

# Old Testament Canon

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## Introduction of the Old Testament

The books of the Old Testament cover centuries of Israel's theological narrative extending from creation to the restoration of Israel from Babylonian captivity ca. 520 BCE.

In short the Old Testament is a *theological narrative* of God's saving acts which have *taken place in history* through the centuries. The Old Testament makes no effort nor has any intention of dating the narrative of God's saving activity in history. Thus the Old Testament is not strictly a historical narrative of God's saving activity but is a *theological narrative of God's saving activity which has taken place in history in the life of his chosen people*.

## Different Collections of the Old Testament

The Judeo-Christian Faiths refer to basically the same books in their collections of the Old Testament. They may be in a different order and collected differently and in some versions additional books are included as in the *Apocrypha*. (*Go to the glossary to read a definition of Apocrypha.*)

In this study we will refer to the Hebrew listing of the Old Testament, The Protestant listing, the Septuagint (*Go to the glossary to read a definition of Septuagint*), and the Roman Catholic listing.

## The Hebrew-Bible listing of the Old Testament Books

### *The Tanakh*

Since the Jewish religion does not have both an Old and New Testament there is only one corpus of sacred literature, the basis for the Christian Old Testament which is called the **Tanakh**.

There are 24 books listed in the Hebrew Bible, or the *Tanakh*. *Tanakh* is an acronym of *Torah* (*Pentateuch*), *Nevi'im* (*Prophets*), and *Ketuvim* (*Writings*).

The term *Torah* is the *Hebrew word for Law* (as in the *Law of Moses*, or the *Pentateuch*).

### **Torah means instruction or teaching**

Although Judaism holds tightly to the *Tanakh* as the divine law for Israel, it accepts only the *Tanakh* as *Torah*, *divine instruction from God for faith and practice*, and as *a basis for a real relationship with God*.

Judaism holds to other religious writings as being important to righteousness and living as YHWH's people. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the *Torah*, ca 230 CE, the Rabbis after the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple in Jerusalem, ca 66-70 CE, collected many of the Jewish teachings into two *Talmuds*, an earlier short Palestinian or "Jerusalem," Tiberian, *Talmud*, and a later more complete *Babylonian Talmud*, ca 475 CE. The history and writing of the *Talmuds* is interesting and worth of a more detailed development. Cf *Talmud*, *Wikipedia*.

## The Tanakh

### *Tanakh is the Hebrew name for the Old Testament*

The 24 books of the *Tanakh* are the same as the 39 books in the Protestant Old Testament only they are defined and grouped differently.

The *Tanakh* is presented in a grouping of *three types of religious literature Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim*

### **Torah**

**The Five Books of Moses; the Pentateuch**  
*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*

### **Nevi'im**

The Eight Books of the Prophets  
*Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel*

### **Ketuvim**

The eleven/twelve Books of the Writings  
*Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra/Nehemiah, Chronicles*

## **The Books of the Protestant Old Testament**

The same books that are listed in a grouping of 24 books in the Hebrew *Tanakh* (Old Testament) are found in the Protestant Old Testament listed as 39 books. The 39 books are the same 24 books as in the *Tanakh*. They are described and grouped differently.

Note that where the Protestant Old Testament lists 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, and 1 & 2 Chronicles, the Hebrew Bible lists only Samuel, Kings, Chronicles. Likewise the Hebrew Bible lists the Twelve Minor Prophets as one listing, *The Twelve*.

### **The Law (Pentateuch)**

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

### **Historical**

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings,  
1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

### **Poetry (Wisdom Literature)**

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

### **Major Prophets**

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel

### **Minor Prophets**

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah,  
Malachi

## **The Canon of the Roman Catholic/Greek Orthodox/Slavonic/Latin Vulgate versions of the Old Testament**

The Roman Catholic and similar versions of the Old Testament are primarily the same as the Protestant Old Testament with the exception that the Roman Catholic Old Testament includes the books of the *Apocrypha* which were books written after the closing of the Hebrew Canon and before the rise of Christianity. They bridge the gap between the Old and New Testament.

The Apocryphal books are not accepted as canonical (accepted or authoritative) by the Jews or the Protestant Christian movement. They are not read in the Synagogue as Scripture or in the Protestant churches as Scripture. They are read in the Roman Catholic Church with the awareness that they are not canonical as the Old and New Testaments, but are suitable to be read in the worship assembly. The *Apocrypha* are considered important since they reflect the views of Judaism prior to the Christian era.

### **The Apocrypha**

Apocrypha means doubtful or questionable, not fully canonical or authoritative.

Some of these books are not in the Roman Catholic Bible but are in some other versions of the Apocrypha.

I Esdras, II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The Rest of Esther  
The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Baruch, The Epistle of Jeremiah  
The Son of the Three Holy Children, The History of Susana, Bel and the Dragon  
The Prayer of Manasses, I Maccabees, II Maccabees

### **The Septuagint**

The Septuagint (often designated LXX, the Roman numerals for 70) represents Greek translations of the Old Testament, first ca. 230-270 BCE, then eventually the remainder of the Old Testament books.

There are several versions of the Septuagint available.

Legend has it that this translation was begun in Alexandria ca 230 -270 BCE by Hebrew scholars from Jerusalem for Jews in Alexandria who had difficulty reading the Hebrew Scriptures.

At first only the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) were translated into Greek; the universal language of the Mediterranean world at that time. Progressively the other books were translated into Greek.

Most of the quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament are from the Septuagint.

### ***The Listing of the books of the Septuagint***

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Kings, II Kings, III Kings, IV Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles,

Ezra, Nehemiah, Ezra, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel.

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

## Brief Examination of the Contents and Theology of the Old Testament

### First Section

#### The Pentateuch, Five Books of Moses

**Genesis.** Genesis is primarily a theological narrative of the development of Israel's faith in YHWH (Jehovah) as the God who had delivered them from Egyptian slavery. Genesis explains for the new nation of Israel after the Exodus that YHWH who had delivered them from Egypt was in fact the God who had in the beginning created everything and who had called Abraham out of Ur of Chaldea (Babylon). He was also the God of their ancestors Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Genesis is not a historical narrative but is a theological narrative that explains how God has acted in Israel's history to establish a covenant with them. This covenant, made with Abraham, promised to make of Abraham's descendants a great nation, to give them a land of their own, and to be a blessing to all nations. The book is primarily a theological narrative set in a historical framework.

**Pre-History.** Genesis 1-11 is commonly called the Pre-historical section of the Narrative which records the creation of everything by YHWH, Adam and Eve's sin of disobedience against God and their banishment from the Garden of Eden, the spread of sin through general disobedience against God, Noah and the Ark as the first redemptive act of God, and finally a record of the many generations following Noah down to Abraham.

#### Abraham's Journey from Ur to Canaan

**Patriarchal.** Gen 12-50 begins with God's call of Abraham out of the Ur of Chaldea and God's covenant with Abraham. Genesis then records the generations of Abraham down through Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Esau, and Jacob's 12 sons. We read of Joseph being sold into Egyptian slavery, and the arrival in Egypt of Jacob and his remaining sons and their families during a famine in Canaan. Joseph was over all the administration of Egypt for the Pharaoh in Egypt.

**Exodus.** Exodus like Genesis is a theological narrative set in a historical context that relates Israel's escape from Egyptian slavery and outlines some of God's covenant requirements of Israel as a new nation under Moses' leadership. In Exodus we have the giving of the 10 great commandments and Israel's commitment to honor God's covenant relationship with them as a nation.

In Exodus we also have the beginnings of Israel's journey through the Sinai Peninsula into the region of Canaan. In Exodus we follow God through Moses forming a theological understanding with the new nation of Israel. We learn of Israel's struggles with leaving a pagan polytheistic culture and developing a monotheistic theological culture.

In addition to being a historical narrative Exodus is deeply theological and forms the beginning of a legal code between God and Israel. Thus understanding of law as religious instruction takes place in Exodus. Israel's understanding of *Torah, divine instruction*, takes place in Exodus.

The following map records one of several possible journeys of Israel after leaving Egypt. Archaeologists are somewhat divided over the exact setting of certain events in this journey. The following map, however, is generally accepted as reliable.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**Leviticus.** Leviticus is the name for the third book of the Pentateuch which derives from the Septuagint, Λευιτικός, *leuitikos*, and primarily means relating to the Levites duties. In Hebrew Old Testament is it identified as *Wayikra*, which means "and He called ..." Leviticus is more *legal* and *liturgical* (relating to worship and sacrifices) than the remaining books of the Pentateuch. It contains long sections explaining how God intended Israel to worship him and only him and how they should offer the necessary sacrifices for atonement and covenant commitment, and regarding their relationship to God and one another.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**Numbers.** In the Hebrew Old Testament Numbers is called *Bemidbar*, meaning "*in the desert*". Numbers records the journey of Israel from Mt Sinai to the plains of Moab on the Eastern side of the Dead Sea and to the South East of Jericho. The tribes are numbered twice (chapters 1 and 26) in Numbers, hence the title Numbers in the Septuagint.

Numbers 33:2 records that Moses "*wrote down their starting places, stage by stage.*" Numbers covers the 40 year "wandering" in the wilderness of Zin and their journey through Edom into Moab. Numbers essentially covers the period of final preparation for the entry into the Promised Land of Canaan.

Numbers 1-10:10 cover the numbering of the tribes, new laws and regulations regarding cleanness being given, and arrangements regarding the life in the camp are made. Numbers 10:11 – 21:35 cover the journey, rebellion among many, the failure of faith among 10 of the 12 tribes sent into Canaan to spy out the land, the faith of Joshua and Caleb, and a clash with the kingdom of Edom, the Amorites, and Gog.

Numbers 22:1-36 covers other challenges to faith, new laws and regulations given, the destruction of the Midianites and the settlement of Trans-Jordan, the East side of the Jordan river. The Levitical cities are listed.

During the period of wilderness wandering most of the generation that fled Egypt into the desert died and a new generation of Israel surfaced to be led into the Promised Land by Joshua and Caleb.

**Deuteronomy.** Deuteronomy which primarily means *the second law* or *repetition of the law*, refers to or contains Moses repeating or re-explaining to a new generation of Israelites the meaning of the Law given at Mt Sinai and the Levitical codes related to that law. Deuteronomy is a second giving of the Law.

The Hebrew name for Deuteronomy is *Devarim*, meaning "*these are the words ...*" Deuteronomy is highly theological in nature with significant recommitment of covenant relationships with God. Deuteronomy's emphasis is preparation of the nation of Israel for moving into a new land and the establishment of a new home for the nation. The Mosaic-Sinai covenant is renewed by the new generation.

Moses' final words to Israel are given, and Moses' death is recorded.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

## Second Section

### The *Nevi'im*, the Twelve Books of Prophetic History

The 12 books of history *do not present a continuous historical narrative* of Israel's history. They touch on historical events which do present some form of historical narrative *but their purpose is more theological than continuous historical*.

We should note that the *Hebrew Old Testament does not list these books as History*, but under the *Prophets, Nevi'im*. It is only in the *Protestant listing* of these books that they are identified as the 12 Books of Historical.

#### **The Hebrew “prophetic” books**

*This includes what the Protestant canon lists as History.*

##### **First Prophets:**

Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings

##### **Latter Prophets:**

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel

##### **Minor Prophets:**

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah,  
Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

**Joshua.** The book of Joshua narrates the events following the death of Moses and with Israel under the leadership of Joshua. The authorship of the book is unknown with some holding that it was recorded by Eleazar and Phineas. The book is both historical and biographical. The book of Joshua narrates the entrance into the Promised Land and the conquest, distribution and settlement of the land.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**Judges.** The title of Judges in the Hebrew Old Testament is *Sophtim* simply meaning judges. The book narrates the events of the first judges over Israel after the settlement of the Promised Land. Although Judges narrates historical events the book is primarily theological explaining that when the nation or tribe loses faith in God, and disobeys God by breaking covenant with God, sin takes over followed by oppression by pagan neighbors, repentance and the rise of a judge who leads the nation or tribe involved to victory and covenant relationship with God. Rabbinic tradition assigned the authorship of the book to Samuel, the last judge before the anointing of Saul, the first king over Israel. The date of Judges is approximately 1025 BCE. The period of the judges lasted several centuries, approximately from 1380 BCE – 1050 BCE.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**Ruth.** Although the events of Ruth predate David's reign the book came to prominence during David's reign. The approximate date for the events in Ruth are ca 1100 BCE. The story of Ruth is a touching love story highlighted by three persons, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. An underling theme in this love story is God's love and tender care of his people. Ruth is important for the royal role she lays in the Davidic line of Jesus; Boaz was the father Obed by Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse; Jesse the father of David the king, and Jesus, the Messiah, was a direct descendent of David the king.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**I and II Samuel.** Because of the length of this series of events the story of Israel narrated following the period of the Judges was divided into two scrolls; I & II Samuel. Although these two books are both significantly historical in that they trace the beginnings of the Israelite monarchy from the birth of the prophet Samuel (BCE 1100) through the death of David (BCE 970), they are also theological in that they demonstrate the devastating results of rejecting God as their true king and seeking human kings like their pagan neighbors. Read 1 Samuel 8:4-9. Major emphases are “the beginning of kingship in Israel; the concern over kingship and covenant loyalty; the ark of the covenant as representing God’s presence; the choice of Jerusalem as “the City of David”; the Davidic covenant with its messianic overtones; David’s adultery and its consequences.”

Fee, Gordon D. & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*, p. 82.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**I and II Kings.** Jewish tradition attributes the writing of I and II Kings to Jeremiah ca 550 BCE before Cyrus’ edict for the return to Israel, ca 539 BCE. The narrative theme of I and II Kings is similar to that of I and II Samuel in that it sets its narrative in the context of history but is like I and II Samuel also significantly concerned with tracing the religious life of Israel after the death of King David and during the reign of Solomon and the other kings of Israel down to the 586 BCE exile of Judah to Babylon.

***During the reign of Solomon the Temple was built in Jerusalem on Mt Moriah.***

I and II Kings evaluates the monarchy of Israel on the basis of covenant loyalty. I and II Kings narrates the serious national consequences of disloyalty to Yahweh which finally resulted in Israel’s expulsion from the Promised Land. Attention is given to the division between Israel and Judah and the civil wars between these two nations of God’s people. We also learn of the rise of the superpowers Assyria and Babylon who under the direction of God defeated Israel and Judah. The Major Prophets of the Old Testament spoke for God regarding Israel’s national and religious life starting with the reign of Solomon. We also follow the steady decline and eventual disbanding of the monarchy in Israel due to the failure of Israel to keep covenant loyalty with God.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**I and II Chronicles.** The English title is derived from Jerome’s Latin translation, “Chronicles.”. The Hebrew title *Divrei Hayyamim* means “words and events of the days”. The Septuagint title *Paralipoménōn* means “things passed over” indicating additions to the narrative of Samuel and Kings. “The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles cover the same period of Jewish history described in 2 Samuel through 2 Kings, though from a different perspective. While the books of Kings relate the history of Israel from the standpoint of captivity in Babylon, Chronicles presents the history of the Jews from the post Babylonian exilic standpoint of those who have recently returned from captivity to the Land of Promise.” Nelson, Thomas, *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*.

I and II Chronicles were most likely written by Ezra during or after the restoration of Judah to Babylon ca 450 BCE. Fee and Stuart write, “The book of Chronicles is the final book in the Hebrew Bible, taking its place at the end of the *Writings (Ketuvim)*. Its present place and division into two books come from the Greek Bible (the *Septuagint*) where it was (perceptively) placed after Kings ... followed by Ezra-Nehemiah. Using Samuel and Kings as his basic narrative, the Chronicler adds other materials—genealogies, lists, psalms, speeches—to present the continuous story of Israel (especially Judah) from Adam to the decree of Cyrus, which brought the exile to its official end.”

Cf. Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*, p. 99.

“The Chronicles were written for the returned remnant who were rebuilding Jerusalem following their seventy-year Babylonian captivity. Because the returning exiles were originally from Judah, the religious and national heritage and history of the Southern kingdom (Judah) is presented by showing its unbroken connection with the patriarchal beginnings. Chronicles is written from a priestly perspective. The primary historical theme centers on the priestly worship of Judah, from the time of Saul until the return of the Jewish nation to the land following the decree of Cyrus (538 B.C.). This religious history depicts the faithfulness and promises of God to His people, the power of the Word of God, and the central role of worship in the lives of God’s people. The temple in Jerusalem is the major unifying theme of 1 and 2 Chronicles.”

Nelson, Thomas, *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*.

Since Ezra was of the priestly tribe as well as a scribe and I and II Chronicles reflect the priestly and religious view of the situation of Judah as a result of its sinful loss of faith and God’s consequent restoration of Judah to Palestine and Judea these books speak more to the religious side of the narrative than the historical narrative of Israel’s kings.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**Ezra.** In the Hebrew Old Testament and the Septuagint Ezra and Nehemiah were considered as one book. The Latin translation of Jerome separated them into two, one religious the other more political. Ezra covers the period of the rebuilding of the Temple, renewal of the Temple rules and cult, and the religious reform of Judah during the postexilic restoration of Judah to Judea ca BCE 458 to 430. The restoration of Judah, or the return of Judah to Judea occurred in three stages; stage one under Zerubbabel ca BCE 538, stage two under Ezra ca BCE 458. The third one was led by Nehemiah ca BCE 444.

The historical period covered by Ezra ranges from the first return of Judah under Zerubbabel ca BCE 539/8 as a result of the edict of Cyrus, king of Persia, to the end of the fifth century, but especially ca BCE 458, during the reign of Artaxerxes I of Persia.

Ezra, being a priest, was more involved with the religious concerns of the restoration than with the political ramifications. The following book in the Old Testament, Nehemiah, was more concerned with political and geographical matters, but also addressed the religious concerns of Judah, restoring the covenant with YHWH and the *Torah*.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**Nehemiah.** As mentioned above, Nehemiah was originally included in the Hebrew Old Testament as one book with Ezra. Ezra and Nehemiah cover the three stages of restoration.

Ezra, stages one and two, Nehemiah, stage three. However, Nehemiah is more concerned with the last two stages under Artaxerxes I, who had eventually succeeded Cyrus as king of Persia. Nehemiah was associated with the royal palace of Artaxerxes I, being his cup-bearer. Nehemiah led the third return of Judah to Judea in BCE 444. He was involved in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the Second Temple. The first part of Nehemiah is political; the second religious and spiritual. The Law/*Torah*, presumably the Pentateuch or part of the Pentateuch, is “re-discovered” and read to the people who affirm their faith in the *Tanakh* and their covenant with God. Note how Nehemiah 8:1ff, KJV, tells this story of the people gathered to *read the book of the law of Moses*.

<sup>1</sup> *And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel.* <sup>2</sup> *And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.* <sup>3</sup> *And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.* <sup>4</sup> *And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit which they had made for the purpose...* <sup>5</sup> *And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood.* <sup>6</sup> *And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God; and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.* <sup>7</sup> *... the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places.* <sup>8</sup> *And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”* KJV.

The history of Judah in the Old Testament closes with Ezra-Nehemiah ca BCE 444. The next historical narratives after the closing of the Old Testament are recorded in the Apocryphal books with regard to the Jewish uprising against the Syrian king Antioches Epiphanes I under the Maccabee family in the Maccabean revolt, ca. 157 BCE. Part of Nehemiah’s restoration was restoring marriage rules against marriages with pagans which had for centuries led to Jewish idolatry.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**Esther.** Esther is not historical narrative but a theological narrative reflecting deep faith and religious conviction. Although Esther is not a historical narrative it is set in a specific historical context in Persia during the Jewish exile from Judea. In later years Esther played a significant role in Israel’s religious history and specific feast days based on the story of Esther. *The Feast of Purim* which Jewish tradition based on Esther is still celebrated by Jews today. Esther 9:26, KJV, reads:

*“Therefore they called these days Purim, after the term Pur. And therefore, because of all that was written in this letter, and of what they had faced in this matter, and of what had befallen them, <sup>27</sup> the Jews ordained and took it upon themselves and their descendants and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year, <sup>28</sup> that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every family,*

*province, and city, and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.”*

The historical setting of Esther fits in during the Persian exile under king Ahasuerus (possibly the same person as Xerxes 1 of Persia) ca BCE 483 - 473. There is some discussion among scholars as to the precise name of the king of Persia involved in this narrative. The events of this narrative are discussed in Ezra between Ezra 6 & 7. The narrative was written ca BCE 465-424 during the reign of Artaxerxes I. The religious theme emphasizes God’s remembrance and providential care of Judah.

Some conservative Jews had difficulty with the book and its story since it portrayed a Jewish girl marrying a pagan king which ran contrary to the marriage rules restored under Nehemiah.

The story narrates how with the encouragement of her uncle, Mordecai, Esther gained the confidence of the Persian king, Ahasuerus, married him, and saved the Jews from a plot by Haman a Persian advisor to the king who plotted to have all the Jews killed.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

### Third Section

#### The *Ketuvim*, the Twelve Books of Poetry and Wisdom Literature

In the Protestant list of Old Testament books Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are listed as Poetry. However in the Hebrew Bible they are listed as *Ketuvim* or the *Writings*. They are in the form of what we might consider poetry but they are considered more than just poetry but as serious religious writings.

The five books we include in the Books of Poetry of Wisdom Books, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Son of Solomon reflect inspired human reaction to a life of response to God.

They carry us through periods of suffering, sorrow, sin, faith, repentance, and worship. In short they are called Wisdom literature because they reflect the wisdom of inspired living before God. In many cases they reflect a psychological response to faith, life, and suffering.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**Job.** The nature of this book has been debated through the centuries. It is obviously old but how old is difficult to determine. The story takes place in the period of the patriarchal age, but at what point is debated. Fee and Stuart refer to Job as a brilliant wrestling with the questions of human suffering and the justice of God. A larger question is “where does one find true wisdom?” *Wisdom lies not in the wisdom of friends*, no matter how intelligent they may be or sound! True wisdom lies in faith and trusting in God even when no solution to a problem is apparent.

The narrative of Job functions as poetic symbolism with the different representatives representing various views to the problem of suffering.

*Satan* obviously plays a crucial role in this narrative, but his wisdom and will is minor in comparison to faith and trusting in the ultimate wisdom of God.

*Job’s wife* becomes Satan’s representative on earth who present worldly “wisdom”.

*Job’s Three Fiends*, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar play the role of speaking conventional wisdom as observed from the human dimension.

*Elihu*, Job’s young friend represents the overconfidence of youth.

*God, Yahweh*, obviously plays the ultimate role. He is in charge from the beginning, not Satan, and he has the last say in the story.

An interesting side line of thought in this book is although at first it may sound like a *theodicy* (where human beings question God and put him on trial) it is in fact a *theology* in which human beings and human wisdom are put on trial by God.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**Psalms.** In our Protestant Bibles there are 150 Psalms. They are collected in 5 books or gatherings of the Psalms. The Psalms date from the early monarchy to the period following the exile in Babylon, 1000 BC to 400 BC. Although they were written over many years they are collected to cover the time from Chronicles to Ezra in such a manner that they present a developing view of Israel's faith, struggles, and reformation.

Their emphasis is on trust and praise for YHWH for his continued goodness. They include laments over wickedness and injustice. YHWH is not only king over Israel but also over the nations. Israel's king is God's representative for the people. Israel is God's covenant people. Zion and its temple (Jerusalem) are the special place of God's presence on earth.

Each Psalm was composed independently and had a theological integrity of its own. The Psalms are not haphazardly collected but are carefully brought together to provide present themes that could be used in liturgical worship of God.

As we survey the Psalms we can identify 1) personal Psalms; 2) penitential Psalms; 3) Psalms of praise; 4) prayer Psalms; 5) royal Psalms; 6) historical Psalms; 7) liturgical Psalms; 8) Psalms attributing majesty and power to God.

The historically earlier Psalms were written by David, but other Psalms by Moses, Asaph and the sons of Korah were blended into the Psalter.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**Proverbs.** Proverbs is a collection of wise proverbial sayings which originated with Solomon but also involved other wise men such as Agur and others. The wise sayings were gathered and arranged later for other generations by someone or some others whose names are not recorded.

The proverbs open with poems praising wisdom and warning against folly. These poems begin with Solomon and are followed by wise proverbial sayings by other wise men who taught wisdom in Israel.

The message of Proverbs is that wisdom begins with fear and trust in God. This wisdom consists of making wise choices between good and evil behaviour. Such wisdom is to be desired above all other wisdom.

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

**Ecclesiastes.** Ecclesiastes reflects the ponderings of a wise teacher who struggled with the contradicting realities of life, wisdom, wealth, poverty, suffering, etc. Key thoughts that almost form a structure to the book hinge around the Hebrew expression *hebel...hebel* which translates out as *vanity of vanities all is vanity or vapor or meaningless!*

Many Old Testament scholars have difficulty interpreting Ecclesiastes since it includes terms and expressions and contexts not familiar to Judaism.

Orthodox Judaism has experienced difficulty accepting the pessimism of Ecclesiastes. In fact, it is apparent that even the Christian tradition had problems with this pessimism for Ecclesiastes is not quoted in the New Testament.

A traditional view of Ecclesiastes was that it was written by Solomon or at least reflected his opinion during his old age. In the first few chapters it seems that the writer is a king thus leading to the view that this king might be Solomon, but his name is never appended to the work. The writer or collector of the sayings of Ecclesiastes refers to himself as *Qohelet* or *Koholet*, a wise teacher or assembler of wisdom.

*Qohelet* plays on certain themes as he advises the young to be careful in regard to what they esteem as having high value such as position, wealth, power, knowledge, etc. Seeking those things that are transitory will only end up in vanity, which like a vapor is meaningless and vanishes into the air.

*Qohelet* (the Preacher/Teacher) who finalized the gathering of the wisdom of Ecclesiastes summed up his view at Eccl 12:9-14:

<sup>9</sup> *Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging proverbs with great care.* <sup>10</sup> *The Preacher sought to find pleasing words, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.*

<sup>11</sup> *The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings which are given by one Shepherd.* <sup>12</sup> *My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*

<sup>13</sup> *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.*

<sup>14</sup> *For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. Fee and Stuart make this observation, "Qohelet's musings are quite true; life's emptiness without the fear of God and keeping his commandment should impel the truly wise to think on these "just the right words".*

For more information and detail the student is referred to the text book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

## **The Five Books of Major Prophets**

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah feature prominently in the link between the Old and New Testaments because they speak of the coming of a new covenant with Israel and the Gentiles in a promised Messiah who would introduce and establish a new kingdom which we casually refer to as the church. I use the word casually since the terms kingdom and church, although they overlap, identify different characteristics of what the new covenant involving the new Messiah would involve.

The point is that through the prophets Israel will be promised *a new system under God's chosen Messiah who would lead them into a new revived mission to both the Jews and the Gentiles*.

Daniel will also speak about four kingdoms that would come and a fifth that would overpower the fourth and all other kingdoms. The New Testament demonstrates that the kingdom of Christ is that kingdom prophesied by Daniel.

Lamentations and Ezekiel pour out Israel's sorrow over God's judgment and exile of Israel for Israel's sin of a serious lack of faith and trust in God. Both, however, speak of a future redemption and restoration of relationship with God and a return to the land of Israel from exile.

**Isaiah.** The prophet involved in this series of prophetic warnings to Judah, the Southern Kingdom (the Northern kingdom was known at this time as Israel) is Isaiah, the son of Amoz. Isaiah prophesied for over 50 years to 4 kings of Israel, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Isaiah's prophecies were mainly against Jerusalem and Judah. Isaiah prophesied between 750 BCE and 687 BCE.

There is considerable debate as to when the final form of Isaiah was written with some proposing ca 435 BCE, the post-exilic period.

*The Story of Isaiah.* By Isaiah's time, Solomon's kingdom had been divided into a Northern Kingdom, Israel, and a southern Kingdom, Judah. The Northern Kingdom had been taken into Assyrian captivity, never to return again to Israel, ca 722 BCE. During Isaiah's time the Southern Kingdom, Judah, as threatened also by Assyria and Judah sought alliances with Egypt against Assyria. Isaiah warned the Kings of Judah not to seek these alliances but to trust in God who would deliver them from Assyria. The mindset of Jerusalem typified all of Judah.

*The Theology of Isaiah.* Isaiah pronounces God's sovereign majesty and power and redemptive love. Even if Judah would not prove faithful God would not give up loving Judah. He repeatedly called on the kings and people of Judah to trust in God and not alliances with Egypt. Israel is destined for judgment, exile, and hardship for its refusal to trust God. But Israel can still and will be redeemed and restored to favor with God through a faithful and trusted servant Messiah.

*The Theological Emphases in Isaiah.* God is a holy God who is sovereign over all creation. He is a compassionate and righteous God, full of mercy. But being a holy and righteous God he will not trust disobedience and unfaithfulness and will judge his people for the lack of faith. When the people of God repent and return to faith God will redeem them and restore them to their home land.

*The Structure of Isaiah.* Basically, Isaiah can be divided into two parts; 1) Chapters 1-39 which deal primarily with utterances against the kings of Judah and Egypt; and 2) prophetic utterances (we call these *servant songs*) of a restoration to Jerusalem out of Babylonian exile, and a new system (kingdom) under a servant Messiah who would be a light to the Gentiles.

*Isaiah and the New Testament.* New Testament writers draw heavily on the servant songs of Isaiah in regard to the restored kingdom under Christ, the faithful servant Messiah, who would "open" the new kingdom to the Gentiles.

Comment by Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, p. 185, "The book of Isaiah stands in the middle of the Old Testament as a reminder that Yahweh is the living God who will both judge the world in righteousness and will in mercy save his people and nations through his "suffering servant" Messiah. It thus gathers up the whole of the Old Testament story and prepares the way for the new."

**Jeremiah.** There are many parallels between Isaiah and Jeremiah in that both call upon an unfaithful people of God, Judah, to repent and return to faith in God.

*The Story of Jeremiah.* Jeremiah was of a priestly family from Anathoth a city about 3 miles (4.8 km) from Jerusalem. Jeremiah was the son of a priest named Hilkiyah. Jeremiah prophesied during the last days of the Southern Kingdom, Judah, before they were taken into Babylonian captivity in three deportations, ca 597 BCE, 587 BCE, and 582 BCE. Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar had crushed Assyria and Egypt in 605 BCE at Carchemish and now ruled that part of the world in which Judah was caught between Assyrian and Egypt. Babylon completely destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple ca. 586 BCE.

Jeremiah prophesied against Judah for its lack of faith and recommended that Judah go into Babylonian captivity rather than to form alliances with Assyria and Egypt. The prophetic utterances of Jeremiah are not recorded chronologically but are thematic and theologically organized. Jeremiah dictated his prophecies to his scribe Baruch who recorded the actual prophecies in writing.

Jeremiah prophesied between 627 BCE and 585 BCE. In some ways his prophetic work was a failure since Judah did not listen to him, repent, and trust in God. However, his prophecies were effective in laying down several principles of repentance and faith in God.

Jeremiah predicts the fall of Jerusalem and a seventy year captivity in Babylon. He challenges several false prophets in Jerusalem who desire to keep in the good political favor of the king and thus falls out of favor politically while wins spiritually. While he shrank from the enormity of his task and the force of the false prophets and the king he was unable to remain silent. At the root of his mission lay the aching heart of a faithful patriot who sensed that Israel's security cannot be divorced from faith in God and a right covenantal relationship and obedience.

*Theological Emphases in Jeremiah.* Jeremiah denounces Judah's unfaithfulness to God and predicts that this will end in Judah's destruction. However, God has a bright future of his people, through a return to faith – a time of restoration and a new covenant. God's heart and compassion for his people is revealed through the heart and compassion of Jeremiah. For comment on the compassion of Jeremiah note the message of the *Book of Lamentations* which follows and which was possibly written by a young eyewitness with Jeremiah or by Baruch of Jerusalem's demise. Scholars are divided over the authorship of *Lamentations* but see its close connection to Jeremiah.

**Lamentations.** Although the themes of Lamentations are similar to those of Jeremiah the style and structure of the books are different. The laments of the book are over the fall Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, p. 167, observe "As to the historical and theological perspective, it is hard for us at our point in history to appreciate the utter devastation of the fall of Jerusalem for the people of Judah ... Thus both the land and the city held significance for Israel in terms of identity unlike most other peoples in history."

*The Structure of Lamentations.* Lamentations is made up of five poetic lamentations. Each of chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 has 22 verses, chapter 3 has 66. The poems are written in acrostic form with each verse beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The poems are thus closely and well-structured for impact.

*Date of the Composition of Lamentations.* No certainty can be given with certainty as we are not sure who actually wrote the five poems. However, a date soon after the fall and destruction of Jerusalem will be close. Possibly 586 BCE.

*Theological Emphases.* It is difficult for us to imagine the deep personal suffering and spiritual grief Judah went through with the destruction of their holy city, Jerusalem and the Temple which had been where Israel met with God. Lamentations pours out this grief and lament while still holding hope that God would finally justify them and return them to glory. The one theme that resonates even today is that "the steadfast love of God (Hebrew *hesed*, unfailing mercy) endures forever. His mercy never comes to an end." Lam 3:2 - 27.

**Ezekiel.** Ezekiel like Jeremiah laments over the fall and destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. Ezekiel was an Israelite priest and prophet who was taken to Babylon

among the first group of captives from Judah ca 598 BCE. He was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah. He prophesied in Babylon between 593 BCE and 571 BCE.

*The Story of Ezekiel.* Ezekiel is not easy to read since he incorporates a number of images and metaphors with which we are not familiar. Some of them are strange! He eats a scroll, lies down next to a brick, and his chariot in ch. 1 is indeed strange with wheels going in different directions all at the same time! Ezekiel mourns the fall of Jerusalem, prophecies against Jerusalem and the nations, and predicts a return to Jerusalem.

*The Structure of Ezekiel.* Ezekiel is divided into three clear parts, 1) Ezek 1-24. Oracles from the five year period preceding the siege of Jerusalem, 588 BC, 2) Ezek 25-32, a series of oracles against Judah's surrounding neighbors, Babylon is excluded, 3) The final oracles, Ezek 33-48 cover the six-teen year period after the fall of Jerusalem (586). They emphasize a hope for a future restoration of Judah.

*The Theology of Ezekiel.* God is a holy and sovereign God whose wrath against Judah is a holy wrath against Judah's idolatrous behavior especially in regard to the Temple which was the place of the presence of God. Judah's neighbors will also experience the wrath and judgment of God for their idolatrous behavior. However, God is a merciful God of great mercy and love for his people. He will have compassion on them and restore his people to Jerusalem and be present with them once more. His Holy Spirit will return to the Temple.

**Daniel.** Daniel can be a confusing study in the sense that it is so mysterious and full of images that are difficult for the modern student to understand.

*First,* Daniel is not strictly a book of prophecy like Isaiah and Ezekiel. It contains stories relating to Daniel and his three young friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and Daniel's inspired interpretation of dreams. In fact, Daniel is not listed among the Prophets (*Navi'im*) in the Hebrew canon (OT) but among the Writings (*Ketuvim*).

*Second,* it is extremely difficult to set the events in Daniel in any historical situation with any degree of certainty, notably regarding when it was written and regarding some of the images or nations included in Daniel's interpretation of dreams. Scholars are divided regarding locating many of the situations referred to in Daniel with any degree of certainty. A major reason for this is that much of Daniel is expressed in the apocalyptic genre which eschews historical constructs other than referring to conditions of severe persecution and oppression which certainly it the situation of Babylonian captivity covered in Daniel.

*Third,* another intriguing factor in Daniel is that part of Daniel is recorded in the standard international Imperial form of Aramaic common to the Middle Eastern Acadian language (Dan 2-7) with some Persian words included. This section includes mostly but not exclusively stories regarding Daniel and his friends. The other portion of Daniel is in traditional Hebrew (Dan 1 and 8-12) which is mostly in an apocalyptic genre. Reasons for the use of the two languages varies among scholars.

*The Dating of Daniel.* Not precisely established. Presumably toward the end of the sixth century BCE (ca 500 BCE era). Some scholars suggest dates ca 165 BCE.

*The Content of Daniel.* Daniel includes a series of stories about how God brings honor to himself through Daniel and his friends in Babylon, followed by four apocalyptic visions about future kingdoms and God's final kingdom.

*The Theological Emphases of Daniel.* Daniel presents a sovereign God in a world of pluralistic gods. God, YHWH, is sovereign over all nations and rulers, including Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel demonstrates how God takes care of faithful Jews who are in exile and

away from home and promises a final restoration to the faithful. God overrides all present powers and promises a final victory in his kingdom over all human evil.

**Hosea.** In the Protestant Bible Hosea is the first of the twelve Minor Prophets. In the Hebrew canon, the *Tanakh*, Hosea is included among the *Nevi'im* - The Eight Books of the Prophets. One of the eight books of the Prophets includes the twelve books Protestants refer to as the Minor Prophets. They were not considered minor in the Hebrew tradition, and even in the Protestant mindset they are not considered minor in importance. The term minor refer to their length, not their importance. However, Hosea is the longest of the Twelve and possibly for that reason is listed first among the Twelve.

*The Prophet Hosea.* Hosea was the son of Beerai who lived ca 758 BCE to 722 BCE in the Northern Kingdom of Israel which was sometimes referred to as Ephraim or Samaria. He prophesied to the Northern Kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II and during the years of rapid decline in Israel following Jeroboam II. His ministry overlapped with that of Amos, Isaiah, and Micah during a period of religious apostasy and idolatry.

*Israel's Sin of idolatry.* One problem was that the kings of the Northern Kingdom who tried to buy the favor and alliance of both Egypt and Assyria. A major problem was that Israel tried to maintain the name of YHWH but combined with this the practice of gross immorality and the practice of Baal worship.

*The Story of Hosea.* God saw Israel as his wife who constantly committed spiritual and physical adultery with Baal and idolatry. A major point in this story is that God loved Israel as a husband would love his wife. To tell his story and explain the extent of his love for Israel and his intolerance of her adultery God told Hosea to marry an adulterous woman and to have children with her. Hosea does this but she keeps up her adulterous behavior and deserves to be divorced. The analogy of this story is that Israel who was God's wife was committing adultery and God would judge her for this even though he loved her dearly.

*The Theological Emphases of Hosea.* God expresses his love and compassion for Israel yet speaks of his condemnation of Israel for her unfaithfulness to him. The emphasis is on God's unfailing love for his people even to the extent that he has to punish them for their unfaithfulness and idolatry.

**Joel.** We know little about Joel, his name means "*YHWH is God*," other than he was the son of one Pethuel.

*The Date of Joel.* Scholars are divided as to when to fix Joel in the life of Israel and Judah other than to suggest sometime between 800 BCE and 590 BCE, which is not much help! It appears from the content of the book that Joel was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

*The Content of Joel.* Joel foretells a judgment against Judah and Jerusalem which God will send in the form of a devastating locust invasion of Judah. The book is short, only three chapters, but powerful. Joel 2:28-33 has major importance to the New Testament message regarding the church and kingdom. Peter picks up on this in his great Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:16 ff.

*The Theological Emphasis of Joel.* Joel speaks of an impending day of YHWH who will judge Judah and Jerusalem for their idolatry. Joel calls for repentance stressing that YHWH keeps his covenants with the faithful by showing mercy to his people. YHWH is a god of mercy but as sovereign ruler over all nations will judge all who show no mercy on the wicked

and idolatrous people. However, Joel speaks of a future restoration of the faithful who repent when YHWH brings restoration to Judah. As a sign of this mercy and restoration at some point in the future he will pour out his Spirit on them.

**Amos.** Amos was a shepherd and cultivator of sycamore trees from Tekoa which lay just south of Jerusalem and Bethlehem in Judah. Amos was a rugged and stern man who was fearless.

*The Time of Amos's Prophetic Activity.* Amos prophesied during a time of economic strength in both Judah and Israel, but unfortunately in a time of gross religious syncretism in which Israel tried to blend worship of YHWH with the worship of Baal. Amos prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II ca 750 BCE. He was a contemporary of the early Isaiah. Although Amos lived in Judah he prophesied against the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

*The Content of Amos.* First (Amos 1:1-2:16) he prophesies against Israel's surrounding nations, Syria (Damascus), Philistia (Gaza), Phoenicia (Tyre), Edom, Ammon, Moab, and somewhat against Jerusalem. Then, he speaks against Israel to the north (Amos 3:1-6:14). Finally, he has five visions of coming judgments and blessings

### **Primary Thought of the Old Testament - One Metanarrative**

We have noted previously that in the Protestant Old Testament there are 39 books grouped under different genre; *Pentateuch, Historical, Poetry or Wisdom Books, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets.*

Under normal consideration one might assume that these books are somewhat disjointed and are separate religious books from the Jewish faith. However, upon closer examination as we noticed in the lesson *The Bible as History and Theology* we learned that these Old Testament books are in fact a narrative of the theological acts of God in Israel's history.

One might be tempted as some scholars have to view these books as representing different theologies shaped through the centuries of Jewish life. However, careful analysis of these books presents one metanarrative (a major narrative that includes several minor narratives) of God's saving activity in the history of Israel as God moved them from creation through the prehistorical age and the age of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, the Mosaic age of Egypt and the Exodus into the promised land, a the period of the judges and kings.

We readily acknowledge that this metanarrative covered many centuries as Israel recorded its faith that the one almighty God, YHWH (*Yahweh* or *Jehovah*) had been working his preordained plan to redeem his fallen creation.

Note Paul's statement at Eph 1:3-11:

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. 5 He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 which he lavished upon us. 9 For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 we*

*who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.”*

Through many ages and faith crises YHWH had remained faithful to his creation which faithfulness became a theme that recurs throughout the Old Testament, “*the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever, his mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning, therefore I will hope in him.*” Lam 3:21 ff. This theme occurs over 300 times in the Old Testament! Cf. Thom Olbricht, *He Loves Forever*.

The Old Testament is thus *a theological metanarrative* that records God’s faithfulness to his creation and his redemptive acts in history in the lives of his chosen people, Israel.

## **The God who Loves Forever**

### ***The Steadfast Love of God<sup>1</sup>***

A cursory survey of the Old Testament reveals, as Professor Thomas Olbricht has argued<sup>2</sup>, that possibly the dominant theme of the Old Testament is the steadfast love of the lord for his creation and fallen man. Perhaps the best known expression of this theme is **Lamentations 3: 21-23**.

*“But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:  
<sup>22</sup> The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,  
his mercies never come to an end;  
<sup>23</sup> they are new every morning;  
great is thy faithfulness.”*

Set in the turmoil of the capture and destruction of Jerusalem and Babylonian exile, *this beautiful confession of faith has today become a favored song of Christian praise and hope.*

In order to appreciate the theme of steadfast love, one has either to read from the Hebrew Bible or the RSV/NRSV where the Hebrew term *hesed* (pronounced *chesed* with a semi-guttural *ch*) that is translated **steadfast love** has a broad meaning “*loving-kindness, kindness, mercy, loyalty, or love.*”<sup>3</sup>

The NIV reads “*Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.*”

A quick survey of the RSV reveals that this expression occurs *373 times in 181 verses*. The first instance of this expression is found at **Gen 24:12** when **Abraham’s** servant went out to find Isaac a wife. *Coming to a spring near the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia the servant prayed these words,*

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas H. Olbricht, *He Loves Forever*, Joplin Missouri: College Press, 2000, passim.

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**“O LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant me success today, I pray thee, and show steadfast love to my master Abraham.<sup>13</sup> Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water.<sup>14</sup> Let the maiden to whom I shall say, ‘Pray let down your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac. By this I shall know that thou hast shown steadfast love to my master.<sup>4</sup>”**

The expression is found 242 times in 150 Psalms, indicating the importance of this expression to the worship liturgy of Israel.

***It is the repeated statements of God’s steadfast love for Israel that led Dr. Thomas Olbricht to open his theology of the Old Testament with this observation.***

“The story line of the Old Testament exudes love, excitement, and hope. It tells how this universe was made, and how humans, these inscrutable beings, occupied such a prominent position. It asserts that the Creator, before the creation of man and the universe, spoke into existence the vast reaches of space. Then he created man in his image. It tells of the Creator’s love affair with creation and man. It affirms an undying, relentless, unceasing love, but not so much from the human side. Man not only is inexplicable, unstable, fickle, vacillating, and often faithless. *But God is not man.* As the Old Testament tells it, *Israel’s God loves – intensely – forever ... The God of the Old Testament is an incessant lover<sup>5</sup>.*”

***In one paragraph Olbricht sums up the story of the Old Testament!***

The Old Testament is a story of a God who creates and loves his creation, who works steadily in history to redeem his fallen creation.

*In the many vicissitudes of life, God remains faithful to his creation, including Israel, loving them, chastising them, but always true to his creation covenant. His **hesed**, love, compassion, and mercy never come to an end!*

## **Hebrew-Protestant Comparative Canon of the Old Testament.**

**The Hebrew and Protestant canons list the same books, but group them differently.**

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<sup>4</sup> Biblical scholars have often complained that the word *hesed* in the Hebrew Bible is difficult to translate into English, because it really has no precise equivalent in our language. English versions usually try to represent it with such words as "loving-kindness," "mercy," "steadfast love," and sometimes "loyalty," but the full meaning of the word cannot be conveyed without an explanation, such as the one given in the article below. Norman H. Snaith, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, edited by Alan Richardson New York: MacMillan, 1951, pp. 136-7.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas H. Olbricht, *He Loves Forever*, Joplin Missouri: College Press, 2000, *passim*.

<u>HEBREW CANON</u> ( <i>Tanak</i> )	<u>PROTESTANT CANON</u>
24 Books	39 Books
THE LAW ( <i>Torah</i> )	THE LAW
<b>Genesis</b>	<b>Genesis</b>
<b>Exodus</b>	<b>Exodus</b>
<b>Leviticus</b>	<b>Leviticus</b>
<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
<b>Deuteronomy</b>	<b>Deuteronomy</b>
THE PROPHETS ( <i>Nevi'im</i> )	HISTORICAL BOOKS
Former Prophets	<b>Joshua</b>
<b>Joshua</b>	<b>Judges</b>
<b>Judges</b>	<b>Ruth</b>
<b>Samuel (2 Books)</b>	<b>Samuel (2 Books)</b>
<b>Kings (2 Books)</b>	<b>Kings (2 Books)</b>
Latter Prophets	<b>Chronicles (2 Books)</b>
<b>Isaiah</b>	<b>Ezra</b>
<b>Jeremiah</b>	<b>Nehemiah</b>
<b>Ezekiel</b>	<b>Esther</b>
The Twelve	POETICAL BOOKS
<b>Hosea</b>	<b>Job</b>
<b>Joel</b>	<b>Psalms</b>
<b>Amos</b>	<b>Proverbs</b>
<b>Obadiah</b>	<b>Ecclesiastes</b>
<b>Jonah</b>	<b>Song of Solomon</b>
<b>Micah</b>	MAJOR PROPHETS
<b>Nahum</b>	<b>Isaiah</b>
<b>Habakkuk</b>	<b>Jeremiah</b>
<b>Zephaniah</b>	<b>Lamentations</b>
<b>Haggai</b>	<b>Ezekiel</b>
<b>Zechariah</b>	<b>Daniel</b>
<b>Malachi</b>	MINOR PROPHETS
THE WRITINGS ( <i>Ketuvim</i> )	<b>Hosea</b>
Poetic Books	<b>Joel Amos</b>
<b>Psalms</b>	<b>Obadiah</b>
<b>Proverbs</b>	<b>Jonah</b>
<b>Job</b>	MINOR PROPHETS Continued
Five Rolls ( <i>Melilot</i> )	<b>Micah</b>
<b>Song of Solomon</b>	<b>Nahum</b>
<b>Ruth</b>	<b>Habakkuk</b>
<b>Lamentations</b>	<b>Zephaniah</b>
<b>Esther</b>	<b>Haggai</b>
<b>Ecclesiastes</b>	<b>Zephaniah</b>
Historical Books	<b>Malachi</b>
<b>Daniel</b>	
<b>Ezra-Nehemiah</b>	
<b>Chronicles (2 Books)</b>	

