

Old Testament Introduction

Welcome everyone – introductions...

Read Psalm 34 and pray. Important – recognise OT as a prayer book for us now – precisely what it was written for, how Jesus used it and Christians for past 200 years.

Think about visiting London – my experience – know bits – centre and where sons live; know various routes, but how they link up – mystery and get easily lost out of familiar. Like many with OT – stories we know and love – David and Goliath, passages like psalm 23. Other bits...

Share with neighbour what drew you to come – what looking for?

Share across wider group...

Let's begin with the case for opposition – ancient case – introduce Marcion – lived in 2nd c – wealthy shipowner from Asia Minor – Turkey – oligarch – came to Rome in around 140. Marcion – radical view that the God of the OT was not the God of the NT – wrathful, legalistic and thoroughly unpleasant. Marcion – God of the Jews had to go. So Marcion ditched OT and a fair amount of NT as well except for his hero Paul. Of Gospels – Matthew had to go – too Jewish but kept Luke – written by Paul's friend. Marcion was condemned as a heretic – but had his followers and sympathisers ever since.

Gathering evidence to support Marcion –

- Pages of Old Testament laws – what to eat and what priests should wear when sacrificing animals... relevant?
- Passages about slaughtering the enemy – leaving none... today – war crimes, genocide
- Rampant nationalism – Ezra tells men of Jerusalem to divorce all foreign wives
- Even familiar stories – disturbing – Joseph in Egypt – saved people from starvation – also enriched central Treasury – people lost land to pay for food. Without mentioning – death of firstborn to let my people go.
- Early chapters of Genesis – seven days of creation, Adam and Eve – little embarrassing in world of science and technology.

Note these and park them...

On the other hand –

- This was Jesus' Bible – read it, shaped by it and quoted it and commented on it. Not exaggeration – can't understand Jesus without it.
- Christians – fed by it; Church read it as the word of the Lord. Read it through the lens of Jesus.
- Continues to be Bible of Jews to this day

To get to grips with OT – can be hard work and maybe need some new thinking but worth it.

Today – world of Old Testament – overview from Geography and History

Geography – all the events of OT took place somewhere; all the books were written somewhere.

Big context – draw map – Palestine – between the great powers of Egypt and Mesopotamia – between two rivers – Tigris and Euphrates. Biblical times – Ur, Assyria/Nineveh and Babylon. Explain powers – no formal boundaries – ebbed and flowed – allegiance and taxes/protection money.

Palestine – crossroads of culture, trade and politics.

Land of Palestine – E-W – six strips:

- Coastal plain – swamp in parts, fertile and flat – good for chariots
- Shephalah – round hills and broad valleys
- Hill country – higher hills and harder communication
- Rift valley – down to Jordan and Dead Sea – arid and desert apart from area near river
- Hills to east – corresponding to west
- Syrian desert

Climate – varied with topography – basically warm dry summers and cooler wetter winter

Economy – agricultural and village. Towns and cities were exceptional. Diet – bread, wine, oil; sheep goats – some fish near Galilee (but not Mediterranean). Everyday life – best reflected in book of Ruth. Rhythm and routine of life – set by agricultural seasons – autumn, ploughing and sowing, winter pruning, spring harvesting, early summer threshing and late summer gathering. Fruit and vegetables – seasonal.

Dominant unit of society – village or small walled town (called ‘city’ in Bible). Communications – often poor locally; conservative society with little contact with other cultures. Large families – blessing; disease and infant mortality – high.

Outline history – next sheet

Old Testament Outline History

2000		
1900	Sometime in this period – the Patriarchs	
1800		
1700		
1600	Joseph and Hebrews in Egypt	
1500		
1400		
1300	c 1280 – Exodus C 1250 – 1200 Conquest of Palestine	
1200	Period of Judges	
1100		
1000	Fall of Shiloh – Samuel Saul David – c 1000-961 Solomon – c 961 – 922 Schism – 922	Assyria weak Egypt weak
900	Rehoboam Jeroboam Judah Israel	Assyria's recovery
800	Separate kings 722 fall of Samaria	Assyria fluctuating Strong Assyria
700	701 – Sennacherib invades Judah Kings and Prophets in Judah	612 – fall of Nineveh Rise of Babylon
600	597 – First exile following Babylon attack on Jerusalem 587 – Fall of Jerusalem Exile in Babylon	
500	538 Cyrus' edict Slow return to Jerusalem Rebuilding Temple C 450 – Ezra/Nehemiah	539 – Cyrus takes Babylon
400		
300	Alexander the Great conquers entire region – impact of Greek culture Septuagint (LXX) – Greek translation of Bible	
200	Maccabean revolt	

Old Testament Introduction 2

Welcome everyone – last week introduced background to Old Testament – Geography and History. Key points to remember – land of Palestine – squeezed between the superpowers of Egypt and Assyria/Babylon. History – David around year 1000 BC and c 900 split into Israel (Northern Kingdom) and Judah (Southern Kingdom). North conquered in 722 – people into exile; South in 584 – exile into Babylon. About 50 years later – slow return, Temple and walls of Jerusalem rebuilt. In 300's BC Alexander the Great conquered and incoming Greek culture and then Roman power takes us up to time of Jesus.

Read Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 – known as? Shema – first part is like Jewish Creed.

Pray

Pairs – make a list – mental or written – what you have read in last week – general terms will do – not book titles... you will have read more than books.

Collate answers on flipchart. Reflect on different ways you read these... happens automatically. Technical term – forgive me if saying the proverbial obvious – genres.

Old Testament – number of genres – then be divided and subdivided. One division – poetry and prose. How much OT is poetry? (c one-third). Look – next week – how we read Hebrew poetry – think about prose today. Love story of boy – home from school very proud to learn that he had been speaking prose all his life. Different genres in the prose – note them on flipchart –

Law, history, prophecy, proverbs, stories, apocalyptic, polemic, myth (careful!!)

Why matter? True. If get genres mixed up – struggle with questions of truth and can we believe this? Not easy to get genre right – classic example of book of Jonah – history? Or fictional story with a point – responsibility to declare God's word to nations? Important but not simple...

Start – more straightforward –

Deuteronomy 5: 17-20 – read and decide genre – Law

Deuteronomy 24: 5, 10-13 – genre? Law – same as first?

Introduce distinction – apodeictic and casuistic – command and case law. Often mixed up in one chapter – Exodus 23 – Law – identify casuistic and apodeictic...

Think – Law – command – *you shall not kill* – think about how and where it applies. Strictly – *murder*. Constantly ask – how does this apply in this circumstance? Reflecting and reflecting on reflection... story of translation of Bible into Luganda in late 19th century – book of Joshua?

History –

History is straightforward...? Never simply a chronicle/diary – story in which choices of what was significant. Story of my PhD about Bishop Tucker – material – limited; choose some quotes and stories – make a coherent story. Others – do differently – fine.

Read II Kings 8: 16-24 – short about king Jehoram of Judah. Confusing – Jehoram and Joram – kings of Israel and Judah... Look at information – contrast – II Kings 18: 1-8 – similar info but different verdict. Writer of Kings – interest in whether the kings obeyed the Lord or not. Simple verdict...

Why? Disaster of exile to Babylon had to be explained – had God failed to keep his promises? Read ending – II Kings 25: 27-30 – shows us that Kings – last edition during time of exile and this detail suggests quite possibly in Babylon – just the merest hint that this might not be the end.

What kind of history? Idea of theological or prophetic history. Idea that we can understand where we are today because of what has happened. Very different from modern secular history – different ways of writing true history.

Questions and prayer...

Old Testament Introduction 3

Welcome everyone – last week introduced idea of different genres in the OT – different types of writing. As we read novels, bills, newspaper and poetry differently – so need to learn how best to read text of OT. Last week – Law – distinguish commandment and case law – how this might begin to help us with difficult issue of killing in some passages. Looked at History – Kings – theological history – did the king obey God's law – purpose to explain disaster of exile to Babylon. End of II Kings – 'glimmer of hope'.

This week – look more at genres, then poetry.

So much of Psalms – recounting what God has done – gives a framework to understand and praise God today – faithful God.

Read Psalm 106: 1-12 – comment and pray.

Worksheet on different genres:

- Exodus 14:21
- Exodus 15:8
- Psalm 78: 13
- Isaiah 51: 9-10 (cf Ps 89: 10, Psalm 74: 13; Is 27:1 – cf Babylonian epic 'Enuna Elish')
- Exodus 13:8

All relate to the Exodus in different ways –

- Exodus 14:21 – probably oldest and closest to literal description
- Exodus 15:8 – note context – poetic – expect some exaggeration and expansive language
- Ex 14:22 – metaphor of 'wall'
- Isaiah 51: 9-10 (cf Ps 89: 10, Psalm 74: 13; Is 27:1 – cf Babylonian epic 'Enuna Elish') – written much later – uses language of myth – ancient Near East – common myth of God defeating the primeval ocean – monster of many names – Rahab, Tiamat, Leviathan – and cut it in two. Writer shows this victory over chaos is repeated at Exodus and he calls on God to do the same again by leading the people out of Exile in Babylon
- Exodus 13:8 – from Passover instructions – not interested in event as such but meaning and identifying with those delivered from Egyptians.

Underline difficulty of reading them all literally or in same way.

Poetry in Old Testament

In English – many types of poetry – very difficult to define but generally – know it when see it:

- Written in lines
- Lines have meter or rhythm
- Rhymes
- Terse – make every word count, make words work hard
- Images and metaphor – picture language
- Crafted and demanding – read carefully.

Hebrew poetry – in common – 1,4,5,6. 3- never; 2 – rarely and not important.

Exploring Genres

Exodus 14: 21

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided.

Exodus 15: 8

At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,
the floods stood up in a heap;
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

Exodus 14: 22

The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Isaiah 51: 9-10

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD,
Awake as in days of old,
the generations of long ago!
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,
who pierced the dragon?
Was it not you who dried up the sea,
the waters of the great deep;
who made the depths of the sea a way
for the redeemed to cross over?

Exodus 13: 8

You shall tell your child on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt'.

Features of Hebrew Poetry

Parallelism – eg Jer 30: 12-14

Your hurt is incurable
your wound is grievous.
There is no-one to uphold your cause,
no medicine for your wound,
no healing for you.
All your lovers have forgotten you;
they care nothing for you;
for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy,
the punishment of a merciless foe,
because your guilt is so great,
because your sins are so numerous.

Parallelism is not just repetition, but the idea can be moved forward in the second line:

Psalms 72: 1-2

Give the king your justice, O God
and your righteousness to a king's son.
May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.

Psalms 1:6 – the parallelism may be contrast:

For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Imagery – eg Song of Songs 2: 1-2. Some images can be very daring – Psalms 78:65.

Hosea 13: 3 – familiar idea presented in a new way.

Common feature – ellipsis – omitting a word or phrase while assuming the idea – Psalms 33:
12

Terse – saying a lot in a few words – Psalms 131

Poetry is carefully crafted – Psalms 119 as an acrostic; Proverbs 31: 10-end. Impossible to translate.

Apply this to Psalms 121.

Old Testament Introduction 4

Welcome. This evening – worlds of Wisdom and Prophecy.

Prayer – read Proverbs 3: 5-10 – pray

Wisdom literature – what books of Bible come to mind?

Bigger picture – Wise Men (Magi)... found across the Ancient Near East (green crescent from Egypt-Ur). Class of men (mostly if not exclusively) – civil servants, diplomats, interpreters of dreams, astronomers/astrologers, mathematicians, philosophers, collectors of proverbs, scholars – moved and shared and traded in proverbs – short sayings that encapsulated wisdom.

Many of these themes – found in two stories in OT – identify... Daniel and Joseph – unpack.

Two strands to Wisdom in OT:

How to live well –

- Prov 3: 5-10 – settled society, all going well
- Prov 14: 27-35 – useful advice and application of Torah
- Prov 30 – sayings of Agur – shared wisdom – key Prov 1:7 – fear of Lord
- Prov 31: 1 – hint of women as channels of wisdom.

Reflect on wisdom as common sense across cultures; wisdom for untroubled times.

Second strand of wisdom – more disturbing and stirring:

- Job – complex book – unknown setting and time – exploration of idea that goodness brings blessing and the reverse (Deuteronomic theology). No resolution in terms of simple answer – but God speaks – Creator. Fact of God speaking validates Job's questions and silences attempts by his 'friends'. Job 38: 1-3. Key passage – Job 28 – v 28 – Wisdom favourite!
- Ecclesiastes – 1:1 – Qoheleth – wry observations and reflections – culminate in chapter 12: 1-8 – go through. 12:13 – standard OT conclusion.

Value of Wisdom:

- NT – Sermon on Mount, letter of James
- Evangelism and mission – recognise other cultures – truth and relating to our postmodern world – Ecclesiastes wry observations resonate...

World of Prophecy

Easy to think of prophets in terms of classics – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; prophecy as about telling the future – popular understanding. But – survey of how shape of prophecy changed –

- Roots in common tradition of ecstatic speaking – some cultures – shamans. Numbers 24: 2b-3 – Balaam – not from Israel
- I Samuel 10: 10-13 – ecstatic prophecy
- Court prophets – II Samuel 12 – Nathan; II Kings 22: 14 – prophetess Huldah
- Amos 7: 14 – Amos not a hereditary or official prophet
- False and true prophets – Jeremiah – 7 – Temple sermon and v 16 – prayer. Jer 23:16 -false prophets.

- Digression – how to spot a false prophet – Dt 18: 17-22 – two tests. Jer 23: 22 – applied in his day.
- Exile – peak of prophecy – after return – greater attention to rebuilding Temple and teaching the Law – Zech 13: 2-6 – discrediting of prophets.

Apocalyptic

Apocalyptic – what happens when Wisdom meets Prophecy!

Daniel 7: 1-14. Short step from interpreting dreams to speaking in the language of dreams (or nightmares!). Apocalyptic in full-blown sense rare in OT (Daniel) but developed in the period between the Testaments and fed into NT – Revelation and parts of Gospels.

Old Testament Introduction 5

Prayers – read Ezekiel 37: 1-14 and prayer

Shape of Bible:

- Show Hebrew Bible – arrangement – Law, Prophets, Writings. Law – Torah; Prophets – Former and Latter; Writings – miscellaneous others
- Compare Luke 24: 44; Luke 16: 16
- Bible in English – follows order of Greek translation of Hebrew Bible – Septuagint (LXX)
- Septuagint contains Apocrypha – recognised by Roman Catholics but as secondary by Protestants.
- Raises question of the Canon – which books are Scripture?

Canon:

- Long and complex process with many gaps of knowledge and information
- Process of recognising authoritative book (Scripture) underway during OT period – II Kings 2: 8-11
- Recognition of Canon – probably in three stages corresponding to Law, Prophets, Writings
- Last books to be generally recognised – Daniel and Esther – in 2nd c BC
- About 90 BC – Synod of Jamnia confirmed Hebrew Canon – with some discussion about Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. But clear that the Hebrew Canon was fixed 100 years before Jesus
- Septuagint – origins probably in Alexandria in Egypt – more flexible about books

Thinking about the Canon:

- Discuss analogy of Premier League and Championship
- Canon – context for reading Scripture – idea of intertextuality – reading texts together and making connections - and reading Old Testament through Jesus and in the light of his teaching and story

Some theological reflections:

- Take OT seriously – Jesus did – Matt 5: 17-18
- OT supplies the ideas and theology to understand Jesus – very clear in eg Hebrews – Heb 7: 11-22; John 1: 1-14
- OT – unfinished book with lots of loose ends – many come together in Jesus

Some specific questions:

- Mark Twain – *it's not the bits of the Bible I can't understand that bother me; it's the bits I can understand.*
- God of wrath and vengeance – not the major theme; see through Jesus; recognise we do not see the full picture. No final satisfactory answer.
- Messianic prophecies – perils of Handel's Messiah! We cannot look to the OT to find an identikit Messiah – apply to Jesus. Rather – in order to understand Jesus – look to OT to find relevant texts.