3 | Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures

The story of the Old Testament in view of the activity of God

Enrichment Version

The Enrichment Version is designed for those who wish to explore Old Testament themes 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. Yet, one may glean a substantial knowledge, comprehension, and understanding of major Old Testament themes through this guide.

The study deals with core Old Testament concepts, where God is the central figure. Assuming a unified view of God, the course considers the function of Scripture, ways God works, and how God's activity interfaces with culture. Included is the faith of Israel, essential elements of Old Testament theology, the theological relationship of the Old and New Testaments, and the relevance of the Old Testament to modern life. The three modules of the course are designed to increase the student's knowledge of the basic elements of Old Testament theology and build on the student's general acquaintance with the Scriptures. Moreover, the course further develops the student's critical thinking skills. The study is organized in three modules: (1) Discovery, (2) Themes in Old Testament Theology, and (3) Messianic Themes.

Objectives

1. Formulate conclusions about the theological content of specific biblical texts

2. Appraise the theological relationship of the Old and New Testaments

3. Determine the application of Old Testament theology for Christians

Course Learning Outcomes

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

1. Summarize fundamental theological themes in the Old Testament

2. Interpret passages that produce theological conclusions about the Old Testament

3. Analyze the significance of theological topics

A Letter of Introduction

The word "theology" scares some people. But there is no reason to shy away from the term. It is a word that suggests a reflection on God. Now, that is a wonderful thing. Each of us has a "theology," for each of us holds a perception about God. Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures is specifically an investigation

into the Old Testament for the purpose of seeing what it says about God and matters related to his person and activity.

Your prospective journey into the Old Testament will pursue several themes. It differs from the previous journey where you traveled through each book of the Old Testament. By focusing on themes instead of individual books, you will be able to build a frame of reference into which the seemingly unrelated stories fit. And, having had some exposure to the New Testament, you will be able to see the relationship between the two covenants.

Please put yourself into the study. The effort will bring great rewards. Be diligent and persistent. For the best results, make a schedule for study and stick to it.

Procedure

1. Become familiar with the content of the entire course syllabus.

2. Read the Things to Know and keep these items in mind as you read through each module.

3. Begin your study with Module 1. Read the material carefully and do the activities in each unit.

4. When you come to the end of Module 1, move on to the other modules.

Things to Know

Module 1

1. How the Old Testament contributes to theology
2. Particular theological insights presented in the major divisions of the Old Testament
3. How to isolate "theological" themes from a literary text.

Module 2

1. Identify the major themes in the Old Testament
2. The significance of God's choosing Israel
3. The concept and function of covenant
4. The concept of salvation in the Old Testament
5. The function of law in the Old Testament
6. The concept of worship and its relation to piety
7. What it means to "know" God

Module 3

1. How the Old Testament prepares the way for the New Testament
2. The concept of a coming Messiah
3. Comparison and contrast between the Old and New covenants
4. The place of land in Israel's history and in the kingdom of Christ
5. The role of David in the messianic projection

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Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures

Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures is the story of the Old Testament in view of the activity of God. The study deals with core of Old Testament concepts, where God is the center. In presenting a unified view of God, the course considers the function of Scripture, ways God works, and how God's activity interfaces with culture.

Before proceeding, it may be helpful to locate the discipline of "theology" as it is known to modern scholars. Theology is the preferred term for that discipline that treats ideas attributed to divine revelation. This isolates the material that is attributed to "religious" studies. Religious studies are more broadly based and often favor human thought over divine revelation. Christian scripture is assumed to be the source book for theological reflection.

If, with Köstenberger, the definition of theology is taken to mean "discerning the spiritual message of Scripture" (*A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters,* p. 43), a beginning place is established. However, the definition itself needs interpretation. One person may claim to discern the message of Scripture in an historical-cultural context, while the next seeks meaning in allegory or myth. Still another may trend toward a "living" constitutional model. Without question, the modern understanding of theology has been influenced by the Enlightenment and evolutionary theory. But that is not all. Interpretations assigned to given passages and themes have also been subject to human speculation. It is sufficient for now to simply be aware of the assumptions that undergird theological reflection. We proceed by examining the most evident meaning displayed in the biblical text itself, which must be the beginning point.

An earlier course, The Hebrew Scriptures, dealt with the people, places, and events. This course asks, What do these things mean? Why were these people and events noted? This course carries the student beyond the particulars of the text and searches for *meaning.* Surely, there is more to the Old Testament than a record of obscure people and events. These matters must have been written for some reason.

By nature, the Hebrew Scriptures are God-centered. They begin by declaring that God created the world. Quickly, they move to the story of mankind. Having presented man in a rather close relationship with God, the story proceeds to show that humans became and remained, generally, rebellious and self-seeking. Had the story ended there, the Bible would be no more than a purely secular account of obscure events. However, the ingenious mark of these scriptures is the story told about the interaction between God and man. They present God's story" (theology) rather than "man's story" (history).

The Hebrew Scriptures provide unique insights into God's intention for humanity and tell how he dealt with man's "sinful" plight. Judgment by flood in Noah's day was followed by salvation of the race and promise. The scattering of the rebellious in the days of the Tower of Babel led to an accomplishment of God's purposes. The choosing of Abraham (Genesis 12) then became the focus of God's activity. Amid a generally depraved world, God raised a nation to (1) declare the glory of Yahweh to a pagan world and (2) become an avenue for the coming of his own "Son," through whom he would provide redemption and salvation for the world.

The Hebrew Scriptures are incomplete in themselves, as they only anticipate the “fulfillment” of God’s promises. It remained for the New Testament to describe how these promises were fulfilled and how God’s purpose was consummated in Jesus Christ.

Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures assumes the student has a firm grasp of the details of the Old Testament. The task here is to set forward the story which the text presents regarding God’s person and intention. The course is organized in three modules. These modules are designed to build on the student’s general acquaintance with the Scriptures.

Module 1--Discovery. The first module is devoted to discovery. You shall have the opportunity to identify key words, concepts, and themes in the Old Testament. The module is introductory in nature as it initiates the process of biblical study.

Module 2--Themes in Old Testament Theology. The module analyzes several important topics of the Old Testament: Yahweh’s purpose, knowing God, the covenant community, salvation, and land.

Module 3--Messianic Themes. The module examines select Old Testament texts that anticipate the coming of the Messiah, the kingdom of God, and the new covenant. Messianic themes are not dominant in the Hebrew Scriptures, but they are significant.

It will be important for *you* to wrestle with the biblical text. Block from your mind any preconceived ideas you have about any given concept or biblical passage. Enjoy looking at the Bible afresh. Certainly, what you know about characters and events will serve you well. But for the meaning of these things, let us start anew.

Module 1 offers an orientation to our theological pursuit. The module has been divided into three units, following the familiar three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures--Torah, Prophets, and Writings. Each unit is subdivided, with suggested passages to explore. You will be given some guidelines, but you are the lead explorer. You are the trailblazer hunting for treasure.

Your pursuit will follow a simple strategy. You will read a passage. Then with pencil and paper, you will make notes of what appear to be important words, concepts, and themes. Occasionally, you will be alerted to special literary structures that may hold important clues. The quest is *theological*. That is, your intent is to discover what the biblical text says about God, his person, and the meaning of his activity. The basic strategy outlined in the early part of Unit 1 is to be repeated under the *Activities* that follow.

MODULE 1 Discovery

The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) are comprised of a wide variety of commonly used literary genre. What makes these scriptures "theological" is their themes and the connotation of the vocabulary found within. Individual compositions were written for a unique purpose, *i.e*., to convey thought relative to matters that are in some way linked with the spiritual world. For example, historical events may be described, but the intent of the author will be to show how that history is related to God's sovereign purposes. The authors of scripture do not "rewrite" history, but they interpret events within a spiritual context. Consequently, an overriding reason to study the theology of the Hebrew Scriptures is to see how biblical authors have used literary means to provide insight into the person and ongoing work of the Creator.

The Bible is a book intended for understanding. The reader should not be intimidated by its size or content. Its vocabulary is quite simple. Its literary structure reflects conventional Hebrew style. Different forms of writing (genre) found within the sacred text help convey its message. Whether stories, poems, laments, judgment speeches, proverbs, songs, genealogies, or laws, the various writing forms play a significant role in communicating the intent of each biblical book.

Assumptions. Any study of the Bible will be governed by assumptions made by the student. If the student makes improper assumptions about the Bible as a whole or a specific text, even the most obvious meaning may be missed. Needless to say, one's general view of the Bible's trustworthiness will determine whether one approaches the Scriptures for enlightenment or for some other reason. For the sake of this study, you are encouraged to assume that **the biblical record is worthy of your trust**. Your quest is not to prove the Bible true or false; it is to comprehend its general message.

Another assumption we are making about the Bible is that **the books of the Hebrew canon form a coherent whole**. This means that various biblical texts agree with each other and do not offer conflicting notions about a topic. They present ideas that are consistent with the general design of the Bible. Just how one discovers underlying themes is a matter of methodology. Does one discover the central themes of the whole Old Testament and then try to discern how individual books and particular passages support them? Or, does one look for themes within smaller selections of text and then try to tie these together in order to establish the purpose of the whole Old Testament? It is useful to work from both directions. Some conclusions seem evident from a cursory look at the Bible. But general conclusions should always be reviewed from the vantage of the smaller units.

Each passage is important for understanding a pericope (block of material that belongs together). And each pericope is important for understanding the Scriptures as a whole. However, no passage or pericope was intended to be read in isolation from the whole composition. Each must be interpreted in light of the overall design and purpose of the Bible. The composite of all the stories, wisdom, and legal enactments holds meaning that governs the particulars. The Bible is indeed a "book of books." But the combined books contribute to a single, unified whole.

A third assumption made in this study is that **God revealed himself and his intentions for mankind through the Hebrew Scriptures**. There have been many events through which God has been known: the exclusion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, the Flood, the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan, the destruction of Jerusalem--to name a few. For Israel, a most important event was the Exodus. There were the "signs" (plagues) in Egypt, but, more importantly, God revealed himself as the One in whom Israel could trust.

Another important assumption is that **interpretation must be governed by the biblical text itself**. Supplementary studies are often needed to provide background and clarification for the reader of the biblical text. Local customs, word studies, comparative studies, archaeological discoveries, theological discussions, and commentaries can shed light on a biblical passage. But the student must remember that background studies and human commentary do not govern the meaning of the Bible; they only bring enlightenment.

Yet another assumption being made in this study is that **the message of the Old Testament is indeed "theological."** Linguistically, "theology" is derived from the Greek and conveys the idea of "a word about God." In terms of a modern discipline, theology is man's search for meaning about God and his work. Traditional Old Testament theology is a discipline that seeks "to describe Israel's faith as it is expressed in the OT Scriptures." To put it another way, "Old Testament theology is the study and presentation of what is revealed in the Old Testament" (Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology,* p. 17).

Old Testament theology provides the basis for understanding the New Testament, for the New Testament is a continuation of Old Testament thought. God appears in the Old Testament as the creator of the universe who takes an active hand in the affairs of the growing population. He holds all people

everywhere responsible for their actions. He moves against communities which dishonor him. God also enters the human experience in order to provide blessings and spiritual redemption.

God is the chief actor in the Old Testament, the source of a productive and harmonious universe. Human beings are expected to act in a manner that honors their maker and his benevolent intentions for the world. When they act without regard for him, God eventually frustrates their plans and summons them to judgment. He allows a measure of oppression to envelope even the righteous, but he never forgets the oppressed. His care for those he has made is observed everywhere. Both the present and the future become points in time when God does marvelous things for the blessing of human creatures.

An equally important assumption is that **men also come to know God through the "cult," that is through rituals of worship**. For Israel, these rituals included prayer, sacrifice, song, feasts, and ritual structures such as the tabernacle, temple, and priests. While man cannot experience God completely (see Exod. 33:12-23), God is not so distant that he cannot have a relationship with mankind. To "know" God is to understand him to be God and to follow his lead. One who knows God can be assured that God is always knowledgeable and his way desirable (Job 42:1-6; Isa. 55:8). Knowing him entails "waiting" for him to act (Isa. 30:18). The opposite action is to take matters into one's own hands, question God's actions, and generally disregard him.

Finally, Old Testament scripture proceeds on the assumption that the goal of revelation is to draw mankind into a spiritual walk with God. A number of concepts relate to the general idea. These include covenant, which binds God with a people. The idea of a proper ethical response and how it is based in the holiness of God becomes a major component of Old Testament theology. Other topics are the place of land in God's dealing with Israel, worship, and the institutions of king, priest, and prophet. These are but a few concerns of theology.

Knowing God also demands a right attitude of heart (Jer. 24:7). God will not force one to accept or love him. But he invites loving response to his acts of loving kindness. To know God is to defend the cause of the poor and needy (Jer. 22:11-17). Those who "know" him will identify with goodness and stand against evil (cf. Dan. 11:32).

Unit 1. The Torah

As the first division of the Hebrew canon, The Torah sets the stage for what follows in the remainder of the Bible. The word “torah” may mean “instruction,” but when the Jews applied it to the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, they intended it to convey the thought of specific instruction. For example, they may have meant, “If you read the story of Abraham, you will receive instruction from God.” The title was attached by the Jews to describe the function of the five books—not their content particularly.

When The Torah was translated into the Greek language two centuries or so before Christ, it became known by the Greek term that suggested “Five Books” (Pentateuch). Then, when the books were translated into English, the idea of instruction was translated as “Law.” Hence, English speakers are more inclined to speak of “the Books of Law” as well as the Pentateuch. As far as we know, these books attributed to Moses were never titled by Moses. But, over the ages, men have given these five books a designation that sets them apart from other books of the Hebrew Scriptures. None of the titles describe the contents. Only “torah” suggests the usefulness of these compositions.

As for the theology of the Hebrew Scriptures, we must look within the books themselves. We should be careful not to pre-judge the compositions before gaining an appreciation for them. We should withhold judgment as to their meaning for Israel and for modern man until we have had opportunity to examine their content, lest we be led astray.

Nevertheless, we have already shown our hand by naming this course, “Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures” suggests that it is possible to draw theological meaning from the corpus. While the discipline of theology is basically human analysis, the underlying assumption is that “the five books of Moses” do in fact offer evidence of divine revelation and theological insight. What the insight may be will be seen from an examination of the biblical texts themselves.

Let us look at each of The Torah's five books briefly to see what they offer for theological review. We have grouped the five into three sections: (a) Genesis, (b) Exodus, and (c) Leviticus through Deuteronomy.

a. Genesis. The book of Genesis sets the tone for the entire Bible. Without offering evidence for the existence of God, Genesis begins with an assertion about God's acts of creation. By the third chapter, what was suggested in the creation account becomes clear: the Scriptures focus on mankind and relationship with the Creator.

In the activities below and throughout the syllabus, examine the biblical passages, list important ideas, and make personal notes. At the conclusion of Module 3, you will submit a summary of your activity findings and submit that summary as one of the five graded elements.

Activity: Genesis 1-2. Read through Genesis 1 and 2. Identify key **words**. Look for words used in repetition (*e.g.,* the word "good") or otherwise accented by the context (*e.g.,* the "image" of God in 1:27). Some words may be objects (*e.g.,* garden); some may be included in commands (*e.g.,* "Let there be . . ."); some may be in the narrative (*e.g.,* "river"); some are in specific activities (*e.g.,* God "blessed" them). Words are vehicles of thought. They are all important to the sentence structure or to the story. However, just the frequency of use is not necessarily an indication of importance. The main question is, Which of the words included in the text of Genesis 1-2 are essentially "theological"? That is, which ones carry significance beyond merely relating events?

Once you have completed your list of key words, work through the material again. This time make notes of key **concepts--***i.e.,* major ideas that the text conveys. For example, the statement that "God created" presents a concept about God and the universe. Reference to God's speaking offers another concept about God. Here are some preliminary observations that can guide your methodology with the activities.

Observe that the statement, “God created the heavens and the earth” forms a fitting introduction to the book of Genesis. It establishes a ground for what follows. If the creation story is dismissed, then there is no reason to think that God had anything to do with the account that follows. If the statement about God’s purposed action is thrown aside, then what can be believed about the biblical text? Even an attempt to interpret the account along lines of chance evolutionary diminishes the potency of the record. To say that God could have allowed evolutionary processes to produce the cosmos and its inhabitants denies the fundamental prospect of purpose. On the other hand, could it be that trying to interpret the text in a very strict literal manner misses the point as well? In other words, is the answer to the creation puzzle stuck with two alternatives—literal or myth?

The first statement about creation is straightforward. It states a vital truth about God. However, the statement that begins with “God said” (1:3ff.) could be accommodating to further emphasize creative activity rather than for the purpose of recording actual words of God. Otherwise, should we assume God spoke Hebrew since Genesis is written in the Hebrew language? To whom did God speak? You see how easy it is to become obsessed with accommodating language and miss the point of the text? Scientists, anthropologists, and theologians will ponder over origins of the universe and its inhabitants to its end, but none will fathom the depths of the issue to human satisfaction. The great divide between them rests on the biblical contention: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Now, look at the Genesis text again and identify what appear to be central **themes--***i.e.,* recurring topics which flow through the entire composition. For example, God's perfect creative activity may be a theme

that runs through the two chapters. This may or may not be a central theme for the entire Bible, but it may very well be for these two chapters. The text of Genesis 1 moves toward the creation of mankind, followed by the text of Genesis 2, which provides more detail. What is important about the detail? What else emerges as a possible theme?

The **literary structure** often reveals clues to the theological content of a biblical text. Notice the pattern set in the creation account. First, you may note the close of each day with, "And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day." Note also the pattern in the creation narrative: light, water, land, light, water, land. What does the literary pattern suggest?

It is important to remain tentative in your conclusion, because the story may develop from this beginning. After all, there are forty-eight more chapters of Genesis to explore, as well as the remainder of the Bible. Creation may become a central theme for the entire Bible, but then it may be overshadowed by some other theme yet to appear. In other words, creation may be a plank in the platform but not be the most significant plank in the Bible's story. This is not to diminish the importance of creation. But it will leave open the question of whether the Bible is principally a book about *creation* or a book about *redemption.*

Having looked at key words, concepts, themes, and literary structure, what are your tentative conclusions about the theological import of Genesis 1-2?

Activity: Genesis 3-11. Open your Bible to Genesis 3-11 and perform the same task as with the preceding two chapters. Keep asking questions of the text. If the Garden episode is assigned to myth, what difference does that make with respect to God's promise to Abraham and to the gospel of Jesus Christ? What does the Garden experience say about man's nature before and after the sin of Adam and Eve? Or, does it say anything at all?

Activity: Genesis 12-50. Move on to Genesis 12-50 and analyze the text as you did in the two sections above.

b. Exodus. God's intent appears clearly in connection with his deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery (Exod. 5:22-6:8). We may be tempted to think that Yahweh delivered Jacob's descendants from bondage because he had mercy of them and responded to their cries. While this may be true, the overriding reason for Yahweh's action was a broader love for the human race. He brought Israel forth to the desert that he might enter into covenant with the company as a whole for his own purposes. The promise to Abraham was two-fold: to bless the descendants of Abraham and to bless all people through those descendants. Israel was blessed in the broader scheme of things, even when she did not behave in keeping with the covenant to which she had agreed. However, along the way, Yahweh did withhold blessing from Israel in times of unfaithfulness.

Yahweh (the name by which God was known to Israel) is the "I Am" and "the God who brings salvation." This salvation is defined for Israel as *deliverance* and *blessing.* That salvation was experienced in connection with worship and sacrifice, *i.e.* the cult.

Activity: Exodus 3. Follow the activity procedure outlined under "a" above as you analyze the episode of the burning bush.

Activity: Exodus 5:22-6:8. Note the difference between Moses' perception of what is happening and God's perception. God's promise to deliver Israel from Egypt was connected with his promise to Abraham. It also embraced a covenant relationship.

Activity: Exodus 12. Look at the institution of the Passover for links it may have with God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

Activity: Exodus 15. The passage is unique, for it appears as a song within an ongoing narrative. Perhaps just here, Israel reveals a deeper faith in Yahweh than at any other time. The song has both a past and a forward look as it describes what Yahweh has done and what he will do in the future. The theological content should be evident. What is the basic meaning of "deliverance" in the context of Israel's exodus from Egypt?

c. Leviticus through Deuteronomy. In the modern age, these three books are read reluctantly. The assumption is that they are concerned with ancient laws and trivia that hold little value for the modern person. Granted, the content deals with laws given to Israel (Leviticus and Deuteronomy) and with tedious wilderness journeys (Numbers). But there may be powerful themes that carry these compositions to their grand conclusion. The contents are linked with both the preceding books of the Hebrew canon and with those that shall follow.

Always keep an open mind to the message of the biblical text. Remember, the discipline of theology is man's attempt to understand the divine. Human categories should always remain under review and be judged finally by the biblical text itself.

Activity. Choose one or two passages from Leviticus through Deuteronomy that you feel are significant for understanding the theological import of the Bible. Analyze the passage(s) in keeping with the procedure outlined above.

Study questions. In review of the entire Torah, consider the following questions.

1. Why might Exodus 5:22-6:8 be chosen over Genesis 12:1-3 as a clearly articulated passage about God's purpose?
2. How is “salvation” understood in the Old Testament?
3. What is the meaning of "cult" in the context of theological study?
4. How does the idea of covenant relate to the community of Israel?
5. What does it mean to "know" God?
6. What significance does the land of Canaan have for God's intentions for Israel?

Doing theology. The following selections will give you experience looking at biblical texts and asking proper questions of them. One selection is made from each of the three book—Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Leviticus. There must be a beginning point and that point should be as objective as possible. You gained a general orientation to Leviticus in The Hebrew Scriptures course. But now, it is your turn to test that orientation. For the present, however, assume that the contents of the book were intended primarily to instruct Israel (priests, Levites, family heads, and commoners) regarding a faithful response to Yahweh. Remember that the title “Leviticus” is derived from the Latin through the Greek and represents the name tag placed on the book by those who translated the book from Hebrew into Greek. The translators detected a leading role for the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, and so designated it. You may be better served if you go beyond the traditional name and note what the text itself says about the book. Key in on what may have been the “original” title of the book—“Yahweh called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting” (1:1). This introductory statement is followed by a command to “speak to the Israelites” (1:2). Leaving the short title aside, the book can be summarized as “God’s instruction to Israel in view of the covenant he had established with them at Sinai.” This is where theology begins. Theological conclusions must rest on a solid foundation. But they progress from there in an effort to understand more concretely the nature of God, the nature of the covenant, and the meaning of various stipulations. Theology will also establish the relevance of these stipulations for Christians who live under a “new” covenant. Your theological methodology provides for distinguishing between what is clearly indicated by the text and personal conjecture. For example, you can establish that certain foods were forbidden, but the reason may not be given. Since the text does not declare the reason, it is safe to leave it at that. A good assumption is that whatever was intended to be revealed was revealed clearly. Your trustworthiness as a theological thinker rests with your methodology.

In the earlier course, it was observed that the discussion of the "day of atonement" comes in the middle of the book. Determining the significance of this placement is a matter of theological interest. In the final analysis, we may never know if the placement is purposed by the author. If so, we may ask, How does the day of atonement relate to the first and second halves of Leviticus? What difference does it make whether this is the case or not? If too little attention is given to the fact that the Day of Atonement is placed in the middle of the composition, then we could miss some important aspect of the author's presentation. On the other hand, if too much attention is given to this feature, we run the risk of distorting what otherwise is a happenstance. Your task is to grasp the overall meaning of Leviticus in general and the significance of the Day of Atonement in particular.

Study the situation. Make notes. Then write out a reasoned approach to the subject. First, deal with the reason why the Day of Atonement *may* be purposefully placed at the center of Leviticus. Then, discuss the significance of the Day of Atonement in the life of the Israelite nation.

Numbers. The book is ill-named because it calls attention to census taking, when this is not the purpose of the book at all. Identify on paper what you see in the book that is "theological." For this experience, concentrate on what went wrong and why? Write out your conclusions as to who, where, when, under what circumstances, and how Israel failed to please Yahweh. In evaluating Yahweh's response, be careful not to enter into judgment of Yahweh himself, for in this area we must simply acknowledge that Yahweh is right in his actions. It is better to *describe* than to *judge*. Theological thinking can get off track when the theologian becomes the judge.

Deuteronomy. The title of the book may suggest a "second law," while in reality is contains the encouragement of Moses to keep the one and only law Yahweh laid out for his covenant people. Modern scholars conjecture that Deuteronomy was constructed to support a reform movement that occurred nearly a millennium after Moses' death. When reviewing a book for its theological substance, assigning a date does make a difference. If Deuteronomy is a restatement of the original law for the benefit of second generation Israelites, that suggests that the nature of Mosaic legislation is static. If, on the other hand, Deuteronomy is a compilation of several sources and rewritten in order to direct a later community, then how can one know what is static and what is adjustable to completely new circumstances? How does this bode with Israel's traditional understanding that the Torah was originally delivered to Moses. Rabbinic Judaism will assume God gave an oral law in addition to the written Torah, so it makes allowances for the law being adaptable to new circumstances. But critical analysis attempts to do this with the written Torah—to wit, Deuteronomy. Doing theology with Deuteronomy brings the student to a fork in the road. Should Deuteronomy be analyzed as an original composition, or should it be analyzed as a revisionary reform piece constructed late in Israel's history.

To more fully appreciate the challenge of interpreting Deuteronomy theologically, see if you can identify any reason why the book cannot have primary application to Moses' generation.

Unit 2. The Prophets

"The Prophets" comprise those books which tell of "God's prophetic history." In a blend of narrative and poetry, they relate the story of the relationship between God and Israel. Beginning with the initial settlement in Canaan, the prophetic books describe a millennium of encounter. God's plan to bless the world through the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lies behind a more immediate intent to bless Israel. Whether faithful or not, Yahweh would eventually reveal himself more fully in a future Messiah. But the immediate concern of the Prophets was with Israel.

The books of the Prophets are divided into two sections. Section one is known popularly as the "Former Prophets," because the compositions placed under the heading pertain to an earlier period in Israel's history. Consequently, the "Latter Prophets" belong to a later era. But we also notice a difference in the compositions placed in the two categories. The Former Prophets are written in narrative and are more

“historical” in style of writing. The Latter Prophets are more concerned with presenting particular messages from God. They are not without historical references, but the use of poetic structure also distinguishes them from the Former.

Theologically, we should look to these books to see how they treat the acts of God in light of Israel’s behavior. The books are not without reference to the covenant God made with Israel. They describe the victories and lapses of the descendants of Abraham in terms of divine expectations. But in spite of constant failings and exile, Yahweh stays true to his purposes. Through the prophets, he projects future blessing which he pledged to bring upon mankind.

If one reads the Former Prophets as a witness to a God who unreasonably destroys Israel’s enemies and glorifies warfare, then one will arrive at the wrong theological content. While one cannot justify judging God’s actions, one can say that God manifests a sense of love, holiness, mercy, and judgment. This is part of the theological package revealed in both the Former and Latter Prophets.

a. The Former Prophets. The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings are narratives which carry the story of Israel from settlement in Canaan to the Babylonian exile. Perhaps the most relevant questions to ask are the following. What is there about the narrative that reveals the *activity* of God? What does the narrative reveal about the *nature* of God? Is Israel's story merely the "history" of a given people, or does it relate what God is doing in and through Israel for the broader world?

As you proceed, keep in mind that the idea of "prophet" in the Old Testament rarely included telling the future. They were not diviners who interceded for God’s favor through magical rituals. True prophets spoke for God, communicating his intentions and attitudes. They accomplished their work through divine prompting. Their messages were revealed. They were not theologians who reflected on a divine message; they were instruments in Yahweh’s hands to declare a divine message. Primarily, prophetic messages called the people back to the covenant, gave warning, and told of future events as they pertained to Yahweh’s character and purposes. As regards to the “former” prophets, the term applies more precisely to “God’s prophetic history” than to individuals who bore the title.

Activity: Joshua 5. Follow the activity procedure outlined in Unit 1 (see Activity: Genesis 1-2 for the model). Look for connections between the second generation and the first in view of the Sinai covenant (Exodus 19). How does Joshua 5:13-15 relate to the role of Yahweh in leading Israel? What is expected of Israel, now that they have entered the land Yahweh swore to give them?

Activity: Joshua 24. Consider the roles of history and covenant renewal in the story of Israel. What was the importance of an occasional renewing of the covenant? Can the Christian community find benefit today in occasional covenant renewal? How would a group of Christians go about covenant renewal?

Activity: 1 Samuel 8. The idea of Yahweh's rule is challenged. But is it set aside? Does the faithlessness of any given generation keep God from completing his work?

b. The Latter Prophets: looking back. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve are called the Latter Prophets. Written in both narrative and poetry, these books carry the message of God which he spoke through ancients. These revelations aimed primarily at bringing Israel back to covenant loyalty. But they also offered encouragement to Israel, pronounced judgment upon evil nations, and presented the picture of what God would do in the future. Like the presentation of Israel's history in the Former Prophets, prophetic pronouncements in the Latter Prophets had theological meaning. They are to be studied in view of God's purpose and future plans.

The prophets did not reveal new laws. They did not revise old one. But they did call Israel back to the Law of Moses, which was a covenant with static stipulations. If the Torah given to Moses by Yahweh had been a “living constitution,” then the prophets would not have summoned Israel to observe the commands they had forsaken. They would have spent their time revising and updating the ancient code to fit new situations.

Activity: Jeremiah 11. Israel is judged in keeping with the stipulations of the Sinai covenant. Even possession of the land is tied to her fidelity. Despite repeated warnings through the generations, the people refused to pay attention, choosing rather to follow their stubborn hearts. Since they had returned to idol worship, Israel faced divine discipline. Study Jeremiah 11.

Activity: Ezek. 34:17-31. The vision of Ezekiel runs past the exile through the post-exilic period to the New Testament era. Analyze the passage in view of its vocabulary, themes, and concepts. How do you separate the literal from the figurative parts of a vision?

Activity: Hosea 2:14-23. Follow the activity procedure. Look for the themes of deliverance, covenant, knowledge of God, and land. Be especially aware of the significance of Israel's unfaithfulness and the threatened loss of land in the impending exile. For many Jews and Christians, the land of Israel is a perpetual gift without qualification. Is this the impression *you* get from the biblical text?

Doing theology. The modern who examines passages like those above is inclined to get caught up in the projections of the future. When this happens, one fail to realize the theological implications. What are the implications of the principles underlying the prophetic summons to Sinai?

Not only did the prophets cite words from the Law, they recalled Israel's history. Without Yahweh's involvement with Israel, we may be looking at pure historical happenstances. With Yahweh's involvement with Israel, we are now looking at "theological" history—or history with a theological twist. Why did the prophets recall their history? What bearing would Israel's unfaithfulness have on this history? Finally, what does the backward looking prophetic message tell you about God?

c. The Latter Prophets: looking forward. As we are about to observe, the Latter Prophets are two-directional. We have noted that they look back by recalling the past. But they also point to Israel's future. In both instances, the starting point is the present. Israel's present is the result of two different activities. One, they are who they are and where they are because of Yahweh's initiatives. Two, they are in a particular condition because of the way they have responded to Yahweh's initiatives.

Looking to the past and the future are inseparably linked from a divine perspective, but not necessarily from a human perspective. What Yahweh envisioned prior to creation would culminate in an historical event that could enable mankind to participate in his righteousness. Accomplishing this feat did not depend upon mankind—not even on the faithfulness of Israel. It is here that the past and future are disjointed. While Yahweh called Israel into covenant relationship to demonstrate his presence, Israel demonstrated the need for God's event in Christ as much as all the rest of mankind. Israel's failure to live in keeping with covenant demands did not frustrate the divine plan. Neither did it guarantee Yahweh's tolerance with them when they forsook the covenant. Some of the prophets even expressed dismay that God would favor an idolatrous enemy when he allowed his people to suffer at the hands of their enemies. Jonah did not readily accept Yahweh's actions toward the people of Nineveh. Habakkuk could not rationalize how a wicked enemy could be favored over God's own covenant people even though they too were evil.

Following are contemplative questions to help you "think theologically" about the material. Take pencil and paper and write your response to each of the questions. The activity will help you prepare for the Module 1 exam.

1. What contribution did apocalyptic visions make toward Israel's position in the post-monarchy era?
2. How was the exile interpreted in view of the covenant God had made with Israel?
3. How did Israel experience God in the cult (*i.e.,* in worship activity)?
4. What did the land symbolize for Israel?
5. Would the land remain significant after the coming of Jesus?
6. How does the book of Hosea help one understand the relationship between God and Israel?
7. What role did kings and prophets play relative to keeping the covenant community faithful?
8. In what ways did men and women in Israel "know" God emotionally and experientially?

9. What quality of life did the land offer for Israel?
10. How would you characterize Israel's covenant loyalty in the post-exilic period?

Unit 3. The Writings

The Writings include all the books of the Hebrew canon which are excluded from The Torah and The Prophets. They represent an array of texts, which were composed under very different circumstances and for a variety of purposes. Interpreting these works "theologically" does not mean giving new meaning to their contents. It assumes that theological interpretation is proper, because the books were written to convey theological truths. Otherwise, they become mere history, poetry, or common wisdom.

The place to begin with any of The Writings is to pose common questions: Who? When? Where? Why? and How? These pieces are first of all literature with an author, a destination, and a purpose. None are specifically classified as theologies. However, theology is present within each composition. This is why we refer to the collection as “sacred” scripture. We are not reformatting the books. We are simply asking what they have to say that is related to the spiritual realm.

Some express concern that some of the books included in The Writings do not seem to be very theological. For example, the Song of Solomon is open to many interpretations and seemingly lacks what one would expect from “divine revelation.” And if, by definition, theology hinges on the idea of divine revelation, how can there be any “theological” meaning to the work? First, the limitations of human definitions should be acknowledged. Perhaps there is not a good fit for the definition in this instance. Second, when attempting to derive theological meaning, it is important not to reach beyond what the text itself displays, as may be the case when interpretation is sought in the relationship between Christ and the church. Third, an attempt to see theology in the composition could itself be an over-reaching effort. Some books must be left to the individual reader to reach his/her own conclusions.

The unit is broken into three sections. These are (a) Psalms, (b) Wisdom, and (c) Other Compositions. We understand the *Psalms* to be a collection of pieces that express man’s feelings toward God and God’s world. So, what do they reveal to us about those matters? *Wisdom* expresses judgment about right and wrong and is counsel for those who are open to it. So, what is found therein that places it in a higher plane than common human wisdom? The *other compositions* are a mix of history, short story, and prophecy. How do these function to tell us something about God, God’s acts, and man’s faithful response to God?

a. Psalms. The Psalter was composed over a long period of time--perhaps a millennium. The Psalms express deep human emotions in an atmosphere of "worship." Probably, they were used by the Jewish faithful in conjunction with both private and public devotional activity.

Modern analysis of the psalms indicates an array of possible categories, including praise, thanksgiving, lament, and royal acclamation. Some of the psalms fit more than one category and some seem to be unique. But central to the psalms are elements of praise, thanksgiving, and trust. The object of these expressions is a God who is the creator and sustainer of the universe. He cares for mankind and acts in response to petitions. Man naturally acknowledges faith in God during times of peace, oppression, abundance, and special occasion. But the Psalms reveal that faithful people call on God when times are bad as well as good. More extensive work in the Psalms is available in another course. In this module, you are introduced to thinking theologically about the Psalms.

A proper study of individual psalms may be concerned with authorship, occasion, and category, but the more significant aspect is their theological meaning for the modern person. If a psalm is David’s petition regarding his enemies, there is not much application other than theological. So what if David had enemies? So what if he cried out regarding his oppressors? The application for the modern person will come from the theological imprint of the passage and not from a desire to defend one’s hostile actions.

Assuming David was correct in his cry for defeat of his enemies, how should one feel about his own oppressors? Is there a sense in which one may call for their defeat? In what sense can he condemn them? To what extent may he protest? What does he ask of God and for what reason? We may surmise that a prayer against one's oppressors is legitimate within the bounds of the spirit of Christ. Indeed, David's blasts may not have been for personal revenge but for divine action against the anointed king of Yahweh's people. Where is the application in these psalms?

A second instance may be with the laments. A present situation may not look like the one that give rise to a biblical lament, but the principle of lamenting is the same. The lament itself (see especially Activity 3 below) will contain essential elements that will help the modern person form his/her own lament. The theological aspect is clearly seen in the tenor. The lamenter is not complaining; he is petitioning for relief. In doing so, he expresses confidence in God and praises him for whatever the outcome may be. Seeing the whole picture is essential to forming a good perspective to the Old Testament.

Activity 1: Psalms 2 and 110. Analyze these psalms for their theological content. They speak of God's anointed in the context of covenant. Those who oppose God's "anointed," oppose God. Follow the activity procedure.

Activity 2: Psalms 8 and 100. What do these Psalms say about God? How does God interact with his universe, particularly with mankind? What role does nature play in Israel's praise? Is it Nature or the Exodus that provides the focus of Israel's call to covenant loyalty?

Activity 3: Psalm 13. This psalm is a lament. What does it teach you about how man may approach God and what he may expect God to do? Notice carefully the various components of the lament: address, complaint, petition, confidence, and praise.

b. Wisdom. "Wisdom" is commonly associated with common sense judgment that is based on human knowledge and experience. While we would like to think that this discernment is fool-proof, as long as it originates out of the human mind and experience, it risks being flawed. Giving attention to human wisdom is essential for survival. Indeed, in many contexts, it is sound advice and should be heeded. Much of the wisdom found in the Bible shows remarkable similarity to that discovered by mankind. The difference, however, is that the wisdom found in the Bible testifies to a higher source than human tradition. For example, the Book of Job is considered wisdom literature. It is filled with traditional Arab wisdom. Job's would-be consolers attempt to answer Job's question about why he is suffering. The general conclusion is that it is due to his sinfulness. Even today, Islam bases its conclusions about God, Jesus, and man on the same traditional wisdom. God silenced both the advocates of this traditional wisdom and Job himself with divine wisdom. In the ultimate sense, divine wisdom lies above human wisdom, leaving man with one practical option—faith. Biblical wisdom is the standard by which all other wisdom is judged. It is trustworthy when other would-be wise pronouncements are skewed.

Wisdom may be conceived in at least three distinct ways. One designates "wisdom" as a body of literature that contains "right thinking"; Ecclesiastes fits into this category. A second recognizes pithy sayings that express truth in a general ways, as do individual proverbs. A third is the conclusion to a symphonic presentation, as the book of Job. Hence, wisdom presents itself in a number of forms. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job are the most recognizable, but wisdom in scripture is not limited to three unique compositions. The activity below introduces biblical wisdom literature.

Activity 1: Job 4. Job makes it clear that not all "wisdom" is well-founded. Follow the activity procedure and examine the "wisdom" offered by Eliphaz. Note that Job's character and condition have been described and he has just delivered his opening speech. Write on paper areas where Eliphaz appears to be wrong. Give special attention to verse 7. How do you understand Eliphaz' statement in verse 17? Do general principles apply to every human situation?

Activity 2: Proverbs 8. Here, wisdom is personified. It takes the form of a person who speaks from experience and understanding. Some questions you may wish to raise when looking at this proverb are,

What is the relationship between wisdom and God? What counsel does wisdom offer? How does one become wise? Follow the activity procedure outlined in Activity 1 and see what you can discover.

Activity 3: Ecclesiastes 12. Ecclesiastes must be read in its entirety for one to appreciate its wisdom. Its premise is that the path pursued by many people yields no permanent value. Neither the pursuit of pleasure nor storing goods will last. Life must be lived in view of its purpose. Comprehending that purpose is wisdom. Follow the activity procedure as you look at the concluding chapter.

Doing theology. Considering the context is always important—yea, it is essential if one's conclusions are valid. The same is true with respect to personal perspective. Take a special look at Ecclesiastes. Younger minds tend to see the book as depressing and a hindrance to happiness; seniors see it as a superbly drafted piece that maps out the way to a purposeful life. Identify those areas in your own life where you have followed a more foolish path, and then contemplate what is needed for a more blissful end.

c. Others. In addition to Psalms and wisdom literature, The Writings include books where narrative is the dominant form and where historical writing appears as the leading feature. Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ruth, Esther, and Daniel raise theological questions of their own. What is the function of each? What are their unique messages? For example, what is so special about Chronicles since the "history" of the kingdom period is detailed in Kings?

Activity: 1 Chronicles 16-17. Note that in the reign of David, God made a promise which would prove to be important in the post-exilic period. Looking beyond the exile, the establishment of David's "house" would have further significance in the person of Jesus. Follow the activity procedure and draft your own questions about the noteworthiness of the exchange between David and God.

Activity 2: Ezra 9-10. During the post-exilic period, Israel again grew lax in her relationship with God. She needed to hear the call for repentance, confession, and specific action. The episode recorded reveals but one occasion when the people were summoned in a powerful way. Both the summons and the response of the people are important in the pursuit of covenant loyalty. Follow the activity procedure.

Activity 3: Esther. Esther has all the appearance of a short story with a happy ending. Its setting is the Persian court. A sinister plot against Israel ends with Israel's security against an evil attack. A special holiday is established. What is "theological" about the book of Esther? Follow the activity procedure when analyzing the book.

Doing theology. Drawing practical application from the books in this section will be different from what you did in the preceding with Psalms and wisdom literature. However, this is what makes the Hebrew Scriptures so rich. A major question to consider is, How does God work in the world today?

We start with a caution. Since God was working through Israel to bring to fulfillment a promise he made to Abraham one and one-half millennia earlier, he had special reason to restore Israel and to protect the remnant. With that promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ, does he continue to function in a similar way today? What evidence do you have either way? We want to believe God continues to work in the interest of those who have faith in him. But Jesus also taught that the righteous will suffer for their faith.

Again, is there any reason to think that God does not work through historical events to judge wicked nations as he did in the past? Here, the easy answer may be, Yes, he appears to do so! But the more difficult part is to identify specific acts as the direct result of God's judgments. We are forced to understand physical phenomena as natural events without a specific divine judgment or blessing being attached to them. Theology is about reflecting on God, human behavior, and natural events. The end result should be to trust God in those areas we cannot fathom. We will not be justified if we overstep our bounds and draw unsupported conclusions. So, be careful.

MODULE 2 Themes in the Old Testament

The Old Testament offers a consistent message. Its stories, psalms, wisdom, and prophecy harmonize. They all come together to form a larger picture about God and his world, as themes are interwoven in the diverse literary compositions.

When reading the Old Testament, one will notice that a person, event, or situation is introduced, only to be picked up later. There may appear to be no connection between an item and the surrounding text. At least, the person or event may appear inconsequential to the larger story being told. Later, however, a connection may be established as a theme develops.

Here is an example. When the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar, appears in Genesis 38, it interrupts the story of Joseph. A union takes place between Judah and Tamar, a son is born, and the name of the son is given--Perez (Gen. 38:29). Perez is further mentioned as having accompanied his father when the family moved to Egypt (Gen. 46:12). Later, Perez is the head of a clan (Num. 26:20-21). References to Judah's family seem incidental to the text. But, in Ruth 4:18-22, Perez becomes the link to King David. The Chronicler, who labors to establish the line of David, lists Perez (1 Chron. 2:4-5). Perez appears a few additional times in the Old Testament, but the most telling reference is in the New Testament, where the genealogy of Jesus is traced from Abraham to David through Perez (Matt. 1:3). The significance of the name rests only with its linkage to persons who held a special place in the story that led to David and then to Jesus.

David was the king whose "house" God promised to establish. The reference is to his kingship, which would continue as an everlasting one (2 Sam. 7:4-16). Whatever the reason for writing the book of Ruth, one cannot overlook the genealogy that comes at the close of the composition. The establishment of David's house emerges as a major event in Yahweh's activity--a watershed mark in God's dealing with mankind. He called Abram to leave Ur and made a covenant with him that would eventually offer hope to every family on earth. He revealed himself to Moses and made a covenant with Israel at Sinai. He established the kingdom of David and projected the reign of his Son, Jesus.

In this module, we shall explore major themes that appear in the Hebrew Scriptures. We have grouped them in three categories: (1) God's initiative, (2) God's provisions, and (3) God's invitation.

Unit 1. God's Initiative

The Old Testament begins with a declaration: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The description of the creation process leaves no doubt that the world as we know it came as a direct and purposed act of God. The act was not one left to chance, but was accomplished by the skill of a great designer who was capable of speaking the entire universe into existence. This is quite a contrast to modern theories of evolution that depend on blind chance.

The account of human formation informs us that the human species was constituted in the “likeness of God” himself. Although the text of Genesis does not explain the exact nature of that likeness, we may surmise from the New Testament that it had more to do with God’s character than with any physical likeness (cf. Eph. 4:24).

As for man's assignment to this time-bound earth, God set certain limitation on the human race so "men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him, and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:26-28). In spite of man's intellectual prowess and awareness of the wonders of the natural order, man does not always seek after God. But God goes farther than natural revelation. He accommodates man's search through special revelation as well.

God has always taken the initiative—whether through natural or special revelation. He does not leave man to his own limited capacity or to his feeble efforts. The whole tenor of the Bible points to what God has done for man, both in prospect and promise and what God accomplished in Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament is therefore less the story of man's search for God and more a story of God's initiative to draw man to himself. Man's tendency is to push away from God, or, at best, to treat God as a force to be appeased for self-centered reasons. If you read the Hebrew Scriptures as a record of the Jewisheffort to find God, you will surely come short of their function. These scriptures are of universal importance, not because they describe Israel's journey to monotheism, but because they inform us of God's relentless pursuit of man and man's ungrateful response.

In this unit, three topics are pursued. These are (a) The self-revelation of God, (b) The nature of God, and (c) Yahweh's purpose.

a. The self-revelation of God. To deal with the Old Testament is to deal with God. Who is he? What does he do? These are questions of universal interest. Students of scripture recognize the God revealed in the Old Testament as the world's only God. He is not only the God of Israel; he is the God who revealed himself especially to Israel at a time when peoples of the earth had adopted other objects of worship.

Read and study carefully the following biblical texts: Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1; 17:1-8; 28:13; Exod. 3; 6:1-2; 19:3; 20:1-2; 33:18-23; 34:5-10. Genesis 12 introduces Abram (later to be known as Abraham). It is not his heritage that is important but God's direction and promise to him. First, God told him, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land that I will show you" (v. 1). It is here (in Canaan) that God will raise up a nation of his descendants and bless them (vv. 2-3a). Note that some of the promise relates to Abram's descendants, but in the close of v. 3, God states, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

In the second and third passage (15:1 and 17:1-8), the promise of blessing is reaffirmed. Here, the land of Canaan is promised as a place for Abraham's descendants. The land promise is reaffirmed in 28:13. The book of Exodus extends the story by detailing how God blessed Abraham's descendants, even through four centuries of enslavement in Egypt. From thence, he delivered them and constituted them as his special people. At Sinai, Yahweh made a covenant with Israel and then, forty years later, led them to the land he swore to give them.

In the process of making a promise, God began to reveal his intentions that would eventually lead to a blessing for all peoples. The revelation was self-directed. The Israelites did not find God; he found them. They were not rewarded for their goodness; God chose them in spite of their shortcomings.

b. The nature of God. The Bible notes various media connected with reference to God's self-revelation. It employs anthropomorphisms (features common to man, like speaking, touching, feeling) with reference to God's character and activity. Hence, God in his unique way, shares our world. He desires communion and relationship with humanity.

God is sometimes represented by a special angel of the Lord. We are introduced to the glory of God and the face of God. The Christian concept of God's revelation rises from texts such as these and differs significantly from that of other religions.

The understanding of the ***nature of God*** is drawn from texts which present him as (1) personal, (2) spirit, and (3) one. Yet, God cannot be reduced to simple abstractions. The revelation provides insight into ***the character and activity of God*****.** Attributes belonging to him include (1) power, (2) holiness, (3) righteousness, and (4) mercy and love. Together, these attributes blend to present a wholesome portrait of God.

God's name is not some simple magical formula for obtaining a blessing or uttering a curse. Rather, God's name reveals his person. The Name and terms of designation stress his presence among his people without visible form or representation. The nature of God is found in his self-revelation, not in human speculation. His acts in history punctuate his authority and will, his hopes and desires, his pleasure and displeasure for his creation.

Your task of discovery continues as you search the Old Testament with the view of forming a composite portrait in your mind of the "nature" of God. It is this nature that prepares us best to have a relationship with him. Some see the God as portrayed in the Hebrew texts as being revengeful and inconsiderate of the value of human life. But those texts that record his call for war testify to God as a God of justice and righteousness. When people flagrantly disavow his just rule in the universe, God executes judgment. in accord with his righteous nature, but not without grief and good will toward those who revere him (cf. Gen. 6:5-18; Jonah 4). If one reads the entire Old Testament, one cannot escape notice of a composite view of God as loving, caring, holy, merciful, just, omnipotent, ever present, and trustworthy.

c. Yahweh's purpose. Yahweh's purpose is the primary thrust of the Hebrew Scriptures. The creation narrative shows why God felt it necessary to reveal himself in history. The various stories developed in the opening chapters of Genesis demonstrate the condition of mankind. The call of Abram reveals how God chose a particular man through whom he would eventually fulfill his redeeming work through Jesus Christ.

The frame of reference for understanding Yahweh's purpose is Exod. 5:22-6:8. This text reveals how God acted upon his purpose to bring the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob out of Egyptian slavery in order to fulfill his promise to build a nation that would witness to his presence in the world. After describing God's commission to Moses, the text proceeds to reveal the personal name of God, Yahweh, by which he would henceforth be known to Israel. Yahweh's acts of judgment upon the idolatrous Egyptians would result in recognition of the real God of the world.

The creation narrative. The pivotal text of Exodus 5 will take on fuller meaning when it is seen against an historical background. That background begins with the creation narrative (Genesis 1-2). Without note as to time, except to say, "In the beginning," the author presents an account of creation that leads to one conclusion: One God has created the universe and all life in an ordered fashion.

Although Genesis 2 covers some of the same ground as Genesis 1, Genesis 1 presents a quick, ordered account of the entire creation. Genesis 2 informs the reader that the author is concerned only with one day of creation and with one element of that one day--mankind. Furthermore, the chapters that follow carry this interest forward, detailing only the occasion of sin, the consequences of sin, and God's initiative to deal with it. Chapters 1 and 2 are not rival accounts derived from different sources. They manifest a literary means for identifying those matters which are of premier concern to the author of Genesis. To attempt to explain original sources is irrelevant. Review Genesis 1-2.

The Old Testament pronounces the created order as "good." This implies that creation is directed by God to fulfill his goals. The created order is intended to glorify God, which it does through normal processes (plant life, animal life, sea life, space objects) and through reflecting the image of God in the human experience.

The Babylonians had a creation story which differed in significant particulars from the biblical account. The people of Babylon had a lesser god (idol) whom they wanted to increase in power and reputation. So, their story represents the elevating of a god who could become greater than other gods

through his creative acts. To read the Babylonian account against its background helps one see the contrasts and appreciate the biblical account.

The focus on Abraham. In the text of Genesis 3-11, the author relates four stories: (1) the sin of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), (2) the contrasts between Cain and Abel (Genesis 4), (3) the judgment/salvation of the world in the days of Noah (Genesis 6-9), and (4) the rebellious nature of man at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). The stories are tied together through genealogies. From these stories, one is able to discover the intent of God for mankind, the role of Satan, the consequences of self-seeking, and the determination of God to offer mankind redemption. The four stories lead to the call of Abram. Review Genesis 1-11.

Abram was a descendant of Noah through Shem. He lived in Ur, ancient Babylonia. God called him to leave his idolatrous city and go to a place he would show him--Canaan. God promised Abram (1) his descendants would become a great nation, (2) he would give him a great reputation, (3) he would bless him and oppose those who opposed him, and that one day (4) all the families of the earth would be blessed through him. From this point forward, the biblical text describes how these promises came true. The last promise prefigured the coming of Jesus (see Gal. 3:8-9). Review Gen. 12:1-3.

God's promise to Abraham was renewed to his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. Even though Abraham's granddaughter-in-law was pregnant with twins, only one became the progenitor of the nation God promised would come out of Abraham. The names of the twins were Esau and Jacob. Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel, became the forefather of Israel (the Jews). The text makes it clear that the choice was God's. The choice here had nothing to do with either man's personal salvation. The choice concerned God's actions in building a nation. That nation would become God's witness to an ancient pagan world and become the forbearers of Jesus. Romans 9 further clarifies the sovereign will of God in the matter of preparing a people to fulfill God's purpose. Review Gen. 25:19-23 and Romans 9.

Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, was favored by his father and despised by his older half-brothers. One reason he was despised was that his dreams anticipated a day when the parents and older brothers would bow down to him. The older brothers sold Joseph to a group of slave-traders who resold him to an officer in Egypt. The story shows how, eventually, God revealed to Joseph the meaning of a dream of Pharaoh (the king) of Egypt. Joseph was appointed second in charge and given responsibility for preparing for a seven-year famine. It was this famine that led Jacob's family into Egypt under the protection of Joseph. Over the next four centuries, a change in dynasty would occur in Egypt, the Israelites would multiply in number, and the Egyptians would enslave them. Review Genesis 37-50; see especially 50:19-20).

As the New Testament writer, Paul, develops the Ephesian letter, he declares that God has been at work in his world to create a holy community. Through Abraham and his descendants, he provides blessings through Jesus to all who express faith in Jesus, the promised Messiah. God has acted according to his own will and pleasure in providing spiritual redemption. Those who respond to his act of mercy and grace live to God's praise. Review Eph. 1:3-14.

Unit 2. God's Provisions

Creation, history, and God's continuing relationship with his creation are all related.Common sense dictates a connection. But in the modern world, the elements easily become separated. While few may outright deny the existence of God—if we understand God in vague terms—he is less often thought of as the “creator” and “sustainer” of the universe. Moderns treat the coming into existence of the universe as something that is “natural,” something that is traceable to a phenomenon that has no or little connection with God. That, in effect, leaves God out of the process. If that is the case, then how could one imagine that God has entered into a universe not of his making? By excluding him from creation, how could “God”

have any effect upon the world—even if he wished to do so? Exclusion means he is not sovereign. He is limited to the non-physical at best. And if a purposed creation is denied, what does that say about special revelation? How could God love something he did not make and over which he has no control? Why would it be reasonable to think that God now provides for humanity when he has been removed from the natural world? If the secular model separates God from creation, it also separates him from any involvement with it. It is certainly unlikely that he influences history, exercising blessing and judgment. It leaves no room for the incarnation of Christ and no basis for hope beyond what a heartless "natural" order may send our way.

The overall interest of this unit is to establish how praise to God for his creation relates to praise to God for Israel's creation as a special people. We have organized the unit into three sub-headings: (a) Creation and providence, (b) Covenant and law, and (c) Salvation as deliverance.

a. Creation and providence. The center piece of theology is God. The Bible affirms that he is the creator of the universe, and this includes man. Man is a special species in this creation, with a nature unique among the creatures. Likewise, the act of sin and its consequences are peculiar to mankind. The basic question to be asked does not relate to the existence of God or to the origin of evil. From a human perspective, the most pressing issue at hand pertains to what man is to do in the face of evil. The world stands as it does. Humans cannot remake it. And they cannot redeem themselves when they sin.

Although not as prominent in the Old Testament as in the New, God's Spirit was at work in the world, both in creation and in prophecy. In prophecy, the revelation of God entails specific messages, which the Spirit inspired. Mention of the Spirit indicates that God has not left the universe to run on its own. Neither has he neglected man, whom he made in his own image.

The idea of God's continuing relationship with creation is critical to Old Testament theology. Did he create and abandon? Or, did he involve himself in human affairs in ancient times? How did God show his concern? What has all this to do with us in the present time?

This is a world of suffering, anxiety, and dashed hopes. We may ask, Why? But that is an inappropriate question. The answer belongs to God. We should not presume that God can be prompted to remove all this for one of his servants. On the other hand, God is not limited in what he can and will do in human affairs.

God's relationship with his creation is not always understood or appreciated. But that is the difference between God and man. God's role is sustainer; man's role is to trust him. We affirm the fact of God's providence, although we cannot explain it. We are not always able to know when he has acted in a special, personal way, and when he has not.

b. Covenant and law. Central to the idea of a spiritual relationship between God and man is the covenant. Closely associated with covenant is law.

The covenant formula and expectation of loyalty. Read Exod. 19:3-8 carefully. Note the setting: the people of Israel gathered at Mt. Sinai following the Exodus. Yahweh reminded Israel of what he had done for them—he brought them out of Egypt. He promised that if they would obey him and keep his covenant, they would be his treasured possession. He further added he would make them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The covenant formula is, "I shall be your God, and you shall be my people." The right response for Israel was loyalty.

In the ancient East, there already existed two basic types of covenant: suzerain and parity. The *suzerain* covenant was the kind that a strong, aggressive nation would put on a vassal. The stronger nation would overtake the defenseless one. The document drawn to mark the occasion included (1) a preamble, to identify the persons of the treaty, (2) an historical prologue, to review the relationship of the two parties, (3) basic stipulations, to detail what each party would do for the other, (4) a call to the gods to witness the

covenant, (5) notation of blessings that would accrue from the arrangement, and (6) specific mention of the curses that would attend the weaker party if the covenant were broken.

The *parity* covenant is one made between two parties of equal status. Here one would expect bargaining and negotiating. While Yahweh's covenant with Israel is certainly not a parity covenant, it is not exactly a suzerain covenant either. However, the language of Exodus 19 is similar to that of the suzerain covenant.

The covenant community. For Israel, the law was an expression of the covenant. Law formed the basis of community life. It shaped community life to reflect God's character and intent for humanity. The Ten Commandments, or Ten Words from the Hebrew perspective, outline the basic moral requirements for Israel. The Ten Words function much like a prologue. They serve as a wonderful introduction to the fuller legal code that follows. Note the substance of the Ten Words in Exodus 20.

Exodus 24 speaks of the confirmation of the covenant. The covenant was sealed with blood. Review Exodus 24.

The covenant Yahweh made with the first generation of Israelites needed renewing with successive generations. Once Israel reached the "sworn land," the new generation was instructed to renew the covenant. And then, at the end of Joshua's day, another covenant renewal took place. Read Deuteronomy 29; Josh. 8:30-35; 24).

Covenant and institutions. Provisions for a king in Israel were made in The Torah. Of course, Yahweh is the king, as dramatically portrayed in the Song of Moses (Exodus 15). So, when he prescribed behavior for the future king of Israel, he expected that king to rule in his interest. The king was forbidden to multiply wives, wealth, and horses. These would either carry him into idolatry (wives), self-indulgence and a sense of self-sufficiency (wealth), or false reliance on his own strength (horses for warfare). He was to have a copy of the torah and lead the people in worship of Yahweh. See Deut. 17:14-20.

The occasion for Israel's receiving a king was Israel's desire to fight against their enemies with a "king" like the nations around them. Their motives were wrong, yet Yahweh honored their request with a choice of his own. Saul's anointing demonstrated the perils of faithlessness. See again 1 Samuel 8.

Something special happened between Yahweh and King David. David wanted to build a temple for Yahweh, but Yahweh refused to allow it. A temple would be built by his son Solomon, but not by David. Instead, Yahweh promised to build David's house, meaning a lasting kingship. Never in the history of Israel (Judah) would there fail to be a king of David's line. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C.E., the king was a descendant of David. Jesus, too, is of the lineage of David. He is the rightful king of Israel. See 2 Sam. l 7:8-16.

The task of the prophets was mainly to bring Israel and Judah back to covenant loyalty. Yahweh is a patient God, but he does act at such time as he deems necessary to bring his people to a vital realization of his presence. The prophets called and called and called Israel to repent, to return to their God. Then they pronounced their plight in the event they would not respond. They foretold of plagues and enemies. The prophets' predictions were often conditional and acted as incentives toward right action. They eventually projected the exile, first of Israel, then of Judah. Beyond the exile, they spoke of the return from exile and the eventual coming of Jesus. The prophets' ethics are part of God's redemptive activity because of the emphasis on inner attitudes. The prophets shared with the priests the responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the community.

c. Salvation as deliverance. In the contemporary setting, "salvation" is usually taken to imply heaven. Certainly, from a New Testament perspective, heaven is the final reality and "salvation" from sins through Jesus Christ is necessary to escape hell. However, from an Old Testament perspective, and from the perspective of this course, the theme "salvation" carries a wider and somewhat different

meaning. It is the theme of "deliverance" that catches our attention. For Israel, God "saves" by delivering her from calamity; he rescues her from evil. He "blesses" her through continually sustaining her life and ensuring her well-being.

When Yahweh revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush in Sinai, Moses reluctantly returned to Egypt to secure Israel's release from Pharaoh (Exodus 3-4). Having met with rebuff, Moses asked, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people" Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all? (Exod. 5:22-23). Yahweh responded, "I am Yahweh. . . . I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan . . . , I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. . . . I am Yahweh and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am Yahweh your God" (Exod. 6:2-7).

When Israel was delivered from Egypt, the people praised Yahweh for his deeds. The "Song of Moses" and the "Song of Miriam" (Exod. 15:1-21) celebrate the event as Yahweh is pictured as the warrior who triumphed over Pharaoh's army. Israel's proper response to Yahweh for his act of salvation was praise and loyalty. Salvation language during the latter kings included both the idea of a messianic visitation and a threat of judgment.

Sacrifice. The salvation theme is connected with sacrifice, for this was a means by which God was to be approached. God was worshiped by sacrifice from the earliest times--by Cain and Abel, by Noah, and by Abraham. It is not surprising that when the covenant was made with Israel at Sinai, sacrifice was part of it. Through sacrifice man approached God for a number of reasons. The principle reason may have been in view of the forgiveness of sins, but Leviticus makes it clear that sacrifice was offer in thanksgiving, in fulfillment of a vow, and in a manner of free will.

Specific sacrifices included the burnt offering, which was totally consumed; the grain offering, which usually accompanied another offering; the fellowship offering, which is otherwise known as a "peace" offering; the sin offering; and the guilt offering, which required restitution to the injured person. Sacrifices required healthy, unblemished animals drawn from cows, sheep, goats, doves, pigeons, or grain. Review Lev. 1:1-6:7.

The central idea of sacrifice carries a host of important benefits. In sacrifice, sin is covered and the person is restored to the favor of God through substitutional atonement. In none of these does the idea of appeasement appear, where the worshiper is motivated to seek God's favor for self-centered interests.

Israel's responsibility. Once Israel entered Canaan, the people began their routines as a settled people. As time passed, a generation of people forgot Yahweh and became disloyal to him. They became indifferent to their responsibilities, cheated one another, stole their neighbor's land, worshiped idols, and engaged in a host of other unholy acts. As a result, Yahweh allowed enemies to encroach upon their land, trample and steal their produce, and harass them. Under oppression, Israel would cry to God and he responded by raising up a "savior." This savior is also known to us as a "judge." In all probability, he was both a deliverer of Israel from her enemies (an army general) and a judge. As a leader of the people, it would be natural for him to settle disputes. Deborah, the only woman judge known to us, carried out the duties of a judge before she became a "savior" of Israel from the hands of the Canaanites. Review Judges 4, 6-8.

Prophets were called upon to surrender their own comforts and carry out their missions in unique ways. One such prophet was Hosea. Told by God to marry a woman of unfaithfulness and name his three children Jezreel, Not Loved, and Not My People, Hosea's family became a living message. The prophet and his family symbolized Israel's unfaithfulness and God's unending love for her, his bride. Look carefully at the opening of Hosea and Hosea 2:14-23.

Israel had come to expect that Yahweh would come to her rescue whenever she was oppressed by her enemies. Israel believed she was Yahweh's chosen bride and that behavior made no difference. Israel took Yahweh's love for granted. Consequently, Israel expected the Day of Yahweh (Day of the Lord) to be a day of salvation, a day of blessing, a day of rejoicing over the downfall of her enemies. However, because Israel was disloyal to her covenant with Yahweh, Israel's attitude produced the opposite effect. The Day of Yahweh would be a bitter day for Israel. It would be a day of judgment when Yahweh would punish Israel for her sins. Review Joel; Amos 5:18-27; Zeph. 1:14-18).

Unit 3. God's Invitation

God's relationship with man is not a one-way street. God is not like the pagan gods, who can be captured by abstinence and sacrifice. Pagan gods are barraged constantly by requests and demands. They hold respect merely because of their supposed power to grant selfish blessings or to cause evil. Yahweh, on the other hand, expects those in covenant relationship to respond to his presence much as a son is expected to respond to his father.

God is not a power waiting to be discovered. Rather, it is he who finds man. One does not approach God as though he is an evil spirit needing to be appeased, or a God who is waiting to be begged for a blessing. God has taken the initiative and invites the human race to turn toward him for fellowship.

God's invitation comes in two forms: natural revelation and special revelation. Men see the evidence for God's being and character through the created order. But God draws man to himself, offering insight and opportunity through special revelation. That special revelation is found first in various ways, but recorded in scripture. Ultimately and finally, God has disclosed himself in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As men are drawn to faith in the Christ, they act upon the Creator's invitation and find righteousness that is otherwise unobtainable.

The Old Testament does not go so far to inform us of the righteousness God makes possible in Christ. But biblical narrative demonstrates God's concern for that which he consciously crafted after his own image. He walked in the Garden with Adam. He judged an unrighteous world in the Flood but saved righteous Noah. He scattered the people at Babel. The call of Abraham was by God's initiative. Likewise, the formation of Israel into a holy nation was by divine design and action.

The unit is divided into three parts. These are (a) The possibility of response, (b) Worship and piety, and (c) Knowing God.

a. The possibility of response. A fundamental principle of the Bible is that God can be known and can be approached. This does not imply that God can be totally comprehended by the human mind. Neither does it imply that God can be brought to the level of created objects.

Moses wanted to see God's glory. That is, he desired to behold something of God that humans were unprepared to encounter in full display. Exod. 33:12-23 indicates something of the distance between man and God. Yet, God is not wholly removed from man, for man is made in "the image of God."

Read Gen. 1:26-27. Then read Eph. 4:22-24. Man and woman share with animal and plant life much of the natural order. Yet, they differ in the spiritual realm. They are the crown of creation; they are the object of God's special attention. Humans were created to give praise to God in a conscious and willful manner and find their ultimate goal in offering praise to their creator and lover. Made in the "image" of God, they share his likeness.

While the "image" of God is not removed from man in the sin of Adam and Eve, its brightness may have

been diminished. There is no reference to a “fall” or depraved nature. but in Jesus Christ, man is renewed in God's image, where he is made to be like God in righteousness and holiness.

Since God is the maker of all people, he has always been approachable by all—and all have been held fully responsibility for the way they respond to God. In Acts, the apostle Paul indicates that the manner of creation causes man to search for God (Acts 17:26-28). It that pursuit, man often denies what is evident—that he is not a deity subject to human whelms. Furthermore, when men forsake what they know in their conscience to be right and behave as animals, they find themselves alienated from God (Rom. 1:21-32). This is the story of the ancient world. Casual references reinforce the status of man (cf. Gen. 6:1-2; 11:1-9. Many references are made to wicked people upon God sends judgment). Yet, it is God who is at work to bring reconciliation. Hence, he called Abraham and made a covenant with Israel. The choice of Israel did not shut other people out; it confirmed that God was inviting people into spiritual union with him. There is nothing in the Old Testament to suggest that God prohibited anyone from approaching him, if he/she came with good motives.

b. Worship and piety. When Yahweh called Israel into covenant relationship, he expected worship that fulfilled an essential function for the community. He also anticipated behavior in keeping with the ideals of a community that had been set apart. God defined each of these, for mankind has demonstrated a lack of self-sufficiency in this regard.

Worship ritual honored *God* by recognizing him for who he is and for what he had done for Israel. He created the world, delivered Israel from Egypt, sustained the Hebrews in the desert, gave them a land, and protected them from their enemies. Worship served *the people of Israel* by providing a means to spiritual renewal.

Ritual took the form of sacrifice, festivals, and circumcision. These were not without prescribed form. They included sacred places, sacred times, and sacred acts.

Coincidental to worship are the character of piety and its expression--devotion, reverence, and affection. The expectant life was defined primarily in terms of attitudes and actions toward one's fellows.

Moral standards revealed by God to Israel showed similarity to known moral codes. Supposedly, they all took their meaning from God himself. They were enacted for man’s well-being. The ethical standard did not produce holiness, but it did describe holiness. Ethical behavior became a means by which one reflected the holiness of God (“Be holy as I am holy,” Lev. 20:26). Since God is the source of righteousness, it is only natural that he should reveal to man how to conduct his affairs.

As in the New Testament, piety was a heart response. This response embraced one's entire life, being motivated by God's character and acts. It expressed itself in the moral life of the community, each of whom expected to reflect their Creator’s being.

The faith to which Israel was called implied Israel knew their God. But it was more than a mental condition, for Israel often failed to “know” God in an intimate sense (Hos. 4:6). Faith was a practical, experiential awareness of God. It led to a voluntary commitment to him and to his purposes.

c. Knowing God. God intended for mankind to live in close relationship with him, a relationship whereby man would "know" him.

Read Exod. 6:7 carefully. The word "know" can take on several meanings: having information in mind, a skill (knowing how to do something), understanding (comprehension), personal acquaintance (as with a friend), knowing of someone (as one knows a famous person), intimate insight (as one knows what another would or would not do), sexual relations, knowing by experience (as with an illness), and ethical decision (knowing what choice to make). When used in Scripture for the God-man relationship, to "know"

God embraces an intimate walk with him and involves the total person. Information alone is not the knowledge of which Scripture speaks when it refers to knowing God.

Knowing God in the larger world. The universe of physical and animate objects attests to the glory of God. The celestial bodies, physical elements, and life forms are part of that grand witness. Read Genesis 1; Job 37-39; Psa. 19:1-6; 89:1-13.

Knowing God through the event. There have been many events through which God has been known: casting Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, the Flood, the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan, the destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.E.), to name a few. For Israel, a most important event was the Exodus. There were the "signs" (plagues), but more importantly, Israel saw a God they could trust. Read Exodus 7-15.

Knowing God through the cult. "Cult" refers to those forms and acts ritually performed in a worship setting where people deal with deity. The word "cult" embraces public prayer, sacrifice, song, and ritual structures such as tabernacles, temples, and priests (Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design,* p. 91). Thus, man knows God through the cult, that is, through the institution and structures of worship. Note Exodus 29:44-45.

The prophet Hosea declared to wicked Israel that there was no faithfulness, no love, and no acknowledgment of God in the land. Instead, cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery abounded. Truly, the people had no "knowledge" of God and faced exile. Read Hosea 4.

Psalm 9:10 states it well: Those who know Yahweh trust in him; he never forsakes those who seek him. What does it mean to "trust" God? What is implied in the idea that God never forsakes us?

The human being is limited by his Creator. There is much he does not know or understand about this world. Oh, how much he does not understand about the Creator and his ways! To "know" God is to allow him to be God and act as he pleases and be assured he is always right. Read Job 42:1-6. Neither his thoughts nor his ways are ours (Isa. 55:8).

Knowing God entails "waiting" for him to act (Isaiah 30:18). It is the opposite of taking matters into one's own hands. The principle is illustrated in Isaiah 36-37.

Knowing God demands a right attitude of heart (Jer. 24:7). He will not make you love him. But he will provide opportunity. God is said to have promised Israel to give her a new heart, but that hardly means he would do so against her will.

The Scriptures make it clear that to "know" God is to defend the cause of the disadvantaged and the defenseless. King Jehoahaz was condemned because he enjoyed personal luxuries at the expense of the poor. His father, King Josiah, had demonstrated a kind of righteousness that was absent in Jehoahaz. Jehoahaz needed to realize that luxury did not make one a king--only righteousness could do that. See Jer. 22:11-17. Jeremiah would also speak of a time when God would establish a new covenant with his people that would involve placing the law in the heart and include forgiveness of sins for both Jews and Gentiles (Jeremiah 31).

The prophet Habakkuk (active 609-597 B.C.E.) struggled with the question of right, even-handed divine retribution. Why does God not act against evil? Why does it take him so long to do so? How can God use evil people to afflict people who are less evil? In the end, Habakkuk realized that God is always righteous in his acts.

Those who "know" God will identify with right and stand against evil. This is easier when an "enforcer" of evil is not nearby. Resisting, not compromising, is what distinguishes God's man/woman. See Dan. 11:32.

God is a refuge. He is my strength. So why fear? This earth is insecure. Nations and businesses fail. People disappoint and let you down. Only God is ever dependable. Pause and know that he is God! Read Psalm 46.

MODULE 3 Messianic Themes

The final module focuses on the future which the Hebrew Scriptures anticipate. Whereas most of the Old Testament is concerned with Israel's occupation of Canaan, the Scriptures do look forward to a period when Yahweh's blessings are extended to Gentiles the world over.

Gentiles and Jews have always been responsible to God for their conduct. But through his covenant with Israel, God revealed himself in a concrete manner. He showed himself to a world that had either corrupted the worship of Yahweh with pagan rituals or had ignored Yahweh altogether. On the surface, one might conclude that God rejected the non-Hebrew world. Not so. Because he cares for all of his creation, God demonstrated his person to them through his relationship with Israel. In one sense, Israel's encounter with God was designed to impress on Israel the unique experience of their God and lead them in righteous living. Then, in a special way, God used his selection of Israel to project great future blessings for both Jews and Gentiles.

As the apostle Paul noted in Romans, mankind demonstrated both an unwillingness and an inability to find justification for behavior before God. The Jews failed to keep the Law of Moses; the Gentiles failed to keep the law of conscience. Consequently, both fell under the condemnation of God due to their unrighteousness. Only God could provide a means to righteousness. And that was not to be done through either the Law of Moses or a law of conscience. It was to be done through a supreme sacrifice of the Son of God. Whether Jew or Gentile, redemption would work the same for both. So, the Hebrew Scriptures recorded various projections as to how this would be accomplished. Prophets often spoke of the coming of a messianic figure, the establishment of a new covenant, and God's future blessings. However, the specifics remained a "mystery" until after the ascension of Jesus.

If one focuses on Jesus and looks back into the Old Testament for connections, one will find major points of contact. Jesus is the climax of the Old Testament story; the Old Testament promise finds fulfillment; Jesus' identity, mission, and values are all projected within the Hebrew text.

The module is divided into three units. These are (1) Jesus and the Old Testament Story, (2) A New Covenant, and (3) Land.

Unit 1. Jesus and the Old Testament Story

A reading of the Old Testament without knowledge of the New leaves a rather disparaging situation. According to Malachi, the last book in the Hebrew Scriptures, Israel is still clinging to sinful practices. Their political future is uncertain. A messianic savior is nowhere to be found. But with the introduction of Jesus into the world, the Hebrew Scriptures take on new life and meaning.

The Greek Scriptures often make reference to the Hebrew Scriptures, quoting either from the Hebrew text or the Septuagint, the Greek translation. The purpose is to link events with past promises and prophecies. The word “fulfill” is generally employed with the idea of bringing to completion rather than simple fulfillment of a prediction. Jesus brings the Law of Moses to completion. The act of God in bringing his Son into the world is a matter of culminating an intention he had even prior to the creation of man.

If this assessment is correct, then the Old Testament is more than the story of an evolutionary development of Israel’s monotheistic belief. The Hebrew people were instrumental in God’s own revelation. These descendants of Abraham did not discover the One God, as they were reluctant to believe. God manifested himself to them so they could bear witness to his person and activity. His revelations always pointed forward to God’s activity in the larger world.

What the Old Testament says about the person, nature, and revelations of God is confirmed by the authors of the New Testament. There is no sense in which New Testament corrects the Old Testament. It is, rather, its extension. The Hebrew Scriptures provide the context for the authors of the Greek Scriptures. That context is enlarged and explained by Jesus and his apostles.

In this unit we shall examine briefly (a) messianic expectations, (b) Jesus as the climax of the Old Testament, and (c) Jesus’ mission and values. As you can see from the topics, the center of attention is Jesus. Remove Jesus from the New Testament and little is left. To accept the New Testament as part of the biblical canon is to recognize Christ as the fulfillment of God’s aspirations for his human creation.

a. Messianic expectations. "Messianic" expectations are those anticipations that pertain to the "anointed one." In Psalms 2, the Anointed One is the king of Israel, the one Yahweh appointed as his representative. The nations surrounding Israel might conspire against Israel, but they had no chance of succeeding against Yahweh's anointed. The writer of Hebrews brings forward this concept and applies it to Jesus. Jesus, as God's Messiah (Anointed One) has come from God to bring deliverance or salvation. To conspire against him will only bring defeat. Victory is in Jesus. Read Psalm 2 and Heb. 1:5.

Psalm 110 carries the Messianic expectations a step farther. Yahweh certainly has the Son, Jesus, in mind here, as both Acts and Hebrews confirm. Jesus is given reign over God's heritage. Furthermore, he is appointed a high priest, not after the order of Aaron but after the order of Melchizedek. The combination of the kingly and priestly roles in Jesus is very significant for the role Jesus plays in God's plan for human salvation/deliverance. Read Psalm 110:1 and Acts 2:34-35. Follow this by reading Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:14-21.

The Gospel of Matthew uses a fulfillment phrase to describe how Jesus is the completion of the Old Testament story. Throughout his ministry, Matthew saw connections with Israel's history. The Gospel introduces Jesus as a descendent of the Jews. The lineage of Jesus is traced from Abraham through King David. Indeed, the entire story of Israel works its way to Jesus, the promised Messiah. Jesus appeared as a real Jew, a real man, and the son of David. He appeared at the end of a long period of preparation and signals a new beginning.

Micah and Hosea provide the reader with some features of expectation about the Messiah which do not come into full view until one studies the Gospel of Matthew. The passages noted above may refer to occasions in Israelite history, but Matthew enriches the meaning as he makes application to the birth of Jesus and the family's exodus from Egypt. Understanding Matthew's fulfillment phrase becomes critical to an appreciation of Jesus as the Messiah, because it unveils the panorama of God's activity with Israel, from Abraham to Sinai to David to the New Covenant. Read Micah 5:2 and Matt. 2:6; Hosea 11:1-2 and Matt. 2:14-15; Isa. 40:3-5 and Luke 3:4-6; Zech. 9:9 and John 12:12-15.

The Jews had long nurtured aspirations for a coming messianic figure. Even specific titles had appeared--the Messiah, the Son of Man, and the Servant of the Lord. The mission of the Servant is treated from the

Old Testament witness, but it also has implications for the Gentiles and believers who live presently. In the Servant Songs (Isa. 52:13-53:12), Isaiah anticipated the coming of a "servant." The servant he projected was Jesus. Through the projection of a "suffering" servant, it is easy to see that God's concept of greatness was one of humility and loyalty.

Familiar New Testament phrases that identify Jesus draw on Old Testament pictures and patterns to shed light on the ultimate question, "Who is this Jesus?" Still left to ponder are other questions as well. What is the Old Testament background for the declaration, "This is my Son?" How is the Old Testament used in the New in relation to Jesus? How did Jesus think of himself in view of the Old Testament? Just as sonship was an important concept in describing Israel's relation to God, so it is woven into the language of the New Testament to depict the relation between God and Jesus.

b. Jesus is the climax to the Old Testament. The story of Jesus does not stand in isolation but in conclusion to a longer human history. If there were no connectivity between Jesus and historical events, he would be a mythological character. If there were no link with a specific group of people, he would have no meaning for anyone. If Jesus were just another human, he would have little to offer the world. Either he is who he said he was or he is a fraud. Either he has physical connection with Abraham, or he cannot be the one through the world is blessed. Either his genealogy is traceable to David, or he cannot be the promised messiah.

The Scriptures reveal the history of a people, who were uniquely chosen to introduce Jesus to the world. Through Israel's historical experience, mankind can see how God has acted in his world for the spiritual benefit of all mankind. God not only controlled Israel's history, but he allows the nations to participate in their history. So, the story of Jesus is not simply the story of a Jewish messiah; he is everybody's messiah.

One should not be surprised to find an expected turn of events with the introduction of Jesus and the unfolding mystery of God. Given the promises and projections found in the Old Testament, one should expect someone special to appear in Jewish history. The New Testament opens the Old Testament to a more glorious conclusion than could have ever been anticipated from the Old alone. Likewise, the experience of Old Testament life is affirmed through the disclosure that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

Jesus stands uniquely at the head of creation, as he participated in it. He stands at the climax of a long history of God's direct dealing with a people chosen to declare his glory to the world. He stands at the conclusion of the worldly order as the triumphant Christ.

c. Jesus' mission and values. Jesus stands at the head of a new history--a history of salvation. The mission of Jesus was to bring to conclusion the purposes of God relative to human redemption. He enters a world that is unaware of the seriousness of its plight. The world's citizens are groping to find God, but they are doing so in a manner that will not reward their efforts. The Jews are stuck on keeping outward demands of the Law of Moses, and the Gentiles are seeking appeasement through idols and traditional beliefs. Jesus enters the world as light shining in darkness. But the darkness seeks to shut him out. Not to be defeated in his task, he pursues divine wisdom, which puts human wisdom to shame. Even Satan's efforts are for naught. Jesus was true to his Father and accomplished his mission, despite Satan and men's efforts to deny him.

The mission of Jesus includes suffering, death, and resurrection—all of which seemed strange in that world. The Messiah was expected to live, not suffer and die. Many Jews and most Gentiles had no clear view of resurrection.

As to values, Jesus accented old virtues and exalted these above sacrifices and feast days. He identified two commands from the Hebrew Scriptures that captured the essence of human responsibility: love God and love your neighbor. Out of this would come the kind of behavior that is appropriate for one who is

chosen by God to live in holiness. The values Jesus taught were rooted in a relationship with God; these were intended to be maintained through faith, not through observing legal demands. He spoke of ideals that ran counter to the typical human response. Turning the other cheek and going the extra mile became higher virtues than retaliation or self-centeredness. Even loving one's enemies became a mark of discipleship.

When analyzing the values found in the Law of Moses, there are some differences, such as turning the other cheek as opposed to just retribution. However, the Law of Moses covered Israel's public life and so spelled out punishment for misbehavior. This is not to say that the Law gave man a right to inflict injury on an offender. The injunction belonged to the justice system for the protection of society much like civil law exists to protect modern people. Ideally, the Law of Moses expected individuals to act kindly toward their neighbors.

Unit 2. A New Covenant

Module 2 introduced the covenant concept and indicated the role that covenants played in the Old Testament. Indeed, the concept is primitive. Even the Bible describes a covenant between God and humankind in Noah's time (Genesis 9). Covenants continued to be formed among Israel's neighbors. The particular interest here is a "new" covenant brought into existence through Jesus Christ. This "new" covenant can be discussed only against the background of the "old" or "former" covenant Yahweh established with Israel at Sinai.

As the closing days of the kingdom of Judah approached, the prospect of a new covenant was announced by Jeremiah (31:31-34). This new covenant had a messianic connotation, which would see fulfillment in the appearance of a messiah figure. It would differ from the old in the emphasis placed on the writing of God's "laws" on the human heart. From the New Testament, however, we learn of another important difference. That dimension lies in the basis of justification or holiness. Whereas the former covenant assumed justification was attainable through obedience and animal blood, the new covenant emphasizes that justification is enabled by the grace of God and made possible by the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. We may concede that justification has always resided in the grace of God, but the reality pointed to the supreme act of Jesus' crucifixion.

If a covenant relationship between God and Israel was important in the past, it continues to be important in modern times. The covenant in effect is between God and the redeemed. It spells out the nature of the relationship between those who have been made righteous through the blood of Christ and the architect of their redemption. The covenant contains stipulations that define the life of the redeemed. God promises to save; man promises to be faithful.

The New Testament does not describe the making of a new covenant in the same manner it depicts how God entered into a covenant with Israel at Sinai. Yet, there is no doubt but that the idea of divine initiative and divine action are present in the crucifixion and proclamation that followed.

Even the two sections of the Christian Bible testify to two covenants—the Old Testament (covenant) and the New Testament. The book of Hebrews details the new covenant and points back to Jeremiah for the origin of the idea and of the ideals it embraced. While the Old Covenant intended for human response to come from the heart, the New Covenant is specifically identified in this manner. God writes his will upon the hearts of his people, and they respond out of a motivation of love rather than obligation. Individuals enter that covenant willfully and through personal faith, not through birth into an ethnic family.

a. Promise and covenants. The idea of "promise" in the Old Testament is more than wishful thinking or a casual remark. When Yahweh told Israel he would give them the land of Canaan, he "swore" to it by himself. God is the true measure of faithfulness. When he speaks, he is bound by his word to perform. No one is able to prevent it from happening.

Promise involves commitment to a relationship, a response of acceptance, and fulfillment. Even though a promise is binding, it may be attended by conditions. Or, it may be long in coming to fulfillment. God's promise to increase the descendants of Abraham was unconditional (Gen. 12:1-3). Abraham himself struggled with the promise, not having a son by his wife, Sarah. In this instance, it is not God, who is slack with his promise. It is Abraham, who cannot figure out how God is going to keep his word and feels he must help God out by having a son by Hagar. Promise asks for faith on the part of the recipient, but the recipient's faith has no effect on fulfillment unless conditions are attached. Hence, when God swore to give Canaan to Israel, he was bound to do it, for his own purposes were tied to it. However, there is a conditional element involved. When the twin kingdoms of Israel and Judah failed to respond to the prophetic calls for a return to Yahweh, many of their number were temporarily removed from the land. God needed only a remnant to execute his purposes. Those purposes that included blessing all nations through the descendants of Abraham were immutable. They did not depend upon Israel's faithfulness.

Covenants are themselves promises. The covenants with Noah, Abraham, and David, and the covenant at Sinai contain the promises of God regarding some particular. These covenants also point toward the activity of Jesus. These were upheld by a God who is always faithful, because he swears by himself. All these former covenants anticipated a new covenant, by which sins would be forgiven.

God's purposes were to be worked out through a coming king (Zech. 9:9). But who is this king and what is his function? The Gospel of John shows that God works in ways man does not expect. Man's expectations are out-of-reach of the average person. Man counts greatness differently from God. But it is God's values that count in the long run. God uses simple things to confound the wise as he makes salvation available to all--not on the basis of human accomplishment but on the basis of covenant loyalty. The Messiah himself appeared and behaved in ways the self-sufficient person could never appreciate. But to those who receive him, he gives the power to become the children of God.

b. A new covenant announced. Even while the Sinai covenant was in effect, Jeremiah announced that the day would come when Yahweh would establish a new covenant with his people. Jeremiah projects the kind of covenant that will become the basis of salvation in the days of the Messiah. See Jer. 31:13 and Matt. 2:17-18.

The projection of a new covenant raises several questions. What is this *new* covenant and how will it differ from the Sinai covenant? What does Israel's history reveal as the reason why a new covenant is needed? Compare the text of Jer. 11:1-13 with Jeremiah 31. See if you can work out the details of what God is projecting for the future.

The emphasis of Jesus on the motivations behind right action points backward to the real intent of the old covenant (cf. Micah 6:6-8) and forward to the requirements of the new covenant. Jesus equates anger with a brother with murder (Matt. 5:21-26). He puts lust on the same level as adultery (Matt. 5:27-30). He exchanges forbearance for retaliation (Matt. 5:28-42). And he substitutes love of an enemy for hatred (Matt. 5:43-47). The objective is to be like the Father (Matt. 5:48).

The *old* covenant was made with Israel at Sinai. The *new* covenant is with all who respond in faith to God's gracious redeeming act in Jesus Christ. The old covenant anticipated the coming of the new. The new covenant fulfills the old, because Christ brought it to completion. It is not just another covenant. It is not simply a Christian version of the old covenant.

Like the old covenant, the new covenant was initiated by God, who is the superior party. He set the terms. Because he is God, he is faithful to his covenant. Men can count on God in all circumstances. Man's part is to be faithful.

c. The new covenant a reality. The composite "New Testament" clearly presents the activity of Jesus Christ as the connecting link with the "new covenant." The book of Hebrews gives the most detailed analysis of the new covenant, although we should be aware of its imprint upon the remainder of the New Testament.

The same language used at Sinai with reference to Israel is found in the New Testament. As the covenant was being fashioned, Yahweh said, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5-6). This language is echoed in the New Testament, where through Christ men are built into “a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2 5). Christ is able to affect the action because he “gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:14). So, without specific mention of entering into a covenant with God at baptism, the idea is implied.

The accomplishments of the New Covenant make it final. This finality makes heretical the idea that Jesus will someday restore the Jewish temple or reinstitute elements of Jewish law. The temple and Law of Moses functioned until the incarnation of Jesus. These have been forever superseded. Christians themselves become the temple of God.

Activity. Study Hebrews 8 with a view toward discovering the reason for a new covenant and how it is attached to Jesus. Note also the implications for establishing a new covenant with respect to the priesthood of Jesus. Sacrificial animals are replaced forever by the death of Christ on the cross. The sacrifices offered by the Christian consist of a life that reflects the sentiment of the New Covenant, where his “law” is written on the heart (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

Unit 3. Land

Land, that is, geographical territory, was important to the promise God made to Abraham, because it was within an earthly territory that God intended to demonstrate his presence in the world. When God called Abram to leave Ur, the text leads us to assume that God did not reveal the destination, saying only, “Go to the land I will show you” (Gen. 12:1; Acts 7:3). In time, God would reveal to Abraham that the location would be Canaan. But the promise of a land grant was not realized for four centuries, not until Abraham’s descendants had multiplied sufficiently and Israel was led there by Yahweh.

When Israel arrived under Joshua’s leadership, the land of Canaan was occupied by many tribes. The impression given by scripture is that they practiced idolatry and were generally evil. God swore to give the land to Israel, knowing it was occupied legitimately by other people. But God, in his wisdom and justice, judged the original occupants unworthy to continue. He used Israel to execute his judgment on the various tribes—a proverbial seven nations. Here, instead of idolatrous people, God planted Israel. Israel, in turn was to be a beacon to the surrounding nations. They were called to worship Yahweh and him alone. This was not always the case, and God used, from time to time, Israel’s neighbors to afflict them in a measure of divine judgment. God’s actions against Israel even included exile of their leading citizens.

Propelled by messianic expectations, many in Israel began to nurture the possibility that a messiah would lead them to permanent political, social, and religious independence. Hence, the hope was that the land would be free of foreign domination. In spite of the fact that independence had been illusive since the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. (with the exception of a century between the testaments), the Jews looked for restoration of the kingdom of David. Assuming the land was a perpetual gift and that it was necessary to achieve the intentions of God, the land of Palestine remains a point of focus. But was it given to Israel in perpetuity, regardless of Israel's behavior?

The New Testament favors a spiritual kingdom where Jerusalem and Palestine would not be important to the purposes of God. This unit on land is included here because Palestine occupies such a prominent role in the Old Testament story. We shall look at (a) pivotal texts, (b) land as a gift: a loan or an unconditional right, and (c) the good life.

a. Pivotal texts. God's call to Abram carried the promises of a great nation, a blessing, and a great name. It also anticipated that he would be a blessing, receive protection from enemies, and become a link to God's ultimate blessing upon all peoples of the earth. In the course of time, however, Abraham's descendants would suffer four hundred years of bondage in a foreign land (Egypt). When the wickedness of the Amorites, who possessed Canaan, had come to full measure, God would place Abraham's descendants (Israel) there. He identified the limits of the land as the River of Egypt to the River Euphrates. When Abraham was ninety-nine, God gave him the rite of circumcision as a sign of the covenant between the two.

The land Israel was given during the days of Joshua was itself a blessing. It is described as a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey (Exod. 3:8). It was a land of abundance (Num. 13:27; Deut. 6:3; 11:9). Israel came to enjoy grapes from vines they had not cultivated. When living faithfully, she enjoyed rest and peace and freedom from harassment by enemies. Occupancy brought an end to wilderness wandering. Christians look forward to entering into God's rest, a rest that Canaan only symbolized (Heb. 3:7). Once in the land, Israel enjoyed numerous festivals to celebrate God's goodness.

Activity

The book of Genesis contains three pivotal texts regarding the land: Gen. 12:1-3; 15:12-16; 17:1-8.Study these carefully and see what conclusions you are able to draw from them. Do you detect any idea of a “land” promise in Genesis 12? What may be said about the occupants of the land Israel is to possess (Genesis 15)? What is revealed about a future relationship between God and the descendants of Abraham (Genesis 17)?

b. Land as a gift: a loan or an unconditional right? The big question is, Did God give the land of Canaan to Israel as a "loan," with the right of occupancy conditioned on Israel's faithfulness? Or, did he give Israel perpetual and exclusive right to the land, without regard to Israel's faith? Many Jews and many Christians feel the latter is the case. Although Jews did not have exclusive right to rule the land between 64 B.C.E. and 1948 C.E., occupancy of the land by the contemporary nation of Israel is reckoned by many as a divine right. Christians who hold to a return of Jesus to earth and the establishment of a millennial reign from Jerusalem, feel kindly toward Israel's occupancy of the land. Jews and Christians have different perspectives about God and what he intends to do in the future, but they find compatibility on the point of Israel's right of occupancy. Christian millennialists, of course, expect wholesale conversion of Jews to Jesus; contemporary Jews have no such intention.

From an Old Testament perspective, Israel's occupancy of the land was conditioned upon her faithfulness. Whenever Israel forgot God, he allowed their enemies to encroach. He sent numerous prophets to warn them of displacement if they continued in faithlessness. Israel's sin included worshiping Baal and other local gods and general neglect of the legal code that governed their covenant with Yahweh. Indeed, Israel was exiled, and their land taken by Assyria in 722 B.C.E. Then, the Babylonians did the same to Judah in 586 B.C.E. Even when God stirred the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, to allow Jews to return to Palestine, the territory remained under the control of Persia. From Persia's hand, the land passed to the Greeks. Only with the Maccabean revolt (168 B.C.E.) did Israel exert independence, an independence they lost when their political in-fighting prompted the Romans to move in. It appears clear from the New Testament (see John 4) that God's intention for a spiritual kingdom removed the territory of Israel from being an important part of the spiritual blessings made available in Jesus Christ. His is a spiritual kingdom; God rules in human hearts. Even God's initial promise to Abram (Genesis 12) looks forward to a blessing for all mankind that transcends physical property.

c. The good life. The blessings of Yahweh come when one of several factors is at work. One, all of Yahweh's blessings are bestowed on all humans because God so wills them. Whether good or evil, man enjoys the fruit of the land, the marvelous sights of nature, and life itself. Two, Yahweh's blessings may be provided to those who are faithful to him. Third, Yahweh's blessings often come because of wise maintenance by rulers and others. Conversely, physical blessings can be withheld because of sin or the evil of rulers or other powerful persons. With respect to Messianic blessings, Israel and the nations

anticipated that Yahweh would send both physical and spiritual benefits.

Language which one meets in the book of Revelation is also found in Isaiah to describe God's future blessings (Isa. 65:17-25; cf. Rev. 21:1-2). The language of the text is utopian, for this is the best way to describe life lived in faith. While the Christian interprets these conditions as paradise in the after-life, perhaps the words of Isaiah should be interpreted more symbolically than literally. The blessings of God in this physical world were not projected as a physical on-earth utopian age as a description of the fullest sense of relationship between God and his people. The condition was anticipated for Israel, realized potentially in Jesus Christ, and enjoyed as reality in heaven.

Even in the last book of the Hebrew Scriptures, the theme of judgment is associated with messianic blessing. In Malachi, the prophet condemns the unrighteous behavior of 5th century B.C.E. Jews. In closing, he speaks of the arrogant and evildoer as stubble for the Lord's furnace, but foretells the coming of Elijah to provoke repentance before that dreadful day (Malachi 4). Likewise, Zechariah had spoken of a day of Yahweh, but in this instance, he describes Yahweh as defending his people and providing for them in a show of his sovereignty (Zechariah 14).

As the anointed of Yahweh, the king was instructed to possess a copy of the Torah on which he would base his rule (see Deut. 17:18-20). But the kings of Israel and Judah often used people to their advantage. They may take advantage of the poor to gain substance for their own personal comfort. When the king turned away from Yahweh, the people suffered--sometimes from affliction of their foes or from Yahweh's pestilences.

Activity

Read 1 Kings 10-12, 21
Read the book of Amos

Conclusion

The idea behind studying Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures lies with the belief that the Old Testament presents a coherent portrait of God, God's acts in the world, and God's expectations for human behavior. As a coherent presentation, the Bible develops themes that are consistent. The Bible, therefore, is not to be read piecemeal or without context. Individual books may differ in purpose and content, but they are all part of a holistic worldview.

The worldview does not set out to prove the existence of God. It simply assumes God and states his activity, as the opening verse of Genesis demonstrates: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This is the beginning point of a theistic worldview. In this worldview, the Old Testament becomes the source of knowledge about God who sustains his creation, is jealous to be known by his human creatures, and cares for them. Hence, an open system is presented, where man makes choices—both good and bad—and is ultimately accountable to God for his actions. Man is not the result of millions of years of aimless evolution, but a fully developed person made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) for a unique purpose (cf. Gen. 1:28).

The “theology” of the Hebrew Scriptures unfolded piecemeal through a long period of time—*i.e.,* over the course of its composition. But it was not completed at the end of Malachi. Completion of the biblical story awaited the conclusion of the New Testament canon. The New Testament did not rival the Old Testament in any way. It complements the Old by extending its course to its logical conclusion. The same God who brought mankind into being and loved him throughout, now consummates that love in the incarnation of Jesus, who exists in God’s expressed image. Jesus provides hope for all mankind through defeating Satanic forces and guaranteeing human resurrection.

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