

1 | The Hebrew Scriptures

Factual content of the Old Testament

Enrichment Version

The Enrichment Version is designed for those who wish to explore biblical content of the Old Testament without the intention of pursuing either a certificate or a degree. This syllabus is identical to the one used by credit and degree-track students, except it is void of Internet articles, videos, listings of secondary resources, exams, and writing assignments. There is nothing to submit for professorial review or grading. Therefore, the Enrichment syllabus is available for downloading without cost. Interested parties may glean a substantial knowledge, comprehension, and understanding of the Old Testament through this guide.

The course introduces the people, places, and events found within the Old Testament, including a minimum of 100 personalities, major geographical sites, stories, events, and prophetic discourses. Moreover, an introduction to the different types of literary genres contained in the Old Testament will be given. The course is organized in five modules: (1) The Torah, (2) The Former Prophets, (3) The Latter Prophets, (4) The Writings: History, and (5) The Writings: Wisdom and Worship.

The course emphasizes self-discovery with a view toward achieving competency in biblical content. Until the student becomes acquainted with the content of the biblical text, there is little justification for moving forward with theology or application. Furthermore, critical thinking skills begin with an open mind, not with predetermined conclusions. Ignorance and hearsay only block the opportunity to draw sound conclusions. The study concentrates on primary sources, not secondary ones. Consequently, course objectives point toward achieving a high level of literacy regarding the biblical text. Critical issues and background studies are reserved for later courses.

Objectives

1. Relate people to geographical locations, events, and institutions listed in the Old Testament
2. Compare and contrast the different types of literary genre contained in the Old Testament
3. Arrange important Old Testament events in chronological order

Course Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, the student will be able to

1. Identify and evaluate the significance of Old Testament characters and sites.
2. Relate events surrounding Old Testament characters and sites.

3. Read the Old Testament with a sense of continuity and integration.

A Letter of Introduction

This course, “The Hebrew Scriptures” will provide an overview of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the larger part of the Bible and precedes the New Testament in time. An understanding of the content of the Old Testament is essential to comprehending the New Testament. So, that is why we begin with the “Old” Testament.

As you begin reading the Old Testament, you will encounter a myriad of unfamiliar names and places. You will hear stories you have never heard before. Or, if you have some acquaintance with the Old Testament already, you will find new and interesting details. At first, you may feel you are drowning in facts about people you never knew or even though were worthy of your attention. But the more you read, the grander the stories become and the more meaning they will pack into your Old Testament portfolio.

I hope you will take the study seriously, for the rewards are great. You will do well to be persistent. Set aside some time out of every day (if your other responsibilities do not prohibit it) to read and study. This will keep the material fresh in your mind and help you carry the story forward.

Procedure

The course has five modules. The modules follow the divisions of the Hebrew Bible according to ancient Jewish practice. While, for the most part, the biblical books follow an historical sequence, they reflect the threefold division of Torah, Prophets, and Writings.

This syllabus is not intended to replace the Bible but to guide you in your engagement with the Biblical text. Each module will culminate with an examination. Although the exams may include some site material, they are primarily over the content of the Bible.

1. First, review the content of the entire course.
2. Read the Introductory section for a quick introduction to the Bible. Then, read carefully the material in Module 1.
3. Read the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) to get the flow of the material.
4. After a first reading, you may wish to read the biblical books again. This time, make notes on the outstanding persons. Note their relation to one another and the story that surrounds them. Be aware of the geographical environment--important place names.
5. It may be helpful to read selections a third time, stopping only when you need to make sure you have the people and events firmly in mind. Use the list of names, places, and events noted in the "Things to Know" below as a study guide.
6. Once you have completed Module 1, move on to the other modules.

Things to Know

Module 1. The Torah

1. In preparing for examination over The Torah, you should know important facts about the following personalities: Aaron, Abel, Abimelech, Abraham, Adam, Ammon, Aram, Asher, Asshur, Baal, Balaam, Balak, Benjamin, Bethuel, Bilhah, Cain, Caleb, Canaan, Chemosh, Cush, Dan, Dathan, Dinah, Edom, Eleazar, Eliezer, Enoch, Ephraim, Esau, Eve, Gad, Hagar, Ham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Japheth, Jethro, Joseph, Joshua, Judah, Kedorlaomer, Korah, Laban, Lamech, Leah, Levi, Lot, Manasseh, Melchizedek, Midian, Miriam, Mizraim, Moab, Moses, Nahor, Naphtali, Noah, Og, Pharaoh, Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, Rachel, Rebekah, Reuben, Sarai/Sarah, Seth, Shechem, Shem, Sihon, Simeon, Tamar, Terah, Zebulun, Zilpah, Zipporah.
2. You should be able to identify these major geographical sites: Ammon, Arabia, Aram, Asshur, Babylon, Bashan, Bethel, Canaan, Damascus, Desert of Paran, Edom, Egypt, Euphrates River, Gilead, Goshen, Haran, Hebron, Heshbon, Jordan River, Kadesh-Barnea, Moab, Nebo, Philistia, Red Sea, Salem, Sinai, Sodom, Ur.
3. You should have a general acquaintance with the stories, events, and content of the first five books of the Old Testament and be able to identify the book in which these occur.
4. Know unique items like the Flood, the Exodus, the Ten Words (Commandments), and the tabernacle. Be able to identify key feasts and special times: the Day of Atonement, Harvest, Ingathering, Jubilee, Passover, Sabbath, and Sabbatical Year. Know the general function of the priests and the purpose, type, and occasion of the various sacrifices. Know the significance of the cities of refuge.

Module 2. The Former Prophets

1. From Joshua, know Achan, Adoni-Zedek, Jabin, Joshua, and Rahab. From Judges, know Abimelech, Barak, Deborah, Delilah, Eglon, Ehud, Gideon, Jael, Jephthah, Micah, Othniel, Samson, and Sisera. From Samuel, be acquainted with Abigail, Abishai, Abiathar, Abner, Absalom, Agag, Ahithophel, Amnon, Asahel, Bathsheba, Dagon, David, Eli, Goliath, Hannah, Ish-Bosheth, Joab, Jonathan, Mephibosheth, Nabal, Nathan, Samuel, Saul, Tamar, Uriah, and Zadok. From Kings, you should know the identity of Adonijah, Ahab, Ahaz, Ahijah, Asa, Athaliah, Baasha, Ben-Hadad, Elijah, Elisha, Gedaliah, Hazael, Hezekiah, Hiram, Hoshea, Jehoiada, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Jehu, Jehoshaphat, Jeroboam, Jezebel, Joash, Josiah, Manasseh, Micaiah, Naaman, Naboth, Nebuchadnezzar, Obadiah, Omri, Pekah, the Queen of Sheba, Rehoboam, Sargon, Sennacherib, Shalmaneser, Shishak/Sheshonk, So, Solomon, Shunemmite woman, Zedekiah.
2. Know major tribal areas of Canaan--Judah, Ephraim, Benjamin, and Dan; places like Ai, Babylon, Bethlehem, Carmel, Damascus, Gibeah of Benjamin, Gibeon, Gilgal, Hazor, Jabesh, Jebus/Jerusalem, Jericho, Jezreel, Moab, Mount Ebal, the Philistine cities, Samaria, Shiloh, and Ziklag.
3. From Joshua, be acquainted with the conquest of Jericho, the battle of Ai, the reading of the blessings and curses at Gerizim and Ebal, the confederated kings of the south and the battle at Gibeon, the confederacy of the king of Hazor, and the covenant renewals at Shechem. From Judges, be familiar with the victory over the Canaanites during the judgeship of Deborah, Gideon's encounter with the Midianites, Abimelech's attempt to gain power, the story of Jephthah, the story of Samson, the account of Micah and the move of the Danites, and the events centering on a Levite from Ephraim. From Samuel, know the story of Samuel's birth, the events surrounding the taking of the ark of the covenant and its return to Israel, the kingship of Saul, and the life and rule of David. From Kings, be acquainted with the rule of Solomon and the building of the temple, the events touching on the lives of Rehoboam and Jeroboam, Ahab, Elijah and Elisha, Jehu, Athaliah and Joash, Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah.

Module 3. The Latter Prophets

1. Fifteen books make up this unit: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The focus of **Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and Micah** is on both Israel and Judah before Israel's captivity. **Joel, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah** are preoccupied with Judah; **Habakkuk** is concerned with Judah and Babylon. **Obadiah** prophesies against Edom, who gloats over the demise of Judah. **Jonah and Nahum** center on Nineveh and the Assyrians. **Ezekiel** addresses the exiles of Judah in Babylon; **Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi** concentrate on the restored community.
2. Some of the books belong to the eighth century (latter part of the 700s)--perhaps Jonah and definitely Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and Micah. Know the general focus and content of each.
3. Significant **places** include Ammon and its cities of Heshbon and Rabbah; Assyria and its capital of Nineveh; Babylon; Bashan; Edom; Egypt; Judah and its capital of Jerusalem or Zion; places in Israel--Bethel, Samaria, and Jezreel; Moab; Philistine cities of Ashdod, Askkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza; Syria and Damascus, its capital; Phoenician cities of Sidon and Tyre.
4. **People** to know, in addition to the prophets themselves, include Ahaz, Gomer, Hezekiah, Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, Lo-Ammi, Nebuchadnezzar, and the "Cows of Bashan."
5. You should know the general time the prophets lived, the synopsis and characteristics of each book, the major characters, and major place.

Module 4. The Writings: History

1. Know the general content of each book addressed in this module.
2. Know the major characters of each book:
 - Ruth** -- Boaz, Elimelech, Kilion, Mahlon, Naomi, Obed, Orpah
 - Chronicles**--None beyond those introduced in earlier modules, except Cyrus of Persia (2 Chron. 36:22-23)
 - Daniel**--Azariah (Abednego), Belshazzar, Daniel (Beltshazzar), Darius, Gabriel (angel), Hananiah (Shadrach), Michael (prince or angel), Nebuchadnezzar
 - Esther**--Esther, Haman, Mordecai, Vashti, Xerxes (or Ahasuerus)
 - Ezra and Nehemiah**--Artaxerxes, Sanballat, Sheshbazzar, Tobiah, Zerubbabel
3. Review place names: Babylon, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Media, Moab, Susa/Persia, Trans-Euphrates.
4. Observe that Daniel contains a mix of genre. Although we have categorized it as "history," a good deal of Daniel is apocalyptic and projects God's future in a manner that is characteristic of apocalyptic.

Module 5. The Writings: Wisdom and Worship

1. Know the nature and general content of each book in this module. Pay special attention to the structure of the book of Job, the variety in the Psalms, the short sayings that mark Proverbs generally, the conclusions given in Ecclesiastes, the romantic character of the Song of Songs, and the somber tone of Lamentations.
2. You will do well to look at parallel structure found within Hebrew poetry (e.g., Psalm 1), the content of a royal psalm (e.g., Psalm 2), the form of a lament (e.g., Psalm 13), the nature of thanksgiving and praise (e.g., Psalm 100), and the character of an acrostic, where each line (or block) begins with a different

Hebrew letter (e.g., Psalms 111, 119). Note also the unordinary, unexpected ending to Proverbs (Proverbs 31).

3. Know the major characters that appear in the book of Job--Job, Job's wife, Bildad, Elihu, Eliphaz, Zophar, and Satan.

Module 5 Exam will have two parts. One part covers the included Writings to see if you have grasped the uniqueness of each book. You should be able to identify quotations from each work without having memorized the quote.

The second part of the exam will measure your overall acquaintance with the Hebrew Scriptures. You will be expected to know the general content of each book of the Old Testament. Exam problems will deal with the chronological ordering of people and events, the identification of leading personalities, knowledge of special occasions and objects, and the location of places. To prepare for this portion of the exam, review the Things to Know sections in Modules 1-4.

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The Hebrew Scriptures

The Bible is a classic masterpiece of world literature. It is comprised of two sections, called covenants or testaments. Hence, the complete Bible contains an "Old" covenant or testament and a "New" covenant or testament. The Hebrew Scriptures (*i.e.*, the Old Testament) are so termed in recognition of the language of its authors. The Jews honor the scriptures of the first covenant and so are more inclined to refer to them collectively as the Scriptures, to the exclusion of the New Testament. Christians claim both testaments as "scripture" but recognize that the Hebrew Scriptures pertained primarily to the Jews, while the New Testament is intended for a universal audience.

Since the Hebrew Scriptures form the foundation for the New Testament, one can hardly appreciate the New Testament fully without an orientation to the Old. The Hebrew Scriptures prepare one to enter the world of the New Testament with a sound understanding of the person and mission of Jesus Christ. The New Testament is filled with quotes from the Old Testament, making it very important to be conversant with its personalities, events, and theological themes. Additionally, a more comprehensive view of God can be gained through its study.

The "Bible" (book), which contains an "Old" Testament and a "New" Testament, was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Hebrew was the language of the Jews; Aramaic was a more widely used language in the Middle East; Greek was the common language during the days of Jesus. Most of the Old Testament is in Hebrew, although primary Aramaic sections are found in Ezra and Daniel. The New Testament is in Greek but contains a few Aramaic words. The Old Testament (Old Covenant) contains 39 books in the English Bible; the New Testament contains 27.

Names applied to the Hebrew Scriptures. In English, the Hebrew Scriptures are most frequently called

the Old Testament. The first five books are known mostly as The Pentateuch (from the Greek, meaning "five books"). The Jews, however, call the first five books The Torah.

Within the Hebrew Scriptures themselves, the Torah is referred to as

"The Law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6)

"The Book of the Law of Moses" (Neh. 8:1)

"The law of my servant Moses" (Mal. 4:4) [New International Version]

Elsewhere, a reference to Jeremiah in Daniel, a book of The Writings, reads

"The Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet" (Dan. 9:2) [New International Version]

Books of the Apocrypha (ancient sources written after the completion of the Hebrew Scriptures) refer to the Scriptures thusly:

"The book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us" (Ecclus. 24:23)

"The books of the law . . . the book of the covenant . . . the law" (1 Macc. 1:56-57)

"The things which were written in thy law" (2 Esdr. 14:22)

"The law and the prophets and the others that followed them" (Ecclus. Prologue)

"The law itself, the prophecies, and the rest of the books" (Ecclus. Prologue)

"The law and the prophets" (2 Macc. 15:9) [Revised Standard Version]

The Greek Scriptures (New Testament) make numerous references to the Hebrew Scriptures as

"the Scriptures"

"the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (Lk. 24:44) [New International Version]

Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived in the latter part of the first century C.E., spoke of

"the sacred writings"

"the sacred books"

It is clear that the Hebrew Scriptures have been referenced in many ways during the time of their existence. In this syllabus, the Jewish ordering will be used. "Hebrew Scriptures" will be employed in regard to the whole Old Testament. "Torah," "Prophets," and "Writings" will be used to designate the three major divisions.

The Jewish division of the Hebrew Scriptures

The Torah=instruction (5 books). The Jews took the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures to be God's instruction for them. Hence, they referred to Genesis through Deuteronomy as "Torah," which means "instruction." For example, they would read the story of Noah as instruction from God.

The Hebrew word *Torah* indicates a full range of instruction. It includes statutes (the Ten Words--better known to English readers as the Ten Commandments), accounts of covenant-making, stories, history, speeches, genealogies, census detail, travel notes, accounts of miracles, and sketching of tabernacle construction.

The Jews designated the first five books of scripture by the opening words. Using NIV language, these were "In the Beginning," "These Are the Names," "The LORD Called," "In the Desert," and "These Are the Words." When the five books of Torah were translated into the Greek language, they began to be referred to as the Pentateuch (i.e., five books). Accompanying this change was the renaming of the books: "In the Beginning" became *Genesis*, "These Are the Names" became *Exodus*, "And the LORD Called" became *Leuitikon*, "In the Desert" became *Arithmoi*, and "These Are the Words" became *Deuteronomy*. While the Jews referred to their books by quoting an opening line, the readers of the Septuagint (Greek translation

of the Hebrew Bible) became accustomed to assigned titles that described a leading feature of the book. From the Greek, through the Latin, came the present English titles.

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

The Prophets=God's prophetic history (8 books). The Hebrews looked upon the books of The Prophets as being "Yahweh's prophetic history." By this they indicated their belief that Yahweh was at work in their midst. The Prophets were commonly separated into two divisions, the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets. The smaller books of the Latter Prophets were put onto one scroll and called "The Book of the Twelve."

Former Prophets

Joshua
Judges
Samuel
Kings

Latter Prophets

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Book of the Twelve (sometimes called Minor Prophets)
Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk,
Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, some of the books had to be divided because the Greek language had vowels and necessitated roughly twice the space to print the contents. Hence, the Greek Bible, and those translations that followed in Latin and English, divided Samuel and Kings into two books each. Along the way, a new ordering of books developed so that most English-speaking people consider the Former Prophets as history and the Latter Prophets only as "The Prophets."

The Writings=the other books, the rest of the books (11 books)

Ruth
Chronicles
Ezra-Nehemiah
Esther
Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon
Lamentations
Daniel

Perhaps due to the late date of composition and/or the varied character of the remaining books of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Jews simply referred to these compositions as "The Writings" or the "other" books.

The total number of books in the above ordering is 24. Sometimes, the Jews grouped their books so they

could number 22 (the number of letters in their alphabet). This was accomplished by placing Ruth with Judges and Lamentations with Jeremiah.

Text, chronology, and geography

Scrolls. In ancient times, writing was done on a variety of materials. A popular material was papyrus, made by pressing together thin strips of a reed plant that grew along the Nile River in Egypt. Papyrus was light and could be made into a scroll. Several documents might be placed on a single scroll, such as the Book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets). Long documents may necessitate two scrolls, as was the case when Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles were translated into Greek. For a history of papyrus use, click on [Papyrus](#).

Manuscripts. The ancient books of scripture were hand-written. For this reason, they are called manuscripts. Although no original autographs have survived, many manuscript copies of the original texts exist. In addition to complete copies of various books, several thousand fragments are available for scholarly study. By reading these manuscripts, the contents of the original text of the Scriptures can be determined. Modern printed Bibles are derived from these manuscripts.

Translation. The Bible is intended for all people. It is important, therefore, that the Scriptures be available in a language that people understand. Consequently, the Bible has been translated into a majority of the world's languages. Efforts continue to translate it into the first language of all people of the world, regardless of how remote people groups may be. Scholars use extreme care in their work so the meaning of every phrase and every word may be transmitted faithfully.

The chronology of biblical times. When Anglican Archbishop James Usher (1580-1656) worked out his chronology of the OT, his dates did not agree with either the Hebrew or Greek (LXX) texts. Nonetheless, the English Bible (Bishop Lloyd's Bible) began to print Usher's dates in 1701. Today, Usher's chronology is generally discredited.

Usher assumed that the genealogical tables could be used to ascertain dates because he thought the tables contained the names of every linking generation. He failed to take into account that "became the father of" is often used to mean "became the ancestor of." A casual perusal of the table of nations leaves one conclusion--great intervals of time were necessary to account for the development of the nations (Gen. 10). Archaeological evidence substantiates the existence of cities before 4004 B.C.E. The safest route is to leave the dates before Abraham open. Why attempt to state as fact that which the Bible does not claim? On the other hand, there is no reason to assume an evolutionary process for man's development and the need for millions or billions of years.

The following dates will provide basic reference points for our excursion through the Old Testament. (All dates are given B.C.E.=Before the Common Era.)

2000 B.C.E. Abraham
1500 Moses, the Covenant at Sinai, Tabernacle construction
1000 David, Solomon, Temple construction
722 Exile of Israel, Assyrian dominance
586 Destruction of Jerusalem, Exile of Judah, Babylonia dominance
536 First returnees from exile, Persian dominance
400 End of the Old Testament

The geography of Bible lands. The lands of the Bible encompass the land mass that touches the Mediterranean Sea and extends eastward into modern Iran and southward into Arabia. See the maps in a Bible atlas.

MODULE 1 The Torah

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

The Torah is one of three major divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is the foundation on which the Prophets and the Writings rest.

Comprising the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, The Torah is the handiwork of Moses, whose life spanned the period encompassed by the last four of the five books. These books present the rationale and essence of Yahweh worship.

The religion of Yahweh did not originate with Moses or Israel. Rather, Moses and Israel became instruments through whom Yahweh revealed himself. That revelation is shown to be in keeping with Yahweh's eternal purpose and his choice of Abraham to become his witness and bearer of his promise of redemption to a sinful world.

The Torah spans a significant portion of ancient human history. It relates Yahweh's creative acts, describes the plight of man, and sets the stage for divine blessing. It contains the story of the family Yahweh engaged to reflect his person and glory. Unknown to them at the time, but made known later, Yahweh's choice of Abraham had far reaching consequences. From this family came Jesus, the Son of God, who died and was resurrected for the benefit of the human race.

The module is divided into three units. These are (1) Genesis, (2) Exodus, and (3) Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Genesis introduces the story of the Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) Scriptures by providing the setting for God's act of human redemption. Exodus relates God's act of constituting Israel a holy people through whom he may declare his glory to a wayward world. Unit 3 further defines their relationship to the point of settling Israel in Canaan. You will be introduced to personalities, locations, and events deemed significant to the overall story.

Unit 1. Genesis

Chronologically, Genesis covers from initial creation (time unspecified) to the death of Joseph (ca. 1750 B.C.E.). The first eleven chapters (20 percent of the material) scan a significant part of human history, while chapters twelve through fifty cover only four generations--Abram (Abraham), Isaac, Jacob (Israel), and Jacob's children. The basic content and pattern of presentation indicate that the focus of attention is upon God's relationship with mankind.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis contain four basic stories. These stories center on Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, and the tower of Babel. Each carries the Grand Story of God forward toward a significant event--God's call of Abram to leave his home in the land of the Chaldeans (Babylonia).

The narrative and historical character of Genesis point to more than a mythological explanation of past human experiences, even though the account of creation is portrayed in exquisite literary form. The prologue (chaps. 1-11) is set in time and space and connected through genealogical tables. It has a specific purpose, as it prepares the reader for an extraordinary event--the call of Abraham. This event reaches its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:6-10). So, not only is the prologue an introduction to the Old Testament, but to the New Testament as well.

Genesis prepares the reader for the constitution of the descendants of Abraham as a special covenant people. If chapters 1-11 point toward the call of Abraham, chapters 12-50 point toward positioning

Abraham's family for executing the mission of his descendants-- Israel.

As you read, notice how this intention guides the content. The more significant names dominate. Selected accounts have a purpose. Ask repeatedly why selected stories and events are included, and your reading will make more sense. The unit is organized into three sections: (a) The Primeval Period (Genesis 1-11), (b) Abraham (Genesis 12:1-25:18), and (c) Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's children (Gen. 25:19-50:26).

a. The Primeval Period (Genesis 1-11)

The structure of Genesis. Genesis begins with a prologue, and then is organized into ten divisions that begin with, "This is the account of . . ." (NIV) or "These are the generations of ..." (RSV) or a similar expression in the English Bible. The Hebrew word *toledoth* (sometimes translated "account" or "generation") is used to introduce each section:

"This is the account of the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 2:4)

"This is the written account of Adam's line" (5:1)

"This is the account of Noah" (6:9)

"This is the account of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, Noah's sons" (10:1)

"This is the account of Shem" (11:10)

"This is the account of Terah" (11:27)

"This is the account of Abraham's son Ishmael" (25:12)

"This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac" (25:19)

"This is the account of Esau" (36:1)

"This is the account of Jacob" (37:2)

Genesis 1:1-2:3 functions as a prologue to the composition. That is, the opening introduces the reader to a story that involves God and humanity. Theologically, Genesis is divided into two major divisions: before (1-11) and after (12-50) the call of Abraham. The literary divisions function to fix the reader's attention on the main story line--events which occasioned Abraham's call, followed by the development of Abraham's family and their eventual relocation to Egypt. Events which led to the call of Abram are important for understanding why God took such a step. Events which led to resettlement in Egypt are a necessary prelude to the Exodus and covenant enactment at Sinai.

If Genesis 1:1-2:3 may be called a prologue, then Genesis 2:4-25 is rightly a more detailed presentation of the original human pair. Chapter two expands on a simple notice of human creation, which included both genders (Genesis 1:26-28). The author carries the reader's mind forward toward the reason for the call of Abraham.

Notice that Genesis 1:1-2 stands alone. The two verses are preliminary to what follows. They are timeless. No attempt is made to provide a reckoning of time. The simple assertion is, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This is followed by a statement of original condition, again without reference to how long this condition prevailed. The earth was formless, empty, and dark. Nevertheless, it was under the control of God.

The shaping of the formless earth is described in Genesis 1:3-31. Notice the literary pattern employed by the author.

Day 1 light
Day 2 water
Day 3 land
Day 4 light
Day 5 water
Day 6 land

He reports creation in parallels and uses "And there was evening, and there was morning . . . day" as a literary note to close each segment. When chapter 2 opens, there is an elaboration of the activity of the

third and sixth days.

Notice in Genesis 1:14-19 how the author develops the account of the making of the sun and moon. He begins with "to separate," speaks of "signs," and then says, "to give light," only to reverse his order in the last part: "to give light," "to govern," and "to separate." This common procedure in biblical writing demonstrates well-conceived literary form. It may also be noticed that God made the sun and moon to have power over man (Genesis 1:16) and man to have power over the animals (Genesis 1:28).

There are seven statements relative to the outcome of God's creation. Seven times the expression "was good" is used (Genesis 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31). In the last instance, at the conclusion of the sixth day, the expression is actually, "it was very good."

Animal life is distinguished by three categories: (1) livestock (domesticated), (2) creatures that move along the ground (reptiles, insects), and (3) wild animals (Genesis 1:24). Then there appears mankind (Genesis 1:26), who becomes the subject of the rest of the Bible. Clearly, the plant and animal kingdoms are important as are the celestial heavens. But the focus of the Scriptures is on mankind. Perhaps the clearest indication of this is the brief reference made to the creation of the heavens--"He also made the stars" (Genesis 1:16).

Genesis 1:26-30 paints a picture of the special place God gave the human race. Made in the image of God himself, humankind is superior and holds dominion over other forms of life. With the making of humankind, God ceased the creating work just detailed (Gen. 2:1-3).

Genesis 2 sharpens the focus. It tells what happens to the earth (2:4-14). The good earth became a paradise for man, but it was not good for man to be without equal companionship. So, God built a woman (*ishah*) from the man (*ish*) (2:23). "This at last" or "this time" there is a companion of the closest relationship. The woman had become man's "helper," *i.e.*, one who stands beside him and is equal to him (2:20). "Adam," which means "man," is a word that sounds like, and may be related to, the word for "ground," from which he was formed.

The **Babylonians** composed an account of creation, but it is very dissimilar to that of Genesis. The Babylonia account tells how Marduk gained ascendancy among the gods by fashioning the universe from parts of gods he had overcome.

Words for God. Numerous words are employed in scripture in referencing God. "God" is an English word; it is the word used to render El or Elohim from the Hebrew. Elohim is the plural form of El, but in the Hebrew language it does not necessarily mean several gods. The two forms are often interchangeable. Elohim is the word used for God through Genesis 1 and is correctly rendered God (singular) because the term is governed by a singular verb in each instance. Numerous words are employed in scripture in referencing God. "God" is an English word; it is the word used to render El or Elohim from the Hebrew. Elohim is the plural form of El, but in the Hebrew language it does not necessarily mean several gods. The two forms are often interchangeable. Elohim is the word used for God through Genesis 1 and is correctly rendered God (singular) because the term is governed by a singular verb in each instance.

In Genesis 2:4ff. the common Elohim is usually combined with Yahweh (YHWH, the Hebrew consonants without vowels), the personal name of God. The Prologue may assert that Elohim created the heavens and the earth, but in chap. 2 Elohim is revealed in more personal terms as Yahweh-God. Although Yahweh is used in Genesis, it is not until Moses' day that God actually revealed his name and the relationship it suggested.

Most English translations reflect a late Jewish tradition of not speaking aloud the personal name of God. To protect themselves from rash oaths, *i.e.*, taking the name of God in vain (the third commandment), the Jews substituted the word "Lord" for Yahweh. When vowels were developed for the Hebrew language (about the fifth century C.E.), the vowel points for "Lord" were put with the consonants for Yahweh, thus making the word unpronounceable. Consequently, English translators have usually preferred to carry Yahweh into the English Bible as LORD to distinguish it from a separate Hebrew word that means "lord."

The American Standard Version of 1901 attempted to transliterate the Hebrew word Yahweh with the innovative "Jehovah."

Four stories. Following the account of general creation (Genesis 1:1-2:3) and the amplified account of the making of man and woman (Genesis 2:4-25), the author proceeds to present an overview of the behavior of mankind and God's response during the period that preceded Abraham (Genesis 3-11). The General Story is carried forward with four independent stories, connected by genealogies. The stories center around (1) Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), (2) Cain and Abel (Genesis 4), (3) Noah (Genesis 6-9), and (4) The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

The story of **Adam and Eve** is sometimes referred to as "the Fall." Indeed, the rest of the Great Story of the Bible proceeds from this event. Mankind sins. The action taken by God in response is to provide for man's redemption. Sin entered the world when Eve and Adam failed to "trust" God. That is, they deliberately choose a course calculated to elevate them above the position God had decreed for them. Thus, the beginning of idolatry is the spirit which drives the human to want to be god, i.e., to control his own destiny. God made the human a creature. The creature said, I am dissatisfied with being a creature; I want to be more. As it turned out, Eve listened to the creature Satan rather than to the Creator. And Adam willfully ate of the fruit as well. Consequently, fear, shame, withdrawal, sin, and expulsion from the Garden resulted. The story would be sad indeed, if it ended here. What lies ahead is Yahweh's marvelous activity on behalf of mankind, an activity which would be crowned by the sending of Jesus to die on a cross.

The results of sin cut across all forms of life. Harmony between God and man is broken. The same happens between man and the animal world (Genesis 3:14-15). Life this side of the Garden of Eden is difficult. Pain in childbirth and toil in work may not be the ideal, but they indicate the way real life was to be after Eden.

The second story, that of **Cain and Abel**, illustrates the continuing saga of life. Abel is a man loyal to Yahweh; Cain is self-driven and, consequently, disloyal to God. After Cain's worship is rejected by Yahweh because it lacks the accompaniment of trust, Yahweh counsels him to do right. Instead, Cain, moved with envy and jealousy, kills his brother, Abel. Even then Yahweh is merciful to Cain. He places a mark on him so he will be recognized. Yahweh thus prohibits anyone from punishing Cain for his deed. The extension of Cain's spirit is found in his descendants. His arrogance is multiplied in his final descendant, Lamech.

Although Adam and Eve have numerous sons and daughters (Genesis 5:4), the line of the human family that would survive the flood was through their son Seth. Seth's lineage is traced to Noah (Genesis 5), where the third story is about to begin.

After an undetermined amount of time, man had grown so wicked that "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5). The world was corrupt and full of violence (Genesis 6:11). So, God determined to destroy the world with a flood. Only **Noah** and his family would be spared, for only Noah walked with God. While it is true that the world was "judged" by God at this time, it was also "redeemed," for creation was not destroyed. Life was able to continue in a world now limited or twisted because of distrust and disobedience. It is interesting just here to note that God knew the flood was not what man needed. The flood was a judgment, but not the remedy man needed for his sin. So, God promised, "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though [perhaps better, "for"] every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood" (Genesis 8:21).

Following the flood, the fear of man was put in the animals as they were fair game for mankind to eat. Yet he was not to eat their blood, for blood is the seat of life which God gives. God established a covenant with mankind and placed the rainbow in the heavens to remind himself of the promise he had made not to destroy the world by water again (Genesis 9). The **Babylonians** also had an account of the flood. Known as the Gilgamesh Epic, the Babylonian story has some similarities to the biblical account, but it lies far beneath it in purpose and style. In time, people once more began to multiply. After an unspecified period of time, those who moved onto the plain in Shinar (Babylonia) protested Yahweh's sovereignty and begin

erecting a massive tower. Some think this tower was a Babylonia ziggurat, a pyramid type structure that had an altar on top. Whatever it was, it represented arrogant defiance to Yahweh. To confound their work and scatter them abroad, God confused their language, thus the word "Babel" which sounded like the Hebrew word for "confused." Despite the flood, mankind had not returned to trust and a respectful relationship with God. He is slow to learn the proper life of a creature.

b. Abraham (Genesis 12:1-25:18). Genesis 12-50 covers four generations: Abram (whose name was changed to Abraham), Isaac, Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel), and Jacob's children.

The most significant passage in Genesis is 12:1-3. Here, Yahweh issues a call to Abram to leave his country, his countrymen, and his family and go to a land Yahweh himself would show him. Yahweh's promise to Abram was that

He would make him into a great nation (and bless him),
He would make his name great (and he would be a blessing),
He would bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him
(and all peoples on earth would be blessed through him).

The promise is actually an affirmation of God's intent to redeem the world via Abraham's seed, that is, in Jesus Christ.

The call of Abram makes it clear that Yahweh took the initiative. His plan for humanity involved the creation of a people who would (1) become his witness before a pagan world and (2) prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. Abram was called to separate himself from his pagan homeland and become a nomad. Yahweh himself would build a nation from the man's descendants.

Abram was a native of Ur, which was situated along the southern end of the Euphrates River in the land of the Chaldeans (ancient Babylonia; present Iraq). When this man of faith departed Ur, he traveled up the Euphrates River to Haran, where he remained until his father's death. Then he took his wife, Sarai, and his nephew, Lot (son of his deceased brother), and traveled southward into Canaan (Palestine; present-day Israel and the West Bank territory). When Abram arrived in Canaan, he found a famine there, so he went on into Egypt. Acting to protect his own life, he followed an ancient Eastern custom and told Pharaoh that Sarai was his sister. Pharaoh took Sarai into his harem, but Yahweh revealed to Pharaoh the real identity of Sarai, after which Pharaoh expelled Abram from Egypt (Genesis 12).

After Abram returned to Canaan, he moved about to several locations, but he always worshiped Yahweh. Both Abram and Lot's flocks grew so large that they had to separate. Abram gave Lot his choice of land; Lot chose the plain and eventually settled in Sodom. While there, a king from Babylonia came into the region, took citizens of Sodom and neighboring towns captive, and looted their cities. Lot was taken, but Abram went to his rescue. Abram took the spoils from the king, returned them to their owners, and paid tithes to Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem (Jerusalem). This Melchizedek became the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews the type of priest/king that Jesus is (Genesis 13-14).

Yahweh promised Abram that he and his wife Sarai would have a son, through whom God would build a nation. As the couple grew past normal childbearing age, the fulfillment of the promise seemed in doubt. Abram asked Yahweh if his servant, Eliezer, might become the heir (Genesis 15:2-3). But this was not to be. Later, Sarai and Abram agreed to follow a local custom and have a child by a surrogate mother. Sarai gave her maid, the Egyptian Hagar, to Abram to bear a son for Sarai. A son, Ishmael, was born, but this is not what Yahweh had promised (Genesis 16). Sarai herself would have a son. Eventually, when Abram was ninety-nine, Yahweh appeared, saying he would confirm his covenant with him. Abram's ("exalted father") name was changed to Abraham ("father of many"). Sarai's name was altered slightly to Sarah ("princess"). She would indeed become the mother of nations (Genesis 17).

When Yahweh made a covenant with Abraham, he promised him the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8) and ordained that circumcision of his male descendants would become the sign of that covenant. Every male was to be circumcised on the eighth day of life (Genesis 17:9-27).

Yahweh's promise to Abraham was confirmed by the visit of three heavenly beings, one of whom is represented as Yahweh. Yahweh also revealed to Abraham his intention to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham's pleading for Sodom would have been answered if a minimum of ten righteous people could have been found there (Genesis 18). As it stood, only Lot's family was judged "righteous." Even then, as Sodom was destroyed, Lot's wife looked back with longing for Sodom and was judged by Yahweh. Lot's two daughters eventually seduced their father in the interest of procreancy and produced Moab (the father of the Moabites) and Ben-Ammi (the father of the Ammonites). It was the perversion of sexual practice that gave Sodom its name definition, although homosexuality was only one of the many ills of the people of the cities of the plain (Genesis 19).

Genesis 20 tells of another episode where Abraham sought to protect his own interest and lied about Sarah's relationship to him. This time, it was with the Philistine king, known in the text as Abimelech. Once again, Yahweh acted in behalf of Abraham.

Yahweh's promise that Abraham and Sarah would have a son came to fulfillment in the birth of Isaac. Sometime after Isaac's birth, Sarah persuaded Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael. Hagar and her son (now probably about 15) were given a small amount of food and water and sent toward the desert. When their food was gone, Yahweh provided for them and promised a great nation would develop from his descendants. As Ishmael reached maturity, Hagar obtained for him an Egyptian wife (Genesis 21:1-21).

Normally, nomads like Abraham were able to live peaceably in the land of Canaan. As the story reveals, occasional tensions did arise when water was in short supply. Abraham moved from place to place with his herds, sometimes going into Philistia (Genesis 21:22-34).

Abraham's faith was tested on numerous occasions, but perhaps never as seriously as when God asked him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Human sacrifice was never demanded by God, except in this one instance. The sacrifice of Isaac was never carried out because Abraham's intent to obey God was sufficient. The command was designed as a supreme test of Abraham's faith, which he passed. Abraham's faith was extraordinary, as he loved Isaac dearly. Yahweh promised to make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars (Genesis 22). Sarah died and Abraham purchased a burial cave for her at Hebron (Genesis 23).

To provide Isaac with a wife, Abraham sent his servant to Haran to find a wife from among his kinsmen. The servant was led to Rebekah, Abraham's brother's granddaughter. Rebekah's brother was Laban, a colorful character who would eventually become the father-in-law to Isaac's son, Jacob. When the servant returned to southern Canaan with Rebekah, Isaac met her and immediately arranged a "tent" wedding (Genesis 24).

Besides Sarah, perhaps after Sarah died, Abraham took Keturah as a wife. They had six children, one of whom was named Midian. Midian's descendants appear often in early Hebrew history. But when he died, Abraham left all his possessions to Isaac (Genesis 25:1-11). Ishmael's descendants settled south of Canaan (Genesis 25:12-18).

c. Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's children (Genesis 25:19-50:26)

Isaac. When Isaac and Rebekah married, they could have no children until God gave them twins. We call them Esau and Jacob, but their real names were Hairy and Grasper. Hairy's friends called him Red (Edom), because when he was born he was red. But his parents named him Hairy, because his skin was as hairy as that of an animal. Jacob came out of the womb with his hand firmly attached to Esau's heel; that is why they called him Grasper.

To introduce their future plight, the author tells how Esau came in from hunting one day so famished he thought he would die if he did not get food immediately. Jacob "sold" Esau a bowl of stew for one-third of the family fortune (Genesis 25).

The important thing to remember about Isaac is that he was a vital link in Yahweh's plan. Yahweh promised Isaac that his descendants would inherit the land as he swore to his father, Abraham. God blessed Isaac so that he became very rich. Isaac eventually settled in Beersheba. At age forty, Esau married two Hittite women, who became a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 26).

Jacob. When Isaac was old, he called in his older son, Esau, so he could bestow upon him his blessing. Preliminary to the event, Isaac asked Esau to prepare for him his favorite food--wild game. While Esau was in the field hunting fresh meat, Rebekah counseled Jacob to trick his father and steal the blessing. Dressed as a hairy man with the smell of wildlife, Jacob prepared his father's favorite meal from another source and served his father. Although suspicious, Isaac passed to Jacob the blessing reserved for Esau. When Esau arrived with freshly prepared food, he learned he had been tricked. Esau was distraught and determined to kill his brother who had earlier stolen his birthright and now had stolen his blessing. Fearful that Esau would kill Jacob, Rebekah asked Isaac to send Jacob to her family's home in Haran to find a wife among their own kindred (Genesis 27).

On the way to Haran, Jacob dreamed of a ladder or stairway that reached into heaven. Here Yahweh confirmed to him that his descendants would become as the dust of the earth. The place was named Bethel (Beth=house; el=of God) (Genesis 28).

In Haran, Jacob met Rachel, whom he befriended at the place where her sheep were waiting to be watered. In return, he was invited to her father's home. The father turned out to be Laban, the brother of his mother, Rebekah. Jacob struck a deal with Laban to work seven years in exchange for Rachel. In the place of Rachel's services as shepherdess, Laban received seven years labor from Jacob. Because of Jacob's love for Rachel, the time went by quickly (Genesis 29:1-15).

On the wedding night Laban substituted his older daughter, Leah, for Rachel. Veiled and under the cover of darkness, Jacob did not realize he had been given Leah instead of Rachel (Genesis 29:16-25a). When Jacob confronted him on the day after, Laban calmly chided Jacob by saying, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one." Laban agreed to give Rachel to Jacob in exchange for seven more years of work. The good news was that after an appropriate honeymoon with Leah, Jacob could have Rachel (Genesis 29:25b-29).

Because Jacob favored Rachel over Leah, Yahweh closed Rachel's womb, enabling Leah to get a head start at birthing children. Leah had a son, whom she named See (Reuben); then a second, Hears (Simeon), a third, Attached (Levi); and a fourth, Praise (Judah). Jealous and unable to have children, Rachel gave Jacob her maid to become a surrogate mother. The maid, Bilhah, had a son, Vindicated (Dan), and then another, Struggle (Naphtali). Now, Leah had stopped bearing, so she gave Jacob her maid, Zilpah, who bore Good Fortune (Gad), and Happy (Asher) (Gen. 29:30-30:13).

The people of that day placed stock in a mandrake plant that supposedly produced fertility. Leah's oldest son had brought his mother some mandrakes. Rachel wanted them, so made the request to Leah, only to intensify the animosity between the sisters. In exchange for the mandrakes, Rachel gave Leah permission to sleep with Jacob. Out of the night's activity came a new son, appropriately named Reward (Issachar). Leah had one other son, Honor (Zebulun) and a daughter, Dinah. Finally, Rachel had a son, whom she named Add (Joseph), in hopes of having another added. She later gave birth to Benjamin, dying in childbirth (Genesis 29:14-30:24; 35:16-18).

Jacob worked for Laban twenty years and Laban had changed his wages ten times. The two made an agreement that clearly separated their flocks so no one could accuse the other of stealing. God blessed Jacob, and his flocks grew more than Laban's. The only way Jacob could get away from Laban was to wait until Laban was away from home. Packing up his family hastily, Jacob left. When Laban heard of it, he pursued Jacob. Laban noticed that his household gods were missing. The significance of the household gods was that whoever possessed them owned the property rights. Laban charged after Jacob with evil intent. God intervened and would not allow Laban to harm Jacob. Laban and Jacob had fiery words about the household gods, which Jacob had not taken. Actually, Rachel had taken them. Unable to find the gods, Laban departed and Jacob went on his way to face an uncertain family reunion with Esau

(Genesis 30:25-31:55).

Jacob was fearful in his approach to Esau and prepared for the worst reception possible. However, the reunion went well (Genesis 32-33). Instead of going to Esau's home, Jacob diverted to Shechem. A Hivite of the city of Shechem, who was also named Shechem, wanted Dinah, Jacob's daughter. He violated her and wanted to take her as his wife. Reluctantly, Jacob's boys agreed he could have her, provided the men of the city were circumcised. While the men of Shechem were sore from the circumcision operation, Jacob's sons killed them. Jacob now had another crisis. He feared that this action would arouse the neighbors and they would take revenge on his family. Eventually, Jacob moved on to Bethel and beyond, where Rachel died (Genesis 34-35). Chapter 36 provides the account of the descendants of Esau.

Jacob's children. Genesis 37 begins the story of Joseph. The section continues through the end of the book and relates how the family of Jacob (Israel) eventually settled in Egypt. Their presence in Egypt anticipated the Exodus, which would come 400 years later.

Joseph was the son of Jacob's favored wife, Rachel, and was himself favored by his father. Jacob's favoritism is symbolized in the gift of a "richly ornamented robe" (NIV) (perhaps a robe with sleeves; possibly not a "coat of many colors"). But Joseph's dreams aggravated the older brothers, for they revealed that the brothers and parents would one day bow before him. The brothers sold him into slavery and he was taken to Egypt, where he was bought by the captain of Pharaoh's guard. The flow of the story is broken briefly in chapter 38 to tell how Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah by his daughter-in-law, Tamar. Perez became an ancestor of King David (Ruth 4:18-22) and, ultimately, of Jesus (Matthew 1:3, 16).

Once in Egypt, Joseph was chased by his boss's wife, falsely accused of making advances to her, thrown into prison, and forgotten by one who could have helped him (Genesis 39-40). When Pharaoh had a dream no one could interpret, his chief cupbearer remembered Joseph's kindness to him in prison. Joseph was summoned to tell Pharaoh's dream, which related to seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine. In the dream, God revealed to Pharaoh what he was about to do. Pharaoh elevated Joseph to his second in command, gave him his signet ring, changed his name to Zaphenath-Paneah, and gave him Asenath, the daughter of the priest of On, as his wife. Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. His work was to prepare the country for the years of famine (Genesis 41).

The famine came. It covered Canaan as well as Egypt. When Jacob heard that Egypt had plenty of grain to sell, he sent his sons to Egypt. Here they encountered Joseph, unknowingly. However, Joseph recognized them, asked about Benjamin, the youngest son who did not come, and required one of them to remain in Egypt until they returned with Benjamin on their next trip (Genesis 42). When the brothers returned with Benjamin, Joseph prepared a meal for them but kept his identify sealed. When they left, Joseph had his "cup" placed in Benjamin's bag so he would have to return (Genesis 43-44). On the return, Joseph revealed himself and made preparations for Jacob and the whole family to move to Egypt. In the process, Joseph made it plain to the brothers that God was behind all the events and would eventually provide a great deliverance for an enlarged family (Genesis 45).

The closing chapters of Genesis relate that the family of Jacob did indeed move to Egypt--some sixty-six people, excluding Joseph's family and the sons' wives (Genesis 46). His family resided in the area of Egypt known as Goshen, in the fertile northeastern delta. Seventeen years later, Jacob died, but his body was returned to Canaan for burial. Upon returning to Egypt, the brothers feared that with their father's passing, Joseph would take revenge on them. Joseph's response was (paraphrased), "Boys, you don't understand me yet. I am not like you. I don't seek revenge. Besides, God has bigger things in mind for all of us. As evidence of that, do not bury me here; I want my bones taken out of Egypt and buried in Canaan when the family returns" (Genesis 47-50).

Unit 2. Exodus

Genesis ends with the descendants of Abraham's family residing in Egypt. Hence, Exodus opens with the line, "These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob" (Exod. 1:1). All indications are the author intended to continue the story without interruption. However, the genealogy points to a gap in time of approximately 400 years. When Genesis ended, the descendants of Jacob numbered less than 100 persons. As Exodus begins, they have multiplied to the point that they are seen as a threat to the native Egyptians. From the author's point of view, the intervening years are not important within themselves, but the connection between the two books is essential for continuity.

The word "Exodus" is Latin, derived from a Greek word meaning to exit. The term was applied to the composition because of a major event is Israel's departure from Egypt. Perhaps the real theme of the book is the covenant Yahweh (God's personal name) made with Israel at Sinai *after* Israel's departure from Egypt. The covenant at Sinai is as much a focal point in Exodus as the call of Abraham is in Genesis. In addition to the divine-led "exodus" and covenant enactment, Exodus contains the Ten Words (commandments) and various laws God gave Israel at Sinai with details for the construction of the tabernacle.

The unit has been divided into three sections: (a) The Egyptian sojourn (Exodus 1-12), (b) The exodus (Exodus 13-18), and Covenant and tabernacle (Exodus 19-40). Remove the second book of The Torah and neither Genesis nor the rest of the Old Testament makes sense. The sojourn of Jacob's family allowed time for the family to increase in size. The exodus itself demonstrates the nature, character, and care of Yahweh, who called the family into service. The covenant showed the nature of the relationship Yahweh was creating with the family. The tabernacle indicated the implications of the covenant for worship.

The content of Exodus reminds us that we are looking at an important part of a larger picture. From Genesis we frame a portrait of a world under a sovereign Creator whose creation tends to stray from the Creator's intentions. To demonstrate his care, God promises Abraham an eventual solution to man's plight. The path to that solution goes through Abraham's physical descendants. Only five centuries years past Abraham has that mass of people reached significant numbers and a destitute situation where God is ready to deliver them from slavery. That deliverance declares the God of the Hebrews to be the real God against those represented by Pharaoh and other Egyptian deities.

Once delivered from oppression, Israel has no place to go. To demonstrate his ability to care for them in more destitute circumstances, God nurtures these people in the desert. Knowing they will tend to adopt the gods of the wicked Canaanites into whose land they are headed, God forms a covenant with them that creates them a separate and holy people. Their worship will reflect their sanctification and honor the God who sustains them.

a. The Egyptian sojourn (Exodus 1-12)

Israel becomes enslaved in Egypt. The story begun in Genesis continues in Exodus. The opening lines of Exodus (1:1-6) highlight the summary given in the conclusion of Genesis (46-50), i.e., Jacob's family moved from Canaan to Egypt and that generation of people died there. Exod. 1:7 reveals that a long space of time (perhaps four centuries) passed before the events about to be enumerated. Israel had grown from less than one hundred to become a large group of people.

During the intervening years, the dynasty of Egyptian rulers (known as pharaohs) had changed. The new king who "knew not Joseph" was not just another relative of the pharaoh of Joseph's time; a new set of rulers had come to power. It is believed that either the pharaohs of Joseph's time or the new pharaohs were not Egyptian at all, but foreigners who forced themselves as rulers over Egypt. If, for example, the pharaoh of Joseph's day was an outsider, this may indicate a more favorable attitude for a fellow foreigner (Joseph). Then, after the expulsion of the foreign rulers, native pharaohs would be less disposed toward the outsiders (Israel). Be that as it may, the text indicates that Yahweh is at work, so we

do not always need a purely human interpretation of events.

Israel's population growth, the change of dynasties, and the importance of Israel to the Egyptian economy may have all contributed to the enslavement of Joseph's people. The Israelites were forced to build "store cities" for Egypt, not pyramids. The multiplication of the Israelites became a concern to the Egyptians, for they feared Israel might take over. Increased burdens were placed on Israel, but this did not curtail the population growth. Birth control measures were undertaken but to no avail. This is the background for the events about to be recounted (Exodus 1).

It was during a period when Pharaoh had ordered drastic measures to be taken to control the population that Moses was born. Defying his orders to kill her son, Moses' mother hid him at home as long as she could, then placed him in a small basket (ark) at the edge of the Nile River where pharaoh's daughter was known to go to bathe. Moses' older sister, Miriam, was placed nearby to watch. When pharaoh's daughter found Moses, Miriam asked if she could find a nurse for him. Miriam engaged her mother, who cared for Moses until pharaoh's daughter could take him into the palace for a genuine Egyptian upbringing (Exod. 2:1-10).

When Moses was forty years old, he identified with the plight of his people, the Israelites. One day he defended them against a tough Egyptian taskmaster by killing the Egyptian. When Pharaoh found out about it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled into the desert for safety. Here he married the daughter of Jethro, had two children, and remained for forty more years. At that time, God "remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So he looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them" (Exod. 2:11-25). From this point forward, the story of Exodus details how God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery and constituted them a nation in covenant with him.

Preparations for the Exodus. In the desert, God revealed himself as Yahweh and commissioned Moses to return to Egypt. Here God would reveal his glory to Pharaoh, who claimed to be a god. What is set up is a "battle of the gods." Pharaoh does not recognize Yahweh. Egypt is religious, but Egyptian religion is pagan. Now Yahweh will declare his glory there. Egyptians and Israelites alike will come to see the real God. Moses is reluctant to return to Egypt even after forty years. Although Yahweh had told him to expect initial rejection, Moses was easily discouraged and Israel was displeased that Moses' actions had caused them more trouble (Exodus 3-6).

The goals of Yahweh were simple: that the Egyptians may know that Yahweh is God and to deliver Israel from Egypt. Following some early signs that would show Pharaoh Moses' credentials, Yahweh let go with ten plagues upon the Egyptians--water to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, plague on the livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and death of the firstborns Exodus 7-11).

Israel was aware of the plagues, but they were safe from them. However, in preparation for the tenth plague, Israel was required to make specific preparation to avoid its consequences. Each family was instructed to take a year-old male sheep or goat and with it prepare a special meal. Some blood from the animal was to be put around the door, for on a certain night the firstborn of all families in the land would die, unless, in Israel's case, the blood was on the door frame. This was the beginning of the Passover, which would be observed by Israel annually in remembrance of the Exodus (Exodus 12).

It should be noted that the pharaoh of the oppression is not the pharaoh of the Exodus. "Pharaoh" is simply the title for the Egyptian ruler. During this period, the Bible does not provide the name of any of the pharaohs. Since the Egyptians did not choose to record such unhappy events, they, evidently, carved nothing relative to these times on their stone monuments. Consequently, in spite of many gallant efforts to name the pharaohs of the period, the results are inconclusive.

b. The Exodus (Exodus 13-18). Yahweh instructed Moses to "consecrate" each firstborn male--both human and animal. The firstborn of the flock would be sacrificed and the firstborn son would be "redeemed." This was in recognition of Yahweh's act of deliverance and in view of the covenant he was about to make with Israel at Sinai (Exod. 13:1-16).

When Israel departed Egypt, God led the people along a longer route to protect them from discouragement that would come from a confrontation with the Philistines. Moses took Joseph's bones and led the people in the direction of the Yam Suph (Sea of Reeds; Red Sea). Yahweh directed them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exod. 13:17-22).

The path taken by Israel led them into a trap. After allowing Israel to leave their land, Pharaoh and his officials had a change of mind and pursued Israel with the army to prevent their leaving. Trapped between the Egyptian army, the desert, and the sea, the Israelites were terrified. Israel's only escape could come from Yahweh's intervention. Yahweh, who had declared his glory in Egypt through the plagues, now held the Egyptian army at bay, prepared a strong wind that dried up a portion of the Yam Suph, led Israel across the bed of the sea, and then drown the Egyptian army in the returning waters of the sea (Exod. 14).

In celebration of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, Moses and the Israelites sang a song to Yahweh. The song recognizes Yahweh as the warrior who triumphed over Pharaoh. To Yahweh is ascribed holiness, glory, wonder, love, and strength. There is no question but that he will perform his intended purpose and plant Israel in the land he swore to their fathers to give them (Exod. 15:1-21).

Very soon after Israel reached the desert, they ran short of water and food. Here was their first test as a free people. Would they trust Yahweh to provide? Yahweh's challenge was, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases [plagues] I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD who heals you." Israel was indeed faced with a foreboding desert which could not, of itself, support two million or so people. But they had seen what God did in Egypt. Surely, he did not bring them into the desert to die! However, just as it is with modern folks, these people were slow to trust God when faced with an immediate crisis. In spite of their grumbling and lack of faith, Yahweh did feed them and give them water. Remember, this is Yahweh's story, not Israel's (Exod. 15:22-17:7).

Along the way Israel was attacked by Amalekites, descendants from Esau (Gen. 36:12). Here Joshua is introduced. Joshua would become Moses' assistant and his successor, the man who would lead Israel into Canaan (Exod. 17:8-16).

Now well into the desert, Moses was reunited with his wife, Zipporah, his two sons, and his father-in-law, Jethro, a priest among the Midianites. Upon hearing of Yahweh's work in Egypt, Jethro declared, "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods." At the time Moses served Israel as judge. His case load was so heavy, Jethro advised him to select some good men who could hear the less difficult cases. This episode is noted in many business management books as an early instance of delegation of responsibility.

c. Covenant and tabernacle (Exodus 19-40). The text of Exodus carries the story of Israel from Egypt to Mount Sinai (Exodus 1-18). The remainder of Exodus tells how Yahweh entered into covenant relationship with Israel, provides some laws, reveals the shallowness of Israel's faith, and tells about the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 19-40).

At Mount Sinai, Yahweh entered into covenant with Israel. The event narrated in Exodus 19 is crucial to the entire Bible story. At Sinai Yahweh reminded Israel how he had delivered them from Egypt and brought them to himself. If they would keep his covenant, then out of all the nations they would be his possession. Israel would become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. To this proposal, Israel affirmed they would do everything Yahweh had asked.

"The Ten Words" (known in English as the Ten Commandments) were delivered to Israel as a prologue to the more detailed laws that Yahweh gave Israel. The Ten Words forbade honoring other gods, the possession of idols, and misuse of Yahweh's name in oaths; demanded Sabbath keeping and parental honor; forbade murder, adultery, stealing, false testimony, and covetousness (Exodus 20).

Some of the detailed laws are included in Exodus, though not all. The Law of Moses contained an

assortment of legislation that dealt with personal life, social life, and worship ritual. It was common to speak of part of this law as "**the book of the covenant**" (Exodus 21-23). The appearance of God himself is not described in the Bible. However, his "glory" and his "throne" are. Language used to describe these attributes is symbolic (Exod. 24).

An important object in the worship of Yahweh was **the tabernacle** (also called the Tent of Meeting, i.e., this is where Yahweh met his people). The tabernacle was a tent-like structure constructed in the wilderness with materials Israel brought with them from Egypt. The tent itself had two rooms, one called the Most Holy Place and the other designated the Holy Place. The only piece of furniture in the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant, which had an atonement cover, and which was over arched by two cherubim. In the Holy Place were a table on which was placed the bread of the Presence, a seven-light lampstand, and an altar of incense. Outside the tabernacle proper but within a courtyard were an altar for offering sacrifices and a basin for the priests to wash their hands and feet. The priests had special garments (Exodus 25-30).

While Moses was on the mountain receiving instruction from God, the Israelites grew impatient and asked Aaron, Moses' older brother, to build them a tangible god whom they could praise for bringing them out of Egypt. Aaron agreed and constructed a calf or bull out of gold. The people seemingly brought to the "worship" experience concepts and immoral behavior associated with paganism. On his way down from the mountain with the Ten Words, Moses became aware of the evil behavior and of Yahweh's intent to destroy Israel. Moses interceded with Yahweh to preserve Israel, but he was also angry with the people and with Aaron. He broke the stones on which the Ten Words were written, ground the calf to dust, mixed the dust with water, and made the people drink it (Exodus 32).

Moses was permitted to see the glory of Yahweh, although no human could look directly at him and survive in human form. He prepared new stones for the Ten Words (Exodus 33-34).

The remaining portion of Exodus details the actual construction of the tabernacle, which follows precisely the pattern given earlier. When the tabernacle was completed, Yahweh's glory came to inhabit it (Exodus 35-40).

Unit 3. Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

The five books of The Torah are distinctive. They are concerned about the call of Israel to be a special people. Genesis provides the link between Adam and the descendants of Jacob and their settlement in Egypt. Exodus describes the movement of Jacob's descendants to the desert of Sinai and Yahweh's covenant with them. The three remaining books of The Torah carry the story forward to a point just prior to Israel's settlement in Canaan some forty years after departing Egypt.

The three books must be read in connection with the last half of Exodus. The covenant Yahweh makes with Israel at Sinai provides a rationale for specific legislation, worship, and Israel's journey toward Canaan. Some of the legislation may be found among other ancient societies, but the difference is that it is anchored in the person of Yahweh and takes meaning in covenant relationship between God and Israel. The covenant enjoins Israel to witness to Yahweh's name among those who failed to recognize him for who he is and for what he is about in the world.

The material is broken into three sections: (a) Leviticus, (b) Numbers, and (c) Deuteronomy. You will learn the particulars of each book. But never lose sight of the connection between each and the other Torah books. Leviticus helps the reader understand the nature of covenant worship within a pre-Christian context. It provides the rationale (holiness as measured by God's character), form, and purpose. The sacrifice of Christ stands in contrast to a more limited function of animal sacrifice. Christ's priesthood is similar in function, but superior, to the priesthood established with Aaron.

Numbers serves an important function by tracing the first generation's response to Yahweh's remarkable support in the desert. It shows how easily humans are dissuaded from faith, even when reason to believe

is everywhere about them. Covering about thirty-eight years of desert life, Numbers transports the reader from Sinai to the border of Canaan and ends with the passing of the first generation that came out of Egypt.

Deuteronomy prepares the way for the second generation to enter Canaan, the land Yahweh swore to give to Abraham's descendants. It consists of an oral rehearsal of the law.

a. Leviticus. Leviticus (from a Greek term meaning "relating to the Levites") contains many laws pertaining to priests, Levites, and sacrifices. Indeed, Leviticus is the world's finest tract on worship. An often repeated phrase from the mouth of Yahweh is a form of "You shall be holy for I am holy."

Among the Jews, the third book of the Torah was called, "The LORD called," after the opening words (Lev. 1:1). The book's English name suggests the work pertains to laws involving the Levites, the tribe from which the priests of Israel came.

Leviticus is a book about worship. The oft-repeated expression, "You shall be holy, for I am holy," reveals Yahweh's intention that his people show their loyalty to him through worship and other appropriate forms of behavior. Since it is his nature to be holy, he called his people to be holy as well. The laws contained in the book were revealed at Mount Sinai.

Leviticus gives considerable space to sacrifices. Sacrifices are outlined for several occasions. These sacrifices vary in terms of how they are offered (totally burned or offered in portions), kind (bull, goat, lamb, dove, pigeon, flour), and purpose (for sin, in fulfillment of a vow, as thanksgiving). In the opening section of Leviticus, the people are informed as to the particulars of the sacrifices (Lev. 1:1-6:7), then the priests are told how to offer the sacrifices (Lev. 6:8-7:38).

Since the priests occupy an important role in offering sacrifices, space is given to the ordination of Aaron as high priest and his sons as priests to assist him. As the priests begin their work, it becomes apparent that human wisdom is not to displace Yahweh's clear intent. Nadab and Abihu, two of Aaron's sons, lost their lives in unfaithful service (Lev. 8-10).

In addition to instructions relative to sacrifices, various laws are contained in Leviticus. These laws cover a range of matters, including clean and unclean food (Leviticus 11), purification after childbirth (Leviticus 12), skin diseases (Leviticus 13-14), bodily discharge (Leviticus 15), eating blood (Leviticus 17), sexual relations (Leviticus 18), and social relations (Leviticus 19).

In the middle of the book, is described the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The Day of Atonement occurs once each year. It is the day the high priest enters the Most Holy Place to atone for himself and for the people of Israel. One goat is sacrificed and blood is applied to the ark of the covenant. The other goat is sent out of the camp to symbolize the carrying away of the people's sins.

The book also pronounces punishment for certain sins (Leviticus 20) and provides rules for the priests (Leviticus 21-22). Special days are outlined--the Sabbath, the Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of Weeks (also known as Pentecost and Harvest), and the Feast of Tabernacles (also known as Booths and Ingathering) (Leviticus 23). During the Sabbatical Year (every seventh year) crops were not to be planted so the land could rest (Lev. 25:1-7). In the Year of Jubilee (every 50th year), debts were to be canceled and land was to return to the original owners (Lev. 25:8-55). A tithe (10 percent) of the produce of the land belongs to Yahweh (and would go to benefit of the Levites and priests (Lev. 27:30-33).

The student should not fail to notice that the book of Leviticus is Yahweh's instruction to Israel regarding worship and behavior. Through loyalty to Yahweh and through the confession of their sins, Israel would be bonded to their God. Yahweh, in turn, would be sure to continue to "remember" the covenant he made with their forefathers and provide for them. Disloyalty, on the other hand, would result in loss of the land. The warning notwithstanding, Israel did become disloyal and Yahweh eventually exiled them (Lev. 26:40-45).

b. Numbers. Numbers takes its name from two census counts, made at the beginning and at the end of thirty-eight years of wilderness wandering. Israel remained in the Sinai for thirty-eight years because of general unbelief in Yahweh's ability to give them the land he had sworn (we commonly use the weaker form, "promised") to give them.

The wilderness wandering (Num. 1:1-21:20). The book of Numbers carried the original title, "In the Desert," thus indicating for the reader that the contents concerned Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness of Sinai. When the book was translated into Greek, the title was changed to call attention to the two census counts (hence "numberings") that were taken.

Numbers does indeed provide an accounting of the Israelites in the desert. The first census counted 603,550 able-bodied adult men (Numbers 1). The second census found 601,730 (Numbers 26). The slightly reduced population indicates that the period of wandering was a difficult one. Indeed, many died as a direct result of faithlessness.

Before departure from Mount Sinai, the tribes were arranged into camps (Numbers 2). The Levites would ring the tabernacle according to a particular plan (Numbers 3-4). Numbers also records various laws that would govern the Israelite community. These included laws pertaining to marital fidelity (Numbers 5), the Nazirite (Numbers 6), and sacrifices (Numbers 15). An important event recorded in Numbers included the dedication of the tabernacle (Numbers 7-8).

God provided for Israel as they left Mount Sinai (Num. 9:15-10:36), but Israel was not always faithful. Complaints brought hardship for Moses and response from Yahweh (Numbers 11-12). The majority report of an exploration mission into Canaan led the people to distrust Yahweh. As a result, Yahweh condemned Israel to remain in the desert another thirty-eight years, until all adults were dead. Only Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who thought Yahweh could deliver the well-fortified land to Israel, would actually accompany the next generation of Israelites into the land of Canaan (Numbers 13-14).

Numbers is an important work, for it describes the response Israel made to Yahweh on the heels of his glorious and gracious activity in their behalf. Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16-17) and Moses' own failure to sanctify Yahweh's name before Israel point to the seriousness of the wilderness situation. In time, the older generation died and the time arrived for taking the new generation to the land God had sworn to give Israel. Aaron, the high priest, died and was succeeded by his son, Eleazar. Israel engaged some Canaanites in battle, then went around Edom and Moab without encountering additional armed resistance (Num. 20:1-21:20).

The Transjordan settlement (Num. 21:21-36:13). Once Israel reached the Plains of Moab, just opposite Canaan and northeast of the Salt Sea, they entered the area known as Transjordan. Here two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, attacked them. However, Yahweh led Israel to victory over the Amorites, and Israel occupied Transjordan (Numbers 21).

Even though Israel had no intentions of disturbing the Moabites, the Moabite king Balak hired a prophet named Balaam from a place near the Euphrates River to curse Israel. The story of Balaam is that of a man who, although a prophet of God, could not resist the temptation to "hire out" for a bad cause when the price was high enough. But instead of cursing Israel, Yahweh would only permit blessing to come from his mouth (Numbers 22-24). However, Israel's men did succumb to the temptation of having sex with the women of Moab and Midian at the places of sacrifice to Baal, a god the Moabites worshipped. Yahweh's anger led him to send a plague which took 24,000 lives. Phinehas, Aaron's grandson and a priest, is credited with an act that brought the plague to an end (Numbers 25).

Some matters are given attention in Numbers that will provide background to some future events. One is the matter of inheritance to daughters when the father has no sons (Num. 27:1-11; 36). Another is the choice of Joshua, Moses aide and one of the two who brought back an optimistic report about taking the land thirty-eight years earlier, as Moses' successor (Num. 27:12-23).

Following a reminder of sacrifices and various feasts instituted earlier (Numbers 28-29), the author notes

regulations pertaining to vows (Numbers 30). Then he returns to the Midianites, mentioned in connection with the Moabite Baal worship in which Israel participated. Yahweh instructed Israel to take revenge upon them for their evil and take their property. Their evil had pushed Yahweh to the point that his righteousness demanded that he act against them. Through Israel, Yahweh meted out justice upon the pagan Midianites (Numbers 31).

The book of Numbers is brought to a close with notations about the allocation of Transjordan to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh (Numbers 32), a recounting of the stages of Israel wilderness stops (Numbers 33), the proposed boundaries of the tribes once they possess Canaan (Numbers 34), towns for the Levites (Num. 35:1-5), and the dedication of six cities of refuge--cities of safety for persons guilty of an accidental killing (Num. 35:6-34).

c. Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy presents three speeches of Moses to a new generation of Israelites readying to enter Canaan. The speeches remind the people who they are in relation to Yahweh and prepare them for crossing the Jordan River into the Sworn Land.

A fitting title to the fifth book of the Torah is the opening line, "These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel." On the Plains of Moab, just opposite Canaan and just prior to Israel's entry, Moses gave his final admonitions. The book is generally recognized as being three speeches of Moses (beginning at 1:6; 5:1; 29:1). When "These Are the Words" was translated into the Greek language about 250 B.C.E., the title was changed to a word that meant "Second Law" or "Repeated Law." This title is unfortunate, for Deuteronomy is not so much a second telling as it is a series of exhortations to faithfulness for the new generation now preparing to enter Canaan, the land Yahweh had sworn to give them.

Moses reminded Israel of her past, including the failings of their parents that resulted in the prolonged wilderness experience and Yahweh's deliverance of the Amorite kings into their hands (Deut. 1:1-3:11). He spoke of the division of the land (Deut. 3:12-20) and of his own pleading with Yahweh to allow him to cross the Jordan (Deut. 3:21-29). Then in the following text, Moses reiterated portions of the law recorded in preceding books, interspersed with reflections from their history.

Deuteronomy does contain new material. One notation that is especially interesting is Moses' assessment of why Yahweh chose Israel and was about to carry them into Canaan. Moses made it plain that God's acts were not due to **their righteousness** but **Yahweh's purposes** (Deut. 9:4-6).

Additional original material is equally important. Moses anticipated that Yahweh himself would designate the place among them where proper worship would be offered--the place where he would put his name (Deuteronomy 12). The test for a false prophet could be determined on the basis of his message (Deut. 13; 18:20-22). Moses even looks forward to the time when Israel would have a king and prescribed restrictions for him (Deut. 17:14-20). A very forward-looking passage appears in Deut. 18:14-19, one which foresees Yahweh speaking through prophets and not mediums. Furthermore, he will eventually raise up a prophet like Moses in anticipation of the coming of Jesus.

When Israel reaches Canaan, they are to destroy completely the wicked, pagan peoples Yahweh must judge: the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (Deut. 20:16-18). Soon after entering Canaan, Israel is to go to the valley between two mountains in central Canaan, near Shechem. Here at mounts Ebal and Gerizim, they are to build an altar for sacrifice and read the curses and blessings that are tied to acts of unfaithfulness and faithfulness. This is connected with a **covenant renewal** for the new generation of Israelites (Deuteronomy 27-30).

The book closes with the appointment and charge of Joshua as Moses' successor (Deut. 31:1-8), the reading of the Law (Deut. 31:9-13), predicted unfaithfulness, and the production of a song that would serve as a warning (Deut. 31:14-32:47). Following his blessing of the tribes, Moses went up on Mount Nebo, where he died. There Yahweh himself buried him. The record says, "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face." With Moses' death, Joshua assumed the leadership and the way is prepared for Israel to enter Canaan (Deuteronomy 33-34). With this, the Torah

ends.

MODULE **2** The Former Prophets

Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings

The designation "Former Prophets" refers to four narrative compositions in the Hebrew Bible that relate the story of Israel under divine oversight. The story begins soon after Israel's release from Egyptian servitude (ca. 1500 B.C.E.) and ends with Babylonian servitude (586 B.C.E.). During the millennium, Israel settles in Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, calls upon a series of deliverers (judges) to rescue them from oppression due to their unfaithfulness to Yahweh, requests and gets kings to rule over them, experiences a split into two kingdoms, and goes through the demise of both kingdoms. Despite the warning of countless prophets, Israel demonstrates over and over again the human trend toward faithlessness. But Yahweh's love affair with humanity leads him to continue to nurture Israel until the means of human redemption is accomplished.

Joshua is concerned with Israel's entrance into the land Yahweh swore to give Israel. The book relates the story of Israel's conquest and settlement in Canaan. Joshua links The Torah with the book of Judges. The time span is about thirty years.

Judges tells the story of life in Israel between settlement and the rule of the kings. A period of 250 to 300 years is covered. The book makes it clear that life in Israel during this period tended toward slackness of faith. When faithlessness set in, Yahweh allowed Israel's enemies to afflict them. Eventually, Israel would call upon Yahweh for help, and he would raise up a savior (commonly called a "judge") to deliver them and provide justice.

Samuel carries the period of the judges to its conclusion and introduces the rule of the kings. It transitions the reader for a new episode in Israel's history.

Kings describes life in Israel from the closing days of King David to the conclusion of the period of the kings. During the period, the kingdom split into the kingdoms of Israel (to the north) and Judah (to the south). Eventually, idolatry and other sinful conditions led Yahweh to carry large numbers of people from both kingdoms into foreign exile. The temple, built during the days of Solomon, was destroyed and kingship ended. The next legitimate king would be Jesus.

Unit 1. Joshua and Judges

The books of Joshua and Judges form part of The Former Prophets. Joshua follows Deuteronomy and Judges follows Joshua in both placement in the canon and chronologically.

With the opening of Joshua, the time has come for Yahweh to fulfill his sworn word to Abraham to give his descendants the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:7-20). Joshua records particulars as to how this was accomplished. But the story does not end there.

The book of Judges describes Israel's behavior once the tribes are settled in the territory. Hence, we get an account from two perspectives. Being faithful to his word to Abraham, Yahweh directs the settlement in Canaan and does so in an exercise of judgment upon its wicked occupants. Israel becomes the beneficiary of Yahweh's actions and yet is often unfaithful to the covenant made at Sinai and renewed in Canaan. A two-sided picture emerges. God provides, Israel becomes faithless, Israel cries out for deliverance, and God delivers. The pattern of drifting and returning to Yahweh becomes more apparent after the tribes are allotted their portions of land.

The portrait painted by Judges is one of political decentralization and tribal leadership under the banner of "Israel" and direct reign of God. In addition to describing conditions that prompted the rise of the judge-leaders, the book offers commentary on how behavior and attitudes led Yahweh to allow Israel's neighbors to afflict them.

The events establish God's devotion to his intentions to redeem mankind. Furthermore, that redemption will not be possible through legislation or through keeping a pure conscience. It will come by divine provision of nothing less than his Son's crucifixion (Romans 1-3). The principle is laid down in Genesis 15:6: "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

We have broken the unit into three sections. These pertain to (a) the conquest of Canaan (Joshua 1-12), (b) the allotment of Canaan (Joshua 13-24), and (c) the life of Israel under the judges.

a. Joshua: The conquest of Canaan (Joshua 1-12). The book of Joshua links the events described at the close of Deuteronomy with those narrated in Judges. It is about the conquest and settlement of Canaan by Israel. Chapters 1-12 pertain to the conquest.

Notice the link between Deuteronomy and Joshua. Events described in the closing portion of Deuteronomy are summarized in the opening of Joshua. After the death of Moses, Joshua became Israel's leader. But the text makes it clear that Yahweh is in charge. Yahweh is about to give Israel the land. Eventually, he will extend the boundary of the land "from the desert and from Lebanon to the Great River, Euphrates--all the Hittite country--and to the Great Sea on the west" (Joshua 1:4). To insure Joshua's success, Yahweh declared he would be with Joshua as he was with Moses. Consequently, Yahweh counseled Joshua to "be strong and courageous" (1:6). Actually, this injunction to be strong and courageous occurs often and sets the tone for the book. Yahweh will fight for Israel, so they should have faith in him.

Even though the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh have been granted permission to settle in Transjordan (the territory on the east side of the Jordan River), the fighting men were required to go with the other tribes to help conquer the land (Canaan or Cisjordan, the territory west of the Jordan River). So Joshua ordered the community to prepare for crossing the Jordan (Joshua 1).

Joshua 2 describes the sending of two spies from the encampment at Shittim to Jericho, the first city they would encounter in Canaan. The two men traveled to Jericho and sought refuge at the home of Rahab, a harlot. Here Rahab manifested outstanding faith by hiding the men and protecting their whereabouts from city officials. In exchange for her confession of faith in Yahweh, the spies promised to spare the life of her family when the Israelite army took the city.

Before the crossing of the Jordan could be accomplished, the people would have to consecrate themselves, prepare to send the ark of the covenant before the people, and await Yahweh's blockage of the Jordan River (Joshua 3). From the middle of the Jordan, twelve stones were selected for a memorial to be set up once they were on the other side. Israel crossed the Jordan at flood stage, crossing on dry ground (Joshua 4).

At the first encampment, at Gilgal, the males were circumcised. None had been circumcised in the desert. At Gilgal, "the reproach of Egypt" was rolled away. The people also observed the Passover, and the manna that Yahweh had supplied in the desert ceased (Joshua. 5:1-12).

Jericho fell to Israel, following seven days of marching around the city. One restriction Yahweh placed upon the people was not to take any loot from Jericho. Thus, Jericho, the first city to be taken was placed under the "ban." It belonged wholly to Yahweh. Nevertheless, Achan took some silver, a robe, and some gold. Consequently, when Israel attempted to take the next place, a small town called Ai, they were defeated, for Yahweh did not fight for them. Achan and his family were stoned for violating the ban (Joshua 5:13-7:26).

Following the destruction of Ai by ambush on the second try, Israel traveled to Mount Ebal where they

built an altar and renewed their covenant with Yahweh (Joshua 8). After this incident, a group of Hivites from nearby Gibeon tricked Israel by pretending to be from a distant place. They requested peace with Israel, although Yahweh had dedicated the wicked people of Canaan for destruction. When Israel found out they had been tricked, they upheld their covenant with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9). This episode set up the events to follow. When powerful allies to the south, led by Adoni-Zedek of Jerusalem, heard that Gibeon had entered an alliance with Israel, the allies attacked Gibeon. The Gibeonites sent word to Joshua that they were being attacked. This brought Israel to the defense of the Gibeonites. The battle was long, necessitating the "sun to stand still." The five Amorite kings who attacked Gibeon were taken and killed. The events at Gibeon thus set into motion actions which led to the conquest of the southern part of Canaan (Joshua 10). When Jabin, king of Hazor (located to the north of the Sea of Galilee), heard of the conquest of the south, he gathered a confederacy to attack Joshua in the north. With the conclusion of this battle, Israel now dominated the entire land of Canaan (Joshua 11). The list of defeated kings follows--31 in all (Joshua 12).

b. Joshua: the allotment of Canaan (Joshua 13-24). The conquest of Canaan took a considerable amount of time. Even in Joshua's latter days, all the land had not been taken. But the land was divided among the nine and one-half tribes which were not given land in Transjordan. While it is not important to know the areas settled by each of the tribes, some territorial allotments are important to recognize. Judah, a dominant tribe, was given the southern third of Canaan (*i.e.*, the land between the Salt Sea and the Great or Mediterranean Sea.) (The inheritance of Simeon was carved out of Judah's.) Ephraim and the other half of Manasseh occupied the central part of Canaan. Allotment was made for each of the tribes by casting lots (Joshua 13-19).

In addition to the tribal allotments, three cities of refuge were named on the Canaan side of the Jordan River. This brought the total to six (Joshua 20). The Levites were given forty-eight cities, scattered throughout the other tribes (Joshua 21).

At the conclusion of the conquest, the warriors from the Transjordanian tribes returned to their homes. On their way, they constructed an "altar" as a reminder to future generations of Cisjordanians (those who settled in Canaan proper) that the Transjordanians (those who remained east of the Jordan River) were one people. However, the intentions of the Transjordanian tribes were misread and a fight was narrowly avoided (Joshua 22).

Near the close of his life, Joshua exhorted Israel to be faithful to Yahweh. He summoned the tribes to Shechem, where the covenant was renewed (Joshua 23-24).

Observe that the operation described in Joshua was under God's direction. As displayed in Genesis, man's preferred action was self-centered. Consequently, man preferred rebellion to faith. Although patient with man, God's righteousness provoked the exercise of judgment on the rebellious. In the midst of rebellion, God projected a means by which redemption could be affected. So, we have coming together the love of God and the judgment of God. Abraham's descendants became an instrument by which God could execute judgment upon the evil inhabitants of Canaan and lay the foundation for redemption to those who approach him in faith. If God had not ordered the displacement of the current population of Canaan, we would wonder about his justice. But we also learn that God is not a respecter of persons. When Israel failed to live according to the covenant, he raised up other people (though wicked they may have been) to oppress them. That is what the book of Judges is about. He eventually removed a significant part of the leaders of Israel because of continued evil they had learned from their neighbors.

c. Judges. The book of Judges describes settled life in Canaan following the days of Joshua. The period covered by the book is uncertain, though it appears to have run from 250 to 300 years.

The "judges" were Israel's saviors. They often emerged during times of crisis to drive out an enemy whom Yahweh had temporarily allowed to afflict Israel for her faithlessness. These characters were leaders; they also appear to have had duties common to judges, *i.e.*, deciding legal matters.

It is clear from the opening of Judges that all the original inhabitants of the land had not been driven out. Before specific "judges" are mentioned, various battles are noted. Sometimes a tribe was given victory by

Yahweh. At other times, the record simply says a tribe did not drive out the enemy from its territory. In the midst of these observations is a most significant summary:

Following the passing of Joshua's generation, a new generation grew up, who forgot Yahweh and his previous activity. Israel did evil and served the Baals and Ashtoreths (male and female counterpart, idols of Canaan). They provoked Yahweh so that he allowed their neighbors to plunder them and defeat them when they resisted. Israel experienced great distress. Then, because of his compassion, Yahweh raised up judges (saviors) to save them from the raiders. Yet Israel would not listen to the judges but continued to serve the gods of the Canaanites (Judg. 2:10-19).

The earliest judges noted in the text include **Othniel**, who fought against the king of Aram (Judg. 3:7-11); left-handed **Ehud**, who killed Eglon, the fat king of Moab (Judg. 3:12-30); **Shamgar**, a man with a non-Hebrew name, who slew 600 Philistines with an oxgoad (Judg. 3:31); **Deborah**, a prophetess (Judges 4-5); and Gideon, who was used to bring victory over the Midianites (Judges 6-8).

The story of Deborah is quite fascinating. She was leading Israel during a period of crisis that involved Jabin, a Canaanite king who ruled from Hazor. When Deborah summoned Barak to lead an army against the Canaanites, he refused to go without her. Deborah agreed to go but told Barak the honor of victory would not belong to him, but to a woman. As the story unfolds, Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army, began to flee before the Israelites. Along the way he stopped for rest at the tent of Heber, who belonged to the friendly Kenite people. Heber's wife, Jael, gave Sisera a glass of warm milk, and put him to sleep. Then, quietly, she drove a tent peg through Sisera's temple. From that moment, Israel gained advantage over King Jabin's army and continued until they destroyed the king's force.

The fifth chapter records the "Song of Deborah," a song that celebrated the victory of Israel over the Canaanites. The song is reminiscent of the Songs of Moses and Miriam, following the Exodus.

The events surrounding **Gideon's** victory over the Midianites is one that clearly shows that the victory belonged to Yahweh. Gideon was only a tool in God's hands. It is a thrilling episode that depicts how Gideon sought a proper sign that Yahweh was calling him to action, and how he inched his way into full compliance with Yahweh's instructions. On God's instructions, he destroyed his father's idols, then paired the Israelite army to 300 men, with which to face 135,000 Midianites. These he armed with trumpets and lights encased in jars. Israel quietly circled the Midianites as they were encamped at night, broke their jars, and blew their trumpets. The Midianites panicked, became confused, and killed each other. Two Midianite kings and 15,000 soldiers managed to escape. As Gideon pursued them across the Jordan, he and his men came to Succoth. Gideon asked for food for his men, but the officials of Succoth refused to accommodate them, as did the citizens of nearby Peniel. On the way back through, Gideon punished the officials of the two towns. Thereafter, the Israelites asked Gideon to rule over them. He refused, but he did ask each to give him a gold earring taken from the Midianites/Ishmaelites. From the earrings, Gideon made an "ephod" (as in a priest's garment) and the people of Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it. As soon as Gideon died, the people went back to Baal worship; they also failed to show gratitude to his family.

Abimelech is a man of a different cut. Scholars are not sure he should be numbered among the judges. He was an opportunist who wanted to be a king. Abimelech was an offspring of Gideon. He wormed his way into the graces of the citizens of Shechem, hired some reckless adventurers, then murdered all but one of Gideon's seventy sons to eliminate the competition. He is called the "bramble king" because of a speech of Jotham, the surviving son of Gideon, who likened Abimelech to a thorn bush. Abimelech did govern Israel for three years, but he met his fate at Thebez. He had captured the city and was closing in on the tower. But as he approached, a woman dropped a millstone on his head. In his dying moments he requested his armor-bearer to thrust him through with a sword so no one would say, "A woman killed him."

Following scant mention of two judges, **Tola** and **Jair**, the author of Judges relates the story of **Jephthah**. Israel digressed into idolatry, so Yahweh sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites. The writer proceeds to treat the story of deliverance from Ammonite oppression under the leadership of

Jephthah (Judges 10).

Jephthah was from Gilead, in northern Transjordan. He was the son of a prostitute who was driven away from home by the sons of his father's wife, so the "real" sons would not have to share the family inheritance with him. But when Israel looked for someone to lead them against the Ammonites, they sent word to Jephthah to become the commander of their army. His reply is classic: "Didn't you hate me and drive me from my father's house? Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?" He bargained for a place of permanent leadership and was given that right. So, Jephthah initiated correspondence with the Ammonites, who were claiming the right to land taken by Israel from the Amorites 300 years earlier.

When communications failed to repel the Ammonites, Jephthah was led by the Spirit of Yahweh against Ammon. Jephthah made a pledge to Yahweh. He promised that if Yahweh would give him victory, he would offer as a burnt sacrifice whatever met him first on his return home. Yahweh delivered the Ammonites to Jephthah's hand. Upon returning to his home, the first to meet him was his virgin daughter. After a two-month leave, she returned home and he sacrificed her. Please note that Yahweh did not ask Jephthah to sacrifice his daughter. Jephthah made a rash vow and he carried it out.

One other interesting event associated with Jephthah pertains to war between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites across the Jordan River. The Ephraimites called the Gileadites "renegades" from Ephraim and Manasseh. The Gileadites took charge of the fords of the Jordan and whenever an Ephraimite tried to cross, the Gileadites asked if he were an Ephraimite. If he replied, "No," the Gileadites would ask him to pronounce the word "Shibboleth" (ear of corn). Since the Ephraimites normally mispronounced the word "sibboleth," the Gileadites would know he was lying and kill him. Would you believe 42,000 Ephraimites died in this manner? (Judg. 11:1-12:7). Life was tough, but you certainly cannot say God was behind all the mischief.

Jephthah was followed by **Ibzan**, **Elon**, and **Abdon**. The next person of color was **Samson**. The angel of Yahweh announced to a barren woman from the tribe of Dan that she would have a son, Samson, and that he would be dedicated a Nazirite. The Spirit of Yahweh would lead Samson against the Philistines.

When grown, Samson wandered down into Philistine territory and found a girl he had to have as a wife. He requested his father to arrange a marriage. This is actually what he told his father, "She's the right one for me." Actually, this would become an avenue for Yahweh to punish the Philistines.

Yahweh had given Samson tremendous strength. He could also tell riddles. Samson lost his wife but got revenge on the Philistines. Next, there was an affair with a prostitute that led to the loss of the city gates. Then he fell madly in love with Delilah. And was she ever a betrayer. Pretty, but bad. Samson ended up with his eyes being poked out and destined to spend the rest of his life in prison. However, when sport was made of him at a great sacrifice to the Philistine god Dagon, Samson was able to pull down the temple and killed more Philistines in his death than during his lifetime (Judg. 12:8-16:31).

The remainder of the book of Judges is given to several stories that provide insight into the quality of life in ancient Israel. The first story tells how the tribe of Dan relocated and how, in the process, they pursued idolatrous worship (Judges 18). The next story relates how the Benjaminites were almost annihilated over an incident revolving around the death of a man's concubine (Judges 19-21). This is the kind of reading that will make your blood curl. It is the way people were, not how God wanted them to behave.

Unit 2. Samuel

Samuel bridges between Judges and Kings. Before the author of Judges completed the account of the deliverer-judges, he interrupted the story to relate two events that helped explain unique situations in Israel during the period. It was up to the author of Samuel to bring this era to a close and introduce the kingship.

Although Eli and Samuel rounded out the judges who ruled Israel during this period, the Book of Samuel

(1 and 2 Samuel in the English Bible) concentrates on events leading to the appointment of the first two kings--Saul and David. More specifically, Samuel focuses on David. David is the king Yahweh appointed for the purpose of creating the kingly line through whom Jesus would come and fulfill the lagging promise to Abraham to bless all nations.

Spiritual conditions in Israel continued to cycle between faith and faithlessness. The Philistines became major antagonists, but the Ammonites (descendants from Lot) posed a threat as well (1 Sam. 12:12-15). Their threat changed Israel's history permanently.

The history of Israel is written from a human point of view in that its major characters are humans who often take matters into their own hands. They behave as though they are in control of their own destiny. Yet, Yahweh works in and through these events to accomplish his own purposes. In this manner, man remains responsible for his thoughts and actions, but he can never confound his creator.

The unit has three sections. These are (a) The last of the judges (1 Samuel 1-8), (b) The United Kingdom: Saul (1 Samuel 9-31), and (c) The United Kingdom: David (2 Samuel). The first eight chapters describe the circumstances surrounding the birth of Samuel. Samuel's mother dedicated him to Yahweh, and he was reared by Eli, the priest-judge. Ironically, Eli's wicked sons became the occasion for Samuel to succeed him and become the last of the judge-rulers in Israel. Although Samuel's sons became judges and others would fill the role of judges throughout Israel's history, the transition to a king-ruler would henceforth limit the judges' role from what it had been during the past two or three centuries. The account of the kingship of Saul begins in chapter 9. David's kingship is described in 2 Samuel.

a. The last of the judges (1 Samuel 1-8). The Period of the Judges continues into 1 Samuel. There are two more judges: Eli and Samuel. Then the books of Samuel treat the period of the first kings: Saul and David. The date for Samuel spans the time frame from before 1050 B.C.E. to the death of David, ca. 961 B.C.E.

Although 1 Samuel carries the story of both Eli and Samuel, the two stories are woven together. Samuel is clearly the main character. Samuel will play a leading role in the early years of the kingship. The priest-judge Eli rears Samuel after his mother, Hannah, brings him to the priest following the answer to her prayer for a son. Samuel is dedicated to Yahweh and so grows up in the environs of the Shiloh temple/tabernacle.

The occasion for Samuel's rise to position was the evil sons of Eli. They took from sacrifices portions which were not permitted them and slept with the women who served at the tabernacle. Yahweh's call of Samuel to become the successor to Eli signals the hope for a new day for spirituality in Israel. The Philistines controlled the territory at the time and fought a battle against Israel that resulted in the taking of the ark of the covenant and the death of Eli's sons. Upon hearing the news that the ark had been taken, Eli, an old and fat man, fell out of his chair and broke his neck and died.

The ark was taken to the Philistine cities of Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron before it was returned to Israel. The reason for returning the ark was that when the Philistines placed it in the temple of Dagon, their god. Dagon fell and broke in the presence of the ark. The people were also afflicted with tumors. The Philistines returned the ark to Israel. The ark made its way to Kiriath Jearim, where it stayed for twenty years--it never did get back to Shiloh, where the tabernacle was.

Throughout Samuel's leadership, the hand of Yahweh was against the Philistines (1 Samuel 7:13). Samuel was a good man, an honest judge, a faithful servant of Yahweh. Like Moses, Samuel carried a heavy burden. He was a circuit-riding judge. But his sons took bribes in their work as judges. When the people asked for a king so they could be like their neighbors, they were rejecting the direct rule of Yahweh. Yahweh told Samuel to warn the people that they would suffer under the kings: he would make servants of their children, enlist their children in war pursuits, and tax them. Nevertheless, the people wanted a king. They thought a king could lead them to victory against their oppressors.

b. The United Kingdom: Saul (1 Samuel 9-31). The segment of Hebrew History that is covered in 1 Samuel 9-31 pertains to part of the "united" kingdom. The United Kingdom, as moderns have designated it, is represented by the rule of three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. Here, we turn attention to Saul.

When Israel asked for a king, Yahweh agreed, but designated who that king would be. The first king was Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin. Saul started out well, but he began doing things his way and Yahweh rejected him. Yahweh led Samuel to anoint David, son of Jesse of the tribe of Judah, to replace Saul. Saul spent much of his time pursuing David to kill him and so lost territory to the Philistines.

The request for a king was ill-conceived. Israel's desire to have a ruler like the nations around them indicated a lack of faith in Yahweh. To the people, Yahweh had let them down by allowing their enemies to infiltrate. They failed to realize that the reason was traceable to their own lack of faithful response to Yahweh. Although the biblical text does not state it this way, it seems as though Yahweh's answer to Israel was, "Yes, you may have a king, but it will be one I designate. And the one I designate will lead to the horrors the prophet has outlined." A reluctant Saul became king, but his focus was more on himself than on being Yahweh's servant. Hence, he was not a king "after God's own heart."

The text begins with Samuel, who served as Israel's final judge-leader. That the reader may comprehend the background, the author provides sufficient detail to show the crisis for faith. What Israel believed could be settled with the appointment of a king only underscored the lack of faith in Yahweh. David's killing of Goliath the Philistine should have been an indication of this critical moment. Rather, it provoked Saul to jealousy and perverse activity. One need not read the account and conclude that all the acts attributed to either Saul or David had divine approval. But the account demonstrates the difference between a king who acted on his own (Saul) and one who thought of Israel as God's people entrusted to his righteous rule (David).

c. The United Kingdom: David (2 Samuel). When Saul died, his son Ish-Bosheth became king of Israel and David became king of Judah. At the end of seven years, Abner (the commander of Ishbosheth's army) delivered Ishbosheth's territory to David. But Joab (David's commander) killed Abner because he thought Abner was after his position. David ruled over the twelve tribes for thirty-three years. During this period, David extended the land's boundaries to the River Euphrates and to the River of Egypt (the Wadi el-Arish). This is the full extent of territory Yahweh had sworn to give Israel.

David's motivations were different from Saul's. Despite his sins, which were many, David had a heart that wanted to live for Yahweh and govern Yahweh's people in righteousness. However, David was a warrior and, as such, was denied the opportunity of building Yahweh a temple. Instead, Yahweh established David's house as the house of kings for the balance of Judah's history.

In perspective of the entire Bible, David is of central importance. He was chosen by Yahweh himself as one who had a heart to do Yahweh's will. All the kings from his time forward were measured by whether they walked in his ways. More significantly, David became a symbol of God's determination to carry the promise to Abraham to fulfillment. The One whom he would bring into the world was spoken of as the "root of Jesse" (David's father). The line of kings in the remnant Judah would all descend from David. The ultimate One whom he would bring into the world would be the "root of Jesse" (David's father). That is why the genealogy of Jesus is so important in Matthew and Luke. Jesus became the rightful king whom God himself anointed. The contrast could not be greater. Israel approached Samuel for a king to be like the nations surrounding them. This act was in an act of defiance against Yahweh, for it rejected him as their spiritual king. So, Yahweh gave them Saul. Then, he chose David, who became the symbol of Yahweh's reign among his people. Second Samuel can only point in the direction of the fitting climax--the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus to God's right hand.

Unit 3. Kings

The book of Kings in the Hebrew Bible appears as two books in the English Bible. Kings spans from the reign of David (10th century B.C.E.) to the end of the exile of Judah (6th century B.C.E.), which marked the end of the kingdom period. The New Testament connects the genealogy of King David with Jesus, making Jesus his legitimate successor and fulfilling Yahweh's promise to establish David's house. On observation we realize the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah all descended from David.

Kings was divided when the book was translated into the Greek language. Because Greek has vowels, the book in translation became too lengthy for a single papyrus scroll. It is now customary to speak of First and Second Kings.

Authorship is uncertain, although Jewish tradition suggests Jeremiah compiled the work. Of necessity, finalization had to come after the closing event it records, which is the death of King Jehoiachin in Babylon. This event is recorded in both 2 Kings 25:27-30 and Jer. 52:31-34.

The author refers to additional sources, noting specifically the book of the annals of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41), the book of the annals of the kings of Israel (1 Kings 14:28; 2 Kings 15:31), and the book of the annals of the kings of Judah (2 Kings 24:5). The nature of Kings suggests the author availed himself of these sources in the development to his story.

For three and one-half centuries, the kingdom that David reunited when he was recognized as king over both the northern and southern tribes, continued in some form. Political history was turbulent. The spiritual condition was shameful, worsening until arch enemies Assyria and Babylon removed the kings, brought devastation, and relocated leading citizens to their own lands.

For convenience sake, the content of Kings has been divided into three sections. These are (a) The United Kingdom: Solomon (1 Kings 1-11), (b) The Divided Kingdom (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17), and (c) The Kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 18-25). The divisions are fairly natural. In the first instance, Solomon ruled over both Israel and Judah, whom David had reunited after Saul's kingship. In the second, the story of the split kingdoms of Israel and Judah is intertwined. In the third section, only the kingdom of Judah remains after the kingdom of Israel falls to the Assyrians.

a. The United Kingdom: Solomon (1 Kings 1-11). Upon David's death, Solomon became king. Solomon went astray, despite encouragement from David to follow the words of the Torah and the receipt of a special gift of wisdom. Among his accomplishments were the construction of a temple, a palace, and many other buildings. Solomon's reign was generally one of peace. His downfall was prefigured by his many marriages--700 wives and 300 concubines. His wives led him into idolatry. For that, his kingdom would be divided as his son came to power.

The opening of Kings assumes the reader is familiar with the story of David as told in the preceding book of Samuel. The author connects the books by noting that David was old and ill, but he had not crowned a successor. His firstborn son, Amnon, had been killed by his half-brother, Absalom, for forcing Absalom's sister, Tamar, into a sexual relationship (2 Samuel 13). Absalom lost his life after attempting to usurp the throne from his father (2 Samuel 15-18). Adonijah, David's fourth son, now puts himself forward as a candidate and tries to win the favor of the people without David's knowledge. When David was informed, he acted on an oath he had made earlier to his wife Bathsheba that their son, Solomon, would succeed David as king (1 Kings 1).

Solomon possessed all the qualities and opportunities needed to be an exemplary king. His wisdom exceeded that of all others. The times favored a glorious and prosperous reign. When he came to the throne, the fullest extent of territory promised Israel had been secured. He faced no external threats. Tribute rolled into his coffers. Despite the gift of wisdom, Solomon often chose an unwise course of action. He succumbed to the trap of power: putting his own personal empire ahead of the well-being of the people. Oppressive work demands overshadowed the otherwise glorious construction projects. The

Solomon era confirms that no matter how much people yearn for perfect government, they will not find it.

The chapters that follow describe David's charge to Solomon (chap. 2), Solomon's request for wisdom (chap. 3), Solomon's administration and provisions (chap. 4), the temple's construction (chaps. 5-9), Solomon's wealth (chap. 10), and Solomon's demise (chap. 11).

b. The Divided Kingdom (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17). Solomon's son, Rehoboam, followed Solomon, only to be overbearing and provide the occasion for Yahweh to give the northern tribes (hereinafter designated simply as "Israel" as distinguished from "Judah") to Solomon's rival, Jeroboam, an Ephraimite. Jeroboam (1) diverted Yahweh worship to idolatry, (2) changed the place of worship for Israel from Jerusalem to Dan and Bethel, (3) changed the authorized feast days, and (4) allowed men to become priests regardless of their tribe. Thus, Jeroboam became the model for Israel's departure from right worship.

The story of the kings proceeds. Some of the kings of *Judah* were inclined toward righteousness, while there is hardly a good word said about any of the kings of *Israel*. The kings of *Judah* remained with the descendants of David. This ties in with Yahweh's promise to "build" David's house and enables a genealogical link between David and Jesus. But the kings of *Israel* changed dynasties quiet often.

The evil that appeared in Israel eventually brought the northern kingdom to an end. Their leaders were exiled to Assyria and only the poor were left in the land. According to Assyrian policy, captives from other places were brought to Samaria (the center of the land) and resettled there. It is out of the intermarriage of these peoples that the Samaritans developed.

In addition to noting unfaithful kings and opportunist queens, the author includes descriptions of faithful oral prophets: Elijah, Obadiah, Micaiah, and Elisha. These "oral" prophets are so-called because their words and acts are not published in separate books.

As you will see, worship of the local god Baal and attendant evil figured prominently in Israel's apostasy and became the basic reason for exile (2 Kings 17:7-23). Do not conclude that Yahweh approved all the activity reported, for this would miss the point of the narrative. Israel chose a faithless road, acted accordingly, and met the consequences. Things would have been much different for them had they behaved in keeping with the covenant.

c. The Kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 18-25). The kingdom of Judah fared better than Israel for a little over 100 years. But in 586 B.C.E., Judah fell to the Babylonians due to neglect of covenant stipulations. Judah remained under foreign domination for four centuries.

The story of this section begins with King Hezekiah (720-686 B.C.E.) of Judah. By contrast to other kings, Hezekiah was a righteous man. Through the encouragement of the prophet Isaiah, he withstood a call for surrender by the Assyrian King Sennacherib, who occupied much of Judah's territory. But Hezekiah was succeeded by his faithless son, Manasseh (686-642 B.C.E.). Although Manasseh repented in his later years, it was too late to reverse the downward trend in moral decay. After a short reign by the evil King Amon (642-640 B.C.E.), Josiah (640-609 B.C.E.) came to the throne. Josiah renewed the covenant and set out to reform the kingdom spiritually. He died in battle with Pharaoh Neco in a failed attempt to keep the Assyrians at bay. After brief reigns by Jehoahaz (609 B.C.E.), Jehoiakim (609-597 B.C.E.), Jehoiachin (597 B.C.E.), and Zedekiah (997-587 B.C.E.), Jerusalem was taken and destroyed by the army of Nebuchadnezzar. Exiles were removed to Babylon. The second book of Kings ends with a note about Jehoiachin in 561 B.C.E.

Significance is attached to the kingdom of Judah because of Yahweh's promise to establish David's house as the legitimate line of kings. Yahweh will work his plan for human redemption through the lineage of David. The books of Chronicles do more to show David's role than Kings. Ezra and Nehemiah extend the story beyond 2 Kings.

As for a digest of the chapters, the theme is that Yahweh will perform his work through humans, but he does not rely upon humans. He looks for covenant loyalty. When it is absent, he exercises discipline.

What kings believe to be important for security is not always part of God's prescription. God judges according to righteousness, not according to military might, walled cities, or international alliances. So, it is important to read the material from both divine and human perspectives.

MODULE **3** The Latter Prophets

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Book of the Twelve

Isaiah is a significant work due to its length and scope. The book covers a time frame from 740-701 B.C.E., a period when Assyria dominated the Middle East. The message of Isaiah concerns how Yahweh holds all nations responsible for their deeds, how Israel's sinful behavior will bring their downfall, how Yahweh will work out the future to return his people from exile, and how he will eventually bring to culmination his long-awaited work in Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah is the written work of a prophet who was active from 625-585 B.C.E. The work focuses on the closing years of Judah, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of her leading citizens to Babylon.

Ezekiel commences just prior to Jeremiah's end, beginning in 592 B.C.E. The prophet himself was taken into exile to Babylonia, and from here he speaks to those who were among the first to go into exile. He foresaw the fall of Jerusalem but also anticipated the restoration of Yahweh's people to their land.

The Book of the Twelve is a cover for twelve independent books. The books are related only in the sense that they belong to the latter period of Old Testament history and that they fit the general description of being prophets of "minor" writing proportions. Hosea, Amos, and Micah belong to the eighth century and parallel Isaiah in a number of ways. Jonah and Nahum are very different from each other, yet they both focus on Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Habakkuk deals with the question of divine justice. Joel, Obadiah, and Zephaniah are unique in their own way. Three of the books--Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are post-exilic, i.e., they belong to the period following the return of the Jews to Palestine.

Unit 1. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel

If you are asking about authority, the three compositions are no more or less important than other books of The Prophets. But they do have length to commend them. Because of their relative length, these are sometimes referred to as "major" prophets only because they left more written material than others. Together, the three were active during the closing years of the northern and southern monarchies and into the early days of the exile of Judah.

When reading the three, we should become aware of the deteriorating relationship between Israel and Yahweh. In spite of Yahweh's grace and patience, neither Israel nor Judah are committed to the covenant. The kings of the northern kingdom (Israel) position their kingdoms in such a way that they would not be loyal. In deference to some reforming kings in the South (Judah), reforms were insufficient to establish lasting devotion to Yahweh. Isaiah's early warnings are extended by Jeremiah. Ezekiel counsels the exiles from Judah to settle in Babylon until Yahweh was ready to return them to their land.

Accompanying the prophets' attention to present and pressing problems was a message of hope. Yahweh was not finished with Israel, though he would use a "remnant" to accomplish his purposes. Those purposes would culminate with Christ and a new covenant that would embrace all who would place their faith in God.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel should be read with an eye toward Israel's present in view of the Sinai covenant. They should also be read in view of the continuing acts of God through Israel. These acts would include restoration to Palestine following a period of exile as discipline for unbelief. However, restoration is not for physical Israel's sake, but for Yahweh's! The promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled ultimately through Israel so salvation could be realized through faith by both Jews and Gentiles. One should not be derailed by more modern approaches that seek to interpret the books apart from their contexts to support a fairly recent projection of a physical millennial reign of Christ in Jerusalem.

a. Isaiah. The man Isaiah was a prophet-statesman in Jerusalem, giving counsel to four kings of Judah. Even though he spoke in keeping with divine wisdom, not all kings were willing to listen. Nevertheless, Isaiah stood as Yahweh's witness regarding the present and the future. When he addressed political matters, he did so as a prophet calling for trust in Yahweh rather than in alliances or armaments.

The Book of Isaiah is lengthy and comprehensive. Yahweh is presented as a God of history. The author makes it clear that he holds all nations responsible for their actions. Indeed, he condemns drunkenness, vanity, injustice, greed, oppression of the poor, open violence, and foreign entanglements. Yahweh will bring about judgment upon all who practice evil, whether Israel or the other nations. So the prophet attests that Yahweh will, in time, deal with the neighbors of Judah and Israel; he will also deal with Israel and Judah in a manner that is appropriate to their behavior.

Isaiah looks toward the exile of Yahweh's covenant people, but he also anticipates the coming of better days. These better days will come when he restores his people to their land and later brings the Suffering Servant, the Branch from Jesse (David's father) into the world and establishes his reign.

Yahweh had called the people to righteousness. Instead of honoring him, they ignored Yahweh's call to loyalty. They had neglected covenant law. But Yahweh's vision included a Servant of righteousness who would establish justice on the earth. Whereas kings and priests had failed, Yahweh would eventually bring his own Servant into the world. And Zion (another word for Jerusalem) would be revisited by God--not to become the center of a political kingdom but the place from which the word of the Lord would flow to all nations.

It is common to divide Isaiah at chapter 40. While there does not appear to be the clean distinction between the first and second halves of the books that some suggest, the second part is more forward looking. It begins with the words, "Comfort, comfort my people" (40:1) and contains words repeated in the New Testament with reference to work of John the Baptist, who prepares the way for Jesus (40:3-5; Matt. 3:3). Hence, the future glory of Jerusalem is not limited to a return of a remnant following the exile and reconstruction of Solomon's temple. We may observe that a focal point in part one is the call of Isaiah (chap. 6). A focal point in the latter part is the coming Suffering Servant, through whom God's promise to Abraham came to fulfillment.

b. Jeremiah. Jeremiah is a book that defies chronological arrangement. The prophet's work is topical in nature. The writing alternates between narrative and poetry. The prophet's message is sometimes presented as object lessons, sometimes in story form, and sometimes in prophetic pronouncements. Jeremiah is a man who would rather not be a prophet, but when he attempts to withhold an unpleasant message God has given him, that message burns like a fire in his bones. He must speak. And speak he does. For his work, he is rewarded with prison. And finally, he is taken to Egypt with those who escape the Babylonian sword.

Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem. He was there when King Josiah initiated reforms based upon the discovery of the Law in the temple. He was also present during Nebuchadnezzar's attacks upon Jerusalem. Jeremiah declared the exile would last seventy years. As a sign that the people would return, he purchased a field. Like other prophets before him, Jeremiah demonstrates that God will not hold the other nations guiltless for their evil.

Although it may be too late for Judah, Jeremiah emphasizes the willingness of God to forgive his people upon repentance. If Judah must go into exile for her excesses, God holds the promise for the future.

Perhaps the most memorable passage in the prophet is his forecasting that God would eventually establish a covenant with his people that would be a covenant of the heart, with forgiveness of sins being his free gift. The author of the New Testament book of Hebrews says this new covenant came in Jesus.

Jeremiah's work covered forty years from 625 to 585 B.C.E. As he put it, he was destined to be a spokesman for God, but he makes it clear this was not by desire on his part (1:4-19). He could choose not to respond to the divine call, but being faithful meant he would accept it. The book that bears his name contains his messages in poetic and prose structure. It also holds autobiographical or confessional material and an account of his sufferings by Baruch, his secretary.

c. Ezekiel. Ezekiel is the record of a priest by that name who was deported from Judah to Babylon in 592 B.C.E. by King Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel ministered to the exiles and described for them through modeling the destruction of Jerusalem and the return following a period of exile. It was Ezekiel who showed that the glory of Yahweh could depart from the temple; therefore, Yahweh could indeed forsake the sacred city. The inhabitants would be punished for their sins.

Ezekiel contains sections of apocalyptic, a form of literature that makes use of symbolic language to describe the phenomena of the spiritual order. With such language as is found in Revelation, Ezekiel described the throne of God. Ezekiel spoke of the exiles returning through the image of dry bones coming to life. He described the building of a new temple. He taught individual responsibility for one's sins/acts of righteousness.

The book will be hard to digest for the first-time reader. Here are some suggestions for approaching the composition. First, note that it has an historical setting, but will deal with divine revelations through visions. The priest-prophet addresses Jewish exiles in Babylonia (1:1-3). So, the message is intended primarily for them. The remainder of chap. 1 establishes the source of his message; chap. 2 depicts his personal call to deliver it. What Ezekiel found was a tough message--one that spelled doom for those left in Palestine (chaps. 3-11). From chap. 12 forward, Ezekiel assures those who are already in exile that the exile will be lengthy (seventy years), yet when the period of punishment for their sins has been fulfilled, God will lead a remnant back to Jerusalem to continue his work.

Like other prophets, Ezekiel shows that Yahweh is the God of all. He will call into judgment other people who have acted in unrighteousness: Ammon (chap. 25), The Phoenicians (chaps. 26-28), and Egypt (chaps. 30-32). The series of judgments on foreign nations is interrupted in chaps. 33-34) with commentary on Ezekiel's role and Jerusalem's demise. He completes his prophecy against foreigners with Edom (chap. 35), before returning to his plans for Israel. The order reflects the content of Jeremiah and Obadiah, which describe the evil behavior of the descendants of Esau (Edom) at the time of Judah's defeat.

A transition occurs with chap. 36 as the prophet reveals Yahweh's future intention to restore his chosen people to their land. This action is not for Israel's sake but for the sake Yahweh's holy name (36:22). God promises to restore the people to Jerusalem (37:1-14), unite them (37:15-28), protect them (chaps. 38-39), cause the temple to be rebuilt (chaps. 40-42), and once again allow his glory to return (chap. 43). Worship and life will be reinstated (chaps. 44-48).

Even though some of the latter part of the book is written in apocalyptic style, the basic message of the book is this: Those in exile should settle down, bear the tragedy of Jerusalem's destruction, and realize that Yahweh's purposes are not dependent upon humans. Through a remnant, Yahweh will restore Israel to Palestine and in his own time bring to reign the rightful king--a descendant of David. We understand from the rest of scripture that this designated king is Jesus Christ and that what is symbolized in Ezekiel may have fuller application in the kingdom of God announced at Pentecost. However, the focus is on post-exilic Israel, not on a post-Christian era.

Unit 2. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah

The Book of the Twelve has no subdivisions. We divide the compositions into two units of six books each for convenience sake. We may have preferred to divide them into pre-exilic (Hosea-Zephaniah) and post-exilic (Haggai-Malachi) periods, but the division would have been too uneven. The order of their placement in the Hebrew Bible is close to a chronological arrangement, but the exact date of composition is unknown for some. For example, the dates of Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah remain contested.

In analyzing the first six compositions, distinctions in subject matter, audiences, and manner of presentation are apparent. Each book has a special message aimed at a specific contemporary audience. The books vary in size but are relatively short. Poetic structure dominates, but Hosea, Joel, Amos, and Jonah include a bit of narrative. Jonah is the story of a prophet, containing one line of prophecy, while the other five are almost exclusively the message(s) of the prophet. The longer ones tend to include with their message to Israel warnings of judgment on Judah and/or Israel's Gentile neighbors.

Their messages are rooted in the current context of religious, economic, political, and social life. In some cases, the fate of their addresses is sealed; in other cases it may not be too late for deferred action if repentance occurs.

The common core demonstrates Yahweh's attitude toward Israel in particular and the nations in general. Each is held responsible for specific sin and is, therefore, subject to divine judgment. Through all the threats of judgment, the love and concern of Yahweh shine like a beacon. For example, Yahweh illustrates his love for faithless Israel through instructions to Hosea to love his unfaithful wife. He shows reluctant Jonah the lack of limits on divine love for the Gentiles even in their wickedness.

The three sections of the unit are (a) Hosea and Joel, (b) Amos and Obadiah, and (c) Jonah and Micah. Hosea, Joel, Amos, and Micah are directed primarily toward the northern kingdom of Israel. Obadiah is addressed to the residents of Edom. Jonah pertains to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

a. Hosea and Joel

Hosea. Hosea is the story of a prophet and his "living" message. Yahweh told Hosea to marry a woman of unfaithfulness. His wife, Gomer, would bear three children, some of whom would not be fathered by Hosea. The names of these children, Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah (Not Loved), and Lo-Ammi (Not My People) would be living messages to unrighteous Israel. Israel was woefully ignorant of God, i.e., they did not "know" (were not living in an experiential relationship with) him as their God. They embraced a spirit of prostitution when they worshipped other gods. Yet not only will Yahweh punish Israel, he will go into the desert and woo her back, just as a young man woos a young girl. Or to put it another form, when Israel was a child, God loved him and called him out of Egypt. But the more God called, the farther Israel went away from God after the Baals. The message is that God expects tender, obedient hearts. The book of Hosea presents superb insight into the love of God for us. Consequently, the book serves as the best informer of how a man should love his wife available anywhere, ancient or modern.

Joel. Joel depicts a terrible locust plague that was about to afflict Judah. In the face of the plague, the priests were summoned to leave their places and enter into repentance, confession, and prayer. Some argue the "plague" represented an invading army. Nevertheless, the day of the Lord--a day of calamity--was upon them because of their evil. Beyond judgment of the locust, Yahweh promised to restore to Judah her fortunes. In the aftermath, Israel would know that Yahweh was among them. The apostle Peter cites the book of Joel in his sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2) to show that God prefigured the events that occurred following Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

b. Amos and Obadiah. The books stand next to each other in the Hebrew canon, but the prophets were separated by over a century. Amos performed his work in the middle to late 8th century B.C.E. If Obadiah refers to activity of Edom during Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem, he would likely be dated in the first quarter of the 6th century.

Amos. Amos targets the nation of Israel. Although he condemns the surrounding nations for their three, yea four (indicating multiple), sins, he focuses his message on Israel. Israel was guilty of selling the righteous for a pair of shoes, trampling on the heads of the poor, illicit sex practices, and idolatry. The women of Israel were especially singled out. These "cows of Bashan" on Mount Samaria oppressed the poor, crushed the needy, and engaged in revelry. The prophet promised they would be the first to go into exile. Yea, to all who were complacent on Mount Samaria, he promised exile. Their complacency is detailed in this description: they lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on their couches; they dine on choice lambs and fatted calves; they enjoy soothing music; they have plenty of wine to drink and use the finest lotions, but they are not concerned over the poverty of the land. The message of Amos remains a reminder that self-centeredness at the expense of the defenseless invites God's ultimate judgment.

Obadiah. Obadiah is a short work that is aimed at Edom, the descendants of Esau. Edom gloated over the demise of Judah and apparently participated in taking booty when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem. Even though Edom had its capital in a stronghold which was hardly accessible to anyone, God promised to bring the nation down.

The point of the prophet's message is that God held the Edomites responsible for both their attitude and their behavior. The principle holds today for people of all lands. Pride, arrogance, a sense of self-sufficiency, and exploitation bring ultimate judgment. When that time comes, the nation will be defenseless.

c. Jonah and Micah

Jonah. Jonah is a book about a prophet by that name. The work is strikingly different from the other prophetic books. Only one line of "prophecy" can be found: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed" (3:4). Most preachers would be pleased with the response Jonah got to his declaration--the whole city repented! But not Jonah. Jonah did not want to go to the Assyrian capital, because these people were Israel's enemies. What Jonah did not know and needed to learn was that Yahweh was not the God of the Jews only. He is the world's God. If Yahweh wanted to prolong the life of Nineveh because the people repented of their evil, that was his business--not Jonah's.

When Yahweh instructed Jonah to go to Nineveh, he quietly slipped out of Israel in the opposite direction. On a ship in the Mediterranean, he found himself in the midst of a storm. When the ship's crew was about to be overcome by the tempest, he asked that they throw him overboard, for he knew he was the culprit. Once in the sea, a great fish swallowed him. For three days he survived in the belly of the fish. When he was vomited out, he was again on the coast from which he set out his escape. Here, Yahweh again said, "Go to Nineveh!" Reluctantly, Jonah went. And did he ever preach! He could see these folks being gobbled up by God. And, in his mind, he was glad of it.

Even after the people repented and God prolonged the city's life, Jonah waited to see what would happen. He took his perch in the hot desert east of the city (Nineveh was north of present-day Baghdad, Iraq). He was mad because God did not destroy them. He built a shelter. Then the Lord grew a vine over it to provide shade. This pleased Jonah. But when God sent a worm to cut the vine down, Jonah was angered. The point of the story is that God's concern for the many citizens of Nineveh is a better perspective on life than Jonah's concern for the one-day vine.

Micah. Containing the utterances of an eighth century B.C.E. prophet, Micah addressed Yahweh's people with stern warnings, then offered the prospect for a time of blessing. Micah addressed both Israel (Samaria) and Judah (Jerusalem). He confronted them with their evil and promised that Yahweh would punish the nations for their sins. Yet, beyond punishment would come blessing.

One of the most memorable passages in the prophets is the one that asks with what should one come before God. Should one come with burnt offerings, with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Should one offer one's firstborn for one's sins? Yahweh has shown us what he requires: "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:6-8).

A second line, equally moving and hopeful, is that there is none other who pardons sin and shows mercy (7:18).

Unit 3. Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

The six remaining prophetic books pertain to the last two centuries of the Old Testament era. The first three compositions are definitely pre-exilic, and the last three are post-exilic. That is, they relate to a period before or after Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon exiled leading citizens of Jerusalem and destroyed the temple built by Solomon. Other books of The Writings, which we shall cover in the next two modules, belong to this period as well.

In this unit, we shall break the content into three sections. The sections are (a) Nahum and Habakkuk, (b) Zephaniah and Haggai, and (c) Zechariah and Malachi. Do not assume the combinations have any particular relationship to each other. However, you may find some comparisons that will aid your study.

Although Nahum and Habakkuk differ in style, time, and focus, they deal with divine judgment upon evil. Nahum celebrates the downfall of Nineveh (Assyria) and Habakkuk anticipates Yahweh's eventual judgment on Babylon. Nahum should also be contrasted with Jonah, where Nineveh was spared when the city repented. Now, however, their evil leads to their demise. The prophet Habakkuk, on the other hand, must wrestle with the question of how Yahweh can allow the wicked Babylonians to inflict pain on Judah, which relatively speaking, is more righteous. A salient point is that righteous judgment may not appear that way from the human perspective, but in the end is righteous judgment indeed for God holds no respect of persons. Zephaniah shows affinity with all the prophets that pronounce divine judgment upon evil nations.

As we move into the post-exilic prophets, we see similarity in denouncing carelessness (Haggai and Malachi), but the threat of exile is absent. Zechariah is by far the most difficult of the six to understand due to its use of apocalyptic-type language. Like Ezekiel and Daniel, the composition anticipates Yahweh's future work.

a. Nahum and Habakkuk. Prophets Nahum and Habakkuk became instruments in Yahweh's hands. Like their predecessors, the prophets did not all share Yahweh's point of view. Jonah resisted preaching to the people of Nineveh because he resented the fact that God might not destroy the heathen. Perhaps Nahum enjoyed the pleasure denied Jonah, but we should not conclude that Nahum approached his work with a spirit of personal vengeance. Jeremiah did not enjoy prophesying against his own people but did it because otherwise it felt like fire burning in his belly. Habakkuk may have acted with righteous vindication, but he was peeved over Yahweh's delay in punishing Judah. The lesson he needed was that God's ways are not those of man, that God is in control, and that will carry out his judgment when and in a manner of his choosing. Not only do we learn from the words of the prophets, but we also learn from the deficiencies of the prophets when they think as human beings.

Nahum. Nahum singles out Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, for judgment. The prophet depicts the enemy's approaching army. When the army of the great Assyria tries to defend the city, it is as an army of "women." That is, the Assyrian army is weak and unable to defend the city. To this evil country, Yahweh would be a jealous and avenging God. He would bring total destruction to the nation which ran rough shod over other peoples. To those who seek refuge in Yahweh, he is good and caring.

Whereas Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, old conditions have returned. This time, there is no turning back the judgment of God. Nineveh (and the Assyrian empire) is doomed. The cause of righteousness will prevail.

Habakkuk. Habakkuk deals with the question of national suffering. The prophet raises the question, How long, God, will you let Judah get by with all the evil that is going on--violence, injustice, strife? God

responds by saying he will deal with the situation, but his plan will not meet with Habakkuk's approval. That plan is to bring the wicked Babylonians in to do the job for him. God's response is untenable to Habakkuk, for he cannot conceive of how God can use a people more evil than Judah to punish Judah? God assures Habakkuk that the Babylonians will receive judgment also.

The message of Habakkuk is that God does punish evil doing, but he does it in his own time. It is the righteous who shall live by his faith! So, he declares, you take care of your responsibility, and God will take care of his.

b. Zephaniah and Haggai. The first book belongs to the pre-exilic period. The second comes in the post-exilic era. Since the authors are separated by approximately a century, we should not look for any direct connection between the two.

Zephaniah. Zephaniah is set in the closing days of Judah, in the vicinity of 620 B.C.E., and portrays Judah's destruction. The leading theme in the book is "the day of the LORD." The prophet speaks of that "day" as a time when divine wrath will be executed against evil-doers. Of primary concern is the kingdom of Judah, but other nations shall also be judged as well--Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush (the Upper Nile region), and Assyria. But he also speaks of the future of a restored Jerusalem.

Zephaniah consists of short oracles of judgment, beginning with a general declaration (1:2-3). Judah takes center stage (1:4-2:3), but others will not escape (2:4-15). As outstanding as the judgments may be, the final chapter closes with the portrayal of renewal and restoration of Jerusalem (chap. 3).

Zephaniah presents a sobering message that shows divine blessing and judgment are related to human faith and faithlessness. The "day of the LORD" brings judgment upon the wicked and redemption to the righteous. Beyond this, God is at work to bring about the fulfillment of his own purposes.

Haggai. Haggai, along with Zechariah (not to be confused with Zephaniah), stirred the Jews to renew their efforts to rebuild the temple. The first exiles had returned in 537. They immediately began reconstruction of the temple, which the Babylonians had destroyed. But opposition from their neighbors discouraged the Jews, so they turned to building their own homes. Meanwhile, God prompted Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the Jews to get back to the task of building the temple. From 520 to 515 B.C.E. (four and one-half years), the temple was rebuilt and opened for worship. The account of these activities is what distinguishes the book of Haggai. Perhaps the lasting lesson that comes from Haggai is that one should always prefer the Lord's cause to self-serving causes.

The author provides a definite setting in time and space and targets a particular objective. He organizes his material around four oracles beginning at 1:1; 2:1; 2:10; and 2:20.

c. Zechariah and Malachi. The two books bear little similarity. They are placed together in this final section simply because they close the Old Testament canon. Separated by a century, they do hold in common a Jerusalem audience. In both instances, the prophets encourage faithfulness.

Zechariah. Zechariah joined Haggai in encouraging the Jews to rebuild the temple (520-515 B.C.E.). But the book of Zechariah itself is a rather complex work which deals more with Judah's spiritual relationship with God than with the mechanics of rebuilding the temple. Here, the prophet talks of matters pertaining to the temple and worship. He also discusses God's care for his people, his judgment upon their enemies, and the coming of Zion's king.

The composition contains eight "visions," which deal with Yahweh's future actions. Even the high priest and governor become part of the symbolic messages. In numerous particulars, Zechariah is looking toward the coming of Jesus.

Vision one of a man among myrtle trees pertains to Yahweh's favor toward Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple (1:7-17, dated 519 B.C.E.). Vision two of four horns and craftsmen signifies Yahweh's enabling of Judah (1:18-21). Vision three of a man with a measuring line speaks of Yahweh's protection of his people

(chap. 2). Vision four takes into account the cleansing of the high priest, which becomes symbolic of the coming Messiah (Branch) (chap. 3). Vision five of the gold lamp stand and the two olive trees points to the role of God in rebuilding the temple (chap. 4). Vision six pictures a flying scroll and represents judgment upon evil (5:1-4). Vision seven of a woman in a basket signifies the removal of sin (5:5-11). Vision eight portrays four chariots that signify Yahweh's protection (6:1-8). The visions demonstrate that rebuilding the temple is not only the right thing to do but that Yahweh has a hand in it. But Yahweh's task does not end with the completion of a physical temple in Jerusalem. The real accomplishment will be in what Yahweh will do in Judah's future as he brings the Messiah to culminate his promise to Abraham.

Malachi. The book of Malachi is unique among the Prophets, for it follows a "rabbinic" style. Assertions are made, followed by responses given to justify the accusations. For example, it is normal for a son to honor his father, but Israel has not honored God. Israel asks, How have we dishonored you? By offering polluted sacrifices (1:6-7). Or, again, Will a man rob God? No, not normally. But Israel has robbed God by withholding tithes and offerings (3:8). The introduction of the rabbinic style suggests a late date. Traditionally, Malachi is placed at the end of the Old Testament period, say somewhere near 400 B.C.E.

The word "Malachi" means "My messenger." Since the book begins with a statement declaring that Yahweh is sending his message through "Malachi," we cannot tell if the intention is only to say God is sending his word through his messenger (unnamed) or whether the messenger is indeed named "My messenger" (Malachi).

MODULE 4 The Writings: History

Ruth, Chronicles, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah

Most of the books of this module are significant for insight into the life of Israel following the first intrusion into Judea by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 606 B.C.E. Ruth is the exception, having its setting in the days of the Judges. The separation of these books from those included in Module 5 is arbitrary. However, if we were looking for a common element, it would relate to the nature of the content. The books at hand tend toward historical narrative, while those of the next module tend toward poetic wisdom and praise.

To say these works are related to history does not imply they are "mere" history. They partake of historical narrative genre, but their purpose carries a blend of theological and sociological concerns. While Ruth connects a story from the days of the Judges with the line of King David, Chronicles connects all of Israel's past with the Davidic and Levitical interests for the post-exilic community. Esther explains a late Jewish festival and, in so doing, connects with concerns noted in Ezra and Nehemiah. Daniel's involvement with history reflects a divine, rather than human, perspective.

Furthermore, these books relate to those of The Prophets in their own manner. Ruth does not name a particular judge and so is not tied to an historical event other than a famine. Chronicles traces the history of Israel, but with a unique reason tied to the restored community. Daniel may have some overlap with Ezekiel in time and place, but it extends the projection of future Jewish life more specifically and offers a more futuristic portrait of the kingdom of God than either Ezekiel or the post-exilic prophets of Haggai and Malachi. Esther falls between the historical record found in Kings. Ezra and Nehemiah continue the biblical story concluded by Kings.

The time line below places the books in a sequence suggested for a date of composition occurring soon after the last recorded in each book.

Ruth (ca. 1100)_____Chronicles, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah

Unit 1. Ruth and Chronicles

Ruth and Chronicles have no direct connection, except they have been placed in The Writings. However, we should add that Boaz, a major character in the Book of Ruth, and Obed, the son of Boaz and Ruth are mentioned in Chronicles as part of a genealogy that leads to David, the king (1 Chron. 2:12). That rather indirect connection should not be overlooked, for the Hebrew Scriptures aim at relating how Yahweh is fulfilling a promise made to Abraham and his descendants.

When you get to the Greek Scriptures (New Testament), you will find that the genealogy of Jesus is traced through David and Ruth (Matt.1:5-6). In this light, the books of Ruth and Chronicles begin to appear more important than one might think after reading endless names that are unfamiliar to a non-biblical audience.

Ruth is also related to the Book of Judges in that the events recorded occurred “in the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). For that reason, Ruth is sometime attached to Judges when the Hebrew Scriptures are grouped in such a fashion to make the number of books agree with the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet (*i.e.*, 22).

Originally one book in the Hebrew canon, Chronicles provided the Jewish people of the Post-Exilic Period with a special account of their story. Their story commenced with creation because the God who chose them is the Creator. The Creator, being the author of history rather than the product of history, pursued his human creation in the interest of a spiritual relationship. The Creator selected Abraham and his descendants to bear witness to a world that refused to acknowledge his presence. Israel was chosen as the medium through whom Yahweh would reveal himself more specifically in a messianic figure and bless the world with forgiveness of sins through that figure, his anointed Son.

Meanwhile, the formal constitution of Abraham's descendants as Yahweh's specially chosen people took shape in the covenant at Sinai. As Israel inhabited the land Yahweh swore to give them, they embarked on their mission. Sadly, however, because Israel failed in their own relationship with Yahweh, Yahweh allowed the Assyrians to invade the northern Kingdom of Israel, subject it to Assyrian rule, and carry away captives in 722 B.C.E. Then, because the southern Kingdom of Judah refused to be loyal to Yahweh, the Babylonians moved into the land of Judah, destroyed the temple, sacked Jerusalem, and exiled leading citizens in 586 B.C.E.

From the people's perspective, the tragedy of Jerusalem was unspeakable. But with a decree of King Cyrus of Persia, now the ruler of the Middle East, hope was rekindled. The decree offered hope for a people of God who had been scattered across Mesopotamia. A restored Jewish community in the environs of Jerusalem would have a future because Yahweh willed it. Yahweh's specially chosen people, now represented by a remnant, must build a community based on covenant loyalty. That fidelity is represented through its connection with the house of David and with worship at the temple. Through his composition, the chronicler impressed upon the post-exilic community its responsibility to maintain holiness in worship and gave it a "connection" with David, whose lineage Yahweh had established as the continuing kingly line. The community was still unique, but it was expected to live in keeping with a divine constitution.

The unit is divided conveniently into three sections. These are (a) Ruth, (b) Chronicles: the first book, and (c) Chronicles: the second book.

a. Ruth. The period of the Judges, as pictured by the book of Judges, was one of affliction due to spiritual unfaithfulness. Although there were times of blessing and plenty, some of the stories in Judges present a rather dismal portrait of the quality of life during the period. The book of Ruth recognizes hardship brought on the people through famine, yet the story that unfolds points to some faithful behavior.

The date of the events narrated in Ruth is sometime during the 300 years between Joshua and the anointing of the first king. The book itself was composed after the kingship of David (see Ruth 4:22) as

indicated by the inclusion of David's genealogy. The author is unknown.

The major characters in Ruth are Elimelech and his wife, Naomi; their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion; their daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah; and two near-kinsmen, one is unnamed and the other is Boaz. The characters are all from the tribe of Judah, except Ruth and Orpah, who are from Moab. In addition, there is the genealogy at the end, which links Perez to King David. This is, incidentally, the line through which Jesus' genealogy is traced.

The story of Ruth begins with a Bethlehemite family who traveled to Moab during time of a famine in their native Judah. Here the sons married, but the father and sons died in Moab. Upon Naomi's decision to return home, Ruth could not be dissuaded from following. Back in Bethlehem, Naomi sent Ruth to find grain, to get the provisions from the sections of the fields left for the poor to glean. Naomi directed Ruth to Boaz who performed the duties of a near-kinsman when a closer kinsmen declined. From the union of Ruth and Boaz, a son, Obed, was born.

Whatever moral material may be found in the book, the most obvious purpose for its composition is to fill out detail on that part of David's ancestry that accounts for his Moabite ancestry. Yet, the book contributes to our understanding of life in agricultural Israel. It shows how stipulations of the Law of Moses were operative within the community and how customs were executed.

b. Chronicles: the first book. The Book of Chronicles mentions Israel (the northern kingdom) only incidentally. It is essentially a book about Judah. The book contains significant genealogical tables, king lists, history, inheritance notes, theological insights, prophecies, and a Persian decree. But its primary focus emerges with notations about temple musicians, psalms, prayers, worship, and particulars about the priesthood. The book appears to have been drafted especially for the Jews who were returning from Babylonian exile. They would certainly be acquainted with the plight of the generations of their forefathers. Consequently, they should be particularly attentive to reestablishing the form of worship which Yahweh had ordained around his temple.

As you read Chronicles, you will probably wonder why the emphasis on genealogy. Think of it in the manner in which you would think of tracing your own family line if a massive inheritance depended on its authenticity. As you read of the details pertaining to the temple, consider the mystic and glory surrounding the worship of Yahweh. The restored community must be reminded of their covenant with Yahweh in order for them to live faithfully.

Having already studied Kings, you are acquainted with many of the principal characters. This time through, look at the players in the light of a larger context--the context of the people of God. Chronicles covers a longer time period than any other Bible composition. Through it, one can get a broad picture of Yahweh's work and the connection between Adam and the descendants of Zerubbabel.

First Chronicles begins with the genealogies that parallel the book of Genesis, running from Adam to the sons of Jacob. Chapter 2 initiates a longer section that carries the genealogy of one of Jacob's sons (Judah) through David and the kings of Judah into the post-exilic period. Only then are the lines of other sons of Jacob considered (4:24-7:41).

The descendants of Levi receive special attention because of their unique responsibilities for the community's worship. They were initially set apart for tabernacle care and service. Priests who would offer the sacrifices were drawn from those Levites who descended from Aaron. With the approaching construction of the temple, King David placed Levites in charge of music. As a further indication of their special place within Israel, the Levites were scattered among the other tribes (chapter 6).

Having completed these genealogies, the author provides a fuller genealogy of Benjamin, the tribe of Israel's first king, Saul (chapter 8 and repeated in 9:35-44). Chapter 9 makes it clear that the genealogies reached their climax in the identification of the community that was restored to Jerusalem following the Babylonian exile.

The genealogies establish the connection between Israel's early and later history. Beginning with chapter 10, a narrated history describes the people of God during the kingdom period. The fact that only fourteen verses are given to King Saul, followed by nineteen chapters devoted to King David identifies David as the central figure.

Of primary importance is the preparation for building the temple. But temple construction would have little meaning were it not for the interchange between God, Nathan the prophet, and David. David wanted to build a temple for God, but God refused to let him do it. Instead, God promised to build a house for David. By this, God signaled his intention to establish the royal lineage of David. From the New Testament, we know his lineage ultimately led to Jesus Christ. It is not surprising that through the duration of the Old Testament era, the hope of Israel was associated with the line of David (chapter 17). So, two themes emerge in Chronicles: the kingship of David and the temple.

c. Chronicles: the second book. Second Chronicles continues the story of the kings. Solomon receives greater attention, because he is the one who actually built the Jerusalem temple. It is not Solomon's reign but the temple's prominence that marks the first nine chapters. Other kings of Judah are noted from Solomon to the end of the kingdom of Judah (chapters 10-36). Events described help the reader understand that Judah's failure to keep covenant with Yahweh is why Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. The climax of Chronicles, however, is the decree of Persia's King Cyrus that permits the exiled people to return home.

The Chronicler makes it clear that Solomon reigned at the will of Yahweh. God "was with him and made him exceedingly great." Solomon in turn acknowledged his dependency on God (2 Chronicles 1:1, 7-12). He would now spend his energies on building the temple, a task God denied his father, David. The temple is described, along with its furnishings. Almost as much space is given to the temple's dedication as to its construction. Solomon's prayer (2 Chronicles 6:12-42) expresses the essence of the faith expected from those who use the temple. The emphasis is not on the structure itself or the act of praying toward the temple, but on the behavior and heart of the worshipers. Yahweh's acceptance of the temple (2 Chronicles 7:11-22) binds him to be merciful toward them when they repent. At the same time, he places conditions on Israel's right to occupy the land. Those who returned from exile know quite well why leaders of the nation were deported and are hereby warned about faithlessness in the future.

The sequence of events following the death of Solomon demonstrate the gradual decline of Judah and the eventual exile. Judah was generally unfaithful and became the object of Yahweh's displeasure. Nevertheless, some kings who showed considerable faith. Two receive substantial attention: Hezekiah and Josiah. Although the long suffering of God finally ran out and Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, Yahweh's purposes would continue and "Yahweh moved the heart of Cyrus" to issue an edict that would allow for the temple's reconstruction.

As you anticipate the study of Ezra, notice the closing line of Chronicles. It ties together the preceding discussion with what is about to follow in Ezra.

Unit 2. Daniel and Esther

Daniel and Esther have a common setting. The main characters, Daniel and Esther, are Jews who live in exile. Daniel was taken from Jerusalem to Babylon in his youth. He became an official in the Babylonian and Persian kingdoms. Esther was born in Persia and became queen to the king of Persia. As to their stories, they exercise faith when to do so has the potential of costing them their lives.

Daniel is sometime included among the prophets because he often engages in work expected of prophets. He interprets dreams that reveal something of God's future work. He foretells political conditions in Palestine that the Jews returning from exile will face. Not only is Daniel a good example of faith; he prepares future generations for exercising their own faith during difficult situations.

Esther likewise is a good example of faith. Even if her faith is a theme secondary to the purpose of explaining the observance of Purim, it is a strong motif. She put the well-being of others above protocol. She arose to bold action in the face of an uncertain outcome. Even in the absence of reference to God, there is no doubt that Esther acted in behalf of the people still living in covenant with God.

The lasting quality of the Book of Esther is the imbedding of national consciousness in the wake of threatening circumstances. By wicked design, an arrogant Persian official had completed the legal task of ordering mass killing of Jews across the Persian domain. Gaining the right for Jews to defend themselves, Esther's story is still celebrated annually by modern Jews.

The compositions themselves are dissimilar in content, style, purpose, and time. We consider them together for what they do have in common. The three units are (a) background to Daniel and Esther, (b) Daniel, and (c) Esther.

a. Background to Daniel and Esther. The two books could be considered a sequel in the sense of time. They also provide continuity with respect to events related to the Jews scattered across the Persian Empire.

Daniel came to Babylon with the first wave of exiles. Esther's ancestors would have come about that time as well, but Esther herself was the better part of a century removed from Daniel. Daniel lived through the entire period of Babylonian supremacy; Esther came on the scene at the height of Persian rule.

Daniel. Daniel actually serve kings in two empires--Babylonian and Persian. The book that bears his name describes activities in Daniel's life that span from 605-538 B.C.E. He is identified as a member of the royal family or nobility who was brought to Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar for service to the king (Dan. 1:1-4). Daniel remained in the service of the Babylonians from 605 to 539 B.C.E., when Cyrus subdued the kingdom (Dan. 1:21). There is uncertainty as to the identify of Darius the Mede (Dan. 5:31) and his relationship to Cyrus, king of Persia. If it is assumed that Darius was "governor" of the new province of Babylon, then it may follow that the events described during the remainder of the book are to be located in Babylon, while Cyrus based his in Persia proper.

Modern scholars differ with regard to the date of Daniel's composition. Because his reference to historical characters belonging to the post-biblical time line are so precise and accurate, some deny a prophetic element and date the book in the Intertestament time frame. Retain the prophetic ability of Daniel and the date is less problematic.

Esther. The Book of Esther is a remarkable story of a Jewess named Esther who became the queen of Xerxes (or Ahasuerus), king of Persia. Xerxes was king of Persia from 486 to 465 B.C.E. The setting to Esther is Susa, the location of the royal throne (Esther 1:2). Esther would have been written after the Feast of Purim became a regular observance.

b. Daniel. A mixture of prophecy, apocalyptic, and story, Daniel is both a delight and a challenge. Daniel's story parallels that of Joseph is several ways. Both found themselves in foreign lands, both became second to the king in those lands, both were exemplary men who maintained faith against great odds. Familiar stories from the book include (1) Daniel and the lions' den and (2) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace.

Daniel was a man to whom God gave the interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams of a great image and of a tree. He also provided an interpretation of King Belshazzar's sighting of the handwriting on the wall. He revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that God was sovereign and would eventually establish his own indestructible kingdom. He lived to declare the downfall of the Neo-Babylonia Empire and witness to God during the opening years of the Persian Empire.

Daniel himself had a vision of four beasts that symbolized four empires. Other visions followed, but they had the same common theme: the sovereignty of God. Daniel declared details of future rulers and

struggles that would befall the Jews before the coming of the "Son of Man." But in the end, it would be God's kingdom that prevails.

Read Daniel first to ascertain the setting--605 B.C.E. Daniel was among the first of the Jews living in Jerusalem to be taken into exile by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He and his fellows were selected for service to the king. Their first test was with the food they were expected to eat to become fit for that service. But they excelled in Babylonian literature and language.

Next, read to understand particular events within the context of God's overall purposes. Two to three years after going into exile, Daniel was called upon to interpret a dream for the king. This is the beginning of his witness to Nebuchadnezzar. It makes clear that Daniel's interest is not just the Babylonia kingdom but Yahweh's future reign.

In 538 B.C.E. Daniel was brought before King Belshazzar to interpret unusual handwriting that appeared during a banquet. The meaning was that the Babylonian kingdom would be succeeded by Persian rule. Chapter 6 describes an encounter with the Persian King Darius. From this point forward in the book, Daniel is concerned with how events on the horizon will affect the exiles who are soon to be allowed to return to Palestine. As you read, be less concerned with interpreting days and future events than with the certainty that Yahweh would restore his people. Their plight after restoration to their land would appear uncertain from human eyes, but God would in his time establish a spiritual kingdom as foretold to Nebuchadnezzar.

c. Esther. The story begins to unfold around the deposing of Queen Vashti, who refused to show off her beauty before a drunken king's court. The search for a new queen ended with the selection of Esther, who had been reared by her cousin, Mordecai.

Mordecai had once saved the king's life, but he evoked the ire of a jealous Persian official named Haman because he would not bow to him. In response, Haman devised a plan and deceived the king into approving it. Haman was determined to have Mordecai and all the Jewish people slaughtered. The intent of the story is to explain how the Jews escaped extermination and came to celebrate the Feast of Purim. The name of the feast recalls the pur (lot) that was thrown to decide the day on which Haman's evil plot would be carried out.

Mordecai persuaded Esther to request the king to counteract a decree that would allow Haman to kill the Jews. The most memorable line from Mordecai's lips to Esther is, "And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (4:14). As Haman gloried in his position, the king was discovering the truth about both Mordecai and Haman. The former was honored and the latter was hanged.

Many have pointed out that God is absent from the book. The absence of God's name in Esther led some well-meaning person to attempt to correct this perceived deficiency by writing "additions" that could be inserted strategically within the biblical text. These additions credit God with certain actions for the purpose of making the book more "acceptable" as part of the biblical canon. These additions may be found among the writings of the Old Testament Apocrypha, but they are not part of the biblical canon.

As to the absence of God from Esther, we can only say he is not referenced. If the events portrayed point in any direction, they point toward God's presence, for God is never "absent" from his world. The faith expressed by Mordecai and Esther testifies to truth and righteousness. God recognizes both. Faith does not demand visible divine confirmation to validate it. Preservation of the Jewish people at this time was certainly a point of interest for God.

Unit 3. Ezra and Nehemiah

Sometimes attached to each other so as to comprise a single volume, Ezra and Nehemiah testify to conditions in post-exilic Israel. The two major characters featured overlap in time and engage in a

common effort to ignite a spiritual spark in Israel.

The initial wave of refugees from Persia had met discouragement but did manage to rebuild the temple under the directives of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. However, over the course of the next six decades, a spirit of apathy emerged. Ezra and Nehemiah themselves had been born in Persia, but they were moved to incite a new spirit in their people in Palestine. Ezra as priest and Nehemiah as governor determined to bring to Israel a level of holiness that would be in keeping with their destiny.

The books that bear their names are comprised of first hand testimony, suggesting Ezra and Nehemiah are the authors. However, since Ezra began his composition with events that happened before his time, he also includes historical narrative to bring the reader to a better understanding of the events that led to his reforms. And Nehemiah is a witness to Ezra's reading of the law (chap. 8). The unit is divided into three sections: (a) Background to Ezra and Nehemiah, (b) Ezra, and (c) Nehemiah.

If one wishes to read the Hebrew Scriptures in historical sequence, one may read from Genesis through Kings then skip to Ezra and Nehemiah. Or, one may begin with Chronicles, then move to Ezra and Nehemiah. In either case, the two books before us carry the Old Testament story from Cyrus' decree to the end of the Old Testament period. Perhaps Malachi can be dated later, but the *narrative* is in pause as it awaits another four centuries before it picks up with the New Testament. Obviously, this assessment omits the apocryphal 1 Maccabees, which is our primary source of Jewish history during the period between the Testaments.

a. Background to Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra and Nehemiah are known as separate books from the 3rd century C.E. forward. They have similar interests. The man, Ezra, appears in both books. Both books deal with returning exiles. Both are concerned with reform.

An important thing to remember about Ezra-Nehemiah is that, although Ezra describes early post-exilic history from 539 (Cyrus) to 515 B.C.E. (completion of temple reconstruction), he lived at a later time. The first six chapters of Ezra should be read with Haggai and Zechariah. Haggai in particular describes the delay in rebuilding the temple. The second part of Ezra (chaps. 7-10) pertains to Ezra's time, beginning about 458 B.C.E. during the reign of Artaxerxes.

Nehemiah comes on the scene in 446 B.C.E., also during Artaxerxes' reign. Whereas Ezra was a scribe and a priest (Neh. 8:1-2) and functioned in those capacities, Nehemiah was not. He had served the king as cupbearer (Neh. 1:11). He was later appointed to be the Jewish governor in Judah (Neh. 5:14). Nehemiah's primary concern is with rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down during Nebuchadnezzar's invasion 140 years earlier.

Events described in Ezra and Nehemiah occurred in both Persia and Palestine, centered in Jerusalem. However, the greater interest is with the exiles in Jerusalem.

Taken together, Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrate that the primary issue was not a lack of physical security represented by a rebuilt city wall. The primary issue was a deficit in spirituality. Social sins and moral laxity posed a greater threat to the remnant than the Arabs and Samaritans. The antagonists of the Jews resisted efforts to restore the city wall lest they dominate the area. The Jews wanted the wall to keep the opposition at bay. Ezra in particular knew that security without spiritual reform would ultimately fail.

b. Ezra. Ezra relates the story of the return of Jewish exiles, following the decree of King Cyrus of Persia. He lists temple articles and identifies returning families. Ezra recounts how the initial effort to rebuild the temple met local opposition that continued throughout the reign of Cyrus and even beyond actual temple reconstruction. In chap. 5 he returns to the specifics of temple reconstruction and describes its dedication and the observance of Passover.

Ezra's personal involvement with his fellow Jews in Jerusalem begins with chap. 7. Armed with a letter from King Artaxerxes, the priest set out for Jerusalem in 458, accompanied with other returnees. Upon his

arrival, he found a degraded situation that involved intermarriage with pagans. He led the people to confess their sins and correct their marital states. The irony was that these intermarriages included priests.

The issue faced by Ezra was critical, for the exile occurred because of devotion to idols and attendant evils. Now, less than 150 years later that included a seventy-year exile, the people had forgotten the dangers of their actions. Intermarriage with unbelievers in Yahweh notwithstanding, the problem was symptomatic of an even larger sin--the people living under covenant with Yahweh were careless and non-observant.

Some may judge Ezra as a harsh and merciless reformer. To do so runs the risk of softening the serious of sin. Ignoring God's covenant stipulations amounts to nothing less than disrespect for God and an exercise of will-worship.

The book that bears Ezra's name compares well with other instances of reform, whether from Joshua's covenant renewal and farewell address, King Josiah's reform, or the preaching of the prophets. It agrees with the story of Israel and the Old Testament world in general in showing man's constant tendencies to turn aside from God. These instances bolster the claim of the New Testament that man needed more than a new law. His behavior required a redeemer who would reveal a righteousness from above.

c. Nehemiah. The Book of Nehemiah is named after a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia. Nehemiah served the king personally and lived in the capital city, Susa. On hearing that his fellow Jews in Jerusalem were living in a city whose walls had not been rebuilt since the city's destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, he was moved to ask the king to let him visit Jerusalem. The king prepared letters and sent Nehemiah with a small cavalry to Jerusalem in 446 B.C.E.

"The words of Nehemiah" begin with a report from some Jews about conditions in Jerusalem and Nehemiah's response (chap. 1). Four months later, Nehemiah requested leave from King Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem (2:1-10). Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah inspected the ruins (2:11-20) and was joined by others who undertook rebuilding operations (chap. 3). But the work was not without opposition (chap. 4). Inequities and hardship prompted Nehemiah to assist the poor (chap. 5). Although opposition to rebuilding continued (6:1-14), the wall was completed (6:15-7:3). As the census shows, Jerusalem was sparsely populated, but all matters were in place for a new beginning (7:4-73). Ezra read the law and a feast was celebrated (chap. 8). The Israelites confessed their sins, God was praised, and the people made a pledge of faithfulness (chaps. 9-10). Concluding chapters tell of a plan to repopulate Jerusalem (11:1-12:26), the dedication of the walls (12:27-47), and final reforms (chap. 13).

Nehemiah is most remembered for his work in leading the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, which had remained broken down for over a century. Without question, the man himself was outstanding. Nehemiah had a tender heart for righteousness, a mind for reform, and a concern for the poor. His love for God and his people motivated him to undertake his daring venture. Amid opposition in Judea from those who did not want to see the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt, Nehemiah completed the rebuilding, knowing it was the right thing to do.

Perhaps the major focus of the composition is not Nehemiah's leadership, but the spiritual ineptness of the returned community. During the twelve years that Nehemiah served as governor of Judah, he, along with the priest and scribe Ezra and the Levites, encouraged the Jews toward reformation and righteousness. It should be evident from the book that the restored community of Israel lacked the depth of faith that might have been expected.

MODULE 5 The Writings: Wisdom and Worship

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations

Compositions included in Module 5 are the six remaining books of the Writings. Most of these works belong to the pre-exilic period, *i.e.*, before 586 B.C.E. The best candidate for a later date is the finalization of Psalms, which may include a few pieces written for use in the Second Temple.

The order in which the books are placed in the biblical canon has limited significance. The setting for *Job* is ancient, though the date of composition is an open question. David is credited with a majority of the works in the *Book of Psalms*, so this could account for its placement after *Job*. *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, and the *Song of Songs* date from Solomon's day (ca. 1000 B.C.E.). Since Solomon succeeded David as king, it is natural that these books follow Psalms. *Lamentations* was prompted by the destruction of Jerusalem and contains the thoughts of Jeremiah.

The Hebrew Scriptures consist of a variety of materials, which were composed for an assortment of purposes. *Job*, *Proverbs*, and *Ecclesiastes* may be classified as wisdom literature because they are devoted primarily to inspiring an appropriate life in association with God. There is a sense in which one could view Psalms, the *Song of Songs*, and *Lamentations* as wisdom, but we shall consider them here under the category of worship or devotion.

By now, you have observed that classifying biblical books derives from a human ordering. Individual autographs are sometimes connected chronologically, sometimes are associated by events or authors, and sometimes stand independent of other biblical books. The total collection is not to be read as an encyclopedia, legal code, novel, or history. Each book serves a unique role in unfolding the wisdom of God. So, the artificial divisions and groupings should not interfere with analysis of each composition as it lends insight into the character of the intended God-man relationship.

The module breaks out in three units. These include two books each as we come to them in the English Bible. Hence, Unit 1 is devoted to *Job* and *Psalms*. Unit 2 focuses on *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*. Unit 3 completes the study with *Song of Songs* and *Lamentations*.

Unit 1. Job and Psalms

If one were forced to pick a single word to describe the two compositions of *Job* and *Psalms*, perhaps the word for *Job* would be “wisdom” and the word for *Psalms* would be “praise.” *Job* presents wisdom in the form of drama. Several characters interact to bring out the failure of conventional wisdom to answer a fundamental human issue. In human terms, that issue is framed as, *Why do the righteous suffer?* Perhaps a more penetrating question would be, *How does one live before God, especially in view of suffering that cannot be explained?*

Psalms is a collection of thoughts rising from the human breast that have been reduced to writing. These thoughts cover a variety of human emotions and moods ranging from praise and thanksgiving to laments. Perhaps a good question to come forth is, *What is a legitimate attitude toward God amid human conditions?*

These two works play an important role in biblical scripture. They demonstrate that divine scripture is not simply concerned with commands, ancient history, or theological speculation. *Job* is aware of theology, but makes the point that the object of life is not to find an explanation to everything divine but to sustain faith in the Creator even when we do not understand the divine mind.

Psalms extends the thought of Job by illustrating how man's faith is properly expressed in good times and bad. Its laments approximate Job's sentiment. The psalmist does not always understand the reason for opposition, but his unwavering confidence in God cannot destroy hope and expectation. The psalmist thinks in terms of God's honor more than his own well-being. Even when calling for divine justice, he does not seek personal revenge. There are utterances in the Psalms where passages seem to take on a prophetic role (e.g., Psalm 2, 110), but this is no indication that the words of the Psalms are divinely dictated. We assume, however, that the sentiments expressed, and attitudes held, correctly represent the righteous. Consequently, we do not remove the Psalms from sacred literature. Neither do we pick the contents apart as though they express a mixture of right and wrong responses. The Psalms teach us much about God and faith and have a utilitarian value in modern contexts.

The unit has three sub-sections. These are (a) Background to Job and Psalms, (b) Job, and (c) Psalms.

a. Background to Job and Psalms

Job. Although of unknown date of origin, the setting of Job is quite ancient, dating possibly from the time of Abraham. Like any good drama, it has a geographical location and named characters. Whether or not these are historical cannot be settled on the basis of text alone. A drama is much like a parable. The setting is more for establishing the circumstance being depicted than for creating an historical record. This is not to say Job was not a real character. It is to say that the work is not primarily an history of an ancient personality. You will not find a striking difference in the manner in which the Bible presents Abraham and Job, for instance. The Genesis record leaves no doubt as to the identity of Abraham's homeland, his travels, his tribulations. These were part of the testing of his faith. Just as surely, Job's travail was a testing of his faith. But there is more to the book of Job than a travelogue. Job is presented as an historical character to be sure. But the purpose of the book aims at "solving" a human dilemma. How is one to explain why a righteous man suffers? At least that was foremost on Job's mind. It is not the most important question in Job, however. Conventional wisdom seemed adequate for those who offered Job counsel, but its arguments were inadequate to convince Job. If you read the first 37 chapters of Job without reading chapters 38-42, you will tend to conclude that all we have in the book is the contention of two sides: one has an unquenchable question and the other persists on a traditional, reasoned explanation. The genius of the book of Job is the divine perspective: how the human should think and live if he is to be God's faithful servant.

Psalms. The Psalms were produced over a long period of time, covering perhaps a millennium, if we allow that Moses contributed one. When analyzing the collection, it becomes apparent that it is indeed a collection of poetic pieces representing human response to a variety of human circumstances. The debate is never ending as to the extent of divine control over the author or how "inspiration" works. Suffice it to say, we are listening to the human heart as it speaks to God. Contextually, we would agree that the expressions of the heart in the instance of the Psalms are correct. Unlike the conventional wisdom expressed by Job's friends (which was incomplete, if not wrong), we place a seal of approval on the thoughts behind the words of the Psalms. Perhaps that is an assumption, but until evidence is presented that the Psalms are improper expressions or run contrary to other biblical teaching, we must trust them for their accuracy.

b. Job. The book of Job is a drama, composed in poetry and framed with a prose prologue (Job 1-2) and epilogue (Job 42). The major human character is a man named Job, who lived in the Near East at an early, but unspecified, time. The supporting cast includes three friends of Job who offer their wisdom as to why he is suffering. A younger man adds his words as a postscript to those of the older counselors. Job's wife has only one piece of advice to her suffering husband, and it is not good.

From a philosophical perspective, the drama would be interesting were its cast only human. But from the prologue and body of the work, the author makes it clear that the story has a spiritual dimension. First, there is an interaction between God and Satan regarding the faith of Job. God allows Satan to afflict Job, for he knows Job is faithful. Second, the cycle of speeches notes the role of God in regard to man's

station in life. Job bemoans not receiving an answer from God about why he is suffering. Finally, God himself speaks and acts on Job's behalf.

The prologue helps the reader know the circumstances which brought great suffering to Job. Job himself was unaware of what preceded his affliction. Whether the account should be treated as a literal reporting of God's proposition to Satan or as a parable similar to that of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16, is debated. Whichever the case may be, the focus is on what should be man's attitude toward God in circumstances he does not understand. Following the prologue, the author presents Job's feelings and his friends' response to his situation. The body of the text contains several cycles of speeches that alternate between Job and the men who offered counsel based on human wisdom.

Job is stricken with personal agony and suffering for no apparent reason. His friends think it is because he has sinned greatly against God and God is punishing him. Job knows he is a sinner, but he also knows he has been loyal to God. Still, unable to understand why he is suffering, he seeks an answer from God. God reveals that Job's friends' assessment is incorrect and that mortals possess limited knowledge.

Job is one of the finest pieces of wisdom ever written. Some understand it to address the question of why humans suffer. But its larger purpose is to answer the question, "What does it mean to be faithful to God?"

It is apparent that our universe is not limited to the physical realm where we can easily account for all events in a simplistic way. There is a spiritual realm about which we have little understanding. But one thing is certain: there is no doubt that God is in control and God does what is right toward his servants. This situation suggests that man is in no position to deal with some of the whys of human existence. In summary, the book of Job counsels, Let God be God and be content to be his faithful servant!

c. Psalms. The Psalter is a compilation of 150 poetic creations that express man's outreach to God in a variety of ways. Although written by numerous authors over a period of perhaps 1,000 years, the most prominent author is King David. Many of the compositions have titles, but these titles were added to retain a tradition about use and/or authorship. The titles suggest that many of the psalms were used in temple worship.

The psalms have been arranged in five "books": 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150. The reason why individual psalms were placed in any given division has not gained a general consensus among scholars.

The Psalms are in poetic verse. One striking feature about Hebrew poetry is its use of parallelism. Parallelism is a phenomenon where verses are related to one another in a "parallel" fashion. These related verses may express the same thought in different words; they may express an opposite thought; or a second verse may complete the thought begun in the preceding verse. There are more complicated forms of parallelism which you will discover as you read Hebrew poetry. Once you see how it functions, you will read the Psalms with greater clarity and understanding.

Some psalms are acrostics. That is, each line (Psalm 111) or set of verses (Psalm 119) begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Although the form cannot be retained in translation, the meaning of the psalm remains undiminished in translation.

Some compositions express the inner thoughts of an individual. Others express the feelings of the community of faith. Psalms may be hymns, thanksgivings, or laments. A hymn may express praise to Yahweh. A thanksgiving psalm may utter a word of gratitude for a specific blessing. A lament will present a case of trouble before God with the expectation that he will respond.

As you study the Psalter, notice the example of how parallel structure governs the flow of ideas in Psalm 1. Look at the concept that lies behind a "royal" psalm (Psalm 2). Refer to Psalm 8 as a magnificent

example of a hymn. Identify the basic elements in a lament--address, complaint, petition, confidence, and praise (Psalm 13). Probably the most familiar psalm is the 23rd, which is a shepherd's way of expressing personal confidence in God as his own Shepherd. A good example of thanksgiving and praise is Psalm 100.

The Psalms concentrate on the praise-worthiness of God. God is creator of the world. He reigns above all peoples. He protects his people. God's steadfast love and righteousness form the foundation of all that is good. The fact that his promise never fails and that his mercy extends beyond justice gives mortals assurance of his salvation.

Because God is righteous, his law is righteous and his judgments are righteous. Hence, he is the object of hope for those who walk uprightly. He is the source of help, peace, joy, success, happiness, forgiveness, and unity. Those who seek him and his ways praise him. The all-powerful, all-knowing Creator is a refuge for the afflicted.

God's faithfulness, righteousness, and mercy make him desirable to know. His dwelling is attractive to the godly. His city is *the* city. His throne has a true foundation. His name is supreme. The Lord is the source of all good things. The greatness, glory, and blessings of the Lord are reasons for honor. All of creation is expected to sound forth in his interest.

The godly yearn for God and desire forgiveness of sin. Those who seek righteousness seek him because they love him. A sacrifice of thanksgiving and a contrite heart are what he asks. And none who trusts in him shall be disappointed.

A salient feature of the psalms is the conflict with "enemies" and the psalmist's request to God for their defeat. It should be remembered that the "enemy" is the wicked, ungodly man. He is not merely an antagonist. He is actively opposed to righteousness. When the psalmist identifies himself with God--especially as king and God's representative of righteousness--he is opposed by the ungodly. Those who refuse his leadership are against God. What is at stake is not a man's personal revenge but the holiness of God. Anyone who closely identifies with God and insists upon righteousness is likely to be opposed.

Among the psalms are some ascribed to a musician named Asaph (or his sons). The Asaph psalms (73-83) speak often of God's judgment. They know his sovereignty and Israel's failings, but they often call upon God to restore Israel's fortunes and judge the wicked. His way is holy, and he is good to those who seek that way. But his holiness also means that his face will be against the ungodly.

Unit 2. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

The two books in this unit are classified as "wisdom." Their content contains both short wise sayings and expanded discourses on what has proven true in light of God's design for man.

Mental perception of the right thing to do may be an essential element, but wisdom is far more than knowledge. While *doing* the right thing is the application of knowledge, wisdom comes with the ability to *discern* between right and wrong. That discernment comes partially through human experience. But even beyond this experience is an enabling by God when the human seeks divine wisdom through scripture and prayer.

The two books illustrate how uniquely wisdom can be expressed. Proverbs has the appearance of being an assemblage of wise sayings, put out for general consumption. Ecclesiastes looks more like the testimony of one man who had to go through disappointing experiences before accepting the validity of the wisdom at hand. Some who read will avoid the misery that comes by refusing to listen. Others will have to endure the pain before confessing the truth of wisdom.

Perhaps the two different approaches increase the likelihood that wisdom will be heard. Sometimes the most complex problems can be analyzed with simple illustrations. Governments and businesses look for favorable results from their decisions through the use of precedent, research, conferences, and expert opinions. The answer may lie close at hand through observing animal life or everyday human behavior. Why should divine wisdom not be found in the natural order, for God rules it by fixed laws? And we must never forget that conventional, traditional wisdom may cater more to what humans want to believe about themselves than what is reality. While man's judgment is flawed, God's is not. He teaches only if we will listen. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes can teach us much.

The unit has three sub-sections. These are (a) Background to Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, (b) Proverbs, and (c) Ecclesiastes.

a. Background to Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The majority of the material included in Proverbs is attributed to King Solomon. All of Ecclesiastes is supposed to be from Solomon.

Proverbs. Proverbs contains a wealth of practical wisdom expressed usually in short sayings. The sayings may not necessarily describe every single incident of human behavior, but they are intended to provide a general framework for human activity. One will certainly do well to pay attention. After all, the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

The proverbs do not claim to be unique, but they do claim to be true reflections of divine wisdom. They tend to be taken from observations in life rather than be the result of divine revelation. Their truth is not to be measured by absolutes but in generalities. Hence, they are not deterministic. They do not attempt to set aside the legal code of the covenant. Rather, they come alongside divine laws and illustrate it in operation. The sayings are timeless; they are not bound by old covenant stipulations.

Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is a work that reflects on the meaning of life. Only a wise man could write the work. Only one with an insatiable appetite and unlimited resources could offer such sound judgment based on experience. The wisdom displayed in the composition comes from a man (Solomon) who was endowed with a special measure of wisdom from Yahweh. The uniqueness of the man's advice is that the wisdom that emerges from the piece comes by way of reflection *after* he had refused to listen to it and proved it to be true.

The composition begins with a prologue (1:1-11) and ends with an epilogue (12:9-14). The material in between can be analyzed in two parts. Part 1 (1:12-6:12) states the recipe for a life without meaning. The remedy is to realize the reality that life is transitory, so one should enjoy it in the present. Part 2 (7:1-12:8) contains maxims for various situations.

b. Proverbs. A prologue states the multiple goals of Proverbs. These are summarized as follows: (1) for attaining wisdom and discipline, (2) for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, (3) for dispensing knowledge and discretion, and (4) for understanding wisdom (Prov. 1:1-7). The fool will learn little from the book; the wise will learn, observe, and pursue the book's wisdom.

Solomon is the acknowledged author of many of the proverbs (cf. 1:1; 10:1; 25:1). However, proverbs by others have been included in the collection. Proverbs are attributed to the wise (cf. 22:17; 24:23), to Agur (30:1), and to King Lemuel (31:1).

Here is a sample. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (15:1). "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise" (20:1). "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones" (12:4). "The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion" (28:1).

Observe that the proverbs included in the book touch on many facets of life. These include family life (Prov. 12:4; 13:1), personal character (Prov. 3:3-4; 12:16-20; 22:1), avoidance of temptation (Prov. 20:1;

23:1-3), morality (Prov. 6:23-29), business dealings and work ethic (Prov. 11:1; 12:11), self-control (Prov. 20:1; 29:11), and one's attitude (Prov. 11:1; 24:1-2).

Read Proverbs. Notice the variety that exists between Proverbs 2, 10, and 31. The common thread is "wisdom." The changing format reveals that the work is a collection of wise sayings, not a narrative. The genre is poetry. As is typical in Hebrew poetry, lines run in parallel.

As to parallel lines in Hebrew poetry, note that in each instance the function may vary. For example, let us take look at verses 2-7 of chapter 1, where the goals were summarized (see paragraph 1, above). Each verse should be understood as a unit that contributes to the thought of the entire pericope. In verse 2, line 2 *restates* line 1. In verse 3, line 2 *defines* line 1. In verse 4, line 2 parallels line 1 in this way: "knowledge and discretion" (line 2) equate with "prudence" (line 1) and "young" (line 2) equates with "simple" (line 1). In verse 5, "wise" and "the discerning" go together; "listen and add to their learning" goes with "get guidance." In verse 6, the parallel line *amplifies* the first line. Although the terms are not synonymous, they are parallel--"proverb and parables" match "sayings and riddles." To complete the piece, verse 7 offers an assessment of the wisdom, then of the reader. Watch for how parallel lines function throughout the composition.

c. Ecclesiastes. Although unnamed within the text itself, the most natural candidate for authorship of Ecclesiastes is Solomon. Here is a man of wisdom who set out to find happiness in every avenue of life. He tried wine, woman, and song. He sought knowledge, wealth, and pleasure. What did he conclude? Happiness cannot be found apart from God. Without him, everything is meaningless. He counseled, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come" (12:1). The conclusion of the matter is, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (12:13-14).

To the casual reader, Ecclesiastes seems depressing. He tends to focus on the word "meaningless" without appreciating the context. Life is "meaningless" when lived without regard for God. To the wise, the work brings solace, for its author understood that true contentment comes not from the pursuit of money, pleasure, and accomplishments, but from the enjoyment of life within the context of a faith relationship with God. That is to say, "meaning" is found when one lives in keeping with the design of God's creation. One enjoys life without trying to satisfy himself through the false promises that worldly attractions hold before the human race. Two equal ideas join: enjoying the life God has given and living it to God's honor.

Solomon begins with a general statement--"everything is meaningless." Then, he proceeds to illustrate his point. Generally speaking, generations come and go, while the natural world continues to function routinely. The author found devotion to knowledge, pleasure, projects, wisdom, riches, etc. to be meaningless because they produce nothing lasting. And what was true for him is true for every person. All share the same destiny--death.

Lest one think that the reality of life should lead to a life of dissipation, one should observe that there is a time for everything, that wisdom is better than folly, and fullness of life is achievable when lived in keeping with the way God designed it to be lived.

Unit 3. Song of Songs and Lamentations

Both works, written in poetic form, belong to The Writings. This group of varied pieces contains a "Song" that has not met consensus on its purpose, main characters, or meaning. When we meet a book of this type, it behooves us to study carefully and draw conclusions tentatively. At face value, the Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon or Canticles, as it is sometimes called) is a "love song" that seems to involve King Solomon and a maiden.

Perhaps the language of love is what the author wished for his readers to hear. After all, wisdom would

be incomplete if it did not address the most basic divine and human emotion--love. Properly expressed, love destroys barriers and builds relationships. It exemplifies life in its highest form.

Some feel that if the Song has no further meaning than to describe love, the Song trivializes the biblical text and makes it unworthy of being included in the canon of sacred scripture. But that all depends on one's view of what is, or should be, included in the canon. On the other hand, to attach some allegorical meaning to the work is risky, especially if there is no indication the book is to be interpreted allegorically. Our task is not to weigh the merits of canonical books but to glean from them.

The other book, Lamentations, is best read with the book of Jeremiah. Lamentations is authored by the prophet at the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Jeremiah laments what has happened to his people, whom he loves so deeply. In spite of his repeated attempts to generate reform, they have turned a deaf ear to his counsel. But as they suffer for their unrighteous conduct, the prophet still has an empty hole in his heart for them.

A closeness exists between a love song and a lament. There can be no lament where attachment does not exist. With Jeremiah, lament is but an expression of love for God, his people, and his holy city. It is possible, of course, to lament a loss and be bitter against God. But biblically speaking, as grievous as a lament may appear, the anchor of the lamenter is confidence in God for a favorable conclusion in keeping with his wisdom.

The unit has three sections. These are (a) Background to the Song of Songs and Lamentations, (b) Song of Songs, and (c) Lamentations.

a. Background to the Song of Songs and Lamentations. These two compositions are presented in poetic form without narrative to introduce them. This makes determining authorship, setting date of composition, connection with events, and purpose more difficult to determine. However, internal evidence and tradition can be helpful.

Song of Songs. Various known as the Song of Songs, the Song of Solomon, and Canticles, the book appears at face value to be a love song that traces the pursuit of Solomon for a young maiden who was too attached to her own lover to be distracted by the wealthy king. The book does carry the heading, "Solomon's Song of Songs" that could be more of a traditional statement than an integral part of the original text. There is no reason not to accept the work as the product of Solomon. It is certainly consistent with what we know about the man, his life, and his abilities. Nevertheless, even the exact meaning of the traditional title is unclear as to whether the book was *composed by* Solomon, is *addressed to* Solomon, *concerns* Solomon, or is in *the manner of* Solomon. In the end, we will have to leave the question of authorship open.

We must be content to conclude that a "song" of wisdom appears in the Hebrew Bible that speaks of love. As to its propriety there, is it not fitting that wisdom related to the most central human and divine emotion be included among the sacred writings? While there is disagreement as to interpretation, may it not be that genuine love is shown apart from the incentives of riches?

Lamentations. Lamentations was written by Jeremiah to express grief over the fall of Jerusalem. The prophet's name is associated with the book due to tradition, content, and placement in the canon. Each of its five chapters is a separate poem. The first four of these is developed as an acrostic (successive lines begin with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet). The fifth is a prayer, not in acrostic display.

Lamenting is cast as an expression of grief over a situation that lies beyond the control of man. In pagan worship, man calls upon the gods to supply his needs and wants. In the Hebrew (and Christian) context, man remains faithful to God in all circumstances--in good times and bad. In good times, he offers thanksgiving and asks for wisdom. In bad times, he expresses confidence. The lament may arise from grief, but it is in reality a pledge of allegiance and an act of faith. It was only right that Jeremiah express his grief over the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of her people. After all, Jerusalem was the symbol of

Yahweh's presence among those covenanted to him at Sinai. But Jeremiah's cry is not one of personal despair but one of confidence and hope in God's purposes.

b. Song of Songs. Although the Song of Songs has been interpreted in a variety of ways, the most natural interpretation is that it was a contemporary love song. The composition moves back and forth from the words of "beloved" to those of the "lover."

The Song illustrates the full nature of Scripture, which embraces the character of both God and man. As surely as Scripture reveals critical aspects of the divine realm, it demonstrates application in everyday human life. Hence, human emotions become very much the subject of biblical literature. We should be glad that pure religion is neither heartless nor isolated from personal qualities of character. Authentic religion consists of a belief system, ritual, and emotional engagement in human interaction. The Song of Song addresses the last element through a poetic presentation of the quest for love.

The words at the top of the piece, "Solomon's Song of Songs," leaves with us at least a tradition of authorship. That tradition bodes well with what we know of Solomon. Endowed with a special measure of wisdom, he wrote on myriads of subjects: 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. He described plant life, taught about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish (1 Kings 4:32-33). Might this be one of those 1,005 songs? In view of the contributions he made to wisdom, it is unwise to overlay the song with some forced allegorical interpretation.

Be forewarned that the Song presents a challenge when it comes to identifying the speakers. For that reason, translations that carry section headings will vary. However, the headings can be helpful in separating the voices of the male lover and the female beloved. Without attempting to ferret out the precise meaning of each section, get into the rhythm of the text. Get the sense of the expressions of love attributed to the major characters. Read the song as a poem about love.

c. Lamentations. Characteristically, a lament reveals human inadequacy in the face of some crisis. Through the lament, the lamenter addresses God, states a complaint, offers prayer, expresses confidence in God's response, and offers praise. The people of God never outgrow their need to lament.

In the wake of the destruction which the Babylonians brought upon Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., Jeremiah cries out in behalf of the residents of Zion (Jerusalem). Zion has cause to mourn, but there is no one to comfort her. Jeremiah faces a sad state of affairs, not just because the city had fallen, but because Judah had not responded to the prophet's call to repentance. God himself has brought Jerusalem down. But Judah's failure has given the unrighteous nations an occasion to delight in her demise. Jeremiah laments the situation, yet continues to look to Yahweh in faith.

Perhaps your reading will be assisted by breaking the book into separate songs that coincide with the chapter breaks. Song 1, which describes the plight of a destroyed city, consists of three line units within each verse. The verses begin with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Song 2 acknowledges the cause for Jerusalem's plight. Song 3 consists of single lines, grouped in sets of three. Each set begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. As the nation wails, the people are called to turn to God. Song 4 contains two-line stanzas, beginning with succeeding letters and recognizes the sorrows of the siege. Song 5 is a prayer for the community.

Chapter 3 is unique in structure and in presentation. The author personifies the kingdom of Judah who cries out in distress. But distress turns to hope when three things happen. One, the nation recognizes the cause of the distress is brought about by sin. Two, the nation acknowledges that Yahweh's love and compassion will bring deliverance. Three, hope for deliverance rests on a return to Yahweh.

Conclusion

As you come to the end of your exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures, you realize the Old Testament

canon is far more than a loose collection of ancient, non-relevant documents. They embrace the story of God's dealings with his human creation that he crafted in his own image. The story is both God's and man's. It speaks to the character of both. It looks forward in anticipation and hope of redemption. It testifies to destiny.

Yahweh's promise to Abram anticipated the coming of Jesus and the blessing of people of all nations. God's choice of Israel was in preparation for the greater and wider blessings of salvation from alienation caused by sin. As time proceeded, God reminded Israel of a greater future blessing. This is clear from Psalms 2 and 110, dating from David's day around 1000 B.C.E. The future blessing is noted in Isa. 2:1-4, in Dan. 2:44, in Jeremiah 31, and other passages. We shall not assume, however, that God's full intentions were comprehended until he revealed them in his own time and manner (cf. Eph. 3:1-6; 1 Pet. 1:10-12).

During the period between the testaments, Jews were looking forward to a "Messiah," *i.e.*, an "Anointed One." They speculated as to what the Messiah might be and the terms of his reign. But the important thing is that the hope for, and expectation of, a Messiah was nurtured in both Scripture and people's minds and hearts.

The story of Jesus is reserved for the next course, BRS 2 The Greek Scriptures. The Greek Scriptures provide the climax for the story of the Hebrew Scriptures. As you will see, your study of the Old Testament will serve you well as you proceed.

On a concluding note, we should observe that the purpose of these written scriptures is not to leave an historical account of Israel's story nor to set forth a certain theology. The purpose is to nurture faith in the one true God, who is not only Creator but Redeemer.

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