



**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**SCHOOL OF ART AND SCIENCE**

**COURSE CODE: CRS 713**

**COURSE TITLE: CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT**

**COURSE  
GUIDE**

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| COURSE CODE:          | CRS 713  |
| COURSE TITLE:         | CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT   |
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## **Introduction**

CTH 713: Critical Introduction to the Old Testament is a one-semester two-credit unit course. It will be available to all students as a course in post-graduate diploma in theology. The course is also suitable for anybody who is interested in the study of the Bible, with particular emphasis on the Old Testament.

The course will consist of 15 units which involve a discussion of some introductory issues about the Old Testament. The course will also examine the following major divisions of Old Testament Canon critically: The Law, The Prophets and The Writings. Some pertinent theological questions regarding the Old Testament will be identified and discussed. The material has been specifically developed for students in African context with particular focus on Nigeria.

There are no compulsory pre-requisites for this course. The course guide tells you briefly what the course is about, what you are expected to know in each unit, what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through these materials. It also emphasizes the need for tutor-marked assignments. Detailed information on tutor-marked assignments is found in the separate file, which will be sent to you later. There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to the course.

## **What you will learn in this course**

The overall aim of CTH 703: Critical Introduction to the Old Testament is to lead you to study the Old Testament literature. Introductory issues that will be examined include: The Historical and Geographical background of the Old Testament, the structure (Canon and text) and literary forms of the Old Testament, how to interpret the Old Testament and modern critical methods in Old Testament studies.

The Old Testament is an interesting document. Your understanding of this portion of the Bible should be broadened. This course will help you to appreciate and understand other aspects of biblical and theological studies better. It will particularly prepare you to approach Old Testament theology, Biblical Archaeology and Biblical Hermeneutics with confidence.

## **Course Aims**

The aim of this course is to give you an understanding of the following: Historical and Geographical setting of the Old Testament, the canon and structure of the text, the literary forms, how to interpret the text and critical approaches to its study. This will be achieved by aiming to:

Introduce you to the background to the Old Testament,

Lead you to study the Canon and Structure/text of the Old Testament,

Assist you to identify the literary forms in the Old Testament,

Expose you to the history and principles of the interpretation of the Old Testament,

Lead you to consider the authority and value of the Old Testament,

Guide you to study, analyse and evaluate the contemporary critical methods as they apply to the study of the Old Testament,

Introduce you to the critical study of the various books of the Old Testament: The Law, The Prophets and The Writings,

Lead you to identify and discuss some pertinent theological questions regarding the Old Testament.

### **Course Objectives**

To achieve the aims set out above, there are set overall objectives. In addition, each unit also has specific objectives. The unit objectives are always included at the beginning of a unit. You should read them before you start working through the unit. You may want to refer to them during your study of the unit to check on your progress. You should always look at the unit objectives after completing a unit. In this way you can be sure that you have done what was required of you by the unit.

Stated below are the wider objectives of this course as a whole. By meeting these objectives, you should have achieved the aims of the course as a whole. On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

Explain the historical and geographical setting of the Old Testament,

Describe the structure (Canon and text) of the Old Testament,

State the different literary forms found in the Old Testament,

Discuss the history and principles for the interpretation of the Old Testament,

Describe, analyze and evaluate the contemporary critical approaches to the study of the Old Testament,

Highlight the critical issues in the introductory study of the various books of the Old Testament under the three major divisions: Law, Prophets and Writings,

Identify and discuss some pertinent theological questions regarding the Old Testament.

### **Working through this course**

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read recommended books and read other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Each unit contains self-assessment exercises, and at points in the course you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of this course is a final examination. Below you will find listed all the components of the course and what you have to do.

### **Course Materials**

Major components of the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignments File
5. Presentation Schedule

In addition, you must obtain the materials. They are provided by the NOUN. Obtain your copy. You may also be required to purchase your own copy from the bookshops. You may contact your tutor if you have problems in obtaining the text materials.

### **Study Units**

There are fifteen study units in this course, as follows:

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Unit 1. | History and Geography of the Old Testament |
| Unit 2. | Canon and Text of the Old Testament        |
| Unit 3. | Literary Forms in the Old Testament        |
| Unit 4. | Interpretation of the Old Testament        |

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Unit 5. | Critical Approaches in Old Testament Study                            |
| Unit 6. | Critical Introduction to the Law I                                    |
| Unit 7. | Critical Introduction to the Law II                                   |
| Unit 8. | Critical Introduction to the Former Prophets                          |
| Unit 9  | Critical Introduction to the Later Prophets I                         |
| Unit 10 | Critical Introduction to the Later Prophets II                        |
| Unit 11 | Critical Introduction to the Later Prophets III                       |
| Unit 12 | Critical Introduction to the Writings I – Worship Books               |
| Unit 13 | Critical Introduction to the Writings II – Worship Books<br>Continued |
| Unit 14 | Critical Introduction to the Writings III– Historical Books           |
| Unit 15 | Critical Introduction to the Writings IV – Wisdom<br>Literature       |
| Unit 16 | Some Theological Issues in the Old Testament.                         |

The following are the books under each major division of Old Testament text:

**Law:** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy,

**Former Prophets** (also called Historical Books): Joshua, Judges, 1&2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings.

**Latter Prophets:** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, **the Minor Prophets** (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi).

**Writings:** Worship Books (Psalms, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Ecclesiastes, **History Books** (1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah), Daniel, **Wisdom Literature** (Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes).

The first five units examine the fundamental issues to the critical study of the Old Testament. The next five units introduce you to the critical study of the five books of the Law (also called Pentateuch or Torah) and the Prophets (former and later). The last five units concern introductory critical study of the Writings and end with examination of some theological issues in the entire Old Testament.

Each unit contains a number of self-tests. In general, these self-tests question you on the material you have just covered or require you to apply it in some ways and, thereby, help you to gauge your progress and to reinforce your understanding of the material. Together with tutor-marked assignments, these exercises will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.



## Set Textbooks

You are required to purchase these textbooks listed below. They are compulsory for you. You need them for this course and some other theological courses.

*The NIV Study Bible* (1995).

Francisco, Clyde T. (1977) *Introducing the Old Testament*, Revised Edition, Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press.

Tullock, John H. (1987) *The Old Testament Story*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Alexander, David and Part Ed. (1983) *The Lion Handbook to the Bible*.

McCain, Danny (2002) *Notes on Old Testament Introduction*. Bukuru: ACTS.

## Assignment File

In this file, you will find details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the Assignment File itself and later in this *Course Guide* in the section on assessment.

## Presentation Schedule

The *Presentation Schedule* included in your course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of tutor-marked assignments and attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit all your assignments by the due date. You should guard against falling behind in your work.

## Assessment

There are two aspects to the assessment of the course. First are the tutor-marked assignments; second is a written examination. In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply information and knowledge acquired during this course. The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment File. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark. At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final three-hour examination. This will also count for 50% of your total course mark.

## **Tutor- Marked Assignments (TMAs)**

There are fifteen tutor-marked assignments in this course. You need to submit all the assignments. The best five (i.e. the highest five of the fifteen marks) will be counted. The total marks for the best three (3) assignments will be 30% of your total course mark.

Assignment questions for the units in this course are contained in the Assignment File. You should be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your set textbooks, reading and study units. However, you are advised to use other references to broaden your view point and provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

When you have completed each assignment send it, together with TMA (tutor-marked assignment) form to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given to the Assignment File. If, however, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is done to discuss the possibility of an extension.

## **Final Examination and Grading**

The final examination of CTH 703 will be of three hours' duration and have a value of 50% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises and tutor-marked problems you have come across. All areas of the course will be assessed.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

## **Course Marking Scheme**

This table shows how the actual course marking is broken down.

| Assessment        | Marks  |
|-------------------|--|
| Assignment 1-15   | Best three marks out of fifteen count @ 10% each = 30% of course marks |
| Final Examination | 70% of overall course marks  |
| Total             | 100% of course marks   |

Table 1: Course Marking Scheme

## Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

| Unit | Title of work  | Week's Activity | Assessment (end of unit) |
|------|--|-----------------|--------------------------|
|      | Course Guide   | 1               |                          |
| 1.   | Historical and Geographical Setting of the Old Testament           | 1               | Assignment 1             |
| 2.   | Canon and Text of the Old Testament                                | 2               | Assignment 2             |
| 3.   | Literary Forms in the Old Testament                                | 3               | Assignment 3             |
| 4.   | Interpretation of the Old Testament                                | 4               | Assignment 4             |
| 5.   | Critical Approaches in the Old Testament Study                     | 5               | Assignment 5             |
| 6.   | Critical Introduction to the Law I                                 | 6               | Assignment 6             |
| 7.   | Critical Introduction to the Law II                                | 7               | Assignment 7             |
| 8.   | Critical Introduction to the Former Prophets                       | 8               | Assignment 8             |
| 9.   | Critical Introduction to the Latter Prophets I                     | 9               | Assignment 9             |
| 10.  | Critical Introduction to the Latter Prophets II                    | 10              | Assignment 10            |
| 11.  | Critical Introduction to the Latter Prophets III                   | 11              | Assignment 11            |
| 12.  | Critical Introduction to the Writings I – Worship Books            | 12              | Assignment 12            |
| 13.  | Critical Introduction to the Writings II – Worship Books Continued | 13              | Assignment 13            |
| 14.  | Critical Introduction to the Writings III– Historical Books        | 14              | Assignment 14            |
| 15   | Critical Introduction to the Writings IV – Wisdom Literature       | 15              | Assignment 15            |
| 16   | Some Theological Issues in the Old Testament.                      | 16              | Assignment 16            |

Table 2: Course Overview

## How to get the most from this course

In distance learning the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might

set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other material. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points.

Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the units you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course.

The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from a *Reading* section. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this *Course Guide* thoroughly.
2. Organize a study schedule. Refer to the 'Course overview' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you chose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates for working on each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to *Unit 1* and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'Overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.

7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this *Course Guide*).

## **Tutors and Tutorials**

There are 30 hours of tutorials (fifteen 2-hour sessions) provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor if:

you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,

you have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises,

you have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and to ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

### **Summary**

CTH 703 intends to introduce you to a critical study of the Old Testament. Upon completing this course, you will be able to answer questions such as:

What is the historical and geographical setting of the Old Testament?

How was the Canon of the Old Testament formed?

What is the structure of the text of the Old Testament?

What are the literary forms found in different parts of the Old Testament?

What are the principles that should guide our interpretation of Old Testament Literature?

What are the critical methods used for the introduction and study of the Old Testament in the modern period?

What are the critical introductory issues to the books of the Old Testament: The Law, The Prophets and The Writings?

What is your evaluation of the critical introductory issues related to the various books of the Old Testament?

What is your analysis of the theological questions regarding the Old Testament?

Of course, the questions you will be able to answer are not limited to the above list. Critical introduction to the Old Testament offers you more. An understanding of the critical issues in the Old Testament will prepare

and equip you for a better understanding of many other courses like Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics. The good thing is that you will find the course to be very interesting.

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|------------------------|
| <b>MAIN<br/>COURSE</b> |
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## **UNIT 1                    HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY OF THE                                   OLD TESTAMENT**

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  - 3.3 The Old Testament World
  - 3.4 The Geography of the Old Testament I
  - 3.5 The Geography of the Old Testament II
  - 3.6 The Significance of the Historical Geography of Palestine
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is the beginning of this course on a critical introduction to the Old Testament. In the first five units that constitute the first module we will consider some introductory issues in the study of the Old Testament: History, Geography, Structure of the Canon, the Text, Literary Forms, Interpretation and some Contemporary Critical Approaches. The concern of this first unit is to introduce you to the historical and geographical setting of the Old Testament. For the study of the geography of Palestine you need a good Bible Atlas. The Maps in **The NIV Study Bible** 1995 edition may serve this purpose.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

List the major historical development of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament.

Highlight significant events in the Old Testament associated with: The Patriarchs, Conquest, United Kingdom, Restoration,

State the major parts of the Old Testament world,

Discuss the physical features of the four major geographical divisions of Palestine,

Explain the significance of the historical geography of Palestine.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL I-FROM PATRIARCHS TO THE CONQUEST**

The history of the Old Testament is the history of the people of Israel (also called Hebrews or Jews). In these first two sections we will explore an overview of Old Testament history. The history of Israel will be highlighted with the following periods: The Patriarchal Age, The Exodus from Egypt, The Conquest of Canaan, The United Monarchy, The Divided Kingdom, The Exilic and Post Exilic periods.

##### ***The Patriarchal Age***

After the accounts of creation and the flood (Gen. 1-11), the history of Israel begins with the call and life of Abraham. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were the patriarchs of Israel. The patriarchs believed God would give them (or their descendants) Canaan as the Land of Promise (Gen. 12:1; 26:3; 18:13). While they never possessed the Land, their dead bodies were buried in the Cave of Machpelah (Gen. 23:10-20) in Palestine. The sons of Jacob actually became the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 35:22b-26). As a result of famine they went to Egypt. There Joseph took care of them. They settled in Goshen and they prospered greatly.

##### ***The Exodus from Egypt***

Around 13<sup>th</sup> (or 14<sup>th</sup>) century B. C. the Israelites left Egypt. With their exodus from Egypt and deliverance at the Red Sea they embarked on a journey to the wilderness to worship the Lord under the leadership of Moses (Ex. 5:1-3). At Mount Sinai they entered into covenant relationship with God and they became a nation (Ex. 19:1-25). Page H. Kelley (1979, 5) explained the significance of exodus event thus: "Few events in history have had such far-reaching effects as Israel's Exodus out of Egypt. The Exodus event lies at the very heart of the Old Testament. The Exodus is to the Old Covenant what the resurrection is to the New."

## ***The Conquest of Canaan***

While very close to the Promised Land they hesitated to enter because of a costly unbelief actually regarded to be rebellion against the Lord. They wandered in the wilderness and the generation passed away. It was the task of Joshua to lead them to enter, fight, conquer and apportion the land. While in the Promised Land they were ruled by judges, charismatic leaders- prominent among who were Deborah, Gideon and Samson. The period is said to be a dark period for the Hebrews because “life consisted primarily of a struggle for survival.” However Samuel was born in that period (at 1105 B.C) and his life became significant for the establishment of Israel’s prophetic ministry, especially the seer type.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1***

1. List the six main periods of the history of Israel.
2. Mention one significant event in each of the first three periods

## **3.2 THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL II – FROM UNITED KINGDOM TO THE RESTORATION**

### ***The United Monarchy***

While Samuel led the Israelites well his sons could not be trusted to succeed him. Therefore, the people asked Samuel to give them a king especially, who could lead them in wars (I Sam. 8:1-9). With the approval of God, Samuel anointed Saul who however, unfortunately, did not rule in obedience to God and the Kingdom was taken away from him. David was anointed to rule in place of Saul. He united the tribes and defeated the Philistines (2 Sam. 5:17-25; 8:1). His dynasty was powerful and it lasted four hundred years. The reign of Solomon, son of David (970-930 B.C) can be said to be the golden era of Israelites history. He was wealthy and famous. He also built the great temple.

### ***The Divided Kingdom***

During the reign of Solomon he used forced labour (1 Kings 12:1-4). When he died the people rebelled. The Kingdom was divided into two. Rehoboam the Son of Solomon became King of the Southern Kingdom with two tribes of Judah (922-915 B.C) and capital in Jerusalem. Jeroboam, one of the officials of Solomon ruled the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel with capital in Samaria (922-901). The Southern Kingdom was more stable because of its devotion to the Davidic dynasty and also geographical location that reduced its being constantly invaded. The Northern Kingdom was more unstable. In a period of almost 200 years there were 9 dynasties and 19 kings, 10 of

whom died violent deaths. However because of idolatry and related sins God allowed the two kingdoms to fall (2 Kings 17:7-23). The Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C. Samaria was captured and the people were taken to exile by the Assyrians. In a similar manner the Southern Kingdom fell in 597 and 589 B.C to Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were deported to Babylon.

### ***Exilic and Post Exilic Periods***

During the exile some faithful worshippers of Yahweh remained in Palestine (Jer. 41:4ff). However, syncretism developed among some of those who remained and those that the Babylonians settled in their land. The Jews in Babylon practiced a worship that did not include Temple Sacrifices. Synagogue worships that center on the reading of Torah most likely developed during this period. Francisco explains (1973, 69):

Such faithfulness under trying circumstances encouraged an exclusivism that magnified the differences not only between them and the Babylonians but also between them and those remaining in Judah... Upon their return this feeling of superiority forced a cleavage between them and those who remained (Ezra 4:1ff)".

This development contributed to the rise of Judaism. During the Persian Era Cyrus permitted Jews to return to Palestine (Isa. 45:1-6). The Temple was rebuilt (538-516 B.C). Nehemiah rebuilt protecting walls in 444 B.C. while Ezra led in spiritual reforms.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2***

Mention one significant event in each of the last three periods of the history of Palestine.

## **3.3 THE OLD TESTAMENT WORLD**

The three parts of the Old Testament world are Palestine, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Palestine was in the centre, Egypt was in the southwest and Mesopotamia was in the northeast. Palestine is located between Mediterranean Sea (in the West) and Arabian Desert (in the East). The areas of the Near East that were watered form a rough crescent-shaped pattern called the Fertile Crescent. This is a kind of semicircle that runs from Mesopotamia to Egypt. Actually the really fertile portion lies at the two extremes.

The four major geographical divisions or zones of Palestine moving eastward are: The Coastal Plain, The Western Mountain Range (also called the Lebanon Range, the Western Plateau or the Judean Highlands), The Jordan Valley (or the Great Rift Valley), and The Eastern Plateau (Trans Jordan). This is the land of the twelve tribes of Israel, the geographical setting of Old Testament history.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3

1. Study the description of Palestine given in this section in map I provided below. Also, study Map 1, "The World of the Patriarchs" in **The NIV Study Bible** (1995).
2. Study the four divisions of Palestine in map II provided below. Also, study Map 4, "Land of the Twelve Tribes," in **The NIV Study Bible** (1995).

### 3.4 THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT I

The **Coastal Plain** has three subdivisions. The first is **Zebulun** around the Bay of Acco (or Acre) and Mount Carmel (Judg 1:31). The second is **Sharon** located between Mount Carnal and Yarkon River. It used to be thick forests with swampy areas. **Philistia** begins from Yarkon southward and it is named after the Philistines. Their major five cities in the area are Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath and Gaza (eg Judges 1:18).

The **Western Mountain Range** begins high in Mt. Lebanon and descends southward to the region of Sinai. The region northward is Galilee and it lies towards the coast called Phoenicia (Lebanon today). Mount Canaan is located in upper Galilee. Lower Galilee is a plateau with hills and valleys. It was assigned to Zebulun (Zebulun) and Naphtali (Josh. 19:10, 32).

The Plain of Esdraelon is located between the lower Galilee and the mountains of Samaria. Mount Tabor is in this area. It is the possible site of the transfiguration of Jesus (Matt. 17). The central mountains (or hill country) from here to the South is the region called Samaria, the territories of Manasseh and Ephraim. Some other important locations in this area are Megiddo (the site of many battles), and Shechem.

Ephraim and Judah (southward) is the area of Benjamin, with Bethel (in the North) and Jerusalem (in the South). Judah and Simeon occupied the highlands of Judah and Shephelah (foot hills or limestone hills). Past the southern end of the Judean highlands is the Negev with Beersheba on its northern edge.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4

Draw a map of Palestine. Indicate the four major geographical divisions of the land (A good source to use is **The Lion Handbook to the Bible**, p. 19).

### 3.5 THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT II

The **Jordan Valley** is a depression running through the whole length of Palestine with the following heights at various points along the Jordan River: Hulley valley (waters of Merom) 210 feet above sea level), Sea of Galilee (630 feet below sea level), Dead Sea Shore (1300 feet below sea level), in the Arabah (750 feet above sea level). The Sea of Galilee (Num. 34:11) was known as Sea of Chinnereth or Lake of Gennesaret in the New Testament (Luke 5:1). The sea is a sweet-water lake with fish life. Sudden violent storms arise quite often on the sea (eg. Mark 4:37). Some important towns around the valleys and plains about the sea are Magdala, Capernaum and Tiberias.

South of the Sea of Galilee is the valley of Jezreel. At various points southward the following join the Jordan valley: Yarmuk River, Wadi Far'ah (from the West), and Jabbok River. The Dead (or Salt) Sea is said by Scoggin, (1973, 38) to be "the deepest fissure on the earth outside the Ocean floors". In 1947 the "Dead Sea Scrolls" were discovered in a cave on the northern side. South of the Dead Sea is the Arabah with its southern part full of copper deposits.

#### The Eastern Plateau

There are four rivers along the mountains from North to the South and they are Yarmuk, Jabbok, Arnon and Zered. There are four subdivisions of the Transjordan. The first is **Bashan** in the North of Yarmuk. It was fertile, productive and rich (Amos 4:1). The second is **Gilead** occupied by Gad and Reuben with nomadic activities (I Chr. 5:9) and part of the tribe of Manasseh. The third is **Moab** at the East of the Dead Sea with pastoral tablelands (2 Kings 3:4). The fourth is **Edom** at the Southern end of the Dead Sea. Some other important geographical features of Palestine that we will not be able to examine are the mountains, climate, roads and highways.

#### Self-Assessment Exercise 3.5

In the map of Palestine drawn in the last section – indicate the following places: Damascus, Dan, Tyre, Hazor, Megiddo, Tiberias, Nazareth, Ramoth Gilead, Jabesh Gilead, Dothan, Shechem, Joppa, Bethel, Ai Gilgal, Jericho, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, En Gedi, Beersheba (An



additional good source is, **The Lion Handbook to the Bible**, 1983, p. 116).

### **3.6 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF PALESTINE**

We started this course, Critical Introduction to the Old Testament, with a brief study of the historical and geographical setting of the Bible. This is because it is not fair to critique the Old Testament text without understanding the topography of the world in which it emerged. Besides the geography location of Israel definitely influenced her history, culture and religion.

A few examples will help to buttress this point. The first is that in view of the geography of the land the rainy season is particularly irregular, it may start as early as October or as late as January. The people thus believed that “weather was entirely in God’s hands” and God can use it to bless or punish people (Isa. 5:6; 1 Kings 17:1-7). Another example is that a knowledge of the routes helps to trace the journey of how the Israelites entered the Promised Land. The “Kings Highway” as stated in Numbers 20:17 is between Moab and Ammon. A knowledge of the routes is also significant for an understanding of some migration, war and commerce in the Old Testament.

A study of the historical geography is necessary to understand the people of the Old Testament. This is because the geography of their land contributed significantly to their way of life. Scoggin (1973, 40) explain the point this way: “The physical geography of Palestine left its indelible stamp on the “people of the Bible.” Its very smallness contributed to their being welded into a community. Its rugged mountainous terrain helped to form their spirit and influenced their language (Isa. 5:1-7; 44:3; 51:1). Its rocky roughness forced them to toil unusually hard...”

While the land of Palestine is small in size it is very important in religious studies. Tullock (1987, 27) thus reason: ‘Possibly no geographical area in the Western World holds a greater fascination for more people than Palestine. For three major religions it is the “Holy Land” ...’ These religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

#### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.6***

What is the significance of the historical geography of the Old Testament?

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

I do hope that this little exposure to the historical and geographical setting of the Bible has awakened your interest in a critical study of the Old Testament. Many scholars and students of the Old Testament share the optimism of Francisco (197, 9): “To know the Old Testament is to love it. If it is not loved, it is because it is not known.”

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we have examined the history and geography of the Old Testament. The history of Israel was studied under the following sub-topics: The Patriarchal Age, The Exodus from Egypt, The Conquest of Canaan, The United Monarchy, The Divided Kingdom, The Exile and Post-Exilic Period. The world of the Old Testament was also considered with the four geographical zones: The Coastal Plain, The Western Mountain Range, The Jordan Valley and the Eastern Plateau.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS**

Write a short note on The Significance of the Historical Geography of the Old Testament.

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## **UNIT 2 OLD TESTAMENT CANON AND TEXT**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Canon of the Old Testament I
  - 3.2 The Canon of the Old Testament II
  - 3.3 Evolution of the Old Testament Canon(s)
  - 3.4 The Text of the Old Testament
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Having introduced you to the history and geography of the Old Testament in the last unit the next thing is to focus on the Canon and the text. This unit will start with explanation of the word “Canon” and how the OT Canon developed from oral traditions. The constituent divisions of the Canon (Law, Prophets and Writings) will be highlighted. Evolution of the Palestinian and Alexandrian Canons will be discussed. The unit will end with brief examination of the various OT texts: Masoretic, Septuagint, Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Qumran Scrolls.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to: Explain the

meaning of Canon when it is applied to the Bible Describe how the

Old Testament Canon developed from oral tradition

Discuss the number and arrangement of books in the Hebrew Bible and Christian Old Testament

Explain how Palestinian and Alexandrian Canons evolved and the differences between the composition of the two

State the various texts and versions of the Old Testament.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 The Canon of the Old Testament I

Generally in literary studies the word Canon means “an official list of writings that are recognized as being truly the work of a certain writer or as being part of a larger collection of writings” (**Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English**, 1987 ed, p. 140). The word actually comes from the Greek word **Kanon** and it means something straight. In a metaphorical sense it refers to any norm, rule or standard of measurement. To “Canonize” is thus to establish a standard.

When it is applicable to the Bible, canon refers to the issues related to the process of compilation and the principles that led to the selection of the books that are regarded as inspired and authoritative. In the context of biblical study, canon, according to B. A. Sizemore, Jr. (1973, 49):

refers to the rigidly limited collection of literature which is believed by the religious community to be given by inspiration of God and to be the basic guide for the regulation of the religious life and the religious institution.

Old Testament canon developed from the Oral traditions of Israelites—poems, stories, memories – which they kept and passed on to their children (Deut. 6:6-9). During the times of Moses or David and Solomon attempts could have been made to write the history of Israel. The stories of earliest interest were probably the Exodus, the patriarchs and the creation. The personal name of God “Yahweh” appeared in these materials followed later by the ones that used the general name “Elohim”. King Josiah of Judah (640-609 B.C) discovered “the book of the law” in the temple (2 Kings 22:8) and it is traditionally identified as the book of Deuteronomy.

However, it was during the exile period in Babylon that many more materials were written and include: the Torah (the first five books), the history and sayings of the prophets, the wisdom and songs of the people. In the exilic and post-exilic periods the priest edited the law and the prophetic books. They also collected the books called Writings. Many scholars believe that the final collection and preservation of the Canon was done by Ezra.

#### *Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1*

What is the meaning of “Canon” as it applies to the Old Testament?  
How did it develop?

### 3.2 The Canon of the Old Testament II

The number and arrangement of books in the Hebrew Bible is not the same as that of the Christian Old Testament. However, the content is the same. The Roman Catholic and some Orthodox Catholic traditions also include the Apocrypha. The twenty-four books in the Canon of the Hebrew Scriptures are:

- (1) **The Law** (Torah, Pentateuch): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy;
- (2) **The Prophets** (Nebi'im): Former prophets – Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (called historical books in the Old Testament). Latter prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; The Book of the Twelve (the minor prophets).
- (3) **The Writings**: (Kethubi'im or Hagiographa) Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles.

Note the following differences when compared with the Christian Old Testament:

- (1) Ruth now comes after Judges, 1 & 2 Chronicles come after Kings and Esther comes after Nehemiah.
- (2) The books of Samuel and Kings are split into two each.
- (3) Ezra-Nehemiah has been split into two.
- (4) Daniel, as a major prophet, is grouped along with other major prophets.
- (5) The books of the Minor Prophets are counted individually.

#### Apocrypha

There are thirty nine books in the Christian Old Testament. There are fifteen other books in the Roman and Orthodox Catholic bibles called the Apocrypha. These books are contained in the earliest Greek Bibles. They are:

- (1) 1 and 2 Esdras,
- (2) Tobith,
- (3) Judith,
- (4) The additions to the book of Esther,

- (5) The wisdom of Solomon,
- (6) Ecclesiasticus or the wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach,
- (7) Baruch
- (8) The Letter of Jeremiah,
- (9) Story of Susanna,
- (10) The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Children (or Young Men),
- (11) Story of Bel and the Dragon,
- (12) Prayer of Manasseh, and
- (13) 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Some Christians read these books today for their moral values. Some other important Hebrew materials that were not canonized either in the Hebrew or Greek scriptures are known as **Pseudepigrapha**, meaning “false writings”. These materials were attributed to ancient authors. Examples are: Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and The Book of Enoch.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2***

Identify (with only one sentence each) the following terms in Old Testament Study: The Law, The Prophets, The Writings, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

### **3.3 Evolution of the Canon(s)**

The question which will now be addressed, though briefly, is how did the Canon(s) of the Old Testament evolve? As it was hinted above the establishment of OT Canon is usually associated with the development of postexilic Judaism. Josephus, a first century Jewish historian spoke about a collection of twenty two sacred writings from the time of Moses to that of Artaxerxes I of Persia, a contemporary of Ezra.

It appears as if Torah (in part or whole) was canonized at the pre-exilic period. Ezra most likely read from The Law (Neh. 8). Their obedience and submission to the word as seen in their response indicate acceptance of its authority. The document may be the J (Yahweh) and El (Elohim), narratives referred to above. That Law also helped to shape postexilic Jewish community. That the Law was considered to be important can also be inferred from the fact that it was translated into the Greek Language (and called Septuagint) around the middle of the third century. In view of these evidences it has been suggested that the Law was canonized, given a fixed and final form and recognized as authoritative, around 400 B.C.

Around 190 B.C. Jesus ben Sirach refers to the names of the books of the prophetic Canon. This implies that the collection has been completed. The Prophets must have achieved canonical status after the Exile by 200 B.C. Certainly the prophetic books were already canonized before the book of Daniel appeared in the second century B.C. The prophetic Canon was not likely closed by the end of the third century B.C.

The third section of the OT Canon, The Writings, is not of equal importance with the Law and the Prophets to the Hebrews. Also, it is not homogenous. The acceptance of some of these books (especially Esther, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes) was a matter of serious debate and substantial disagreement. At the Council of Jamnia in about AD 90 the rabbis apparently decided to canonize The Writings. This was done with “the principle that inspiration ceased with Ezra.” At that time it was necessary to have a fixed canon of scripture for the faith and religious practice of Judaism. These main three divisions (Law, Prophets and Writings) constitute the **Hebrew or Palestinian Canon** accepted by the Jews in Palestine.

However, the Jews in the Diaspora, especially Alexandria in Egypt, considered some other materials to be important. They included these in The Writings and translated it into Greek. These are the books referred to as Apocrypha. They are part of the **Alexandrian Canon**.

### *Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3*

What is the difference between the composition of Palestinian and Alexandrian Canons?

### **3.4 The Text of the Old Testament**

Since the Old Testament is cherished by both Jews and Christians the text has been carefully preserved. Our present Old Testament is based on the **Masoretic Text**. The Masoretes were the Jewish scholars who preserved the textual tradition of the Hebrew Bible. Initially there were many textual traditions of the Hebrew Bible. However, the Palestinian canon became definitive.

One of the problems of the study and history of the Old Testament text is that before the Christian era the **Sopherim** were the scribes that preserved the text. Unfortunately it is not known if they preserved one particular text or a variety of competing text forms. The problem is not solved by the **Septuagint (LXX)**, the Greek translation of the Old Testament done by seventy scholars in Egypt about 250 B.C. Unfortunately it is also difficult to determine the original LXX.



Another important Old Testament version is the **Samaritan Pentateuch**. This is the scripture of the Samaritans in Palestine and it is said to be written before 400 B.C. When the **Qumran Scrolls** were discovered in 1947 it raised the hope of getting older Hebrew manuscripts. The scrolls are dated from third century B.C. to the first years of the Christian era. The scrolls however support the earlier textual traditions used by the Septuagint, Samaritan Pentateuch and the Proto-Masoretic Text.

Apart from the Septuagint some other various versions of the Old Testament are:

- (1) **Aramaic Translations** (Targums) eg. Targum Onkelos (the Pentateuch) and the Targum Jonathan (the Prophets)
- (2) **Greek Versions/Translations:** That of Aquila (a Jewish proselyte from Pontus), That of Theodotion, Symmachus.
- (3) **Syriac Translations:** The standard one was called Peshitta.
- (4) **Latin Versions:** This appeared in North Africa in the late second century A.D. **Vulgate** replaced the Old Latin versions and it became the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.
- (5) **Other Ancient Versions:** Gothic (fourth century), Armenian (fifth century), Georgian (fifth century), Ethiopic (fourth century), Arabic versions (about the ninth century).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4***

Write short notes to identify the following Old Testament texts: Masoretic Text, The Greek Septuagint, Samaritan Pentateuch and Qumran Scrolls.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Our study of the canonization and text of the Old Testament ought to increase our confidence in the authenticity of the document. With particular reference to the study of the textual traditions, the conclusion of Sizemore Jr. (1973, 55) is that “we can thus be sure that our received text has been preserved without substantial change from very early time.”

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have studied the meaning and development of Old Testament Canon. We also considered the number and arrangement of books in the Hebrew Bible. The development of the Old Testament canon was highlighted and the classification of the books, first the

canonized ones: Law, Prophets and Writings. Then the ones not canonized: the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Evolution of the Palestinian and Alexandrian canons were also considered as well as the various texts/versions of the Old Testament.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT QUESTION**

How did the two Canons (Palestinian and Alexandrian) evolve?

## **7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES**

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## **UNIT 3 LITERARY FORMS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Rationale for Critical Literary Study of the Bible
  - 3.2 Poetry in the Old Testament
  - 3.3 Narratives in the Old Testament
  - 3.4 Other Literary Forms in the Old Testament
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment Questions
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

What will be done in this unit is to study the Old Testament as Literature. Since this may raise some doubt in your mind the unit will begin with a justification of the critical study of the Bible as literature. After this, two major literary genres of the Old Testament will be discussed, namely, poetry and narratives. Some other literary forms that will be briefly highlighted are prose, law, prophecy, apocalypse and wisdom literature.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

State the rationale for a critical literary study of the Bible,

List various literary forms in the Old Testament,

Describe the unique features of poetry in the Old Testament,

Discuss the nature of Old Testament narratives as interpreted history,

Highlight the following other literary genres in the Old Testament: prose, law, prophecy, apocalypse and wisdom literature.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Rationale for Critical Literary Study of the Bible**

One essential requirement to understand the Old Testament is to understand the nature of the literature. Some Christians object to the treatment of the Bible as literature because it is an inspired document. While that concern is understandable it should be recognized that the Spirit of God used human beings to record the message (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Since the divine message is communicated with human language we have no choice but to use some principles and tools of language studies with the help of the Holy Spirit to interpret the Bible.

Clyde T. Francisco (1977, 31-32) thus explains:

We need to renew an appreciation of the beauty of the biblical accounts, for it is the open door to the realization of the fundamental revelation... An appreciation of the sublime beauty of Old Testament literature will never destroy its religious interest, it will both enhance it.

In an academic study of the Bible like this course it is also common for students to express concern that it is not fair for the word of God to be treated with critical scholarship. Some fear that an academic study of the Scriptures will destroy it. This is over-protectionism as a spiritual attitude and that is naïve. Down the ages the Bible has been subjected to critical studies and it has survived the tests. Truth must never be afraid of critique. Even destructive criticism cannot destroy the word of God. Quiet to the contrary, through a critical study of the Bible we can have more knowledge of God and our understanding and faith will be strengthened the more. A critical bible study is both an academic and a spiritual exercise.

There are many literary forms in the Old Testament: Poetry, Narratives, Prose, Law, Prophecy, Apocalypse and Wisdom literature. These literary types will be studied in the next sections.

#### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1***

1. Is it proper for the Bible to be studied as literature? Explain
2. List seven literary genres in the Old Testament.

#### **3.2 Poetry in the Old Testament**

Poetry abounds in Psalms, Job, Songs, and other portions in the Old Testament. We see poems in prayers, songs and liturgies. In the **Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary** (2000, 895) poem is defined as "a piece of writing in which the words are chosen for their sound and the images they suggest, not just for their obvious meanings. The words are arranged in separate lines, usually with a repeated rhythm, and sometimes the lines RHYME at the end." With this definition people expect to see in a poem rhythm and rhyme. Only in few cases do we have rhyme in Hebrew poetry in the Old Testament. Examples are Judges 16:24; Psalms 14:1; some verses in Isaiah 40-60 (such as 43:2). However, these familiar features of common, modern poetry are lacking in most Hebrew poetry as found in the Old Testament. Hebrew poetry uses a rhythm of meaning and ideas and not that of sound and words.

The rhythm of thought in the Old Testament poetry is called parallelism and this is the most important internal characteristic of Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry emphasise parallelism. The second line echoes or reinforces the first. Some examples are (Ps. 14:1-2; Prov. 14:28 and Is. 1:3). The second line may repeat the thought of the first line (e.g. Ps. 2:4; Prov. 1:8; Job 22:3-11). The second line may contrasts with the first (e.g. Prov. 10:1, 5, 7; 22:16). The second line may also supplement the thought of the first (e.g. Prov. 1:10; 3:27-30).

What is more important to the Hebrew writers as recorded in the Old Testament is to record the mighty acts of God and to communicate the messages of God. In their songs, oracles and sayings they were not particularly concerned with literary style. Of course it is anachronistic to expect ancient writings to conform to modern, contemporary styles.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2**

What are the unique features of Hebrew poetry as seen in the Old Testament?

### **3.3 Narratives in the Old Testament**

Narratives in various types constitute about half of the whole of the Old Testament and it is the most common literary genre. Samuel, Kings and Chronicles are essentially historical books, along with many parts of Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Jonah and Haggai. The Israelites had a sense of history and their religion has always been a historical faith. The faith of the Old Testament people was based on concrete actions of God in their history such as the Exodus from Egypt, conquest of the Promised Land and restoration from exile.

It has been observed by several scholars that the biblical writers should not be seen as “historians” in the modern, objective, “documentary” sense. Objective history is a scientific enterprise supposedly devoid of personal prejudice. It requires accurate reporting and supply of information and it is impersonal. On the other hand biblical history does not only discover and report facts it also interprets the events and it is coupled with exhortation. As a religious reportage it is written to elicit faith and to call for obedience to God. The significance of the events recorded for the people of God are as important as the events themselves.

In view of this explanation Old Testament narratives are to be treated as interpreted history (technically called **Geschichte**) and not ordinary history (**Historie**). The interpreted history is the vehicle of the revelation and lesson that it seeks to communicate. Some scholars question the historicity of some Hebrew narratives and describe them as myth. In the last unit of this course we will examine some theological issues concerning creation, the fall of man, the flood and the like. For now we affirm that the biblical narratives are historically accurate and reliable while their overall interest is to interpret the acts of God. The Old Testament is not a document of philosophy of religion of the Israelites; it is a record of definite historical events.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3

A narrative in the Old Testament is an interpreted history. Discuss.

### 3.4 Other Literary Forms in the Old Testament

Some other literary genres found in the Old Testament are prose, law, prophecy, apocalypse and wisdom literature. These will now be highlighted. In a sense every part of the Old Testament that is not poetry is **prose**. Prose occurs in various forms like speeches, sermons, prayers and letters. Most prose sections of the Old Testament can be read and interpreted literally. However, some are figurative. Examples of symbolic prose in the Old Testament are allegory (Ezekiel 16) and apocalypse (Daniel 2:7-12). More will be said about interpretation of the Old Testament in the next unit.

The **laws** have unique literary forms in the Old Testament. The Israelites did not think of the law as legal codes as we do today. The law, as found in the Pentateuch is to them God’s revelation; It is not judicial but instructional. The two types of legislative forms found in Moses’ Laws are the casuistic style (e.g. Ex. 22:1, 14) and the apodictic type (e. g. Ex. 20:1-17).

**Prophetic** utterance is another kind of literary genres in the Old Testament. To prophesy is to speak for God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A prophet communicates God's message by forth-telling (speaking about present situation) or foretelling (speaking about the future). Unfortunately, however, a popular false view associates prophecy with only the predictive utterance. In the Old Testament God sent prophets to proclaim his word. They delivered the message with the popular formula, "Thus says the LORD. Two important types of prophecy are: prophecy of doom, judgement or disaster (e.g. 2 Kings 1:3-4; Mic. 1:2-7) and prophecy of salvation, restoration or hope (e.g. Jer. 28:2-4, Amos 9:11-15).

**Apocalypse** is actually a type of prophecy. In apocalyptic writings the message is usually presented in a hidden form. It is usually communicated in form of dreams, visions and symbols. Popular apocalypses of the Old Testament are found in Daniel and Zechariah 9-14.

**Wisdom Literature** constitutes a significant portion of The Writings, the third major division of the Old Testament. The wisdom literatures are Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes and some Psalms. They encourage godly choices in life. Proverbs are short parables. The wisdom lesson of Job is enigmatic while that of Ecclesiastes is puzzling.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4***

Write short notes on the following literary forms in the Old Testament:

1. Prose
2. Law
3. Prophecy
4. Apocalypse
5. Wisdom Literature

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

From our study of the literary forms in the Old Testament the following conclusions can be made:

It is in order to study the Old Testament text as literature with critical literary tools.

The Old Testament is full of literary forms like poetry, narratives, prose, law, prophecy, apocalypse and wisdom literature.

Literary genres in the Old Testament like poetry and narratives have unique forms and should be studied and interpreted accordingly.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This study started with justification of the examination of the Old Testament text with the tools of critical literary studies. The major literary forms identified and discussed, are poetry, (with characteristic parallelism), narratives (interpreted history). Some other literary genres identified are prose, laws, prophecy, apocalypse and wisdom literature.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS

1. List six literary genres in the Old Testament.
2. An Old Testament narrative is an interpreted history. Discuss.

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## **UNIT 4 INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Basics of Bible Interpretation
  - 3.2 History of Bible Interpretation
  - 3.3 Literal Interpretation of the Old Testament I
  - 3.4 Literal Interpretation of the Old Testament II
  - 3.5 Theological and Devotional Interpretation of the Old Testament
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment Question
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The question that this unit will attempt to answer is how do we interpret the Old Testament? Since there are different literary forms in the Old Testament there has to be different principles to interpret them. In this unit we will only examine the following general principles of hermeneutics: literal (grammatical and historical), theological and devotional. In a biblical hermeneutics course you will learn more about how to interpret figurative bible passages like: similes, metaphors, parables, prophecy, apocalypse and symbols.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

State the meaning and importance of biblical hermeneutics,

Highlight the development of biblical hermeneutics from the patristic to the contemporary periods

Describe and evaluate the allegorical school of bible interpretation

State and evaluate the literal approach to the interpretation of the Old Testament

Discuss grammatical and historical principles of bible hermeneutics,

Explain the interpretation of Old Testament with theological and devotional approaches.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Basics of Bible Interpretation**

Hermeneutics is the theory of text interpretation, in a biblical and theological context. It is the process of determining what the Bible is saying. Biblical interpretation follows certain rules or principles, it is thus a science. One important purpose of biblical hermeneutics is to derive accurately from the text what it says in its original setting. This is technically known as **exegesis**. The opposite of exegesis is **eisegesis** to read into the Bible pre-conceived ideas of the interpreter.

Exposure to the history, principles and rules of Biblical interpretation help people to avoid or overcome eisegesis. When an interpreter has been able to determine the meaning of a bible passage to the original readers he will now convey that meaning to the contemporary reader.

Accurate interpretation of the Bible is important because since it has the breath of God, it is thus authoritative for Christian faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Unfortunately, the biblical texts especially the Old Testament were first of all communicated to people about four thousand years ago. The ideas, thoughts and worldviews of the authors and first recipients are also so much different from ours today. Historical, cultural, linguistic, geographical and philosophic gaps exist between those ancient authors and the modern readers. Actually an important concern of biblical hermeneutics is how to bridge the gaps.

The task of biblical interpretation is thus how to correctly handle the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Christian leaders and scholars have recognized this sacred responsibility across the ages. At the different periods of church history (patristic/medieval, reformation, modern/contemporary) several rules, schools and principles of Bible hermeneutics have been designed to interpret the word of God. These will be surveyed in the next section.

#### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1***

Write a short note on the meaning and importance of biblical hermeneutics.

### 3.2 History of Bible Interpretation

In Nehemiah chapter 8 we see rudimentary steps of hermeneutics. We are told that Ezra read from the Book of the Law, he made it clear and he gave the meaning or sense (8:8). About three steps were involved in that task to help Israelites understand the law. Before the Christian Era Greek philosophers have been using grammatical and allegorical methods to interpret texts. Jewish scholars borrowed these ideas from the Greeks to understand the Torah.

The four types of **Jewish exegesis** are literal, midrashic, peshet and allegorical. Peshet (literal hermeneutics) served as the basis of other types. For midrashic interpretation Rabbi Hillel gave rules of rabbinic exegesis such as comparison of ideas words or phrases. Qumran communities practiced peshet interpretation by giving eschatological emphasis to their doctrines.

During the periods of the **church fathers** as well as the **medieval time** there was debate about the use of literal, allegorical and other senses/of scripture and schools of bible interpretation – typological, analogical, anagogical and typological. Many interpreters favoured allegorical hermeneutics which was spiritual and mystical in nature. Allegory believes that real or spiritual meaning of a passage can be found beneath the ordinary and obvious meaning.

Philo and Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Augustine emphasized multiple senses of scripture. For example Augustine taught that the ark built by Noah represented the church. The church is rescued by the wood (cross) on which Christ hung; the dimensions of the ark stand for the physical body of Christ; the door in its side signifies the wound inflicted in the side of Christ (John P. Newport, 1973, 25).

We observe that allegorical interpretation which involves looking for hidden and spiritual meaning appear “smart” but it is actually arbitrary and even “magical.” Little wonder that the Reformers called it “monkey tricks” and abandoned it. However, even at the patristic/medieval periods Antiochene scholars (like Mopsuestia and Chrysostom) rejected it.

Emphases of biblical interpretation during the **Reformation** (by Luther, Calvin and others) are: humanistic interpretation, Christological exegesis and clarity of scripture. The Reformers opposed allegorical approach to interpretation, supported the use of grammatical and historical approach with the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Some important biblical hermeneutist in the **modern** periods are Schleiermacher and Bultmann. One particular feature of biblical

hermeneutics today is the influence of historical-critical methods. As observed by Newport (1973, 27), “Unfortunately, in most cases, non-biblical philosophical presuppositions guided the historical investigation and criticism of the Bible.” Theological and devotional principles of Bible interpretation have helped to balance the critical methods.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2***

Describe (with only one sentence each) the nature of biblical hermeneutics of the following periods:

- (1) Jewish exegesis,
- (2) Church Fathers/Medieval,
- (3) The Reformation,
- (4) Modern/Contemporary Time

### **3.3 Literal Interpretation of the Old Testament I**

Literal Bible interpretation “takes the natural, straightforward sense of a text or passage as fundamental.” A text is taken to mean what it says unless the context or expression indicates otherwise. Actually, the literal interpretation of the Bible is a combination of grammatical and historical principles. As a historical product the Bible was written by human beings with the use of their languages and in the context of their conditions. Grammatical interpretation of the Old Testament involves:

The study of the roots of words (etymology)

Current usage and idioms

Relationship of words (syntax)

Method of thought of the author

Type of literature (narrative, poem, etc).

#### **Illustrative Example**

To interpret the meaning of creation of human beings in the image of God, some scholars in the past made a distinction between image (**tselem**) and likeness (**demut**) in Genesis 1:26. In contemporary studies however the “image” and “likeness” are regarded to be synonymous. In that text we find an example of Hebrew parallelism where ideas are repeated for emphasis.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3***

Using one example discuss how the grammatical principle can be used to interpret the Old Testament.

### **3.4 Literal Interpretation of the Old Testament II**

The historical principle of bible interpretation also includes the geographical and cultural backgrounds of the original readers. Contemporary interpreters of the Old Testament cannot but identify “with the life and feelings of biblical times.” The Old Testament originated in a particular historical context. It cannot be understood correctly outside the context. Any serious Old Testament study today requires the studies of the history and culture of biblical people with the use of histories and atlases.

#### **Illustrative Example**

In the Old Testament we see a covenant making and keeping God in the call of Abraham and the covenant God made with him to possess the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1; 15:18-21). In Gen. 23, we read that after the death of Sarah in Kiriath Arba. Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah (v.9) for a burial site. Many years later when the descendants of Abraham were sent to spy the land under the leadership of Moses the people got to Hebron (Num. 13:22). Moses promised that Caleb would inherit the land (Num. 14:24). Forty-five years later, Caleb asked for and got the hill country (Joshua 14:10-15). That story has significant implications not only for the modern state of Israel but also for the Christian faith and mission but it cannot be appreciated without the knowledge of the historical geography of the Old Testament.

While the literal (grammatical and historical) approach to interpret the Old Testament is good, we need to avoid literalism. This is because some passages of the Old Testament cannot be interpreted with the literal principle (e.g. Isa. 55:12; Jug. 9:7-15; Dan. 2:31-35). Literal interpretation recognizes that there are bible passages that are symbolic and metaphorical. Interpretation of such figurative texts requires special hermeneutical principles that are usually discussed in a full course on biblical hermeneutics. Unfortunately today there are preachers and teachers of the bible who engage in hyper literalism more often than not in sincere ignorance.

#### ***Self-Assessment Exercises 3.4***

1. What is the literal principle of Bible Interpretation?
2. Evaluate its limitation in Old Testament hermeneutics.

### 3.5 Theological and Devotional Interpretation of the Old Testament

Biblical interpretation is a theological discipline. Hermeneutics and theology are related because both are concerned with interpretation of the word of God. Christian interpretation of the Old Testament is based on the conviction that the Bible is written to lead us to faith in God and the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament and fulfilled in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Messiah, as recorded in the New Testament. This is a theological foundation on which the truths of Old Testament studies should stand.

In addition to the knowledge of geography, history and grammar of the Bible an existential commitment to faith in Jesus Christ also provides a spiritual, theological disposition for biblical hermeneutics. This theological principle also involves doctrinal interpretation. Luther and some other Protestant Reformers used the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith as the central motif for bible interpretation. Today, many scholars argue that the bible should be interpreted with the themes of salvation and eschatology. The devotional method is sometime called practical principle and the concern is to relate biblical studies and meaning to contemporary life. Devotional interpretation calls for application of Bible truths.

#### Illustrative Examples

1. Old Testament students have asked for the meaning of “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated” (Mal. 1:2-3). A critical study shows: **One**, this is the Hebrew way of stating “a comparison rather than a direct opposite.” It is like saying loves Jacob more than Esau; **Two**, from the perspective of the doctrine of election it really means “I chose Jacob and not Esau”; **Three**, theologically we cannot ascribe hatred to God who is loving, who is love (1 John 4:16).

2. How do we interpret Isaiah’s vision of “the king, the LORD Almighty” (Isa. 6:1-6)? What of the throne, robe and bodily appearance? It is significant that this vision is remarkably similar to that of Apostle John (Rev. 4:1-8). It teaches some abiding lessons; **One**, God is personal, holy, and awesome; **Two**, the otherness and transcendence of God means we must never identify (equate) God with man; **Three**, it is imperative to receive a vision of God as part of one’s call and commission to serve the Lord.

#### *Self-Assessment Exercise 3.5*

Why is it necessary for the Old Testament to be interpreted theologically? Give one example.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

With regard to the controversy about principles of interpretation before the Reformation, John P. Newport (1973, 26) stated that “Critical scholarship combined with a devout Christian faith, is the answer to a dogmatic church-controlled interpretation.” Our study this unit shows that for sound interpretation of the Old Testament today we also need to combine “Critical scholarship” with “a devout Christian faith.” Good biblical interpretation is always both an academic and spiritual exercise.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

This unit has examined how to interpret the Old Testament. The meaning and importance of biblical hermeneutics were stated. This was followed by a highlight of the history of biblical interpretation at the various periods of church development: patristic, medieval, Reformation, Modern and Contemporary. Literal (grammatical and historical), theological and devotional principles of interpretation were also considered.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Write a short note on The Literal Principle of Bible Interpretation.
2. Discuss the problem of literalism in Old Testament Hermeneutics.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES**

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## **UNIT 5      CRITICAL      APPROACHES      IN      OLD TESTAMENT STUDY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Meaning and Rationale for Biblical Criticism
  - 3.2 Textual Criticism of the Old Testament
  - 3.3 Literary Criticism of the Old Testament I (Source)
  - 3.4 Literary Criticism of the Old Testament II (Form)
  - 3.5 Literary Criticism of the Old Testament III (History)
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment Questions
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the study of the Canon and Text of the Old Testament in unit 2 we tried to answer the question “how did the Old Testament text develop”? We considered how oral traditions were eventually written down. We also highlighted the history of canonization of the three main divisions of the Old Testament: The Law, The Prophets and The Writings. In this unit we will build on that information by discussing how scholars today study biblical writings “to ascertain their original wording, the nature of their composition, their sources, date, authorship and the like,” F. F. Bruce (1988, 93). This is what is known as biblical criticism.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Define Biblical Criticism and state the rationale for the field of study

State the two major sub-divisions and five methods of biblical criticism

Explain the method of textual criticism of the Old Testament

Discuss source criticism of the Old Testament

Describe form criticism of the Old Testament

Explain historical and redaction criticisms of the Old Testament

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Meaning and Rationale for Biblical Criticism**

Biblical Criticism is a contemporary approach to the study of the Bible. It is a study of biblical writings, according to Harrington (1987, 115), “in order to establish their text, understand their context and style, and determine their origin and authenticity.” Issues examined in critical biblical studies include: title, date, authorship, setting, occasion/purpose, literary features, theme/message/theology, and structure/outline.

Since this is an introductory course it is necessary to clarify that biblical criticism is not a fault-finding, destructive critique of the bible. Like other literary criticism it is an analysis, assessment or even appreciation of biblical materials so we can understand and interpret them better. Beginners in critical study of the Bible may initially find it to be spiritually disturbing. However, committed Christian scholars involved in this discipline find it not only to be academically challenging but also spiritually rewarding.

Some bible students also wonder “what is the necessity of this inquiry into the past process that biblical writings have gone through?” To this sincere question we respond that generally in life we understand, know and appreciate somebody or something the more when we know the background. I once pastored a church where people were disposed to see me like any other pastor. One reason why some members related better with me more than others in the pastorate is that they knew me more because they knew my spiritual background and antecedents.

The truth is that the more we know of the background of the Bible the better we will understand it. Believe me, critical introductory study of the Bible is not a mere scholarly exercise. It is a profound spiritual life experience. This is one way for us to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18).

#### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1***

1. What is biblical criticism?
2. Is it a useful spiritual exercise?

### 3.2 Textual Criticism of the Old Testament

Textual criticism is the starting point of biblical critical methods and it is also called lower criticism. Lower criticism, according to John I. Durham (1973, 87), “attempts the most accurate reconstruction of the text which is possible with attention to its earliest known form and the history of its transmission from earliest times to the present. Its object is to approach as closely as possible the purest and most original form of the Old Testament text.” This task is necessary because we do not have a single copy of any of the autograph (original) of any of the Old Testament books.

As explained earlier, today, we have many traditions of the Hebrew text in parts and whole. As specialists study these texts they see omissions and scribal mistakes introduced into the text during the process of copying and transmission. The textual specialists have vast knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Syriac and Latin. They are therefore “able to compare the various manuscripts and thus bring us closer to what the original copies said.” The good thing is that much more than other ancient manuscripts there are more copies of biblical manuscripts to work with.

Moreover, the variants constitute only about 5% of the text due to problems like lack of vowels and punctuation in the original, division of words and sentences, omission or addition of letters and words. It is thus comforting to read the observation of Durham (1973, 88), “the text of the Old Testament is remarkably well preserved, considering the length of its history and the complicated circumstances under which it has been transmitted.” **The NIV Study Bible** provides some textual critical information as **text notes**. I will now direct you to study some of them.

#### Self-Assessment Exercises 3.2

1. What is textual criticism?
2. Study the text notes (not study notes) of the following passages in **The NIV Study Bible** (1995): Gen. 4:8; 18:22; 22:13; Lev. 11:2; 1 Sam. 10:1; Job 4:21; Ps. 9&10; 145:13 (for example, that of Gen. 4:8 read: “Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac: Masoretic text does not have “Let’s go out to the field.”

### 3.3 Literary Criticism of the Old Testament I (Source)

Literary criticism is also called higher criticism. The three categories of literary criticism and their concerns are:

- (1) **Source Criticism:** What are the sources of the literature?  
Who is (are) the author(s) of the books?
- (2) **Form Criticism:** In what forms or styles did the Old Testament text develop?
- (3) **Historical Criticism:** What is the history behind the use of the sources and the development of the forms and styles of the Old Testament?

### Source Criticism

Source Criticism of the Old Testament has deliberated much on the authorship of the Pentateuch. Jewish and Christian traditions have identified Moses as the author. Internal references support this position (e.g. Deut. 1:1; 2 Kings 14:6; Ezra 6:18; 2 Chr. 25:4; Mark 12:26). Many Pentateuch critics now hold the opinion that the first five books of the Bible is not a unity and the whole of it is not a composition of Moses. This view is held in view of reasons such as: Variations in the creation accounts (Gen. 1, 2); Repetitions e.g. Pretence of Abraham that Sarah is his Sister (Gen. 12, 20); The same place and people named differently (Mt. Sinai and Horeb, Jethro and Reuel); and Different names/conceptions of God (Yahweh and Elohim).

While some scholars deny Mosaic authorship most holds that Moses used available traditions to write the books. In 1878 Julius Wellhausen, a German biblical scholar, suggested that the Pentateuch evolved through four stages called JEDP hypothesis (1) **Yahwistic history** written in the time of Solomon (J); (2) **Elohistic history** written in the eight century B.C. (E); (3) **Deuteronomic history**, the book discovered by Josiah in 621 B.C. (D); (4) **Priestly history**. Around 450 B.C. priests compiled the above and added legal materials (P). Some other scholars have challenged the JEDP hypothesis. Like several other Old Testament books, source criticism now claims that three sources were used to compose the Pentateuch: oral, written and editorial.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3

1. What is source criticism?
2. How does source criticism apply to Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch?

### **3.4 Literary Criticism of the Old Testament II (Form)**

Form criticism is concerned with the sources which used the literary forms as well as the “theological motifs which are recurrent throughout the sources.” As explained by John I. Durham (1973, 92) the question of form analysis is “how the text was composed; i.e., in what forms and styles, quite apart from whether the composition was oral or written.” It is thus a study of the smaller units that make up the larger texts.

We have learned from form criticism that throughout the Old Testament consistent styles and patterns are employed in the following: Prophetic sermons, Priestly blessings and curses, Expositions of law, Hymnic praising and Lament of the individual worshipper.

Form analysis of Psalms, legal and prophetic literature has been done. By studying Psalms of similar content and form it was discovered that hymns of praise always contain a call to worship (e.g. 105:1-4; 113:1-3) and a creedal basis for praise in worship (e.g. 105:5f; 113:4f). Form analysis also deal with the types of literature and styles of composition. Poetry and prose are the major categories in the Old Testament.

#### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4**

Write a short note on Form Criticism of the Old Testament.

### **3.5 Literary Criticism of the Old Testament III (History)**

The study of the literary history of the Old Testament combines source-research and form-analysis discussed in the last two sections above. Historical criticism of the Old Testament tries to construct its sequential biography. While the question is still authorship as for source criticism the answer include “the origin of both the content and the forms in which this content is expressed, the time and circumstances of the composition of the various parts of the Old Testament and its compilation into the array of books which we know.” Durham (1973, 94).

Some historical critics have also worked on the literary forms and motifs of the Old Testament in their relation to the context of ancient Near East. They have used discoveries in archaeology to recover the “situation of life” of the writings of the Old Testament. They are also able to trace history of Old Testament in various stages: oral traditions, written sources and editorial composition while the presence of God is discoverable in the history of Israel, the influence of other peoples and nations on them is also recognized.

An aspect of historical criticism is called **redaction criticism**. It is a theological criticism and it complements historical analysis. Scholars proposed that editors of Old Testament text collected and preserved written sources available to them. However, they also selected and used these materials for particular theological purpose. For instance the author (redactor, theologian) of Chronicles omitted some portions of Samuel and Kings (such as the affair with Bathsheba) so as to present David as the ideal King of Israel.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.5***

1. What is historical criticism?
2. What is redaction criticism?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

I believe that by now you would have appreciated the more (however little) the need for and the task of critical approaches of Old Testament study. I wish to state again that the overriding intention of this exercise is for us to have a better understanding of the word of God. The benefits derived from the tools of biblical criticism include: establishment of Old Testament text, more understanding of the context and style, better assurance of the origin and authenticity of the materials. We ought to appreciate the efforts of these scholars. Some of the results of their labour are made available in Study Bibles and these have enriched our understanding and use of scriptures.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

This unit has built on the discussion on Canon and Text of the Old Testament. The unit started with the meaning and rationale for critical approaches in biblical studies. Two major types of Old Testament criticisms are studied. The first is lower or textual criticism concerned with construction of a text that will be close to the original text. The second is literary analysis with divisions of source, form history and redaction criticisms. The task of literary history of the Old Testament is to discover how the text came to be, the content and the style. In the next modules we will discuss how these tools have been used to study the different books of the Old Testament.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS**

What is source criticism of the Old Testament? Illustrate with Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

## **7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES**

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## **UNIT 6      CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE PENTATEUCH I**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Introduction to the Pentateuch I
  - 3.2 General Introduction to the Pentateuch II
  - 3.3 Critical Introduction to Genesis I
  - 3.4 Critical Introduction to Genesis II
  - 3.5 Critical Introduction to Exodus I
  - 3.6 Critical Introduction to Exodus II
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment Question
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is the beginning of the second module of the course on Critical Introduction to the Old Testament. The module will introduce you to a Critical Study of the first two major divisions of the Old Testament, namely, The Law and The Prophets. This first unit will begin with a general introduction to the Pentateuch. After that each individual book will be studied under sub-sections like title, author, date, literary features, outline, theme, message and theology.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to: State the

contents, authorship and themes of the Pentateuch Mention the

tools that are used for critical introduction to the Bible

Discuss critical introduction to Genesis with particular reference to its title, background, date, literary features, theme, message and theology

Discuss critical introduction to Exodus, its title, author, date, the route, outline, theme and theology.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**



### 3.1 General Introduction to the Pentateuch

The first five books of the Bible is called “Pentateuch” (“meaning five scrolls”) or the Law (Hebrew, Torah). They are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Some scholars speak of Hexateuch and consider the book of Joshua to be “the necessary conclusion of the historical narratives” found in the other five books. While the Pentateuch contains different literary materials (as discussed in unit five of module 1) it is homogeneous with inherent unity, clear purpose and objectives that are recognizable.

Pentateuch contains the story of the people of God from the call of Abraham in the Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 11) the death of Moses in the plains of Moab (Deut. 34). While it is extremely difficult for us to be sure of the dates of this part of the history of Israel, it is certain that the period concerned about 600 years, 1900B.C. to 1250B.C. accordingly to **The Lion Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 122), or 2100B.C. to 140B.C. according to **The NIV Study Bible** (1995).

The Pentateuch begins with a prologue (Genesis 1-11). The ancient records and tradition as explained by John Taylor (1983, 122) “serve not only to introduce the main themes of the narrative but also to relate them to God’s purpose in the world of fallen mankind.” The first section of the Pentateuch deals with the generations of the four patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (Genesis 12-50). The second section contains the history of the birth and life of Moses (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).

#### Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1

Pentateuch is one book divided into five sections. Discuss.

### 3.2 General Introduction to the Pentateuch II

Some important themes in Pentateuch are election, covenant, law and redemption. These and some other doctrines will be studied in Old Testament Theology course not only in the Torah but in the entire Old Testament Canon. The story of Pentateuch is that God chose and called one man (Abraham) and through him and his descendants God gave his revelation and blessing to the whole world.

Another important aspect of a critical introduction to the Pentateuch is the question of authorship. The traditional Mosaic authorship has been challenged in modern scholarship with the JEDP hypothesis of Wellhausen as explained in the last unit. It is significant to observe

however that the modern view lacks conclusive evidence. According to Ronald Youngblood (1995, 2) “intensive archaeological and literary research has tended to undercut many of the arguments used to challenge Mosaic authorship”.

Some related criticisms of the Pentateuch are that its history is incredible, that the account of the supernatural is questionable and that the authors did not receive special revelation of God. Over and against these skeptical scholarships we affirm the historicity of the records and the inspiration of the word of God. As a matter of fact, both internal claims (e.g. Ex. 17:14; 24:4; 34:27; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 31:9, 24) and external evidence (Josh. 1:7; Ezra 6:18; 7:6; Matt. 8:4; John 5:45-47) support mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

### *Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2*

Write a short note to introduce a new Christian to the Pentateuch.

### **3.3 Critical Introduction to Genesis I**

Tools of biblical introduction that will be used for a critical study of Genesis in the next two sections are title, background, date, literary, features, theme, message and theology.

#### **Title**

The title of the first book of Pentateuch and the whole Bible, Genesis, is derived from the Greek translation (Septuagint) of Gen. 2:4; 5:1. “Bereshith” (in the beginning) is the first phrase in the Hebrew text. The book is actually a book of beginnings and origin.

#### **Background**

A substantial part of the story of Genesis is located in Mesopotamia. A working knowledge of the life and culture of ancient Mesopotamia will enrich our study and understanding of Genesis. A number of ancient literary sources that come from Mesopotamia and are parallels to Genesis are **Enamellist**, **Gilgamesh epic**, **Atrahasis epic**, **Mari letters** and **The Nazi tablets**. These documents are described in **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, np) as follows:

**Enamellist:** “Marduk, the Babylonian god of cosmic order, is elevated to the supreme position in the pantheon. The 7-tablet epic contains an account of creation (cf. Gen. 1-2).”

**Gilgamesh epic:** “Gilgamesh, ruler of Uruk, experiences numerous adventures, including a meeting with Utnapishtim, the

only survivor of a great deluge (cf. Gen. 6-9).” The 11<sup>th</sup> tablet is similar to the flood narrative.

**Atrahasis epic:** “A cosmological epic depicts creation and early human history, including the flood (cf. Gen. 19).” Just like the biblical account, it has the motif of creation, rebellion and flood.

**Mari letters:** “Letters and administrative texts provide detailed information regarding customs, language and personal names that reflect the culture of the OT patriarchs.”

**Nuzi tablets:** “Adoption, birthright-sale and other legal documents graphically illustrate OT patriarchal customs ... centuries earlier.”

**Tale of Two Brothers:** “A young man rejects the amorous advances of his older brother’s wife (cf. Gen. 39).”

While the first five documents are Akkadian the last is Egyptian. The Akkadians were Semites and they lived in Mesopotamia around 2350-2150 B.C. The Israelites also came from the Semites. The heirs of the Akkadians are Babylonians and Assyrians.

## Date

As discussed in the General Introduction to the Pentateuch, the dates of early Israel history are approximate. Some scholars think that Moses most likely wrote the bulk of the Pentateuch during the forty-years of the wanderings of Israelites in the desert which was about 1446 to 1406 B.C.

### *Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3*

Mention five ancient Mesopotamia texts that are parallels to some sections of Genesis.

## 3.4 Critical Introduction to Genesis II

This section will introduce you more to the literary features, theme, message and theology of the book of Genesis.

## Literary Features

After the introduction (1:1-2:3) the body of Genesis can be divided into ten accounts of Creation, Adam, Noah, Shem/Ham/Japheth, Shem, Terah, Ismael, Isaac, Esau and Jacob. The introduction and the first five accounts can be grouped together to form the “primeval” or general history (1:1-11:26) while the last five can be called “patriarchal history” (11:27-50:26). However, theologically speaking, the first part is described by the **NIV Disciple’s Study Bible** (1988, 2-3) as “The Nature of Human Life” while the second part is called “The Mission and Nature of God’s Family”.

### **Theme Message and Theology**

Genesis highlights the relationship between God and nature, God and humanity, man and fellow men. It teaches monotheism and opposes atheism, polytheism and pantheism. It affirms the sovereignty of God over the entire creation. The theological nature of the message of Genesis about the universe, human creation and the fall will be examined in the last unit of this course.

For now it is sufficient to assert that in Genesis we find the beginning of biblical doctrines of “creation, God, salvation, sin, family, mission, humanity and hope”. There are some theological conclusions that can be drawn from genesis. The major ones are that God is the creator and sustainer of the world, that human trouble is due to rebellion (sin), that humanity received great potential and responsibility through creation in God’s image, that human sin will be punished, that human hope lies in redemption, which human identity centers in missions (**Disciple’s Study Bible**, 1988, 2-3). The book of Genesis teaches us that as God dealt with Noah, Abraham and others God is still speaking to us and is reaching out to us with a missionary purpose to bless all nations through us.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4**

1. List seven tools of critical introduction to Genesis.
2. Write a concise note on the theme, message and theology of Genesis.

### **3.5 Critical Introduction to Exodus I**

#### **Title**

The name exodus is a Latin word derived from the Greek word **exodus**. It means exit, departure or outgoing and it is retained in the LXX and Vulgate. In the Hebrew Bible, the title of the book is “And these are the names” based on the first words in the book. This shows that the book is a continuation of a narrative that began in Genesis.

## Author

Discussion of the general introduction to the whole Pentateuch and the critical introduction to Genesis apply to Exodus. Statements that indicate Mosaic authorship include Ex. 17:14; 24:4; 34:27 others are Jos. 8:31; Mk. 7:10; 12:26 and Luke 2:22-23.

## Date

The exodus event took place between 1450 B.C. and 1250 B.C. One principal view is that the exit occurred during the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty in Egypt. The Pharaohs of oppression and exodus are identified as Thutmose III and Amunhotep II respectively (see Ex. 2:15; 23:3, 10). Another view locates the exodus during the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty with Set I and Rameses II as Pharaohs of the oppression and the exodus respectively (see Ex. 1:110). The traditional date that many scholars still affirm is 1440B.C. For more discussion please see Francisco (1977, 75-76) or **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 83-84).

## The Route

Three routes of escape from Pithom and Rameses (Ex. 1:11) that have been proposed are: **One**, a northern route through the land of the Philistines. This is unlikely because of Ex. 13:17; **Two**, a middle route leading eastward across Sinai to Beersheba; **Three**, a southern route. The most likely route appear to be the southern route along the west coast of Sinai (see page 106 or map 3 of **The NIV Study Bible** [1995]).

### *Self-Assessment Exercise 3.5*

Write one sentence about each of the following to introduce the book of Exodus: Title, Author, Date and The Route.

## 3.6 Critical Introduction to Exodus II

### Outline

The book of Exodus can be divided into five parts:

- Introduction (1:1-7): Death of Joseph and their multiplication;
- Their experience of oppression (1:8-12:36);
- The Exodus and journey to Mount Sinai (12:37-19:1);
- The Giving of the law, the covenant and its renewal (19:2-34);
- The construction of the Tabernacle (35-40).

### Theme and Theology

In Exodus we have a record of the revelation of God especially his attributes, redemption, law and how God is to be worshipped. The attributes of Yahweh revealed include justice, truthfulness, mercy, faithfulness and holiness (Ex. 3:13-15; 6:3). It contains the Mosaic (or Sinaitic) covenant of God that transformed Israelites from being a family to a nation.

Exodus emphasises theology of salvation as redemption (Ex. 6:6, 4:12; 15:13; 24). The Ten Commandments and some other passages constitute the foundation of biblical ethics and morality. Instructions concerning the Tabernacle (Ex. 25-40) constitute integral aspects of the biblical theology of worship. Some theological conclusions that are derivable from Exodus include the ideas that God is covenant-maker and keeper, the Lord of history, the Deliverer of the oppressed who calls and uses people for service; he demands righteous living and he wants to be worshipped as he dwells among his people (**NIV Disciple's Study Bible, 1988, 72-73**).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.6***

Exodus is a book of revelation redemption, ethics and the law. Discuss.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In the books of Genesis Exodus we find many teachings and lessons; God is one and sovereign over the universe; God is the source and sustainer of creation in general and humanity in particular; God cares for those who are oppressed and is able and interested in delivering and redeeming them; when God calls and we obey we are expected to see holy and righteous lives; He is the King of glory who is to be worshipped.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

This unit began with a general introduction to Pentateuch, the nature, the contents and the themes were highlighted and the mosaic authorship was affirmed. This was followed by critical introduction to the book of Genesis through a study of the title, background (some ancient literary sources), date, literary features, theme, message and theology of beginnings and relationships. The unit also considered the book of Exodus. The title, author, date, route of Exodus, outline, theme and theology of the book were also introduced.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT QUESTION**

What is the theological contribution of Genesis to the Bible?

## **7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES**

Francisco, Clyde T. (1977) **Introducing the Old Testament**, pp. 55-84.

Tullock, John H. (1981) **The Old Testament Story**, pp. 35-83.

**The NIV Study Bible** (1995), pp. 1-87.

Taylor, John (1983) "The Five Books" **The Lion Handbook to the Bible**, pp. 122-126.

**Disciple's Study Bible** (1988), pp. 1-124.

McCain, Danny (2002) **Notes on Old Testament Introduction**, pp. 27-74.

## **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Critical Introduction to Leviticus I: Title, Themes
  - 3.2 Critical Introduction to Leviticus II: Outline and Theological Significance
  - 3.3 Critical Introduction to Numbers I: Title, Author and Outline
  - 3.4 Critical Introduction to Numbers II: Large Numbers and Lessons
  - 3.5 Critical Introduction to Deuteronomy I: Title, Author and Setting
  - 3.6 Critical Introduction to Deuteronomy II: Content, Outline and Value
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment Questions
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is the second part of critical introduction to the Pentateuch. The first two books (Genesis and Exodus) were considered in the last unit. In this unit the remaining three books (Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) will be examined. Each introduction will contain a highlight of the themes and message which would be studied briefly. Some of those theological questions that will be raised will be answered in the last unit of the course.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Discuss the title, themes, outline and theological significance of Leviticus

Describe the title, author, outline, large numbers and lessons of the book of Numbers

Explain the title, author, setting, content, outline and value of Deuteronomy



### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Critical Introduction to Leviticus I: Title, Themes

##### Title

The third book of the Bible takes its name from the tribe of Levi. More accurately, the title is derived from Levitical priest who administered the law and assisted the Aaronic priests to take care of the tabernacle. Leviticus is a book of laws about ritual and worship. The general discussions of the mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch apply to Leviticus as well.

##### Theme

Three prominent issues in Leviticus are law, sacrifices and the tabernacle. Different kinds of sacrifices are recommended in the book, these are:

- (1) **Sin Offering** – the use of blood of animals to obtain forgiveness,
- (2) **Burnt Offering** – burning the whole animal as a sign of dedication or consecration.
- (3) **Peace or fellowship Offering** – a picture of communion between God and Man,
- (4) **Cereal or grain Offering** – usually accompanying burnt and peace offerings,
- (5) **Guilt, repayment, motive or trespass Offering** – for restitution, payment of a vow,
- (6) **Thank Offering** – to express gratitude for favour or blessing received,
- (7) **Freewill Offering** – to voluntarily express love and devotion to God,
- (8) **Meal Offering** – to dedicate fruits of labour to God,
- (9) **Drink Offering.**

Many times two or more types of offering go together in the sacrificial system. The sacrifices, especially the ones which involved blood of animals, were a constant reminder of the sin which cut off Israelites from the presence of God. This sacrificial system in Leviticus helps us to understand the meaning of the death of Jesus, a sacrifice for the redemption of humanity. This is a “vital role in God’s message of salvation”. The laws were given for the total welfare of the people of God and this includes even matters of health and hygiene. The laws also concern regulations for worship in the tabernacle with elaborate

instructions about ceremonial cleanness, morality, holy days, the Sabbath and the year of Jubilee.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1**

List seven kinds of sacrifices in Leviticus. What is the significance of the sacrificial system?

### **3.2 Critical Introduction to Leviticus II: Outline and Theological Significance**

#### **Outline**

The major divisions of Leviticus are:

- (1) Laws concerning sacrifice, purification and atonement (1-16)
- (2) The Holiness Code – moral and ceremonial requirements with emphasis on holiness (17-26)
- (3) Vows and Tithes (27).

From the viewpoint of the message of the book, it has been outlined by the **NIV Disciple's Study Bible** (1988, 125-127) thus:

- (1) Offer yourself in praise and adoration to God (1:1-7:38),
- (2) Consecrate priests to mediate between God and man (8:1-10:20),
- (3) Purify yourself before God (11:1-16:34),
- (4) Present yourself in holiness before God (17:1-26:46),
- (5) Offer proper vows before God (17:1-34).

#### **Theological Significance**

While God is holy the Israelites were sinful Leviticus deals with how a sinful people could relate with and worship a holy God. It is always a sacred event to stand in the presence of God. Leviticus is significant for the lessons on a life of consecration required of human beings to worship a holy God. It teaches that God requires righteousness, holiness, purity and godliness from his people. Rituals and sacrifices described in Leviticus are no longer applicable today because of the once-for-all perfect sacrifice of Jesus for our sin. In Christ we have been forgiven and cleansed from our sin. Nonetheless we need to continue to approach God with holy reverence.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2***

Write a short note on the theological significance of the book of Leviticus.

### **3.3 Critical Introduction to Numbers I: Title, Author and Outline**

#### **Title**

The title of the book is based on the Septuagint version because of the census figures found in chapters 1 and 26. The Jewish title is “in the desert” (“bemidhbar”). This is very descriptive of the contents since the book contains the wanderings of Israelites in the wilderness for 38 years.

#### **Author**

While we affirm Mosaic authorship of Numbers as discussed earlier for the entire Pentateuch, it is quiet possible that some scribes or editors are responsible for the complete and final form of the book at later periods of the history of Israelites.

#### **Outline**

The three major divisions of the book are based on geographical locations of Israelites at Sinai, Kadesh and Moab. **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 185-186) provide the following structure:

- (1) Israel at Sinai, preparing to depart for the Promised Land (1:1-10:10),
- (2) Israel at Kadesh, the delay resulting from rebellion (13:1-20:13),
- (3) The journey from Kadesh to the plains of Moab (20:14-22:1)
- (4) Israel on the plains of Moab, in anticipation of taking the Promised Land (22:2-32:42)
- (5) Appendices dealing with various matters (33-36).

#### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3***

Mention one key event that occurred in the three major geographical locations of Israelites recorded in Numbers.

### **3.4 Critical Introduction to Numbers II: Large Numbers and Lessons**

One critical issue of interest in the study of the Old Testament in general is the records of numbers that appear to be impossibly large. According to John Wenham (1983, 191-192), “It has often been assumed that these figures were simply invented and are evidence that the Bible is historically unreliable.”

Please read the explanation of scholars in Francisco, **Introducing the Old Testament** (1977, 87-88) and or **The Lion Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 191-192). The number of Israelites that left Egypt (with 600,000 men) suggests an entire population of about two million people. We agree with Francisco (1977, 88) that, while we may not know the exact number, the important thing is the lesson “that God was able to care for the needs of all the Israelites who were in the wilderness, regardless of how many there were. And without his aid they could not have survived.” Indeed this is an important part of the value of the records and the book.

Other theological lessons in the book are:

The God of covenant is also a God of wrath. We see his wrath in his dealings with Miriam, Moses and Aaron as well as in the punishment of Israelites for their unbelief, rebellion and reluctance to move on to enter and possess the land.

The event of Kadesh-barnea is a warning that God’s people should go forward with him by faith while that of Meribah shows that God will not compromise trust and obedience required from leaders.

God’s purpose of victory will be achieved for his people in spite of their rebellion.

#### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4***

Does it make sense to believe in the large numbers of Israelites involved in the wilderness experience? Explain.

### **3.5 Critical Introduction to Deuteronomy I: Title, Author, Setting**

## **Title**

The title of the last book of the law is based on a wrong translation of a phrase in Deut. 17:18 which actually mean “a copy of the law”. However, the title, meaning second law or “repetition of the law,” is fairly appropriate. In Deuteronomy the law found in the preceding books are further stated, reaffirmed and explained. Based on the first two words the Jews call the book ‘**ella haddevarim** (“there are the words”), or simply “debarim” (“words”).

## **Author and Development**

Like other books of the law internal evidence show that Moses wrote most parts of it (1:5; 31:9, 22, 24). Moses gave the sermons at the territory of Moab, at the end of his life and in the process of transferring leadership to Joshua. However, some other persons wrote the preamble (1:1-5) as well as the account of the death of Moses (34). In contemporary scholarship it is believed that the book originated before the reformation of Josiah (621 B.C.). It took its final form before the seventh century B.C.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.5***

Write short notes on the title, authorship and setting of the book of Deuteronomy.

## **3.6 Critical Introduction to Deuteronomy II: Content, Outline and Value**

### **Content and Outline**

Moses delivered these discourses between the end of wanderings in the desert and entrance into the Land of Canaan. It is a covenant renewal document as he appealed to the Israelites to respond to the love and grace of God with worship, obedience and loyalty. He spoke to them about the settled life they were about to start in Canaan. After the introduction (1:1-5), the book can be divided roughly on the basis of the three addresses:

- (1) Historical prologue (1:6-4:49);
- (2) Stipulations of the covenant (5:1-26:19);
- (3) Curses and blessings (27:1-30:20).
- (4) The book ends with the song, blessing and the account of the death and burial of Moses (31-34).

### **Value**

Deuteronomy seems to be a favourite of the Lord Jesus Christ. He testified to its Mosaic authorship (e.g. Mark 10:3-5; John 5:46-47) and he affirmed its authority (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). The book teaches the importance of love and loyalty to God because of his grace. However, one theological issue that cannot be examined here because of lack of space is the nature of holy war championed in the book (Deut. 7:1ff). Does the destruction of the Canaanites contradict the love of God? This will be examined critically in the last unit.

Deuteronomy teaches us that when we enter into a covenant relationship with the sovereign God he asks for total, unalloyed devotion. Blessing will result from obedience but rebellion will attract judgement and curses. Isn't that serious?

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.6***

What is the theological value of the book of Deuteronomy?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The study of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy done in this unit leads to the end of critical introduction to the Pentateuch. We wish to conclude our study of the Torah as follows:

- The Pentateuch contains many literary materials – narratives, laws, poetry, genealogies and addresses,
- These materials are drawn together by Moses and others from a number of sources,
- Within a narrative framework, the Pentateuch speak of election, covenant, the law and exodus,
- The story of Pentateuch is that, according to John Taylor (1983, 126), in a world of disorder and corruption God called out “Abraham and through him his descendants the Jews, to be the channel of grace and revelation to all mankind”.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we completed a critical introduction to the first five books of the Bible called the Torah. The titles, authorship, themes, contents,

outlines and the theologies of the books were highlighted. The Torah, Prophets and Writings are the three major divisions of the Jewish Canon. The Pentateuch is the first and the most important section of the three. It contains the fundamental “teaching” or “instruction” to guide the entire life of the people of God. The remaining units of this module will consider the second section, the Prophets.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS**

Write short notes on the following:

- a. The significance of the sacrificial system in Leviticus.
- b. The author and development of Deuteronomy.

## **7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES**

Francisco, Clyde T. (1977) **Introducing the Old Testament**, pp. 85-97.

Alexander, David and Pat (1983) **The Lion Handbook to the Bible**, pp. 172-203.

**The NIV Study Bible** (1995), pp. 144-283.

**NIV Disciple’s Study Bible** (1988), pp. 125-255.

Tullock, John H. (1987) **The Old Testament Story**, pp. 80-92.

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## **UNIT 8 CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE FORMER PROPHETS**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Introduction to the Former Prophets
  - 3.2 Critical Introduction to Joshua
  - 3.3 Critical Introduction to Judges
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  - 3.5 Critical Introduction to 1 & 2 Kings
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment Question
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Having introduced you to the five books of Torah in the last two units I will now lead you in a critical introduction to historical books that are also called “former prophets” or “prophetic history”. The books are Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings. However, before we examine these individual books, I will first of all give you a general introduction to their nature, formation, content and themes.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Highlight the nature, formation, content and themes of the former prophets

Describe the role of Joshua in leading Israel to conquer Canaan.

Discuss how judges delivered Israel from their enemies.

Explain the issues of sources and authorship of 1 and 2 Samuel.

State the problems associated with chronology of the Kings of Israel and the solutions offered by scholars.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Introduction to the Former Prophets**



The account of the history of Israel is presented in two separate sections in the Hebrew Bible. These are: **The Former Prophets** (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings) and in **The Writings** (1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah). Ruth will be studied along with the books of Writings. This unit will consider the first part while the second will be considered in unit 13. We will now consider the nature, formation, content and themes of the former prophets.

## **Nature**

The historical books from Joshua to 2 Kings are called “The Former Prophets” so as to distinguish them from the latter prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve minor prophets). Daniel will be discussed along with these prophets. The historical books are regarded as prophecy most likely because they were intended to teach and they are sometimes called “Prophetic history”. Some scholars see them as “Deuteronomic history” because they express a theological viewpoint similar to that of Deuteronomy.

## **Formation**

The books were most likely written after release of Jehoiachim from prison in 561 B.C., the last event in 2Kings. The books used court archives and histories like the Book of Jasher, the Book of the Acts of Solomon and the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and Israel (not the one in the Bible).

## **Content**

These books covered the period from the time Joshua led Israelites to enter the Promised Land to the middle of the exile (1400 B.C. to 560 B.C.).

## **Themes**

According to John Taylor (1983, 205-208) four important themes of the prophetic history are:

**Kingship** with particular interest in the dynasty of King David,

**The Prophets and the word of the Lord.** The writer believed that the word of God controlled history

**The Temple at Jerusalem.** Concern for the ark of the Lord was especially demonstrated

**Worship.** The kings were assessed on the basis of their worship at Jerusalem in purity.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercises 3.1***

Write a concise note to introduce a new Christian to the Former Prophets in the Old Testament.

### **3.2 Critical Introduction to Joshua**

The book of Joshua is the beginning of the section of the Old Testament known as the Former Prophets (also called Historical Books). Others are Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings. Joshua is also the hero of the book. The book contains the history of Israelites from the time Moses died to the conquest of Canaan and the death of Joshua. Scholars think that the book of Joshua was written around 1045B.C. in the early days of Monarchy during the lifetime of Samuel before David captured Jerusalem.

Joshua was born in Egypt during the time of bondage and suffering. The name Joshua means “Yahweh is Saviour” or “Salvation of Yahweh” and it is equivalent to Jesus. He was the faithful assistant of Moses during the experience of exodus and wanderings in the wilderness. He also served as the commander of the Hebrew armies. Joshua and Caleb were the two spies who urged the Israelites to believe God would give them the land. Out of the multitude that left Egypt only the two entered the Promised Land. Joshua was the successor to Moses.

Joshua led the tribes of Israel to conquer the land in three stages: Central section at Jericho and Ai (6-9), defeat of the Kings of the South (10) and the victory over the northern strongholds (11). The ethical question of the war will be examined later.

The book is a story of conquest and success and **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 287-288) outlines it as follows:

- (1) The Entrance into the land (1:1-5:12)
- (2) The Conquest of the land (5:13-12:24)
- (3) The distribution of the land (13-21)
- (4) Epilogue: Tribal unity and loyalty to the Lord (22-24).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2***

In the book of Joshua what do we learn about the man Joshua and the conquest of Canaan?

### 3.3 Critical Introduction to Judges

The book of Judges is the account of the history of Israel after the death of Joshua and the rise of Samuel. The “Judges” were actually “deliverers” of Israel from enemies like Moabites, Philistines, Midianites, Amalekites and Ammonites. The recurring themes throughout the book are apostasy, oppression, penitence and deliverance. The monotonous, repetitive cycle of the nation is described thus: “Israel deserts God for the heathen gods. In consequence God allows them to suffer at the hands of the Canaanites. Israel cries to God for help. God sends them a deliverer. All is well until his death: then the old pattern of infidelity reasserts itself” (**The Lion Handbook to the Bible**, 1983, 219).

The Israelites had just settled in the Promised Land and they faced the temptation of idolatry, especially of Baal worship. Some of the judges are: Othniel of Judah (3:9), Ehud of Benjamin (3:15), Deborah of Ephraim and Barak of Naphtali (4:4-6), Gideon of Manasseh (6:11), Jephthah of Gilead (11:11) and Samson of Dan (15:20). The Judges are called charismatic leaders because they exhibited peculiar leadership qualities like wisdom, strength, courage and military prowess needed to deliver Israel from their oppressors.

One of the problems, issues addressed by a critical study of judges is the total period of leadership of the judges. Scholars do not agree on the chronology because of the overlap between the periods of the judges. Some of them also ruled only some parts of Israel.

#### *Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3*

Judges were charismatic leaders who delivered Israel from their enemies. Discuss.

### 3.4 Critical Introduction to 1 & 2 Samuel

In the Hebrew Bible these two books were originally one. 1 and 2 Samuel tell the story of Israel from the period of the end of the judges and the birth of Samuel to the last years of King David, a total of about 100 years (about 1075-975) B.C). The books are named after Samuel though he was not the author. Samuel anointed both Saul and David, the first two kings in Israel and thus God used him to establish kingship in Israel. The author of the book of Samuel used a variety of sources which include the following: the writings of Samuel (1Sam. 10:25), contemporary prophetic histories (1 Chr. 29:29), the poems of David (2 Sam. 1:19-27; 22:2-51; 23:1-7), national poetical literature (eg. 2 Sam. 1:18) and oral tradition.

Interpreters have observed that the account is religious (not political) history. According to **The Lion Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 231), it is “the story of God and the nation particularly God and the nation’s leaders.” It is difficult to state exactly the time he wrote the histories. The simple Hebrew language used indicates an early period. Since the story include the whole reign of David (2 Sam. 5:5) and he mention the “Kings of Judah” (1 Sam. 27:6) it shows that he wrote after the division of the kingdom. He probably wrote around 900B.C. following the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon before the exile.

One question of interest in a critical study of 1&2 Samuel is if the books have one or more authors. Some scholars argue for two major sources and authors in view of several “duplicate” accounts such as the choice of Saul. One, possibly early source, presents this in a favourable light (1 Sam. 9:1-10; 16:11:1-13; 13:1-7a; 13:15b to 14:52). Another later source reports it as a mistake for Israelites to ask for a king and points out the failings of Saul (1 Sam. 8:1-22; 10:17-27; 12:1-25; 13:7b-15a). Some other scholars think that such repetition may be different opinions expressed in the days of Samuel recorded faithfully by one author.

A concise outline of the two books, extracted from **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 371), is:

- (1) Historical setting for the establishment of kingship in Israel (I Sam. 1-7)
- (2) The establishment of kingship in Israel under the guidance of Samuel the prophet (I Sam. 8-12)
- (3) Saul’s kingship a failure (I Sam. 13-15),
- (4) David’s rise to the throne; progressive deterioration and end of Saul’s reign (I Sam. 16:1-2 Sam. 5:5)
- (5) David’s kingship in its accomplishments and glory (2 Sam. 5:6-9:12)
- (6) David’s kingship in its weaknesses and failures (2 Sam. 10-20),
- (7) Final reflections on David’s reign (2 Sam. 21-24).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4***

Write a short note on the sources and authorship of 1 and 2 Samuel.

### **3.5 Critical Introduction to 1 & 2 Kings**

Like Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings of our English Bible were actually one book initially. The Jews called it “The Book of the Kings” or simply “Kings. The translators of the Septuagint introduced the division. Latin vulgate and modern versions followed it. The division of the book thus separated the reign of Ahaziah King of Israel (see 1 Kings 22:51-2Kings 1:18).

Kings continued the story of Samuel and it covered four centuries of the history of Israel. In it we find the account from the end of the reign of David, that of Solomon, the division between Israel and Judah, the fall of Samaria (in 722 BC) and the destruction of Jerusalem (in 587 BC). When combined together Samuel and Kings tell the full story of the monarchy from its rise to its fall.

The writer of Kings is more of a compiler and editor. He was likely a prophet in Babylon during the exile. He lived after 561 B.C. because he mentioned Amel-Marduk. However, he did not know about the return under Cyrus in 539 B.C. He most likely wrote around 550 B.C. The sources that he used include: “the book of the annals of Solomon” (11:41), “the book of the annals of the Kings of Israel” (14:19), “the book of the annals of the Kings of Judah” (14:29).

The chronology of the Kings of Israel has been a problem in Old Testament Studies. Scholars are trying to solve the problem through a study of factors like overlapping reigns, co-regencies of sons with their fathers, etc. Please refer to and study: “Rulers of the Divided Kingdom of Israel and Judah,” **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 496-497); Arthur Cundall, “Unravelling the Chronology of the Kings”, **The Lion Handbook to the Bible**, 1983, pp. 269-271.

A condensed form of the outline done by **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 463-464) is:

- (1) The Solomonic era (1:1-12:24),
- (2) Israel and Judah from Jeroboam I/Rehoboam to Ahab/Asa (12:25-16:34),
- (3) The ministries of Elijah and Elisha and other prophets from Ahab/Asa to Joram/Jehosaphat (17:1-2Kings 8:15),
- (4) Israel and Judah from Joram/Jehoram to the exile of Israel (8:16-17:41),
- (5) Judah from Hezekiah to the Babylonian exile (18-25).

1 and 2 Kings describe the history of the Kings of Israel and Judah from the viewpoint of the covenants of God. After introducing each king by giving information about his age, length of reign and mother, he assessed the reign by conformity to the law. We can, therefore, infer the

theme or purpose of the book from the style of the accounts. The suggestion of **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 460) is: “The guiding thesis of the book is that the welfare of Israel and her Kings depended on their obedience to their obligations as defined in the Mosaic covenant.” God has not changed. Today, through 1 and 2 Kings, God calls us to obey and serve him to fulfill His Kingdom purposes through us.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.5***

State the problems of chronology of the Kings of Israel? What are the solutions to the problems?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

As stated at the beginning of this unit, while the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are called “historical books” today the Jews refer to them as “Former Prophets”. This is not just because they were written by prophets but according to J. N. Schofield (1964, 16) “because they are recorded from a prophetic standpoint and with the prophetic purpose of using history to reveal God.” We have therefore examined them as “Prophetic history”, a kind of history lectures serving the purpose of prophetic sermons.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have been introduced to a critical study of the Former Prophets in the Old Testament. The books concerned are Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings. The books covered the following periods in Israel’s history:

The death of Moses, and the conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua.

The leadership of Judges, charismatic leaders who delivered Israelites from their enemies when they settled in the Promised Land.

The ministry of Samuel and the establishment of Kingship in Israel and the United Kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon.

The division of the kingdom and the reigns of several other kings of Israel and Judah as well as the fall of Samara and Jerusalem in 722B.C. and 587B.C. respectively.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS**

Discuss the issues of sources and authorship in a critical study of 1 & 2 Samuel.

## **7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES**

Francisco, Clyde T. (1977) **Introducing the Old Testament**, pp. 99-130.

Alexander, David and Pat (1983) **The Lion Handbook to the Bible**, pp. 204-285.

**The NIV Study Bible** (1995), pp. 285-354.

Schofield J. N. (1964) **Introducing Old Testament Theology**, Nashville, Ill: SCM Book Club, pp. 15-17.

**NIV Disciple's Study Bible** (1988), pp. 256-464.

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## **UNIT 9 CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE LATTER PROPHETS I**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives

- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Introduction to the Major Prophets
  - 3.2 Critical Introduction to Isaiah
  - 3.3 Critical Introduction to Jeremiah
  - 3.4 Critical Introduction to Ezekiel
  - 3.5 Critical Introduction to Daniel
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment Question
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit we studied the Former Prophets, the Old Testament books that deal with the history of how the Israelites entered, conquered and settled in Canaan till they were carried to Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. In this unit, we shall study some of the books of the prophets that God sent to the people before and during the exilic periods. The Major Prophets and books to be considered are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. Lamentations will be studied as part of The Writings in the next module. While chronologically Daniel is part of The Writings it will be studied here as one of the prophetic books.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning and task of Old Testament prophets
- Describe the authorship of the book of Isaiah
- Discuss the problem of chronology of the book of Jeremiah
- Highlight some peculiarities of the person and book of Ezekiel
- Explain why the book of Daniel can be treated as prophetic.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Introduction to the Major Prophets**

When the Israelites got to the Promised Land they engaged in sinful practices like idol worship, sexual immorality, and oppression of the poor. God raised individuals, called prophets, to call the people back to a right kind of living: obedience and purity. Whereas the Israelites have



become occupied with “other gods” and a new morality the prophets reminded them of the requirements of their covenant relationship with God.

The term “prophet” (Hebrew, **navi**) means to speak. The prophets were thus men and women (like Mariam and Deborah – Ex. 15:20, Judg. 4:4) who were caused to speak for God (Amos 3:8). A prophet is called by God to speak the mind (word) of God (Jer. 1:9; Ezek. 2:7; 3:4). He is a “seer” (e.g. Samuel) seeing the mind of God and the affairs of men (I Chr. 29:29). Prophets have the privilege of close fellowship and consultation with the Lord as they stand in his council (Jer. 23:18, 22). They proclaimed the message given them by God as they declared, “Thus says the Lord.” Of course they could make the claim because the word of the Lord came to them (e.g. Jer. 47:1; Ezek. 17:1; Zech. 8:1).

Out of their personal communion with God the prophets declared the message of God for their contemporaries and people of all ages (I Kings. 17:1; Acts 7:38). Most of their messages were carefully constructed and prepared before they were spoken to people. Some prophets like Jeremiah (e.g. chapter 19) and Ezekiel (e.g. chapter 4) also used dramatic means to communicate their messages.

Prophecy is the word of God both for contemporary situation (forth telling) and also for the future (foretelling). More often than not in the Old Testament predictive prophecy concerns warning and judgement that will follow obedience and promises of blessing due to obedience. The prophets were rooted in specific social, economic and political situations and they spoke the word of God to social injustice, economic oppression and political disorientation. Some of the prophetic messages sound like civil and human rights campaign today. Study “The Prophets in Their Setting” in **The Lion Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 374-375).

According to Alec Motyer (1983, 372-373) the themes that constitute the core of the message or teaching of the prophets are: the Lord as Ruler of all history, the primary need to be right with God, the moral foundation of religion and society, a blend of judgement and hope and the messianic kingdom. In the next sections I will introduce you one by one, though briefly, to the Major Prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1***

Write a short note on the meaning and task of Old Testament prophets.

## **3.2 Critical Introduction to Isaiah**

Many scholars consider Isaiah to be the greatest of Old Testament prophecies and it is the head of the prophetic books. Isaiah lived in Jerusalem in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. He prophesied for over forty years during the reigns of Jothan, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The vision of the glory of God that he experienced during his call influenced the whole of his life and ministry. He spoke about the holiness and righteousness of God, sin of people, and forgiveness available from God.

An important issue of scholarly interest in the study of Isaiah is that the visions and prophecies are probably not all by the same prophet. It is clear that Isaiah wrote down some of the prophecies (6, 8; 30:8). Many scholars have pointed out the differences between chapters 1-39 and 40-66 and so have argued for more than one author of the single Scroll of Isaiah. However, some other scholars think that the structure and language found throughout Isaiah speak for its unity. While the debate continues the opinion of Clyde T. Francisco (1977, 169) is educative: “Whether Isaiah is the author of the entire book or whether his disciples added to it in later times cannot be determined with finality. It is sufficient to know that the book is the word of God. Regardless of the human authors it speaks with divine authority.”

The three main divisions of Isaiah are chapters 1-39, 40-55, 56-66 and they speak about the Messiah as King, the Suffering Servant, the shame and future glory of Israel respectively. An outline of the book adapted from **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 1009-1011) is:

### **Part 1: The Book of Judgement (1-39)**

- (1) Message of rebuke and promise (1-5)
- (2) Prophecies occasioned by the Aramean and Israelites threat against Judah (7-12).
- (3) Judgement against the nations (13-23).
- (4) Judgement and promise (the Lord’s Kingdom) (24-27).
- (5) Six woes: five on the unfaithful in Israel and one on Assyria (28-33).
- (6) More prophecies on judgement and promise (34-35).
- (7) A Historical transition from the Assyrian threat to the Babylonian exile (36-39).

### **Part 2: The Book of Comfort (40-66)**

- (8) The deliverance and restoration of Israel (40-48).
- (9) The servant’s ministry and Israel’s restoration (49-57),
- (10) Everlasting deliverance and everlasting judgement (58-59).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2***

Is the book of Isaiah written by one or more authors?

### 3.3 Critical Introduction to Jeremiah

Jeremiah probably means “The LORD throws or hurls” and it either indicates that God “hurled” the prophet into a hostile world or judges, throws the nations down for their sins. He was born about 650B.C. into a priestly family in Anathoth (Anata), a few miles north of Jerusalem. God called him to be his prophet in 627 B.C. He started his prophetic ministry about 100 years after Isaiah.

The historical background of his prophecies include the following (2 Kings 22-25; 2 Chr. 34-36): The wicked King Manasseh was ruling Judah at the time of Jeremiah’s birth, the power of Assyria was already crumbling; he prophesized during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah: Josiah (640-609 B.C.), Jehovah (609 B.C.), Jehoiakim (609-597 B.C.), Johoiachim (597 B.C.) and Zedekiah (597-587 B.C.). The people rejected his call for repentance and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon broke into Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Later, Jeremiah left Judah for Egypt along with some people who had remained in Judah.

Prophets who were contemporaries of Jeremiah were Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Daniel and Ezekiel. The prophet was a lonely figure. His messages make him unpopular, such as: the call for submission to Babylon before 587 BC, the prediction that the exile will last seventy years. He also prophesized hope; that after the judgement and the exile God will restore the people and bless them with joy and prosperity in their homeland (Jer. 29).

Unlike the other prophets, Jeremiah had a personal secretary/scribe, Baruch (Jer. 36). His book has various literary forms like prose and poetry and it is difficult to identify a particular theme and central purpose in the unrelated prophecies. Also, the arrangement is not chronological. For instance the message of comfort to the exiles in Babylon is presented in chapter 31 before the prediction of the exile in chapter 36. It has been suggested that the arrangement is topical with the stories of the life of the prophet inserted between them.

Seven major collections of the book are:

- (1) The earlier prophecies of Jeremiah (1-6),
- (2) False and true wisdom (8:4-10:25),
- (3) Pessimistic messages (11-20),
- (4) Polemics against Kings and prophets (22-29)
- (5) Passages of hope (30-33)

- (6) Historical section (from the siege of Jerusalem into the flight into Egypt, 37-44).
- (7) Foreign prophecies (46-51).

Jeremiah (and his ministry) was like that of Jesus in some respects so much that people thought Jesus was Jeremiah come back from the dead!

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3***

The arrangement of the book of Jeremiah is not chronological but topical. Discuss.

## **3.4 Critical Introduction to Ezekiel**

The name Ezekiel means “God will strengthen” or “God strengthens.” He was the Son of Buzi (1:3). He was most likely training to be a priest for service in the temple when King Jehoiachim surrendered Jerusalem to the Babylonian army in 597B.C. Ezekiel was a part of the aristocracy of Jerusalem, about 10,000 men consisting of statesmen, soldiers and craftsmen taken into exile (2 Kings 24:14).

In Babylon Ezekiel lived at Telabib by the Keber River (3:15; 1:1). Ezekiel had a wife but they appear to be childless (24:16-18). Five years in exile, about the age of 30, he was called to be a prophet (1:1). In his call he received a vision of the awesome majesty, fire and glory of God. Against this dazzling brilliance, he preached about the sin of people and inevitability of judgement.

Ezekiel was seen to be an extraordinary (even, abnormal) personality. He was a priest by training but a prophet by call and practical ministry. His prophecies are full of visions, ecstasies and symbols. With the prophet Ezekiel, prophecy merges into “apocalyptic.” He used the method of pantomime to communicate his message: “mud pies” (4:1ff), eating a meal publicly (4:9ff), the use of a knife to cut his beard (5:1ff) and the death of his wife (24:15ff).

There are some problems associated with the book of Ezekiel in critical scholarship. The first is that some laws appear in the book of Ezekiel which are not found in the Pentateuch (e.g. Ezekiel 45:18-20). The rabbis were thus reluctant to canonize the book. This is because the “prophetic books were considered to provide a commentary on an interpretation of Torah,” according to Davidson (1964, 18). Another problem is that the visions and symbols are difficult to interpret and so the speculation can lead to fanaticism. The third is the question of background, whether the prophecies were given in both Jerusalem and Babylon. Did the prophet visit Jerusalem in body or in his spirit?

One of the themes of the book is the principle of individual responsibility before God: The book can be outlined as follows:

- (1) Oracles of judgement against Israel (1-24),
- (2) Oracles of judgement against the nations (25-32),
- (3) Oracles of consolation or restoration of Israel (33-48).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4***

Mention (1) Some peculiarities of the person and prophecy of Ezekiel,  
(2) Three critical problems in the study of the book of Ezekiel.

### **3.5 Critical Introduction to Daniel**

Daniel was a man of noble birth (1:3). He was part of the first batch of Judean exiles taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. (1:1f). Daniel grew up as a youth during the reign of Josiah and the reform most likely influenced his character. He was a man of good physical quality combined with marked ability and exceptional intelligence (1:4f). His life was also characterized by faithfulness, discipline, excellence and devotion to God (1:20; 2:48; 6:4).

Daniel was not a typical kind of prophet; he was more of a statesman. He served in the Babylonian court. For the whole period of the exile he was “in a position of influence at the political centre of the Babylonian Empire.” Here was a statesman-prophet who won victory for God and God’s people in a foreign land.

Like most other Old Testament books, much of the book of Daniel was written in Hebrew but a part (2:4-7:28) is Aramaic. By internal evidence (9:2; 10:2) Daniel is to be regarded as the author of the book. The debate about the date and authorship of Daniel continues. Some scholars argue in favour of an exilic period by the 6<sup>th</sup> century prophet while others prefer a later date because the work looks like some other apocalyptic writings of the Maccabean period and that it was written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. The good thing is that the dating does not affect the interpretation of the book.

The book of Daniel teaches the sovereignty of God (5:21). The visions of Daniel consistently show God triumphing (7:11, 26-27; 8:25-9:27; 11:45; 12:13). The book is structured into three parts:

- (1) The prologue, the setting (1)
- (2) The destinies of the nations of the world (or the history of Daniel) (2-6).

- (3) The destiny of the nations of Israel (or the visions of Daniel) (7-12).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.5***

State some of the reasons why it is appropriate to treat Daniel as a prophetic book.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The following conclusions can be drawn from our study of the major prophets of the Old Testament done in this unit:

Old Testament prophets were individuals caused to speak the word of God to the Israelites

The visions and prophecies recorded in Isaiah were probably recorded by more than one author

The book of Jeremiah did not follow a chronological but topical arrangement

Prophet Ezekiel and his book have some peculiarities

While it is originally part of the Writings the book of Daniel can be treated as prophetic.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this study I have led you in a critical introduction to some of the latter prophets in the Old Testament. The four Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. The prophets proclaimed the message of God during the decline of the nations and the exile.

Isaiah prophesized in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in Jerusalem before the Babylonian exile

Jeremiah delivered God's message at the time of the fall and during the exile while he was in Egypt

Ezekiel spoke as a priestly-prophet to the Jewish exiles in Babylon

Daniel served as a statesman – prophet at the Babylonian court.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT QUESTION**

Write short notes on the following:

- a. The Authorship of Isaiah
- b. The Chronology of Jeremiah.

## 7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SERVICES

Francisco, Cyld T. (1977) **Introducing the Old Testament**, pp. 168-188, 198-210, 213-220, 276-288.

Alexander, David and Pat (1983) **The Lion Handbook to the Bible**, pp. 370-437.

**The NIV Study Bible** (1995), pp. 1012-1310.

Tullock, John H. (1981), **The Old Testament Story**, pp. 199-213, 230-249.

Schofield, J. N. (1964), **Introducing Old Testament Theology**, pp. 17-19.

Davidson, Robert (1964), **The Old Testament**, p. 18.

McCain, Danny (2002) **Notes on Old Testament Introduction**, pp. 297-320.

## UNIT 10 CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE LATTER PROPHETS II

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Introduction to the Minor Prophets
  - 3.2 Critical Introduction to Hosea

- 3.3 Critical Introduction to Joel
- 3.4 Critical Introduction to Amos
- 3.5 Critical Introduction to Obadiah
- 3.6 Critical Introduction to Jonah
- 3.7 Critical Introduction to Micah
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment Question
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The study of this unit is a continuation of the study of the Latter Prophets started in the last unit. The sections will examine six Old Testament prophets out of those traditionally called The Book of the Twelve or the Minor Prophets. They are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micha, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. I will lead you in an introductory study of only the first six now.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Explain the arrangement of the minor prophets in the Old Testament

Discuss the message of the covenant love of Yahweh for Israel delivered by prophet Hosea

Describe Joel as a prophet of Pentecost

Describe the person, ministry and writing skill of prophet Amos

Explain the parallels between some of the prophesies of Obadiah and Jeremiah

Describe literal and allegorical nature of the story of Jonah

Discuss why the prophesies of prophet Micah focus on Samaria and Jerusalem.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Introduction to the Minor Prophets**



It was Jesus ben Sirach (Sira) who is known to have first referred to “the twelve prophets” and named the books. He did this in Ecclesiasticus, one of the books of the Apocrypha around 190 B.C. The twelve prophecies were written together as a unit in a scroll. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, also mentioned the grouping. It appears as if Augustine gave them the name “Minor Prophets” because of the small size of the prophetic books when compared with those of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The idea of “minor” does not imply less importance but the volume of the prophecies.

The arrangement of the twelve works as done below is based on the traditional Jewish canon according to the chronological order:

- Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah were written (around 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) during the time of the Assyrian power,
- Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah belong to the period of the decline of Assyria (around 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.)
- Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are post-exilic prophecies (from the end of 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.)

Please note that arrangement is not the order found in the Septuagint. In the traditional Jewish canon, as in modern versions, the twelve books are placed after the Major Prophets.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1***

Write a short note on the arrangement of the Minor Prophets in the Old Testament.

## **3.2 Critical Introduction to Hosea**

The name Hosea means “salvation” and it is equivalent of the names Joshua and Jesus. Hosea was an 8<sup>th</sup> century prophet from northern Israel who prophesized to his own people. He became a prophet at the end of the reign of Jeroboam II, a powerful King of Israel. The whole of his ministry lasted for forty years. His ministry ended just before the fall of Samaria to Assyria in 722 B.C. The period of his prophecy (2 Kings 14:13-17:6) in Israel was characterized by rejection of God, idolatrous practices, moral and political degradation.

Hosea was an evangelist of God’s grace and love. Through a bitter personal experience of a wife who betrayed and deserted him, he spoke

passionately about how Israel has spurned the covenant love of God for them. He called for repentance because the steadfast love of God would not abandon his people (Hos. 11). A concise outline of the book is:

- (1) The unfaithful wife and the faithful husband (1:1-3:5),
- (2) The unfaithful nation and the faithful God (4-14)

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2***

Hosea was a prophet of the covenant love of God for Israel. Discuss.

### **3.3 Critical Introduction to Joel**

The name Joel means “Yahweh is God”. Not much is known about this prophet apart from the name of his father (1:1). There is also the problem of the date of the prophecies. Two suggestions are: either an early date, 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., during the reign of Joash in Judah (around 837 B.C.) or a late date, 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in post-exilic times (around 400 B.C.).

Joel called for a true repentance (2:13) because “physical disaster accompanies moral disintegration. How a man lives in relation to his God vitally influences his earthly joys and sorrows” according to Francisco (1977, 230), Joel is popularly known today as a prophet of Pentecost because of the prophecy of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh (2:28-32). A brief outline of the book is:

- (1) Judah experiences a foretaste of the day of the lord (1:1-2:17),
- (2) Judah is assured in the day of the Lord (2:18-3:21).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3***

What does it mean to describe Joel as a prophet of Pentecostal?

### **3.4 Critical Introduction to Amos**

The name Amos means “sustained”. He lived in or around Tekoa, about twelve miles south of Jerusalem. He was a shepherd and dresser of fig-trees (1:1; 7:14-15) when he started to prophesy to the northern Kingdom of Israel. He preached in the market in Bethel, the religious center of the worship of calf-image set up by Jeroboam I (I Kings 12:25-33).

Amos lived in the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.). It was a time of military success and great material prosperity for Israel. However, beneath the superficial affluence the nation was rotten with social and religious corruption as well as oppression of the poor (3:12; 41; 6:4). After denouncing the sin of the surrounding nations (1:1-2:3), Amos prophesied against the evil and wickedness of Judah and Israel (2:4-16). Amos cried for justice and righteousness in the land (5:24). He opposed a religion of sacrifice that lacked social morality. However, he was not a prophet of doom as he is sometime wrongly labeled, for he ended his message with the hope of restoration and blessing for Israel (9:11-15). The people in pleasure rejected the message, ignorant of their impending doom. Just thirty years after the death of Jeroboam II the Assyrians invaded and destroyed Samaria and took the people to exile.

Scholars have observed that the language of the book of Amos is a pure and classical Hebrew. The shepherd did not only know sound theology he also demonstrated superb literary skill to communicate God's message to the elite of his days. An outline of the book provided by Millard and Stek in **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 1338-1339) is:

- (1) Superscription and introduction (1:1-1:2)
- (2) Judgement on the nations (1:3-2:16)
- (3) Oracles against Israel (3:1-5:17)
- (4) Announcements of exile (5:18-6:14)
- (5) Visions of divine retribution (7:1-9:10)
- (6) Restored Israel's blessed future (9:11-15)

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4***

What do you know about Amos as a shepherd, as a prophet of justice, and as a writer?

### **3.1.5 Critical Introduction to Obadiah**

The name Obadiah means "servant (or worshipper) of the LORD" and it was a very common name in the Old Testament (e.g. 1 Chr. 3:21; 2 Chr. 17:7; Ezra 8:9; Neh. 10:5). He is not the same as the Obadiah of the day of Prophet Elijah (I Kings 18). The book has only twenty one verses and it is the shortest in the Old Testament.

The occasion of the prophecy is the capture and devastation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the Edomites' support of the invasion. The prophecies of the book most likely referred to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (around

605-586B.C.). In that case he was a contemporary of Jeremiah and the two prophets may have shared from a common source in view of the parallels between Obadiah 1-9 and Jeremiah 49:7-22. Some scholars hold to an early date (853-841 B.C.) because of the invasion of Jerusalem by philistines and the Arabs (Arabians) at that period.

Obadiah prophesied the downfall of Edom (vv. 4, 15). The Edomites were descendants of Esau and lived in the mountainous region South-east of the Red Sea. The Edomites took pride in their strongholds. Obadiah then prophesied the prosperity of Israel (v. 21). An outline of the book offered by Francisco (1977, 213) is:

- (1) Destruction of Edom inevitable (1-9, 15b),
- (2) Reasons for the destruction (10-14)
- (3) Day of Yahweh near (15a, 16-21).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.5***

How can you explain the parallels between Obadiah 1-9 and Jeremiah 49:7-12?

## **3.6 Critical Introduction to Jonah**

The name Jonah means “dove”, the principal character of the book. Though there is no internal evidence, the prophet Jonah has been traditionally recognized as the author. He was the son of Amittai (1:1) from Gath Hopher in Zebulun (2Kings 14:25; Jos. 19:10, 13). The prophet ministered in 800-750 B.C. during the time of King Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 B.C.). Some scholars think that the book was written after 612 B.C.

There are two schools of thought in the interpretation of Jonah. The first is that it is a literal account and experience of the prophet. The other argues that it is an allegory like the parable of the Good Samaritan. Whatever is the position the lessons of the story is not debatable. God’s people have a missionary task to the whole world. It was particularly, primarily directed at Israel to make Yahweh known to the Gentile nations. The book can be divided into two parts:

- (1) Jonah flees his mission (1-2),
- (2) Jonah reluctantly fulfills his mission (3-4).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.6***

Do you consider the story of Jonah to be literal or allegorical? Explain.

### 3.7 Critical Introduction to Micah

The name Micah means “Who is like Yahweh?” His home town is Moresheth or Moresheth Gath (1:1; 1:14) in South-west Judah. Micah was thus a simple countryman. He spoke like a village person—plain and straight forward. Both as a result of his apparent dislike of cities as well as the sufferings of common people, he “denounces rulers, priests and prophets; Deplores the money-grubbing exploitation of the helpless; dishonesty in business; sham religion” according to **The Lion Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 449).

Micah was particularly concerned about how the social ills of both Judah and Israel affected people in small towns and villages like his homeland. He thus directed his messages to Samaria and Jerusalem, the capital cities of the two kingdoms.

Micah is regarded as an 8<sup>th</sup> century prophet along with Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. Most scholars agree that he wrote the first three chapters (which describe the doom of Samaria and Jerusalem) sometime between 724 and 701 B.C. However, he did not only proclaim judgement and fall of Samaria and Jerusalem; he also prophesied restoration. As explained by David and Pat Alexander (1983, 449), he sees a glorious future, when Jerusalem will become the religious center of the world, and Bethlehem give birth to a greater David who will rule over all God’s people” (Micah 5:2cf; Matt. 2:3-6).

MacRae and McComiskey offer this outline Micah in **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 1364):

- (1) Superscription (1:1),
- (2) Judgement against Israel and Judah (1:2-3:12),
- (3) Hope for Israel and Judah (4-5),
- (4) The Lord’s case against Israel (6),
- (5) Gloom turns to triumph (7).

#### *Self-Assessment Exercise 3.7*

Why did Micah’s prophecies focus on Samaria and Jerusalem?

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

From our study of some of the minor prophets of the Old Testament done in this unit we can conclude as follows:

- The twelve prophecies existed as a single unit parallel to the Major Prophets before 190 B.C.

- The book of Hosea is a love story and the prophet emphasized the covenant love of Yahweh for Israel,
- Joel is a prophet of repentance, the Holy Spirit and Pentecost,
- Amos was a social critic, a prophet of justice and a skilled writer,
- Obadiah was a typical prophet of destruction and restoration,
- Jonah was a reluctant prophet of the universal missionary concern of Yahweh,
- Micah was the prophet of common people and the poor.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit started with general introduction to the Minor Prophets. In the study I led you to examine some of the 8<sup>th</sup> century prophets of Judah and Israel who spoke for God during the time of the Assyrian empire. The prophets considered are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Write a brief critical introduction to Amos in the Old Testament.

## 7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES

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## **UNIT 11 CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE LATTER PROPHETS III**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Critical Introduction to Nahum
  - 3.2 Critical Introduction to Habakkuk
  - 3.3 Critical Introduction to Zephaniah
  - 3.4 Critical Introduction to Haggai
  - 3.5 Critical Introduction to Zechariah

|     |                                  |
|-----|----------------------------------|
| 3.6 | Critical Introduction to Malachi |
| 4.0 | Conclusion                       |
| 5.0 | Summary                          |
| 6.0 | Tutor-Marked Assignment Question |
| 7.0 | References and Other Sources     |

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is the end of this module. In the previous units you have been introduced to the Law, Former Prophets (historical books), Latter Prophets (some major and minor). In this study unit I will lead you to examine the last six minor prophets of the Old Testament. These are Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The first three prophesied during the decline of the Assyrian empire (just before the exile). The last three are post-exilic prophets.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Discuss the date and subject of the prophecy of Nahum

Discuss the faith of prophet Habakkuk as seen in the book

Explain the idea of the concept of “the day of Yahweh” in the prophecy of Zephaniah

Highlight the important themes/teaching of the book of Haggai

Discuss the authorship of Zechariah

Describe the didactic style of the book of Malachi.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Critical Introduction to Nahum**

Nahum expresses the idea of consolation and it means comfort. He is called “the Elkoshite” (1:1) and this suggests that he was a native of Elkosh, a town of uncertain location. He seems to come from Judah. Prophet Nahum uttered the oracles recorded between the sack of Thebes by the Assyrians (663 B.C.) and 612 B.C. The fall of Nineveh appear to be imminent (2:1; 3:4, 19) and this was fulfilled in 612 B.C. with the attack of the Babylonians and the Medes. Nahum ministered during the



reign of Josiah and he was thus a contemporary of Zephaniah and Jeremiah.

Like that of Jonah, the subject of Nahum is also Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. However, while Jonah reports that Nineveh repented and was not punished Nahum predicts its destruction. He pronounced the judgement of God on the city because of her sins like idolatry, cruelty, oppression and wickedness.

To the Hebrews Assyria was a symbol of their treachery and oppression. Some scholars think that Nahum was guilty of “shallow and narrow vindictiveness” since the prophet did not point out the sin of his own people. Theologically, according to Livingston and Barker, “Nahum declares the universal sovereignty of God. God is Lord of history and of all nations as such he controls their destinies” (**The NIV Study Bible**, 1995, 1374). A simple outline of the book is:

- (1) Title (1:1)
- (2) Nineveh’s judge (1:2-15)
- (3) Nineveh’s judgement (2)
- (4) Nineveh’s total destruction (3)

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1***

Discuss the date and subject of the prophecy of Nahum.

## **3.2 Critical Introduction to Habakkuk**

Habakkuk means “embrace” and true to his name, he embraced the people of Judah in his arms. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah and he most likely lived in Judah towards the end of the reign of Josiah (640-60 B.C) or at the beginning of Jehoiakim (609-598). The book was most likely written at the latter part of the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

Habakkuk is a unique prophetic writing. It does not include oracles to be addressed to people. The record is a dialogue between him and God. The concern of the prophet was the oppression and wickedness that was going on in Judah. He was worried that God did not do anything about the situation. The prophet became more troubled when God decided to use evil, “ruthless” Babylonians to judge his own people (1:6, 12, 13). He thus wrestled with the same problem recorded in Psalm 73: Why do evil people sometime prosper while the righteous suffers? Why do God’s people sometime suffer why the wicked go free?

We see him as a man of vigorous and deep faith. He engaged in religious speculation and questioned God but he did not loose his faith

in God. An outline of the book given by Harrison and Williams in **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 1380) based on the prophet's dialogue with God is:

- (1) Title (1:1)
- (2a) Habakkuk's first complaint: why does the evil in Judah go unpunished? (1:2-4)
- (2b) God's answer: The Babylonians will punish Judah (1:5-11)
- (3a) Habakkuk's second complaint: How can God use wicked Babylon to punish a people more righteous than themselves? (1:12-2:1).
- (3b) God's answer: Babylon will be punished, and faith will be rewarded (2:2-20)
- (4) Habakkuk's prayer: After asking for manifestations of God's wrath and mercy, he closes with a confession of trust and joy in God (3).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2***

Habakkuk was man of deep faith in God. Discuss.

### **3.3 Critical Introduction to Zephaniah**

The name Zephaniah means "Yahweh hides" or the person "whom Yahweh has hidden." He was a descendant of the royal family of King Hezekiah and so was a person of high social standing (1:1). He was born during the evil reign of Manasseh king of Judah. He lived in the Southern Kingdom and he was most likely a citizen of Jerusalem (1:4, 10-11).

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.). He was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Nahum and most likely Habakkuk. He must have prophesied before the reform of Josiah and the death of Ashurbanipal, the king of Assyria in 627 B.C. Scholars question the authenticity of many verses in chapters one, two and three of Zephaniah. The prophet announced the approaching judgement on Judea with the central theme of "the day of Yahweh". The outline of the book provided by Francisco (1977, 194) is:

- (1) The coming day of Yahweh (1:1-6)

- (2) Judah shall be punished severely (1:7-2:3)
- (3) Heathen also shall be punished (2:4-15)
- (4) Through deserving complete destruction a remnant of Judah and of the heathen shall be saved (3:1-20).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3***

Write a short note on the concept of “the day of Yahweh” in Zephaniah. Refer to the outline of the book.

## **3.4 Critical Introduction to Haggai**

Haggai means “festal” and he was probably born during one of the pilgrimage feasts of Israel (Unleavened Bread, Pentecost/weeks or Tabernacles; cf. Dot. 16:16). Haggai and Zechariah both encouraged exiles who returned to build the temple. It has been suggested that Haggai was one of those who saw the Solomon Temple in its glory and also witnessed the destruction (2:3). If this is true he must be old (probably in early 70s) when he prophesized.

Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are the last three books of the Old Testament and they are post exilic. Cyrus king of Persia who conquered Babylon issued a decree in 538 B.C. which allowed the Jews led by Zerubbabel to return to Jerusalem. The exiles returned from Babylon in 537B.C. with enthusiasm but they met a sparse and dispirited population that was poor unlike the prosperity that they enjoyed in Babylon.

Prophet Haggai gave these messages in 520 B.C. He stated the consequences of obeying and disobeying the Lord (1:6, 11, 12:16-17 cf. 2:7-9, 19). One important permanent relevance of the little book is that he like Malachi called the people to right priorities. An outline of the book based on the four messages structured by Herbert Wolf in **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 1394) is:

- (1) First Message: The call to rebuild the temple (1:1-11)
- (2) The response of Zerubbabel and the people (1:12-15)
- (3) Second Message: The temple to be filled with glory (2:1-9)
- (4) Third Message: A defiled people purified and blessed (2:10-19)
- (5) Fourth Message: The promise to Zerubbabel (2:20-23).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4***

Haggai called for a rebuilding of the temple and right priorities. Explain.

## **3.5 Critical Introduction to Zechariah**

Prophet Zechariah was born in Babylonia while people were in Exile. He saw Jerusalem for the first time when he traveled with the exiles who returned home after the exile. He also came from a family of priests. Along with Haggai he was involved in the rebuilding of the temple. While both Haggai and Zechariah were passionate for the restoration of the temple, they were different in some respects. Haggai was old and straightforward in presenting his message. His ministry was brief. Zechariah was youthful and his ministry which also started in 520 B.C. lasted for some years. Zechariah was also visionary like Ezekiel and Daniel.

The book of Zechariah has two major sections: There is a significant difference between the visions of chapter 1-8 and the messages of chapters 9-14. Some scholars even suggest a change of authorship. While the first section was based on the immediate historical situation, written by the prophet in his early life, the second was written later in life as an apocalyptic drama. Zechariah contains many references to the messiah which were fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ. A brief form outline of the book is as follows:

- (1) Introduction. Return to Yahweh (1:1-6)
- (2) Messages of encouragement to the builders (1:7-8:23)
- (3) The burden of Hadrach and other heathen cities, together with messages of mingled promise and warning for Israel (9-11)
- (4) A group of prophecies concerning Israel (Judah and other tribes who returned) (12-14).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.5***

Write short notes on:

- a. The differences between Haggai and Zechariah
- b. The authorship of Zechariah

### **3.6 Critical Introduction to Malachi**

Malachi means “My Messenger.” It may have been a proper noun, the actual name of the prophet or a pseudonym. The authorship of the book is identified with Ezra in Jewish tradition. Nehemiah and Malachi were likely to be contemporaries because of the similarity between the sins denounced by both prophets.

Under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor, the exiles who returned finished the temple in 516 B.C. In the last two sections we discussed how the prophetic activities of Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the work. It is now about 80 years later and **The Lion**

**Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 459) explain the prevailing conditions as follows:

And since then disillusionment had set in. Times were hard, and the promised prosperity had not been realized. The people tended to feel that the prophets had been shooting them a line; that God was a bit of a let-down. This showed in an increasingly casual attitude to worship and the standards God has set.

This was the occasion for the prophetic ministry of Malachi.

The book was written around 460-430 B.C. before Nehemiah became governor of Jerusalem or during his absence later. The style of the book is didactic based on a series of questions asked by both God and the people: God makes a charge; the people reply; the prophet teaches a lesson. The approach is academic and the prophecy assumed a form of teaching and it resulted in the scholasticism of rabbinism. It has been described as "prophecy within the Law" (4:4). The outline of the book looks thus:

- (1) Title and Introduction (1:1-5)
- (2) Neglect of Yahweh by Israel, especially by the priests (1:6-2:9)
- (3) Taking of heathen wives, and divorcing of Jewish wives forbidden (2:10-16)
- (4) Skepticism rebuked (2:16-4:3)
- (5) Conclusion. Keep the Law of Moses and wait for the forerunner, who will promote love and unity (4:4-6).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.6***

Describe the didactic style of the book of Malachi.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Altogether we have studied sixteen prophetic books of the Old Testament (four Major Prophets and twelve Minor Prophets) in unit 9, 10 and 11. The following general conclusions can be drawn from the studies:

Sometime we have dealt with the words of the prophets themselves and sometime with the words of their followers or disciples who wrote, compiled and edited in the name of their masters.

Each book preserves a prophetic tradition that is based on the immediate social, political, economic and religion situation of the time and the personality of the individual messenger.

The “prophets brought a different approach to religion from the priestly attitude seen in the law; they had a new insight into the national, social and individual requirements of a moral God,” according to Scofield (1964, 20).

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit is the last study in this module of critical introduction to the law and the prophets. You were introduced to the law in units 6 and 7, to the Former Prophets in unit 8, to the Major Prophets in unit 9 and the Minor Prophets in units 10 and 11. In the next module you will be introduced to the Writings, the third major section of the Old Testament.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

“The day of Yahweh” is a day of punishment and salvation. Illustrate with the outline of Zechariah.

## 7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES

Francisco, Cylde T. (1977) **Introducing the Old Testament**, pp. 189-197, 211-212, 221-227.

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McCain, Danny (2002) **Notes on Old Testament Introduction**, pp. 337-346.

## **UNIT 12    CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE WRITINGS I – WORSHIP BOOKS**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Introduction to the Writings
  - 3.2 General Introduction to Psalms
  - 3.3 Critical Introduction to Psalms: Book 1
  - 3.4 Critical Introduction to Psalms: Book 2
  - 3.5 Critical Introduction to Psalms: Book 3

- 3.6 Critical Introduction to Psalms: Book 4
- 3.7 Critical Introduction to Psalms: Book 5
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is the beginning of the third and last module of a critical introduction to the Old Testament. The unit will begin with general introduction to the third major division of the Old Testament called Writings. This will be followed with a general introduction to psalms. After this I will lead you to examine the five books of psalms. The following Psalms will be analyzed briefly: 1, 8, 22, 23, 42, 43, 51, 65, 73, 84, 91, 98, 107, 126, 133 and 150. They are released on the basis of their themes and popularity.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to: List

the books under the major divisions of the Writings,

Highlight the title, division, authorship and date of Psalms

Discuss the features of book one of Psalms

Describe how book two of Psalms teach the deliverance/redemption of Israel,

Explain the theme of corporate worship in the sanctuary as found in Psalms book three.

Discuss the major emphasizes of book four of Psalms

Describe the liturgical theme of the Psalms that make up book five.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Introduction to the Writings**

The books that constitute the third section of the Old Testament are called the “Writings” or the scriptures. The Greek title is **Hagiographa**



meaning the sacred writings. They are a varied collection of three major kinds of literature as will be studied in this module.

The first are the books of worship. The Psalms are for private devotion and corporate hymn singing. Five scrolls (Megilloth) are used in religious festivals: Song of Songs (Passover), Ruth (Harvest/weeks/Ingathering), Lamentations (Destruction of Jerusalem) and Esther (Purim). (Sometime Ecclesiastes is also regarded to be a festival scroll of the Feast of Tabernacles).

The second are the history books which retell the story of Israel. They are 1 & 2. Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. (While Daniel was written about the same period we have discussed it in unit 9 as a major prophet).

The third is wisdom literature. The essential wisdom literature books of the Old Testament are Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes.

Please refer to Unit 2 Section 3.1.2 and revise how the Writings were canonized. In spite of the variety of the collection of the Writings, their emphases and uses, they have one thing in common. Like it applies to the rest of the Old Testament and the entire Bible, they teach us about God and humanity and the relationships between God and man, and man with fellow men.

### *Self – Assessment Exercise 3.1*

Mention the three major divisions of the Writings. List the books under each division.

## **3.2 General Introduction to Psalms**

The Hebrew title of Psalms is Tehilim meaning “praises” or “song of praises.” Many of the psalms are also prayers. The Greek title is **psalmoi**, melodies or songs set to music. The word Psalter is used today to refer to the entire collection and it has to do with the musical instrument used to play and sing the psalms.

The Psalter is made up of five books; this is the traditional grouping. Each book/division is provided with an appropriate concluding doxology. Many scholars have suggested the theme/emphasis of each division and its correspondence to a book of Pentateuch. The five divisions and the common theme, purpose and author are:

| <b>Book</b> | <b>Psalm</b> | <b>Doxol</b> | <b>Corresp</b> | <b>Emphases</b> | <b>Major</b> |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
|-------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|

|       | s           | ogy          | ond to          |  | Author/<br>Collector                          |
|-------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|--|---|
| One   | 1-41        | 41:13        | Genesis         | Man and<br>Creation                            | David   |
| Two   | 42-72       | 72:18-<br>19 | Exodus          | Deliverance<br>redemption of<br>Israel         | “Sons of<br>Korah”<br>and David               |
| Three | 73-89       | 89:52        | Leviticus       | Sanctuary                                      | “Psalms of<br>Asaph and<br>“Sons of<br>Korah” |
| Four  | 90-10<br>6  | 106:4<br>8   | Numbers         | Sojourning on<br>earth (wandering<br>and rest) | Anonymo<br>us                                 |
| Five  | 101-1<br>50 | 150:6        | Deuteron<br>omy | Liturgy (Praise<br>and God’s Word)             | -   |

The psalms can also be classified by theme: pleading with God, praising God appeal for forgiveness, destruction of enemies, prayers for the King or nation, wisdom. Another possible grouping of psalms is according to the literary types: hymns, community laments, individual laments and thanksgivings, and royal psalms. The psalms are poems written by several authors/collectors. Please refer to and revise poetry in the Old Testament (unit 3, section 3.1.2). The authors of psalms include David, Moses, Solomon, Asaph, “Sons of Asaph”, Sons of Korah, Heman, and Ethan.

It is extremely difficult to date individual psalms. They were written over a long period, about 1,000 years from around 1405 (the exodus or desert wandering) to 500BC (during or after the Babylonian captivity). The overall teaching, importance and relevance of psalms that have made them very popular has been summarized well in **The Lion Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 327) thus: “The psalms express the whole range of human feeling and experience, from dark expression to exuberant joy. They are rooted in particular circumstances, yet they are timeless, and so among the best loved most read, parts of the Bible. In our modern age we are stirred by the same emotions, puzzled over the same fundamental problems of life, cry out in need, or worship, to the same God, as the psalmists of old.”

### *Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2*

Write a concise introductory essay on the title, division, authorship, date and message of Psalms.

### **3.3 Critical Introduction to Psalms: Book 1**

By their titles Psalms 1 to 41 are attributed to David (with the exceptions of 1, 2, 10 and 33). The frequent use of Yahweh is a distinguishing feature of the psalms in Book One. We will highlight some psalms in this and other divisions.

Psalm 1: The blessedness of the righteous life (vv.1-3) is contrasted with the destruction that awaits the wicked (vv. 4-6). The things that make for blessing are the study and practice of God's law, to turn away from evil life and associations.

Psalms 8: The transcendence of God and the vastness of the universe (vv. 2-3). Man is insignificant when compared with God's greatness (v. 4) but significant as the crown of creation (vv. 5-8). God is to be praised (vv. 1, 9).

Psalm 22: Triumph over suffering. The two distinct parts of this Psalm are: prayer of suffering (vv. 1-21), and song of triumph (vv. 22-31). Note that psalm 22:8 is applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament (Matt 27:43). The psalm teaches that, to a godly life, defeat is temporary, victory is certain.

Psalm 23: The Lord is our shepherd: who provides food and drink (vv. 1, 2a, 5, 6), who gives rest (vv. 2a, 2b, 3a), who leads and guides (vv. 2b, 3a), who gives courage and comfort (vv. 4a, 6).

### ***Self – Assessment Exercise 3.3***

Write a short note on the features of book one of psalms using Psalm eight for illustration.

### **3.4 Critical Introduction to Psalms: Books 2**

Some of these psalms were written by "Sons of Korah" (42-49) and some by King David (51-65, 68-70). The name Elohim predominates in these Psalms compiled for tabernacle and temple services.

Psalms 42 and 43: These two psalms constitute only one poem in many Hebrew manuscripts. The two have the same theme and the same refrain (42:5, 11; 43:5). They portray aspiration of the psalmist(s) for God. The three main emphases are: expressions of aspirations for God (42:1-2, 5); reasons for the aspirations (42:6, 11; 43:1-5); a vow to praise God (43:4). It teaches the longing of the

soul for God when in exile, away from God's purpose, plan and promise.

Psalm 51: This psalm is a prayer of repentance. Verses 18 & 19 seem to belong to a later period, the fall of Jerusalem to Babylonians. The occasion is the sins of David: adultery with Bathsheba and the death of Uriah (2 Sam 11, 12). David made this confession when Prophet Nathan confronted him. The prayer contains: the basis of repentance (v.1), the need for repentance (v. 5), expressions of repentance (vv. 1-2, 9-10, 12) and the results of repentance (vv. 13-15). The prayer teaches about the mercy and the gravity of sin.

Psalm 65: It is a song of praise and Thanksgiving. We should praise and thank God because: He forgives sins (vv. 3-4), He is sovereign (vv. 5-8), He provides miraculously for his people (vv. 9-13).

### ***Self- Assessment Exercise 3.4***

Psalm 51 is David's prayer of repentance How does it illustrate Israelite's corporate redemption?

## **3.5 Critical Introduction to Psalms: Book 3**

Most of these psalms are called "Psalms of Asaph" (73-83). Some others belong to "Sons of Korah" and one is attributed to David. Asaph was one of the leading musicians in the court of David (see 1 Chr. 6:33; 2 Chr. 5:12). Apparently his sons continued the "ministry" after his death.

Psalm 73: Why Does the wicked prosper? This psalm deals with an important issue about the providence of God, how God is ordering the world. The question is, why does God (who is good) allow evil people to suffer? Why does trouble falls on those who do not deserve it? This theme is called theodicy in theology and some other bible passages that wrestle with the issue are psalms 37, 49 and the book of Job. Psalm 73 discusses the prosperity of the wicked as outlined by John Stott (1988, 70-72) thus: the problem (vv. 1-14); approaches of perplexity and hopelessness, envy, bitterness, temptation) (vv. 15, 16); solution to the problem (vv. 17-27). The wicked will be destroyed finally. The righteous need not envy them.

Psalm 84: This psalm is like a pilgrim's song. It presents longing for the temple as found in some of the pilgrim psalms (120-134). Israelites loved the Jerusalem temple and most likely sang these Psalms as the three annual festivals. The two emphases of the psalm are: desire to be in God's dwelling place for blessing (vv. 1-7); a

personal prayer for the experience (vv. 8-12). The psalm teaches the modern man the happiness we derive in corporate worship.

### ***Self – Assessment Exercise 3.5***

Psalm 84 is a pilgrim song with implications for corporate worship in the sanctuary. Discuss.

### **3.1.6 Critical Introduction to Psalms: Book 4**

One of the psalms of this book is attributed to Moses (90), two to David (101,103), while the others are anonymous. Yahweh is constantly used.

Psalm 91: A Psalm of Security in God. While there may be troubles in the life of a person who trusts God (v. 15) he will be protected from man or beast, by day or night, from war or disease. The poem can be analyzed thus: the basis of the assurance of the believer in God's protection (vv. 1-2); the perils that may face the godly (vv. 3, 5, 6, 13, 16); the deliverance of the believer (vv. 9, 10, 14-15). The psalm teaches the need for the godly to trust God for security in life.

Psalm 98: A song of God's sovereignty. God is great. God rules over the nations and direct the affairs of humanity. The three major parts of the psalm are: God the Saviour (vv. 1-3), God the King (vv. 4-6) and God the Judge (vv. 7-9). God the righteous King and Judge is the one reigning over the nations. We have reasons for joyful, wild celebration.

### ***Self – Assessment Exercise 3.6***

Write a short note on the security of the godly as found in Psalm 91.

### **3.7 Critical Introduction to Psalms: Book 5**

Most of the songs of this book are the Psalms of Ascents, and include the Yahweh Hallelujah psalms (113-118). It is a book of liturgy.

Psalm 107: The Steadfast love of God for his people. The occasion of the psalm is the deliverance of Israelites from Babylonian captivity. The psalm drew from the history of Israel: their oppression in Egypt and their deliverance at the Red Sea (vv. 33-34); provision in the wilderness (v. 35); occupation of Canaan (vv. 36-38). Response: the redeemed should be glad (v. 42) because God's love is unchanging (v. 43).

Psalm 126: A psalm of restoration. Israelites sang this poem when there was physical restoration - the construction of the temple, followed spiritual restoration – the dissolution of mixed marriages. The two parts are: joy (vv. 1-3) and prayer for national restoration (vv. 4-6).

Psalm 133. God's people dwelling together in unity. The short psalm contains: assertions on the unity - it is good and pleasant (v. 1); the basis of the unity – God's people are brothers, members of the same family (v. 1); description of the unity, it is like anointing oil of consecration and dew that brings blessing (vv. 2-3).

Psalm 150. Choral symphony of praise. The song begins and ends with Halleluyah (meaning. Praise the LORD). This psalm is a call for us to praise and worship God: Where should we praise God? - In the sanctuary, heavens, everywhere (v. 1b); Why should we praise God? – Because of His power and greatness (v. 2); Who should praise God? – Everything life (v. 6), How should we praise God? – With prayer, songs, instruments and dance (vv 3-4). There can be no better final doxology and climax to the whole collection of psalms.

### ***Self – Assessment Exercise 3.7***

Psalm 150 is a fitting conclusion of the Psalter. Discuss.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The psalms are songs and prayers that mirror life and provide a rich devotional source of praise, prayer and worship. They are relevant for both periods of celebration and lamentation. God's people have identified with psalms and “their sheer, dogged faith, the depth of their love for God” is both a tonic and a rebuke in the contemporary technological age.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

This unit has dealt with three related things. First, I have given you a brief introduction to the third section of the Old Testament. Second, I also gave you a general introduction to the psalms. Third, the five books of psalms were highlighted with analyses of some psalms as illustrative examples.

## **6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS**

Write a brief critical introduction to the Psalms in the Old Testament.

## 7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES

Alexander, David and Pat (1983) **The Lion Handbook to the Bible**, pp 327-356.

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## UNIT 13 CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE WRITINGS II – WORSHIP BOOK CONTINUED

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Critical Introduction to Song of Songs
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  - 3.4 Critical Introduction to Esther
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment Question
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit we started a study of critical introduction to Writings. The five books of Psalms were considered with a few selected for illustrative purpose. In this unit we will continue to examine four other books that are associated with some important religious festivals of the Jews. The four books are Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations and Esther. The study will consist of highlights on title, authorship, occasion and date, theme/purpose/message, contemporary relevance and outline.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Discuss the book of Song of Songs as a Jewish worship book

State the issues involved in post-exilic and pre-exilic dates and the lessons of the book of Ruth

Explain the literary features of Lamentations

Describe the purpose of the book of Esther.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Critical Introduction to Song of Songs**

As stated in the last unit this book is associated with one of the great occasions in the religious year of the Jews, the Passover. In the Hebrew text the title is “Solomon’s Song of Songs.” This may mean they are songs by, for or about King Solomon. “Song of Songs” may also mean the greatest of songs. Concerning the authorship it appears as if, by internal evidence, the book is ascribed to Solomon (1:1). He is referred to in several places (1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11:8:11-12). The opinion of most scholars today is that while parts of the book refer to him another author wrote it about him.

There are two theories about the date of the Song. The first is tenth century B.C. during the reign of Solomon. The second is a later date on the basis of the language. The “Song of Songs” is a collective of lyric love poems (with pastoral setting) that are passionate. The inclusion of the book in the Old Testament canon was controversial because it does



not mention God and it appears to be merely a celebration of physical love making.

The “Song of Songs” has been interpreted in different ways. The first interpretation is allegorical. The poems are considered to be allegories of the love of God for Israel or the present and relationship between Jesus Christ and the church. This is the traditional view. The second interpretation which is modern is that it is a poetic drama between two characters, a bride and the royal bridegroom. A similar view is that the poems involve three characters – King Solomon, the Shaunamite and her shepherd lover. It is therefore a celebration “of a maiden’s pure, spontaneous love for her rustic shepherd lover over the country blandishments of Solomon, who sought to win her for his royal haven.” (**The NIV Study Bible**, 1955, 996).

However the song can be interpreted as a celebration of human love that is seen to be exclusive (2:16), spontaneous (2:7), overwhelming, intense, unquenchable (8:6-7a) and precious (8:7b). Such beautiful and wonderful even sexual love is a gift of God that should enrich marital life and relationship. It is not carnal for delightful physical attraction to enrich faithful, godly, Christian marriage. After all, the husband and wife illustrated the union of Christ and the church in the New Testament (Eph. 5:32).

A theological outline of the book provided by the **NIV Disciple’s Study Bible** (1988, 802) based on the theme of celebration of human love is:

- (1) Longing Is a Part of Love (1:1-8)
- (2) Love Will Not Be Silent (1:9-2:7)

Spring and Love Go Together (2:8-17)

Love Is Exclusive (3:1-5)

Love Is Enhanced by Friendship (3:6-11)

Love Sees Only the Beautiful (4:1-7)

Love Involves Giving and Receiving (4:8-5:11)

Love Means Risking the Possibility of Pain (5:2-6:3)

Words Fail For Expressing Love (6:4-7:9)

Love Must Be Given Freely (7:10-13)

## True Love Is Priceless (8:1-14)

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1***

Write a short essay on Song of Songs as a Jewish Worship book.

### **3.2 Critical Introduction to Ruth**

This little book is one of the scrolls used for religious festivals in ancient Israel. Ruth is associated with the harvest feast of weeks of Pentecost. The historical setting of the book is the period of the judges. Interestingly, this “quiet tale of ordinary life,” contrasts the war strife of the period.

Scholars disagree about the time of writing. Some hold to a post-exilic time. This is because: Ruth is included among the writings which were canonized late and the author used some Aramaic style. Francisco (1977, 267) suggest that the book was written late to solve a post-exilic problem. His theory is: “Naomi is the returning exile, Ruth represents the foreigners who came along at the same time and Boaz represents the people of the land who were left behind when the others were taken into captivity. As in Obed the three were united to bring David, just so these three groups, united, would produce a great and permanent Kingdom.” Francisco also critiqued the above theory by explaining two points that may favour pre-exilic time: the style is very close to that of 1 and 2 Samuel; its canonization was probably delayed because it sanctioned foreign marriages.

The book of Ruth raises certain theological issues about the response of God to human crises, tragedies and pains of life. How should God’s people respond to disappointments and tragedies of life? This issue about the providence of God will be examined more in the last unit from the perspective of the entire Old Testament.

The book of Ruth has some practical lessons. It shows that God can turn bitterness to sweetness. God can use even ordinary people, even foreigners, to give favour to his people. Also, if the book was written during the period of the judges, the normal peaceful lives of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz is significant and the personal faith of the women when Israelite’s religion was at low ebb is particularly commendable. The sacrificial love of Ruth (a Moabite girl) for Naomi, her mother-in-law, is part of the gracious plan of God for universal salvation. It is a drama of redemption that King David descended from Ruth and the Messiah comes from Davidic lineage. An outline of the book provided by Francisco (1977, 268) is:

- (1) Sojourn in Moab for Ten Years, during which Time Naomi's Husband and Two Sons Die (1:1-5).
- (2) Return of Naomi with Ruth to Bethlehem (1:6-22).
- (3) Struggle with poverty, Relieved by the Kindness of Boaz (2:1-23)
- (4) Bold Act of Ruth (3:1-18)
- (5) Redemption of Naomi's Property, and Marriage of Ruth (4:1-22).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2***

List the factors involved in regard to the book of Ruth as post-exilic or pre-exilic.

### **3.3 Critical Introduction to Lamentations**

Lamentations are read by orthodox Jews in the synagogues in the middle of July to mark the anniversary of the destruction of Solomon's temple in 586 B.C and the destruction of Herod's temple in A.D 70. The **title** of the book in Hebrew scripture is **ekah** ("How...!") the first word in 1:1; 2:1; and 4:1. In Jewish tradition the book is referred to as **qinot** ("Lamentations"). The book appears among the Writings in the Hebrew Bible. However, in the Septuagint and some other texts it appears with the book of Jeremiah.

While the book is anonymous the authorship was ascribed to Jeremiah in ancient Jewish and Christian tradition, Jeremiah authorship is based on reasons like external Bible passages (2 Chr. 35:25; Jer. 7:29, 8:21; 9:1, 10, 20, (2) Similarity of vocabulary between the books of lamentations and Jeremiah, (3) Jeremiah witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. If Jeremiah did not write the laments the author must have been his contemporary. The book was likely written around 575 B.C., between 586 BC and 517 BC (when the rebuilt Jerusalem temple was dedicated).

The people of Judah lamented when Jerusalem was burned, the temple was destroyed and they went into exile because it meant "God had given them up to the enemy...so these laments express the poet's grief, not simply over the suffering and humiliation of his people, but over something deeper and far worse, that God had rejected his people because of their sin." (**The Lion Handbook to the Bible**, 1983, 414).

Literary feature of Lamentations is interesting. There are five poems in the book corresponding to the five chapters. The whole book is poetic. The first four are alphabetic acrostics. Each verse starts with a letter of the Hebrew alphabets. Chapter three is a triple acrostic. While each of the five laments has 22 verses, the third has 66 verses. This literary structure shows that the laments were carefully composed. Lamentations is the only book of the Old Testament that consists solely of laments. Many psalms are lament poems and most of the prophetic books contain different types of laments. The outline of the book in **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 1208) is:

- (1) Jerusalem's Misery and Desolation (1:1-22)
- (2) The Lord's Anger Against His People (2:1-22)
- (3) Judah's Complaint and Basis for Consolation (3:1-66)
- (4) The contrast between Zion's Past and Present (4:1-22)
- (5) Judah's Appeal for God's Forgiveness (5:1-22)

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3***

Write a short note on the literary features of Lamentations with the outline of the book.

## **3.4 Critical Introduction to Esther**

The book of Esther is associated with the Jewish feast of Purim. The origin of the feast is contained in the book. The book is actually the story of a plot to exterminate the Jewish nation in the days of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) the Persian King and how the plot was thwarted.

We do not know who wrote the book. However, from the internal evidence, the author was a Jew resident in a Persian city. Some scholars think that Mordecai wrote the book (9:20). The book was most likely written between 460 B.C (before the return of Ezra to Jerusalem) and 331 B.C (when the Persian Empire fell to Greece).

While some scholars treat the book as a fiction others regard it as a historical novel because of the available knowledge of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Persian life. One major problem of the book is that it has no explicit reference to God, worship, prayer or sacrifice. It has been observed, however, that while the book lacks divine name, religious elements are present in the account. This is because: (1) The providential care of God is taught, (2) Mordecai demonstrated trust in

God, who he believes is the Sovereign Lord over all, (3) Sin and retribution are taught.

The central purpose of the book appears to be the interest of the author “to record the institution of the annual festival of Purim and to keep alive for later generations the memory of the great deliverance of the Jewish people during the reign of Xerxes.” (**The NIV Study Bible**, 1995, 709). A concise outline of the book is:

- (1) How Esther came to be the Queen of Persia (1-2)
- (2) How the Jews Fell Under the Ban of Extermination (3-5)
- (3) How Danger was turned to Deliverance (6-10).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4***

Esther was written to document Purim and to preserve the knowledge of preservation of Jews in Persia. Discuss.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

From our study of four worship books of the Old Testament in this unit (Song or Songs, Ruth, Lamentations and Esther) the following conclusions can be made:

Song of songs is a collection and celebration of human love poems with allegorical or dramatic interpretation

Ruth teaches the providential care of God and the reward for personal faith and sacrificial love

Lamentations is not only an expression of grief for the physical destruction of Jerusalem and the temple but of God’s rejection of his people

Esther contains the origin of the feast of Purim and preserves the record of the deliverance of Jews in Persia.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we have examined some important critical introductory issues for the study of four worship books of the Old Testament Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations and Esther. These four, together with Psalms, are the festival scrolls used for some annual religious festivals among the Jews. In the next two units, you will be introduced to the historical books and wisdom literature.

## **6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENTS**

Write short notes on the following topics:

1. Some practical lessons in the Book of Ruth,
2. The literary features of Lamentations.

## **7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES**

Francisco, Clyde T. (1977), **Introducing the Old Testament**, pp. 267-269, 274-276.

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## **UNIT 14 CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO HISTORICAL BOOKS**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Critical Introduction to 1 & 2 Chronicles I
  - 3.2 Critical Introduction to 1 & 2 Chronicles II
  - 3.3 Critical Introduction to Ezra – Nehemiah I
  - 3.4 Critical Introduction to Ezra – Nehemiah II
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignment Questions
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

I have explained to you earlier on that Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings that are called historical books today are known as former prophets in the Hebrew Bible and can be regarded as prophetic history. In this unit, we are going to deal with 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah as the historical books of the Old Testament. They will be studied with the usual elements of critical biblical introduction: title, authorship, date, literary features, theme/purpose and outline.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Discuss the title, author/editor, date, and original readers of 1 & 2 Chronicles.

Explain the repetition and purpose of 1 & 2 Chronicles

Describe the authorship, date, as well as the order of return of Ezra and Nehemiah to Jerusalem.

Explain the differences in the characters of Ezra and Nehemiah and the common value of their books.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Critical Introduction of I & 2 Chronicles I

#### Title

I and 2 Chronicles was originally one book with the title **dibre hayyamim** which mean “the events of the days.” The events and days may also mean annals and years respectively. Later on the translators of the Septuagint called the book “the things omitted” showing that they regarded it as a supplement to the accounts in Samuel and Kings. They were also the first to divide the book into two parts. Jerome, who translated the Latin Vulgate, suggested the name “Chronicle” to the accounts.

#### Author/Editor

Ezra the scribe and reformer probably wrote Chronicles as well as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. If Ezra was not the writer the author appears to have shared some of the concerns of his reforms. Scholars have doubted the traditional view that Chronicles were written from a

priestly viewpoint. There are more evidences to show that the author was a Levite, perhaps a Levitical priest (2 Chr. 29:34).

### **Date**

Chronicles were most likely written during the lifetime of Ezra. The terms, style, theology, religious interest and ethical outlook indicate a date late in the Persian period. Chronicles were thus probably written in the later half of the fifth century around 450 to 425 B.C. They come at the end of writings because of the lateness of composition or admission for canonization.

### **Original Readers**

Another important basic issue worthy of note about Chronicles is the question of the original readers. They were written for those who had returned from exile with Ezra and Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem. They were written to give this new community a sense of their religious history. The author gave them historical facts for the sake of true worship, so as to avoid the mistake of the past that led God's people into exile. The history was therefore meant to be a sermon "that prosperity and well-being depend absolutely on faithfulness to God. Idolatry and neglect of God's law always has and always will result in judgement and disaster," according to **The Lion Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 286).

### ***Self – Assessment Exercise 3.1***

Write short notes on the title, author/editor, date, and original readers of 1 & 2 Chronicles.

## **3.2 Critical Introduction to 1 & 2 Chronicles II**

### **Repetition**

It is commonly known by Bible readers that Chronicles is a repetition of the information in 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings. It should be noted that the repetition is done with some particular interests. One of these is that he laid special interest on Judah (the Southern Kingdom) instead of Israel (the Northern Kingdom). He also seems to have moralized the information selected. Within the historical frame work he emphasized true "worship and true kingship". He showed concern for Jerusalem worship and tried to show that worship was more important than the political state.

### **Sources**



The chronicler is better seen as an editor and not as a writer or author. To compose the book he selected and arranged ideas taken from many sources to present a narrative for reorientation of the people of God. He used many sources which include the following:

1. 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings
2. Pentateuch, Judges, Ruth, Psalms, Isaiah, Lamentations and Zechariah
3. "The book of the Kings of Israel" (2 Chr. 20:34)
4. "The book of the annals of King David" (I Chr. 27:24)
5. "The book of the Kings of Judah and Israel" or "... of Israel and Judah" (2 Chr. 16:11).
6. "The annotations on the book of the Kings" (2 Chr. 24:27)

### **Purpose**

Building on some of the points mentioned above, we can see that the chronicler was especially interested in the reigns of David and Solomon. He devoted the bulk of his account to both of them. In addition to this observation he idealized both. He omitted difficulties and anything in his sources that would tarnish them. He did not mention the sin of David with Bathsheba, the flight from Jerusalem and such information that can diminish the glory of his reign. He also refrained from mentioning the terrible sins of Solomon like the execution of those who had wronged David, his idolatry, foreign wives, failures and rebellions against his rule. Such is the idealization of Davidic and Solomonic reigns in Chronicles.

Some other features/issues of Chronicles that will not be considered are: high figures like amounts of money or size of armies; the writing style of two fold stress; historicity; the sources he used were not available to others; the use of genealogies. For these and some other literary issues please refer to and study **The NIV Study Bible** (1995). An **Outline** of the two books is:

1. The Genealogies of the Tribes of Israel, from Creation to Restoration (I Chr. 1-9)
2. The Reign of David (I Chr. 10-29)
3. The Reign of Solomon (2 Chr. 1-9)
4. The Schism and History of the Kings of Judah to the Restoration of Jerusalem (2 Chr. 10-36)

### **Self – Assessment Exercise 3.3**

Chronicles is a repetition of Samuel and Kings with a purpose Discuss.

### 3.4 Critical Introduction to Ezra – Nehemiah I

#### Title

Ezra and Nehemiah were combined as one in the early Hebrew manuscripts. Josephus (the first century Jewish historian) and Jewish Talmud refer to them as the book of Ezra. The Septuagint also regarded them to be one. The beginning of both (Ezra 1.1, Neh. 1:1) can be taken as either two separate compositions or the same. Origen distinguished between the two calling them I Ezra and II Ezra. Jerome who translated the Latin Vulgate called Nehemiah “the second book of Esdrae (Ezra).” That tradition continued till 1448 when the two were separated.

#### Author/Date

It appears as if the same person(s) wrote the two books as well as Chronicles. The most popular opinion is that Ezra wrote the two books but the personal pronouns show that the chronicler used the personal memoirs of the two. The four books share the same historical perspective. Actually “Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther cover the last century of Old Testament Jewish history, roughly 538-433 B.C. ... the Jewish events belong to the time following the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire by Cyrus, King of Persia, in 539,” according to **The Lion Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 306). The composition of Ezra may be dated around 450-440 BC and that of Nehemiah around 433-430 B.C. Both Ezra and Nehemiah were written in Late Hebrew. A part was written in Aramaic, the international language during the period.

#### Order of Ezra and Nehemiah

2 Chronicles ended with the destruction of Jerusalem while the people were carried to Babylonian exile by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. Ezra follows from the end of Chronicles (Study 2 Chr. 36:22-23 and Ezra 1.1-3). The three-stage return of the exiles to Jerusalem is:

1. The first party which returned with Zerubabal in 538/7 B.C. to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. The story of Esther belongs to this period, before the return of Ezra (7:1).
2. The Second party arrived in Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ez. 7:8). This took place around 458 B.C.
3. The third party led by Nehemiah arrived in the 20<sup>th</sup> year (Neh. 2:1) at 445 B.C.

This is the traditional position. An alternative view that suggests that

Nehemiah arrived before Ezra is more problematic.

### **Self – Assessment Exercise 3.4**

Highlight the three-stage return of the exiles to Jerusalem in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

## **3.5 Critical Introduction to Ezra – Nehemiah II**

We will first look at the characters of Ezra and Nehemiah before we examine the features of the book based on their memoirs.

### **Ezra and Nehemiah**

Ezra was a scribe who was well educated. He was also a priest with deep spiritual piety. His interest was to carry out a religious reform in Jerusalem based on Mosaic Law. It was he who closed the Canon. Unfortunately Ezra was not popular among the ancient Jews. On the other hand **Nehemiah** appears to be more appreciated by the people. Francisco (1977, 135) described him as being “quite humane and, with all his faults, possessed much nobility of character. Generous, faithful, with a splendid patriotism he at once arouse our interest. Nehemiah was a businessman with a love for God in his heart. This heart kept him true, and his cleverness kept him successful. While the two contemporary men had similar spiritual interests they probably had different dispositions.

### **Lists and Documents/Letters**

One of the literary features of Ezra and Nehemiah like that of Chronicles is the prominence of various lists. Examples are:

- (1) The temple articles (Ezra 9-11)
- (2) The returned exiles (Ezra 2 cf Neh. 7:6-73)
- (3) The genealogy of Ezra (Ez 7:1-5)

Examples of official documents or letters in Ezra are:

- (1) The decree of Cyrus (1:2-4)
- (2) The accusation of Rehum and others against the Jews (4:11-16)
- (3) The Replay of Artaterxes I (4:17-22)

### **Value**

One of the values of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah is that they give information of the period after the return from exile. Ezra gives the account of the religious restoration which took place in Judah. Nehemiah complements this with the history of the re-establishment of the government and worship in Jerusalem.

### **Outlines of Ezra and Nehemiah**

A simple outline of Ezra is:

1. The First Return under Zerubbabel and the Rebuilding of the Temple (1-6)
2. The Second Return under Ezra and Reforms (Effort to break up mixed marriages, 7-10).

A broad outline of Nehemiah is:

- (1) The Third Return under Nehemiah: The Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem in the Face of much opposition (1-6).
- (2) Continuation of the First Administration of Nehemiah and Outbreak of Revival and Dedication of the wall (7:1-12:47)
- (3) Second Administration of Nehemiah: Absence, Return, Reorganization and Reforms (13:1-31).

### ***Self – Assessment Exercise 3.6***

Explain: (1) The differences in the characters of Ezra and Nehemiah  
(2) The common value of their Books

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

With our study of 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah three important observations can be made. The first is that while the accounts of Chronicles are historically reliable he “Contemporized” for the benefits of the returned exile. The second is that while he did not include new facts he used facts at hand to moralize and sermonize for the worship of God. The third is that in Ezra and Nehemiah we find accounts of post-exilic and restored lives of Israelites.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit I have led you in a critical introductory study to the historical books of the Old Testament. 1 & 2 Chronicles were studied with title, author, editor, date original readers, repetitive nature, sources, purpose

and outline. The title, author, order, lists and documents/letters, and outlines of Ezra and Nehemiah were also examined.

## **6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS**

Why did the Chronicles repeat but contemporize Jewish historical facts?

## **7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES**

Francisco, Clyde T. (1977) **Introducing the Old Testament**, pp. 130-136

Alexander, David and Pat (1983) **The Lion Handbook to the Bible**, pp 286-312

**The NIV Study Bible** (1985), pp 578-717.

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## **UNIT 15 CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE WRITINGS IV – WISDOM LITERATURE**

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- 3.0 Main Content
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  - 3.2 Critical Introduction to Proverbs
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- 7.0 References and Other Sources

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Apart from the worship books and the historical books the third type of the Writings is Wisdom Literature. The major wisdom books of the Old Testament are Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes. These are the books that this unit will examine. However, it should be pointed out quickly that in the Old Testament wisdom tradition is not confined to only Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes. We have wisdom in other parts. For example, in the narratives (Jotham's fable of the trees- Judges 9:7-15), in the Psalms (like 37, 49, 112, 127, 133), in the prophetic oracles (like Isaiah 28:23ff; Jer. 17:5ff; Hosea 14:9).

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Discuss the meaning, types of wisdom and development of Old Testament wisdom literature

Explain the title, author, date, types, themes, nature and interpretation of Proverbs

Analyse the issue of human suffering in the experience and book of Job.

Evaluate the seemingly pessimistic wisdom stated in Ecclesiastes.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Introduction to Wisdom Literature**

What is wisdom in the Old Testament? The answer provided by Derek Kidner (1983, 377) is, "the voice of reflection and experience, rather than of bare command or preaching." This makes the wisdom literature of the Old Testament to have some similarities with that of the ancient Near East-Egypt and Mesopotamia. The two types of wisdom literature are: Practical wisdom and contemplative/speculative wisdom.

#### **Practical Wisdom**

Practical wisdom is intended to give "practical advice on how to live happily and successfully." The Old Testament example of this is the book of Proverbs.

#### **Contemplative/Speculative Wisdom**

Contemplative wisdom is intended to probe “the mysteries of human existence often with considerable skepticism.” The book of Job and especially the book of Ecclesiastes are good examples of this type of wisdom in Israel.

### **The Development of Wisdom in Ancient Israel**

The level of the development of wisdom in ancient Israel is so high that one cannot but ask: How did the wisdom literature of Israel develop? What is the source or origin of ancient Israel’s wisdom? It has been observed that the Old Testament wisdom literature did not develop in an intellectual vacuum. We find in Israel’s wisdom sayings some concerns that are similar to the wisdom writings of Egyptians, Babylonians and Canaanites. Some of these are “teachability, sobriety, wise speech, kindness, trust in divine help, magnanimity, friendship,” according to **The Lion Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 318). The Israelites must have been influenced by the wisdom of their environment.

In the Old Testament Solomon has outstanding reputation for wisdom and his openness to and interaction with foreigners is well known. Solomon was acquainted with other world courts (I Kings 4:32-34) as exemplified with the visit of the Queen of Sheba. The wisdom men and circles in Israel must have received their impetus from Solomon.

In spite of the similarity of Old Testament wisdom literature to that of the Ancient Near East, biblical wisdom is distinct because of its God-centredness. Consistently it is asserted that wisdom is to fear God and to live rightly. Ecclesiastes concludes on this note (Beck. 12:13-14) and it is the starting point of Proverbs (1:7) and the focus of all the wisdom literature (Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Prov. 9:10). With this general introduction to wisdom literature of the Old Testament I will lead you to examine Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes in the next sections.

#### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1***

Write short notes on the meaning, types of wisdom and development of Old Testament Wisdom books.

### **3.2 Critical Introduction to Proverbs**

#### **Title**

Proverb is a translation of the Hebrew term “marshal” which means “to be like”. Because of the primary meaning of comparison or similitude, the term is applied to diverse discourses, sentences and expressions. Some examples are the prophecy of Balaam (Num. 23:7), the poems of

Job and the parables of Ezekiel (17:2; 20:49). It is more accurate then to describe an Old Testament proverb simply as “a wise saying of any form”. In Proverbs wisdom is based on the fear of God and obedience to his word. Hence, Proverbs is mainly concerned with what is right and what is wrong.

### **Author/Date**

Traditionally, Solomon the King of Israel has been recognized as the author of Proverbs. However, the book itself claims three authors. While Solomon appears in the title, three sections are prefaced with the name of Solomon but two are attributed to Agur and Lemuel. It may be best then to regard Solomon as the author/compiler (I Kings 3:32-34) who, with others, incorporated the wisdom of the East in line with the standards of God.

In view of this explanation most of the proverbs would have been written during the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the days of the first kings of Israel. It must be recognized, however, that editing continued for some centuries. King Hezekiah (who reigned 715-686 B.C) arranged for compilation of the work (Prov. 25:1-29:27). The present form of the book was finalized at the time of Ben Sira (180B.C.)

### **Types/Themes**

Five types of proverbs in the Old Testament according to Francisco (1977, 265) are: **Historical** proverbs, a popular saying based on a past event (e.g. I Sam. 10:12; 19:24); **Metaphorical** proverbs; **Enigmas**; **Parables**; **Didactical** proverbs, information and behaviour. Proverbs can also be grouped according to the subject. Important themes in Proverbs 10-31 from **The Lion Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 358) are:

- (1) The fear of the Lord (eg. 1:7; 3:7; 10:27);
- (2) Wisdom and folly – the wise man and the fool (eg. 9:8; 14:8, 15; 26:1,3)
- (3) The righteous and the wicked (eg. 1:10-19; 3:1-2; 11:3-11; 21:7-8; 26-27)
- (4) Words and the tongue (eg. 12:6, 14, 17-19; 18:4, 6, 13, 20-21)
- (5) The family, parents, children and wives (eg. 1:8; 4:2-4; 20:11; 22:6, 15)
- (6) Laziness and hard work (eg. 10:4-5, 26; 18:19; 22:13)

### **Nature/Interpretation**



Proverbs should be understood as generalizations based on observation about life. They are not to be understood as formula or promise of God for success. For example some proverbs teach that prosperity comes when a person live by God's standards (Prov. 3:2). While this is generally true there are many godly people who have no wealth to show for it. On the other hand even wicked people may even prosper through bribe.

### **Outline**

The main sections of Proverbs are:

- (1) A general introduction (1-9)
- (2) Six collections of sayings (10:1-31:9)
- (3) An acrostic poem on the ideal woman (37:10-31)

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2***

Who is the author of Proverbs? When was it edited?

## **3.3 Critical Introduction to Job**

### **Title**

The book of Job takes its title from the principal character of the book, a wealthy and righteous sheikh of the people of the East (1:1-3). The book is a great and dramatic work. It is also unique in form and theme though it is a wisdom material.

### **Author/Date**

The author/editor of the book of Job is not known. However, he was most likely an Israelite since, very frequently, he used **Yahweh** (the covenant name of God, rendered as "the LORD" in NIV). The date of the book is also not known. Questions that relate to the dating of the book are: When did Job live? When did the events recorded happen? When was the book composed? Scholars think that Job lived in the days of the patriarchs like Abraham. The book was probably written during the reign of Solomon and it is close in outlook to the book of Proverbs.

An alternative view is that it was written during or after the exile, based on the style, advanced theology of Satan and late canonization.

### **Theme**

The book of Job deals with the subject of human suffering, technically called **theodicy** in theology and philosophy. How do we explain the greatness, goodness and justice of God in the light of human experience of evil, suffering and pain? Why do the righteous suffer? This has been one great enigma of the human mind. Unfortunately, I cannot lead you in a further study of this subject because of lack of space. I advise you to read it up in **The NIV Study Bible** (1995, 722-724).

What has compounded the problem of theodicy is the role of evil, the devil or Satan in human suffering. Both Job and his three friends were ignorant of the involvement of Satan in his calamity. Do we know better today? The three comforters of Job suggested a simple solution to the difficult problem: God prospers people for good living. Job was suffering because of wickedness or sins committed. They were guilty of fallacy of overgeneralization. The traditional theology is narrow, inadequate and faulty because it was misapplied.

### **Teaching**

The book of Job teaches us some hard abiding lessons of life:

- (1) Reality of suffering, pain, troubles in human life experience.
- (2) Not all suffering is due to sin. The righteous can experience calamity for reasons not known.
- (3) God will reward the righteous. The godly will be victorious over pain.
- (4) God will do and give justice in his own time and in his own way.

### **Outline**

The book of Job can be arranged as follows:

- (1) The prologue: Affliction of Job by Satan (1-2)

- (2) Three Cycles of Speeches: Dialogue and Dispute between Job and Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar (3-27).
- (3) Interlude on wisdom (28)
- (4) Monologues: Job, Elihu and divine discourses (29-42:6)
- (5) Epilogue (42:7-17)

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3***

Write a concise essay on the problem of suffering in the book of Job.

## **3.4 Critical Introduction to Ecclesiastes**

### **Title**

In Hebrew the title of this book is “Kohелеth” or “qohелеth” and it is taken from the opening sentence (1:1). This is the title of the anonymous writer and it could mean “Teacher”, “Speaker” or “Philosopher”. However, from the Hebrew root it means “to call” or “to assemble” especially for religious purpose. The Greek and Latin versions of the book are called “Ecclesiastes.” Apparently a person who gathers the congregation also can be called “The Preacher.”

### **Author/Date**

The author is not known but it is traditionally attributed to King Solomon as suggested by several Bible passages (1:1, 12, 16; 2:4-9; I Kings 2:9; 3:12). Another author most probably wrote it because he wrote as a subject and teacher and not as a King. The opinion of most scholars today is that the Teacher used Solomon as a model of life that he used for evaluation. No time period is mentioned in the book. If Solomon is the author then it was written during his reign in the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The book was canonized reluctantly and it was not fully accepted till about AD 400.

### **Purpose/Theme**

The book of Ecclesiastes is strange to the modern person but it is said to be “a popular form of writing in Near Eastern countries in Old Testament times.” This is also one of the reasons why we find it difficult to interpret the book. The literary device is not familiar; it looks disjointed with thoughts, observations, and sayings that lack connections and coherence. The author carefully and deeply studied human life, aspirations and preoccupations and he has drawn some logical conclusions. His main conviction as stated by **The Lion Handbook to the Bible** (1983, 362) is that “Life as man lives it, without God, is futile, meaningless, purposeless, empty. It is a bleak future.” It is wrong for us

to look at Ecclesiastes like secular existential philosophy of cynicism and despair. The book is God-ward, profoundly spiritual and ultimately optimistic. It concludes that when God is not left out of the picture of life a person will enjoy his food, work and marriage (2:24-26; 3:10-15; 5:18-20; 9:7-10).

The theme of Ecclesiastes is relevant to the yearnings of modern life as seen in many novels and plays. He argued that the highest good in life (**summum bonum**) can not be found in pleasure, wisdom and wealth. To him, the meaning of life is to moderately enjoy the gifts of God (James 1:17). Life is meaningful and purposeful when it is centered on God. The wisdom of life is the fear and obedience of God (Ecc. 12:9-14).

### Outline

- (1) Prologue (1:1-11)
- (2) The vanity of wisdom, pleasure, toil, wealth, achievement (1:12-6:16)
- (3) Various practical observations (7:1-11:8)
- (4) Advice to young people (11:8-12:8)
- (5) Conclusion (12:9-14).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4***

Is the view of life expressed in Ecclesiastes realistic or pessimistic? Explain.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Certain conclusions can be made about the concept of wisdom in the Old Testament as found in our study of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes. The conclusions include the following:

Wisdom books deal more with philosophical and practical matters of life; wisdom is associated more with “wise men” (like Solomon).

Proverbs give instructions about righteous, prosperous and happy life and appear to be optimistic.

Job and Ecclesiastes wrestled with philosophical and theological questions like the problem of evil and the prosperity of the wicked and they seem to be pessimistic.

All affirm that the fear of God is the basis of all wisdom.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit you have been introduced to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The unit started with a general introduction to the wisdom books-especially Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes. This was followed with brief critical introduction to each book. This unit brings us to the end of introduction to each book of the Old Testament. In the next unit certain theological issues will be examined from the overall perspective of Old Testament revelation.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS**

Write short notes on:

- a. The Development of Old Testament Wisdom Literature
- b. The Pessimistic Wisdom of Ecclesiastes

## **7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES**

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## **UNIT 16 SOME THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Sovereignty of God
  - 3.2 Creation and Evolution
  - 3.3 Miracles
  - 3.4 The Ethics of the Holy War
  - 3.5 The Problem of Evil
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment Question
- 7.0 References and Other Sources

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

I am pleased to welcome you to the study of this unit, the last in our critical study of the Old Testament. It has been a long journey from unit 1. I hope you have received some useful spiritual insights and benefits from this academic study of the Bible. In the course of the study I have given you hints about most of the theological issues that will be examined in this concluding unit. They are: the sovereignty of God, creation and evolution, miracles, the ethics of the Holy War, and the problem of evil. They will be studied from the perspective of the entire Old Testament.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Discuss the implications of the doctrine of sovereignty of God as seen in the Old Testament

Describe and analyse the relationship between the doctrine of creation and the theory of evolution

Highlight the nature of miracles in the experience of Old Testament people

Explain the ethics of the holy war fought for the conquest of Canaan, Evaluate the problem of the existence and effects of evil in the Old Testament and in the world today.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 The Sovereignty of God**

One of the theological issues in the Old Testament is the existence and sovereignty of God. The Old Testament does not attempt to prove the existence of God. The existence of God is affirmed as the Creator, Owner and Sustainer of the Universe. Some of the attributes of God revealed in Genesis are that God is: eternal (1:1), gracious (2:8-24; 22:14; 32:10; 45:5-9; 39:21-23); wrathful (6:5-8), faithful (8:1), personal (9:8-17), saviour (12:1-3), ever present (16:13), sovereign (18:14; 24:3, 7, 50; 28:3; 43:23; 41:16, 25, 28, 32); just (18:20-33; 20:4-6), one (31:30-35; 35:2), and holy (32:36).

The revelation of God as experienced by the people of Israel has many implications. Some will be highlighted. One is the significance that, as the Creator of the world, God has the power to fulfill his purpose

concerning the creation. Nothing can thwart the plan, and intention of God for his people. The Old Testament consistently affirms the dominion of God over the entire physical and spiritual Universe. This is the absolute nature of God's sovereignty.

Another implication is that the LORD who is the Creator is also the Saviour of his people (Isa. 43:1, 14). This makes the philosophy of life and the faith of the Hebrews to be holistic. This is one of the reasons why the Jews did not make a distinction between the sacred and the secular. The religious, social and political dimensions of their society are intricately bound together. God is not only dependable but is sufficient to meet all the needs of his people.

The Lord revealed himself to the Jews as Yahweh, the covenant making and keeping God, who is loving, kind and merciful (Ex. 34:6-7). He chose them in love and they entered into covenant relationship with him. But God is also just and righteous. When they rebelled against the Lord they experienced his wrath. The experience of the flood and the exile shows the other side of God. The love and wrath of God are not opposite but complimentary attributes of God.

Finally, God deserves to be praised, worshipped and obeyed. That assertion will be illustrated with Psalms, the most important book of prayer, praise and worship of the Old Testament. God is the central theme of Psalms. The Psalms reflect the faith of the Israelites in God. They reveal who God is as one, holy, spirit, and steadfast and loving. The Psalms invite us to worship him accordingly (e.g. Psalms 41; 72; 89; 106; 150). The Psalms also praise the mighty acts of God in what he does. God creates, rules, reveals himself, chooses, forgives and saves (e.g. Psalms 78, 136, 145). The sovereignty of God is the basis of all other theologies of the Old Testament.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1***

Why should we worship the sovereign God? Discuss from the Old Testament perspective.

## **3.2 Creation and Evolution**

The Old Testament declares emphatically and consistently that God is the creator of the universe (Gen. 1; Psalms 8, 100, 104; Isa. 40:12-31). A very important theological emphasis is that God created the physical and spiritual universe out of nothing (Latin: **ex nihilo**). Human beings were also created by God to be dependent, spiritual, intelligent and responsible beings (Gen. 2; Job 33:4). In 1859 Charles Darwin published **Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection**. He



proposed a theory of evolution that has had serious impact on the biblical account of creation as a record of human beginning. The theory of evolution can be defined as “the derivation of species from different pre-existing species by a process of descent with modification,” according to Bruce Milne (1998, 115).

We will now reflect critically on the implications of the apparent conflict between the biblical doctrine of creation and the scientific theory of evolution. As stated under section 3.1.1 above, the biblical doctrines of creation, sin and redemption are related. The first implication is that if humanity was not created but evolved from lower beings then it can be argued that the doctrines of sin and salvation are untenable. The second is that the biblical doctrine of creation is not a treatise or science and it is wrong to interpret it as a document of natural or physical science. However, biblical revelation should be open to scientific investigation as much as possible. Religion should respect science. The third is that science should not be arrogant by thinking that the scientific method can investigate every dimension of reality. How can science investigate the revelation that creation was made out of nothing? What is the answer of science to the fact the evolution could not have taken place in a vacuum? Where did the first species come from?

Finally both religion and science are valid routes to knowledge. Some aspects of creation and evolution can be reconciled. An objective reading shows various stages from creation **ex nihilo** to the appearance of man. The days of Genesis may be periods of time after all. Faith and science should cooperate for the enrichment of human life.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2***

Can the apparent conflict between creation and evolution be resolved? Discuss.

### **3.3 Miracles**

The Old Testament is full of many supernatural events called miracles. Some examples are: How the Israelites crossed the Red Sea when delivered from the Egyptian bondage (Ex. 13:17-14:31), the provision of water, manna and quails for them during the desert journey (Exodus 15:22-17:7), the sun standing still at the command of Joshua (Joshua 10:12-15). A miracle is “An act of God beyond human understanding that inspires wonder, displays God’s greatness, and leads people to recognize God at work in the world,” according to **NIV Disciple’s Study Bible** (1988, 1736). Miracles as recorded in the Old Testament

give glory to God and to increase the faith of people (e.g. Ex. 14:18, 31). The God of the Old Testament is a miracle-working God.

Some scientists do not believe in miracles. They try to give scientific explanation to every miraculous claim. For instance the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea is accounted for by a powerful wind while the sun standing still during the day is described as a kind of eclipse of the sun.

The Christian, biblical response to scientific and philosophical objections to miracle includes the following: One, life, even human existence, is a mystery. Human beings only witness to the facts of life and death. We don't know how they take place. Secondly, God does perform miracles in response to prayer of his people. When God brings an event to pass by the performance of miracles, he is merely demonstrating his power over nature and history. Thirdly, objection to the possibility of miracles is a denial of the sovereignty of God. Can the sovereign God not suspend natural laws and intervene in nature as he wishes? (Psalm 115:3).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3***

The people of the Old Testament believed in a miracle-working God. Discuss.

## **3.4 The Ethics of the Holy War**

In Numbers 21:1-3 we read the account of how Israel completely destroyed Arad. During the farewell address of Moses, he prophesied that the Lord would drive out the inhabitants of Canaan before them. He urged the Israelites to destroy the nations totally (Deut. 7:1-6). Joshua led the army to destroy and conquer the Kings and people of Jericho, Ai and many other cities (Josh. 6-11). The role that warfare played in these accounts is disturbing. Why did a good God declare and lead his people to kill others? This is the ethical question of war associated with the conquest of Canaan. We will start our analysis by explaining that these are holy wars were ordered, fought and won by God himself.

God had made a covenant with Abraham to possess the land. One of the reasons why God decided to wipe out the land is the sin and idolatrous worship practices of the Canaanites. God carried out this action for the spiritual protection of the Jews. The holy wars are thus to be understood in the context of the history of redemption and judgement at a particular time in the dealings of God with humanity. This was a particular

mission of God which testifies to God's hatred for idols and his ability to triumph over them. Israelites were merely instruments in the hands of God to achieve his purpose. You will recall that God earlier on destroyed a large portion of mankind because of their evil, wickedness and rebellion (Gen. 6-7).

Consequently the Lord warned Israelites not to enrich themselves materially with the booty of the war. The Lord won the war for them and he owned the land. When the Hebrews refused to honour the Lord in the land, but lived in disobedience and sinned against the Lord, he drove them away from the holy land to exile.

The conquest of Canaan is not a license for God's people today to kill and conquer people of the world. Even the crusades that Christians fought in the 12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries did not achieve the redemptive, missionary purpose of God. The holy war described in the Old Testament has no application to modern warfare. Warfare is a terrible human experience and they are fought on the basis of human aggression, evil and wickedness. The innocent suffer in war. Women, children die in millions. The human and Christian ideal is peace not war (James 4:1-2).

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4***

Write a short note on The Ethics of the Holy War in the Old Testament.

### **3.5 The Problem of Evil**

The last theological issue in the Old Testament that we will like to examine is the question of theodicy. How can we account for the evil, wickedness, sin, pain and suffering experienced by people of the Old Testament who belong to Yahweh who is great, powerful and good? How do we explain: The bitterness that made many of the Psalmists to cry and agonize to God? The tragedy that Naomi experienced in Moab described in the book of Ruth? The destruction of Jerusalem that led to the writing of the book of Lamentations? The afflictions of Job who was blameless, upright and God-fearing?

The Christian explanation of the problem of evil in the world is part of the doctrine of providence. According to **NIV Disciple's Study Bible** (1988, 1737), providence is "God's care for and guidance of His creation against all opposition." Theologically, evil is usually classified either as moral (sin) or physical (natural). Sin has come into the world as a result of the disobedience of man. Sin is not part of the things that God created

originally. Physical evil are natural disasters like floods, whirlwinds and earthquakes.

In the experience of Old Testament people we see the reality and mystery of evil. Naomi experienced bitterness and tragedy of loss of husband and children. Job suffered loss of children, health and material possessions. We also see the mystery of evil in the fact that many times we do not know why people suffer pain. The secret of evil appears to be in the mind of God and it is beyond human reason. Job and his comforters did not know that Satan was responsible for his affliction. We like the Old Testament characters do not always understand why we suffer calamity today.

We do know that pain warns us of danger in our body system. Suffering makes us to depend upon the Lord. However, in spite of such explanation, evil can not be justified. Christian response to the problem of evil includes the following: One, the biblical perspective does not necessarily resolve the mystery of evil, but a declaration and assurance of certainty of victory over all kinds and manifestations of evil in human experience. Two, the presence of evil in the world does not question the power and sovereignty of God. We must not misinterpret God. The world may be evil, wicked and bitter. God is always good and sweet. The author of Lamentations affirmed the goodness of God in the face of their suffering occasioned by the destruction of Jerusalem (Lam. 3:22-23). That is victory over the problem of evil in the world. Steadfast, stubborn faith in God in the face of trials and tribulation now will give us total victory over evil some day.

### ***Self-Assessment Exercise 3.5***

Give a Christian and biblical response to the mystery of evil.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

A critical study of the Old Testament raises some theological questions. The following are some of the conclusions from a critical reflection on some of such issues:

God has the freedom and power to act as he wills. Our response is to worship, obey and submit to God

The doctrine of creation and the scientific theory of evolution are not necessarily alternative, contradictory but complimentary explanation of the origin of creation.

Possibility of miracles is very consistent with the doctrine of sovereignty of God. Science and philosophy can not successfully deny the supernatural events of life.

The holy war that Yahweh declared, fought and won in the Old Testament is part of his redemptive plan for the world and does not justify any modern warfare.

In the Old Testament we see the reality and mystery of evil. Biblical revelation is not theoretical justification for suffering but practical affirmation of victory over evil.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have examined some theological issues in our study of critical introduction to the Old Testament. Questions have been raised about the sovereignty of God, creation and evolution, miracles, the ethics of the holy war and the problem of evil. Attempt has been made to reflect critically, respond to and answer those issues.

What I have done in this course is to introduce you to a critical study of the Bible. You will take another course on a critical introduction to New Testament. I urge you then to remain committed to the prayerful study of the word of God. May it please the Lord to use these efforts to give you a better understanding of the biblical revelation to bless your life and to enrich your Christian work. God bless you.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS**

Write a concise theological essay on The Problem of Evil from the Perspective of the Old Testament.

## **7.0 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES**

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