122.

<sup>75</sup> Robinson, 94-95.

- iii. Micah 5:2 is also seen as a prophecy concerning where Christ was to be born – in Bethlehem.

## G. Nahum

### 1. The Prophet

- i. Very little is known about this prophet. Even the location of his homeplace, Elkosh, is uncertain.
- ii. His name means “comfort”

### 2. Date of Prophetic Activity

- i. His prophecy was given about 95 years after Nineveh defeated the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. This would place Nahum at around 627 BC.
- ii. Nineveh eventually fell to the Babylonians and was totally defeated in 612 BC, about 15 years after Nahum’s prophecy.

### 3. Content

- i. Nahum proclaimed good news for Judah but disaster for Nineveh. A summary of his overall message is contained in Nahum 1:7-9.
- ii. Although Nineveh was graciously spared from destruction after Jonah’s ministry due to a season of repentance, Nahum prophesied that the persistent wickedness of Nineveh in the years after Jonah will be judged by God and the city will be punished with destruction.
- iii. James Bruckner writes, “Nahum is primarily a book of hope and comfort to those who are being or have been victimized or oppressed. It is a book for survivors, for those who want to find hope beyond their oppression.”<sup>76</sup>

## H. Habakkuk

### 1. The Prophet

- i. Habakkuk may have worked directly in the Jerusalem temple as an official Temple Prophet and as a musician in the Temple.
- ii. His name is difficult to define but may have something to do with embracing God.

### 2. Date of Prophetic Activity

- i. Based on the evidence found in the book, we can see that Habakkuk prophesied around 609 BC.

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<sup>76</sup> James Bruckner, *The NIV Application Commentary: Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 133.

- ii. James Bruckner observes that the content of Habakkuk “covers 66 years in 65 verses.”<sup>77</sup> He prophesies concerning the events that happened in the region from 605 to 539 BC.

### 3. Content

- i. Bruckner summarizes that “The Book of Habakkuk is a dialogue between Habakkuk and Yahweh during a vision Habakkuk receives from Yahweh. It begins with Habakkuk’s complaint against local corruption and leads to a prophecy that spans 90 years, as he is drawn into a progressively more difficult understanding of faith.”<sup>78</sup>
- ii. Paul and the writer of Hebrews quote from the book of Habakkuk 2:4 – “the righteous shall live by faith.”
  - a. Paul uses Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11.
  - b. Hebrews uses Habakkuk 2:4 in Hebrews 10:38.
  - c. It is clear that this verse from the Old Testament prophet helped the New Covenant believers understand that faith was not just a New Covenant concept but faith has always been the way by which God intended his people to come to him. From Abraham until now, people can and must come to God by faith.

## I. Zephaniah

### 1. The Prophet

- i. Zephaniah was a great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah. According to 2 Kings 18:5, Hezekiah was one of the best kings of Judah. He lived in or nearby Jerusalem.
- ii. Zephaniah’s name means “Yahweh hides” or “Yahweh Protects”

### 2. Date of Prophetic Activity - He prophesied during the reign of King Josiah, likely in the 630s BC.

### 3. Content

- i. A book announcing judgement against Judah and Jerusalem. However, God promises to protect a remnant of his people and restore Jerusalem with joy in the future.
- ii. Zephaniah lists many sins of Judah but idolatry, greed, arrogance/pride, and unfaithfulness seem to be the primary and persistent sins of the people of Judah.

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<sup>77</sup> Buckner, 202.

<sup>78</sup> Brucker, 197.

- iii. However, as Bruckner points out, through Zephaniah God sends “a strong call to a self-absorbed culture to come back to reality, Yahweh, who made everything, calls everyone to turn to him in humility for redemption. Hope is woven together with the historical reality of judgement against arrogance.”<sup>79</sup>

## J. Haggai

### 1. The Prophet

- i. Little is known about the prophet it is believed by some that he was not a Jewish exile but rather he grew up in Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem.
- ii. His name may mean “festival of Yahweh”

### 2. Date of Prophetic Activity

- i. Haggai is seen addressing Zerubbabel in his messages. Zerubbabel was a leader among the Jews who returned from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem. This make Haggai a “post-exilic” prophet since he prophesied after the exile as some others did.
- ii. His messages were most likely given after 539 BC.

### 3. Content

- i. Haggai emphasized the need to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple had major significance for Israel and was a key part of right worship of Yahweh under the Old Covenant. It was important to rebuild the Temple that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed. Haggai’s prophetic messages encouraged the residents of Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.
- ii. Bullock writes that, “Outside of Ezekiel, there was no prophet more zealous for the Temple than Haggai.”<sup>80</sup>

## K. Zechariah

### 1. The Prophet

- i. Little is known of his prophet but we do know he had a time of extended ministry in Jerusalem. He was a priest and carried on the priestly ministry of his father.
- ii. His name means “he whom Jehovah remembers”

### 2. Date of Prophetic Activity

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<sup>79</sup> Bruckner, 273.

<sup>80</sup> Bullock, 301.

- i. He was another post-exilic prophet working after the Jews return from exile in Babylon.
- ii. Most likely he worked between 520 to 490 AD.

### 3. Content

- i. Zechariah emphasized rebuilding the Temple.
- ii. He also proclaimed God's desire to restore the people of God in Jerusalem.
- iii. Zechariah seems to be concerned with reviving the people towards devotion to God. Robinson observes that the prophet wants to boost "the drooping faith of a community . . . through the preaching of a sincere and earnest prophet. . . it behooves believers ever to hope beyond hope."<sup>81</sup>
- iv. Zechariah uses highly symbolic language so the reader must determine what the symbols are actually attempting to convey.

## L. Malachi

### 1. The Prophet

- i. Very little is known about this prophet.
- ii. His name means "my messenger"

### 2. Date of Prophetic Activity

- i. Malachi was the last recorded prophetic voice prior to the coming of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the New Covenant.
- ii. He may have prophesied around 460 - 444 BC.

### 3. Content

- i. By the time Malachi began his ministry, the Temple has been rebuilt and the work of the Temple was being carried out. However, Malachi knew that the people of God would be tempted to trust more in outward ceremony than inward commitment to Yahweh.
- ii. Malachi proclaims that God loves his people and keeps his covenant with Israel but also expects Israel to keep their covenant with him by upholding their responsibilities as explained in Old Covenant law.
- iii. God has both unconditional love for his people and unwavering justice for unrighteousness.

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<sup>81</sup> Robinson, 153-154.