



## UNIT 1 - OLD TESTAMENT

### LESSON 1

#### FOREWORD

For this unit of work, you will need a copy of the notes, an exercise book or loose-leaf binder and a Bible (preferably Good News). For fuller study, at times, reference will be made to three books which would form a good beginning to any Christian's library.

The New Bible Commentary  
The New Bible Dictionary - both published by Inter-Varsity Press  
The Lion Handbook to the Bible

The work is divided into 10 lessons, on the following plan:

1. Introducing the Old Testament and The Pentateuch
2. The Book of Genesis (chapters 1-11)
3. The Patriarchs
4. The Exodus
5. The Wilderness Journeyings
6. The Old Testament Covenants
7. The Book of Deuteronomy
8. The Entry into Canaan
9. The Period of the Judges
10. Religious Development in early Israel

A later term's work will deal with Israel from the period of the monarchy up to the Intertestament period.

In this unit **questions** will be used in place of an examination.

Each lesson contains 5 questions. These are to be answered in approximately half a page each.

On completion of **Lessons One to Five** please forward your responses to the registrar for marking. These will be returned to you.

On completion of **Lessons Six to Ten** forward your responses to the registrar for marking, and these will be returned to you with your certificate.

The questions are designed to push the student to study beyond the notes to the Bible itself and also to think of the application.

There is a 6th question included in each Lesson.

This is for discussion for anyone studying "O.T." in a group. The answers to these questions are not to be sent in for marking.



### GLOSSARY FOR UNIT 1

A glossary is included to explain the meaning of any unfamiliar words.

1. Amphictyony - association of tribes for common welfare
2. Apostasy - abandonment of religious faith and vows
3. Canon - list of sacred books accepted as genuine
4. Circumcision - act of cutting off foreskin
5. Covenant - agreement; especially between God and Israelites
6. Dismemberment - act of tearing or cutting off limbs of body
7. Evolution – origination of species by development from earlier forms, not by special creation
8. Exposition - explanation, commentary
9. Hebrews – members of Semitic people in Ancient Palestine; Israelites; Jews
10. Mediator - one who forms connecting link between two other people
11. Militia – military force raised from among civilian population for an emergency
12. Monarchy - state of government with a king or queen at the head
13. Monotheism – doctrine that there is only one God
14. Oracles - means of conveying divine inspiration or revelation
15. Ratification – acceptance of an agreement by formal consent or signature etc
16. Scapegoat – person bearing blame that should fall on others
17. Secular – concerned with the affairs of this world, not sacred
18. Syncretism - attempt to unify or reconcile differing religions
19. Theocracy - government by God



## OLD TESTAMENT INTRODUCTION

### INTRODUCING THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE PENTATEUCH

Most people who become Christians are advised to begin their Bible reading with one of the Gospels. The standard advice (and sound advice it is) is, "Don't read the Bible by starting at Genesis and reading until you have completed Revelation, or you will find yourself giving up in the first few books". This advice is followed. The young Christian reads the New Testament, but only ventures occasionally into that forbidden territory which is called the Old Testament.

This term's study aims to introduce the Old Testament to you, and is based on the conviction that Christians need to read this part of the Bible, as well as the New Testament. J.B. Taylor in his book, "A Christian's Guide to the O.T." page 8ff, says that Christians should read the Old Testament because:

1. It was the Bible of Jesus Christ and the Apostles.
2. It gives meaning to the New Testament.
3. It gives Christianity an historical setting.
4. With the New Testament, it makes up the Bible.

The old jingle about the relationship of Old and New Testaments says:

"The New in the Old is concealed. The Old in the New is revealed."

Our understanding of God's revelation of Himself to mankind, reaches its peak in the person of Jesus Christ. However, we will not understand this revelation fully until we have read all that has preceded, and for this we turn to the Old Testament. There we will discover an unfolding revelation of God to man.

### THE SCRIPTURES OF ISRAEL

The Old Testament has come to us from the nation of Israel. The Jews saw these writings as the Word of God to their Nation, just as Christians see the Old and New Testament together, as the Word of God. In the Jewish canon, the books were arranged differently from the order in the English Bible. They had a threefold division:

1. The Law (Torah)  
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

#### The Prophets

- a) Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings.  
These are prophetic in the sense of being interpreted history. They are not concerned about history in the usual sense of the word: their interest is God's activity in the history of Israel.



b) Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Twelve Minor Prophets.

3. The Writings

Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah (1 book), Chronicles.

By the end of the 1st century A.D., these books were accepted by the Jews as canonical (authoritative). These books have also been accepted as such by the Protestant Churches, but the Roman Catholic Church also recognises as canonical, certain other books, which are known as the Apocrypha.

### **THE ANTIQUITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

While the New Testament writings were written within a short period of time, the Old Testament books were written over hundreds of years, the events spanning almost 2,000 years; and even more, when we consider the early chapters of Genesis. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the language used by the Israelites. It was also translated into Greek, a few centuries before the birth of Christ, in order to cater for the many Jews living outside Palestine.

There is a variety of literature in the Old Testament, such as poetry (popular, epic, sacred); documents (e.g. 1 Kings 4, Ezra 2); wisdom literature (e.g. Proverbs) laws; history etc.

There are a variety of authors - kings (e.g. David, Solomon); prophets (e.g. Isaiah, Amos); priests (e.g. Ezra, Chronicles); historians and poets. Some authors are known and some books are by unknown authors (e.g. Ruth, Esther).

There is a variety in time, in which the events took place, and also when they were recorded. The range of time is uncertain.

### **THE UNITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Despite its composition by many authors over such a long period, there is a remarkable unity about the Old Testament. This does not mean that there is not development of thought, so that later writings may differ in emphasis from earlier ones. What it does mean, is that there is a revelation of God which is progressive and consistent in these writings. In the Old Testament we read of God's dealings with people: His progressive revelation of God does not change, but becomes fuller, as people are able to grasp more truth. God is revealed as the Creator, the Holy One, the Lawgiver and in later revelation, the Redeemer. ("Redemption" means "setting free" and Exodus is a picture of redemption in the Old Testament. The children of Israel are set free from Egypt.)

The divine person of God is revealed in the Old Testament through:

- a) historical events, and
- b) inspired interpretation

Historical events were used because Jews dealt with concrete concepts, not abstract ones. Hence, God is not just an idea but a real person, who reveals himself through actions. So, the escape through the



Red Sea for example, shows God in action. The song of Miriam (Ex. 15:19-21) is an interpretation of it as an act of God.

People's response to God changes constantly, but in the Old Testament, it was mostly disobedience, rejection and neglect of God.

In its record of revelation and response, the Old Testament stands incomplete and unfulfilled. Only when we add the New Testament revelation of God, do we see the fulfilment of what has been promised in the Old Testament.

## **INTRODUCING THE PENTATEUCH**

### **THE NAME**

The Pentateuch is the name given to the group of five books found at the beginning of the Old Testament. The term is taken from the Greek, Pentateuchos, meaning, "the book of the five scrolls". The Jews referred to this group of books as the Torah or "Law".

We may wonder at the strange name given to these books, but there is a simple explanation for each:

Genesis	- "Beginning"
Exodus	- "Going Out"
Leviticus	- "The Levitical Law"
Numbers	- Greek - "arithmoi" - Numbering of the People"
Deuteronomy	- "The Second Law"

### **ITS AUTHORSHIP**

Much debate has taken place in the last 100 years over the authorship of these books. The main lines of thought can be seen by referring to the article "Pentateuch" in the [New Bible Dictionary](#). In these notes, only the briefest guidance will be given.

1. Traditionally, the Pentateuch has been ascribed to Moses. This was the view of the Jews of the first century, and was adopted by the early Church. The headings of the books in the English Bible refer to "The First Book of Moses" etc., but these were added long after the books were written, and cannot be regarded as real evidence.

A strong argument in favour of the traditional theory is that Christ referred to these books as Mosaic (Mark 12:26; John 5:45, 47). Against this view, it has been argued



that Christ was accommodating Himself to the beliefs of His hearers, and speaking in terms of Mosaic authorship because that is what the general belief was.

Apart from the difficulties which arise from belief in a simple Mosaic authorship, and which are elaborated in the next theory, we must observe that the Pentateuch does not claim Mosaic authorship for itself in its entirety. Some parts claim to be the word of Moses; but for the others, there is no indication of authorship, and had the tradition been that, for example, Samuel wrote these books, this position would also have been defended by traditionalists.

2. In the nineteenth century, the rise of literary and historical criticism led to increasing scepticism about Moses' authority. The Pentateuch was seen more as a combination of traditions and documents, than the writings of one man. On this theory, the composition was much later than Moses.

Wellhausen, the **most famous proponent** of this theory, divided Pentateuchal narratives into four basic streams of tradition, represented by four hypothetical documents, named J, E, D and P. Document J was from the southern kingdom and dated from the period of the early monarchy. Document E was from the northern kingdom, and a little later than J. Document D was from the book of Deuteronomy, while P was the Priestly Document concerned with Israel's laws and customs. By an unknown process at an unknown date, these documents were combined into the books of the Pentateuch, but sometimes in such a way as to leave difficulties in the text such as inconsistencies and contradictions.

It is **necessary to know of this theory**, for most modern works are written on the basis of the documentary hypothesis. The four documents J, E, D, P have been elaborated by later scholars into further divisions. However, many conservative scholars remain unconvinced that this is the answer to the problem of Pentateuchal authorship. It must be emphasised that this scheme remains an hypothesis, for none of the 'originals J, E, D, P are known to us.

3. There is support in conservative circles today for the view that the Pentateuch is basically Mosaic, but contains much additional material, and that the whole has been edited in the post-Mosaic era. If Moses wrote Genesis, he must have used oral material and written material to do so, for the events occurred long before his birth. It is just as reasonable therefore, to suggest that somebody else may have compiled this book on the basis of those same oral and written records. The Pentateuch, as we know it, may have been edited during the reign of King David, using the substantial Mosaic basis which already existed. It would then be natural to regard those books as written by Moses, as it was common Eastern practice to name a book after a man if it was written on the basis of his work.

(For further discussion see the New Bible Dictionary, page 963).



## **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PENTATEUCH**

1. It is the foundation on which the rest of the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, is built.
2. Historically, it tells of Israel's beginnings.
3. Theologically, it tells the origin of sin, and of God's dealings with humans concerning this problem.

## **QUESTIONS**

### **Question 1:**

Why should Christians study the Old Testament?

### **Question 2:**

There is variety, yet unity, in the Old Testament. What are some examples of its variety?

### **Question 3:**

Why is God revealed in the Old Testament through his actions and not just ideas? What are some examples of God's actions?

### **Question 4:**

What is the Pentateuch? Why is it important? What do the Jews call it?

### **Question 5:**

Who do you think is the author of the Pentateuch? Why?

## **QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY**

What do you think this jingle means? "The New in the Old is concealed. The Old in the New is Revealed" Give examples.