

Introduction to the Old Testament
– with African perspectives

Eero Junkkaala

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With articles by Joshua Erasto Chussy,
Peter Fue, and Andrew A. Kyomo

Iringa 2010
Tumaini University, Iringa College

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Layout: Erkki Kurppa
Printed in Tanzania 2010
Colour Print (Tanzania) Limited

ISBN 978-9976-89-131-7

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Preface

This Introduction to the Old Testament has been written for theological students at Tumaini University, Iringa College, Tanzania, and it is based on lectures the author has given during the years 2009-2010. The book also contains three articles by Tanzanian theologians. All four writers are introduced at the end of this preface. The main principles in this text are the following:

1. This short and compact book does not contain a discussion of the many and varied scholarly opinions. Only in some critical points are the theological debates mentioned. However, the text is up to date on modern Old Testament research. The reader will find additional pertinent information in the books listed in the Bibliography. Many of these books are available at the Tumaini University Library.
2. This book is based on the traditional Christian belief according to which the message of the coming Messiah is a central topic throughout the Old Testament.
3. A special emphasis is placed on the historical and geographical background of the Old Testament. The Bible is full of personal names, city names and descriptions of wars. All of these speak about the close connection between the text and the historical reality behind it.
4. The most important archaeological discoveries are presented, because they shed light on the historicity of the Bible.
5. This book is not only an Introduction in the normal western sense; it also contains issues which belong to Old Testament theology. Because of the emphasis on the historical background and the message of God's plan the view represented in this study can be called salvation-historical.
6. Some explanations and narratives have been included because of their possible special interest for African readers. A good link with African theology is Africa Bible Commentary (ABC), ed. by Tokunboh Adeyemo. Several quotations from that book have been included in order that an African voice be heard in this text. The articles by Tanzanian writers add significant African perspectives to the book

In PART I we start with an overview of the history of Israel. After that we cover such subjects as the beginnings of the history of writing, the

canon of the Bible, the authority of the Old Testament, archaeology of the Bible, the geography of Israel, creation and science, and Old Testament research history and methodology. The important chapter in PART I deals with interpretation of the Bible. PART II is made up of articles that offer glimpses of how Africans understand and read the Old Testament. PART III covers each Old Testament book, giving both a brief description of the content and a more detailed survey.

When we speak in this study about the geographical area where Israel is situated today (and in biblical times), we use mostly the word *Israel*, although this name has not always referred to that particular area. As its synonym we use also the term *Palestine*, which is a geographical term commonly used of that area in many maps and historical descriptions, especially those describing the most ancient times. In view of the present political situation, we want to emphasize that the term *Palestine* as used in this book has no political connotations. In the period of the Israelite settlement in the Promised Land the area is called the *Land of Canaan*. For the entire area where Israel, Syria, Lebanon and some other Arab countries today are situated we use the term *The Middle East* or sometimes the term *Levant*.

The English Bible translation used here is mostly the New International Version.

Archaeological periods, such as the Early Bronze Age, the Middle Bronze Age, the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age, are mentioned at times when the text refers to the history of Israel. The dating of these periods is explained in the Appendix.

The abbreviations used in this book follow the ones used in ABC: Old Testament (OT): Gen, Exod, Lev, Num, Deut, Josh, Judg, Ruth, 1-2 Sam, 1-2 Kgs, 1-2 Chr, Ezra, Neh, Esth, Job, Ps, Prov, Eccl, Song, Isa, Jer, Lam, Ezek, Dan, Hos, Joel, Amos, Obad, Jonah, Mic, Nah, Hab, Zeph, Hag, Zech, Mal

New Testament (NT): Matt, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Rom, 1-2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, Col, 1-2 Thess, 1-2 Tim, Titus, Phlm, Heb, Jas, 1-2 Pet, 1-2-3 John, Jude, Rev

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PART I

THE OLD TESTAMENT AS A HISTORICAL BOOK

1. An overview of the history of Israel

Where should we place the beginnings of the history of Israel? At the creation of the world? At the time of the most ancient archaeological discoveries in the Land of Israel? At the time of the narrative of Abraham? At the time of the Israelite settlement in the Promised Land at the beginning of the Iron Age? Or perhaps much later, at the 9th or the 8th century BC? All of these views have been argued for. In this study we deal with all of these topics, but we choose as our starting point the Land of Israel and the earliest remains that tell of the life of its inhabitants.

Prehistory

The earliest signs of human prehistory have been found in East Africa, especially in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania, in the Great Rift Valley. The Great Rift Valley is a very special geological phenomenon. The astronauts tell us that it is the most significant physical detail of the world visible from outer space. The valley begins in the Middle East, in Lebanon. From there it continues southwards and has formed the Sea of Galilee (Lake Gennesareth), the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea in Israel. From there it reaches down to the Red Sea and continues on to East Africa, ending in Mozambique (or according to some scholars, Botswana).

In Israel the most ancient Stone Age sites are located in the area of the Great Rift Valley. The oldest settlement has been found in Ubeidiya, at the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. The caves on Mount Carmel

belong to the area of this geological phenomenon as well, although they are situated a bit westward from it.

The beginning of permanent agriculture with food production and deliberate cultivation was a very important phase in human history. The earliest signs of it, dated at about 10 000 BC, have been discovered in Israel, at Jericho and at Netiv Hagdud in the Jordan Valley, 80 km north of Jericho. The third important site is Abu Hureyra in Syria near the Euphrates River. Evidence of cultivation of rye, einkorn and lentils has been found. This period has been called the “Neolithic Revolution”. Jericho, the oldest city in the world, dates back to that era.

The Period of the Patriarchs

The period of the biblical patriarchs has traditionally been dated to the Middle Bronze Age (2300-1550 BC). The period before the Middle Bronze Age (MB) is called the Early Bronze Age (EB), which covers c. 3300-2300 BC in the Middle East. The dating of these periods follows the commonly accepted divisions of Egyptian history: the Early Bronze Age corresponds to the Old Kingdom, the Middle Bronze Age to the Middle Kingdom, and the Late Bronze Age (LB) to the New Kingdom in ancient pharaonic history of Egypt.

The beginning of the Early Bronze Age is crucial in the history of the ancient Middle East. The last centuries of the 4th millennium BC saw so many big changes in world history that it could be compared with the time of the end of colonialism in Africa or the time of the Enlightenment in Europe. This is the transitional era from Prehistory to History. The biggest upheaval was the invention of writing. The Sumerians developed the cuneiform script and the Egyptians the hieroglyphic script, both at the end of the 4th millennium BC. From that period onwards we have information in king lists both in Mesopotamia and Egypt. The beginning of EB saw also the first urban settlements in the world. People started to move closer to each other and build cities with walls. Farming was practised outside the walls. The oldest city in the world, Jericho, was an exception, because it was

founded already five thousand years before the building of cities became more common. Some of the first EB cities in Palestine were Dan, Hazor, Beth-Shean, and Megiddo.

At the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (MB I, 2300-2000 BC) the first urban culture collapsed, and during the following centuries Palestine was very sparsely populated. People were mostly pastoralists and village dwellers. This was most probably the period of the biblical patriarchs. According to the Bible Abraham travelled from Ur of the Chaldeans first to Haran and then to Shechem in Palestine. Ur (located in present-day Iraq) was excavated by Leonard Woolley, and its ancient history is well known. With its 65,000 inhabitants Ur was one of the biggest cities in the Middle Bronze Age. People worshipped the moon and stars in Ur. The travels of Abraham and his family was probably part of the large-scale migration of the Amorite peoples.

Although this dating and the existence of the patriarchs has been debated and even denied, there are good reasons to believe that the patriarchs should be dated to this period. There is no archaeological evidence to prove this, but the period fits in well with the biblical account.

The Mari Texts mention many names and describe a number of habits that are similar to those found in Genesis. Mari was a great kingdom in Mesopotamia in the Middle Bronze Age. It was destroyed by Babylon in 1756 BC. Found in the 1930's and consisting of more than 25,000 clay cuneiform tablets in the Akkadian language, the Mari Archives are one of the most significant text discoveries from that period.

The beginning of MB II (2000-1550 BC) was the time of mighty Canaanite city-states in Palestine. Several EB cities were rebuilt. The end of this period (1750-1550 BC) is called the time of the Hyksos. This was the only period in the Egyptian history, when foreign rulers ("hyksos") reigned over pharaonic Egypt. The biblical story of Joseph in Egypt fits in with this period, although the name of Joseph has not been found in Egyptian sources. It was not rare for names of earlier

significant people to be deleted from records when new rulers came into power.

Israel in Egypt

The next period is called the Late Bronze Age (LB, 1550-1200 BC). The first year of this period marks the collapse of the empire of the Hyksos. In Egyptian history we now come to the period of the New Kingdom, which is the most prosperous time in Egyptian history. This is the time of some of the most famous pharaohs, such as Thutmose III and Ramses II. Several huge building projects were completed, and many rulers of Egypt conducted military campaigns in foreign countries.

This is the time when – according to the Bible – the descendants of Abraham were in Egypt. We have no direct archaeological evidence of the Hebrews' stay in Egypt. However, we know from wall paintings that there were many Semitic people in Egypt during the Middle and Late Bronze ages. There are also paintings describing brick-making on the shores of the River Nile. According to the Book of Exodus, that is what the oppressed Hebrews were forced to do in Egypt.

One connecting point is the name of Ramses. The reign of Ramses II (1279-1213 BC) is one of the best-documented periods in Egyptian history. He moved his capital from Upper Egypt to Lower Egypt and built a new city called Ramses. According to Exod 1:11 the Hebrews built “Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh”. For this reason the most likely candidate for the pharaoh of the Exodus of the Israelites is Ramses II.

Settlement of the Land of Canaan

The next period is called the Iron Age (1200-586 BC). It can be divided to Iron Age I (1200-1000 BC) and Iron Age II (1000-586 BC). This period begins with the Israelite settlement in the Land of Canaan and continues with the period of the Israelite Kingdom. It ends with the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylonians in 586 BC.

The story of the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land (referred to in the Books of Joshua and Judges) is one of the most debated topics in the history of Israel. Conventionally the time of Exodus has been dated to about 1400 BC, but nowadays the most commonly accepted date is about 1200 BC. The previous dating is based on the interpretation of 1 Kgs 6:1. According to this text, Solomon began to build the temple “in the four hundred and eightieth years after the Israelites had come out of Egypt.” The temple building started c. 960 BC. If we add 480 years to that, we arrive at the year 1440 as the year of the Exodus.

However, this is not possible in the light of what we know about history and archaeology. The Amarna Letters tell about the Late Bronze Age life in Canaan in great detail, and the description does not fit at all with the Exodus story. The Amarna Letters (sometimes called the Amarna Tablets) are an archive of correspondence on clay tablets between the Egyptian administration and its representatives in Canaan during the New Kingdom. The letters were found in Upper Egypt at Amarna, which was founded by Pharaoh Akhenaten.

Thutmose III (1479-1425 BC) conducted several military campaigns to Canaan and Syria, and we have no mention of Israel from that time. In addition, archaeologically it seems clear that the Canaanite period continued up to 1200 BC. Because all historical and archaeological facts favour the 13th century as the period of the Exodus, the Bible passage mentioned above has been interpreted to mean that there were twelve generations from Moses to Solomon, the biblical length of a generation being 40 years. In this way the writer of the Book of Kings

has arrived at the number 480, although the average length of a generation really is not more than 25 years.

The discussion mentioned above is not the toughest problem concerning the date of the Exodus. Many scholars have denied the whole event by saying that we have not enough archaeological evidence to prove it. In spite of that there is a general consensus among mainline scholars that the Exodus and the settlement of the Land of Canaan took place in the 13th century BC. The following is a brief summary of the most important information on the subject.

As was mentioned above, the appearance of the name Ramses suggests that the Exodus from Egypt took place at the end of the 13th century BC. That is when the New Kingdom was in decline, and it could have been possible for an entire people to leave the country. In the Middle East and especially in the land of Canaan this was a time of great changes. Many new nations emerged. The so-called Sea Peoples began to move towards Egypt and the coastal areas of Canaan.

In the 13th and 12th centuries BC a huge number of small settlements arose in the Land of Canaan. An obvious change in material culture took place at the same time, first in the Central Hill Country and one or two hundred years later in the Coastal Plain. Culturally the newcomers were not as developed as the country's earlier inhabitants. Signs of destruction can be seen in some of the cities (e.g. Hazor, Lachish, Bethel, Tirzah), and in many of them there was a clear change in material culture. It is evident that the country was settled over a period of more than one hundred years. The Bible refers to this by saying, "Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time" (Josh 11:18). "Joshua" is to be interpreted here as "the people of Joshua".

The archaeological information referred to above fits in very well with the biblical account of the country's settlement. Although the Book of Joshua seems to tell about a quick and total conquest of the land, both Joshua and especially Book of Judges make it clear that the Israelites did not succeed in conquering the entire land overnight. Several cities

stayed unconquered until the time of David at the end of the 11th century BC. A list of the unconquered cities is found in Judg 1:21-33, and the same information is given in Josh 11:22; 13:1-5; 17:11-12; 23:12.

The history of Hazor is a good example of the connection between archaeology and the Bible. Hazor has been excavated by two famous archaeologists, Yigael Yadin (1955-1958, 1968) and Amnon Ben-Tor (1990-). The latter project is still ongoing. Hazor was the largest city in the country in the Canaanite period. It is also mentioned in several extra-biblical sources, e.g. in the Mari Texts. This huge Late Bronze Age city was destroyed in a fierce fire at the end of the 13th century BC. After that a tiny settlement was built on the site. This fits in exactly with the narrative of Josh 11.

The earliest extra-biblical mention of Israel is found in the Merneptah Stele (also known as the Israel Stele) from the year 1208 BC. The son of Ramses II, Pharaoh Merneptah conducted a military campaign in Israel and recorded it in the stele. He boasts of having defeated Israel. In reality he was not able to defeat Israel at all. The significance of this inscription lies in the fact that it refers to the existence of Israel at this period.

The Philistines

The Books of Joshua and Judges contain narratives of two periods: that of the settlement of the Land of Canaan and that of the judges. Archaeologically it is not possible to make a distinction between them. A most significant factor in this period was the arrival of the Sea Peoples. The newcomers who settled on the coastal plain of the Land of Canaan were called Philistines. The Old Testament describes many battles between the Israelites and the Philistines in the Books of Joshua, Judges and 1 Samuel. Because the Israelites settled the mountainous areas and the Philistines the coastal areas, the dividing line was very often the battlefield. Archaeology gives exactly the same picture of this time.

Archaeologically the presence of the Philistines is very clear. The pottery they made is easily distinguishable. They were highly skilled in making clay vessels which show signs of Greek or Mycenaean influence. The vessels were painted black and red and decorated with ornamental pictures of birds. A bird looking backwards was the most typical Philistine figure.

According to the Bible, the most important Philistine cities were Gaza, Ekron, Gat, Ashdod, and Ashkelon. These five formed the Philistine Pentapolis. Archaeological excavations have revealed an abundance of Philistine material at the sites of these cities. Another large Philistine centre was Tel Qasile, located in the northern section of what is modern Tel Aviv. Some Philistine remains have also been found in the Jezreel Valley.

The Period of the Monarchy

Moving from the Iron Age I to the Iron Age II we come to the period of the monarchy, which is sometimes called the United Kingdom. The idea of kingship was becoming more common in many small countries of the Middle East. Israel had been a loose tribal coalition, but in the face of the pressure exercised by the Philistines it became necessary to strengthen national unity. This is the biblical period of Samuel and Saul, the first king of Israel. The religious centre was Shiloh, where the tabernacle was located. King Saul chose Gibeah as the first capital of Israel. Located five kilometres north of Jerusalem, the city is called Gibeah of Saul in the Bible. It has been suggested that the ruins of a large building found there should be identified as being part of King Saul's' fortress.

The reign of Saul was quite short, but the exact length is not known, because the Bible verse which refers to it (1 Sam 13:1) is corrupted. The next king was David, who ruled Israel for 40 years. According to the Bible, his reign was one of the best in the history of Israel and David himself was one of the finest kings the nation ever had. In addition, David was given the first promises of the coming Messiah

who would be the eternal king and who would come from among his descendants (2 Sam 7). David was first chosen to be king of the southern tribes and later of all Israel. He conquered Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it his first capital. Later he defeated many enemies and extended his rule as far as the Euphrates River.

Scholars are divided as to whether the picture which the Bible gives is historically reliable, because very few remains of Jerusalem of that time have been found. They argue that if Israel was indeed an empire, how does this fit in with the fact that its capital, Jerusalem, was so very small. Besides, David himself is virtually unknown outside the Bible. However, the archaeology of Jerusalem is difficult because the city is so densely populated today. The foundation of a large building, which has been uncovered in Jerusalem, could be the foundation of King David's palace.

A few years ago some scholars claimed that David was a fictitious person, because his name did not occur anywhere outside the Bible. Then in 1993 Avraham Biran found at Tel Dan an inscription with the name of King David. The text was written by an Aramean king in the 9th century BC. The mention of the "House of David" is important, because it proves that David was a real historical person and also because "the House of David" is a messianic term which appears several times in the Old Testament.

David was succeeded by Solomon, who ruled for 40 years as well. The golden period of Israel continued during his reign. At no time before or after has Israel been so large an empire as during the reigns of David and Solomon. Solomon's greatest achievement was the building of the temple in Jerusalem. He was also famous for many other building projects. According to the Bible (1 Kgs 9:15), he built three important cities – Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer – on the Via Maris, the important highway that connected Egypt with Mesopotamia. All three had great significance as defensive fortresses. Interestingly, the same type of city gate has been found in all of these three cities. That is why they are called "Solomonic city gates".

The Division of the Kingdom

After the death of Solomon the kingdom was divided into two in 930 BC. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, was the first ruler in the southern kingdom, which was called Judah or the House of David. The northern tribes invited Jeroboam to be their king. The northern kingdom was called Israel. The capital of Judah was Jerusalem. The capital of Israel was at first Shechem, then Tirzah and later Samaria. All the kings of Judah belonged to David's dynasty. In Israel there were several different dynasties. There were continual conflicts between these two kingdoms during the following centuries.

Soon after the division of the kingdom the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak conducted a military campaign to Judah and Israel. Perhaps he thought that the time had come to conquer an internally weak country. The Bible describes the campaign in 1 Kgs 14:25-28. Shishak himself wrote a long story about his military expedition on the walls of the temple in Karnak. The story includes a list of the conquered cities of his campaign, in all some 187 names. In reality he did not destroy most of these cities, and he was not able to gain control over the conquered countries.

The Northern Kingdom, Israel

As was mentioned above, Jeroboam I (930-909 BC) was the first king of the northern kingdom, also known as Israel. According to the Bible, he made a drastic change in the religious and cultic life. Previously people had travelled to the temple in Jerusalem during three important annual festivals: the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). This created a problem for Jeroboam, because Jerusalem was on the wrong side of the border from his point of view. Therefore he decided to build two more temples, one at Bethel and another at Dan, in the southern and northern parts of his kingdom. The foundation of the temple at Dan has been discovered in excavations led by Avraham Biran.

Omri (884-873 BC) was one of the most influential kings in Israel. The Bible doesn't tell much about him (only 1 Kgs 16:21-28), but extra-biblical sources give more information. The so-called Mesha Stele (or Moabite Stone) mentions that Omri ruled over the Moabite Kingdom as well. The Mesha Stele, which is a Moabite stone inscription from c. 850 BC, was found in Jordan in 1868. Omri built the city of Samaria and made it his new capital.

Ahab (873-852 BC) was another prominent king of Omri's dynasty. He is also mentioned in extra-biblical texts. The Assyrian King Shalmaneser III writes that Aram and Israel led by King Ahab conducted a military campaign against Assyria, and a decisive battle was fought at Karkar in 853 BC. According to the Bible Israel and Aram waged many wars against each other, but there they joined forces against a common enemy. The Bible tells that Ahab was a sworn enemy of the prophet Elijah. Ahab wanted to kill Elijah because of Elijah's victory over Baal's prophets on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18-19).

The following ruling dynasty after Omri's descendants began with Jehu. Jehu (845-818 BC) killed Ahab's family members and usurped the throne. The prophet Hosea writes later that the Lord will punish the house of Jehu for the massacre (Hos 1:4). On the other hand, Jehu's religious views were different from those of Ahab. He killed Baal's prophets and tried to restore the worship of Israel's God. However, the concluding remark of the biblical writer about him is, "Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to commit" (2 Kgs 10:31). Another notable king from Jehu's dynasty was Jeroboam II (787-747 BC).

The prophet Amos began his ministry in Israel during Jeroboam's reign. Amos can be called the first canonical prophet, which means that there is a book in the Bible bearing his name. Amos condemned Israel's unrighteousness in both religious and secular life. The prophet Hosea ministered at about the same time.

In the 8th century BC Assyria's power was increasing. King Tiglath-Pileser III (745-728 BC) was the first who conducted military campaigns southward against Israel. 2 Kgs 15:29 says that he conquered the northernmost part of the land. He himself writes in an Assyrian text that Menahem, the king of Israel, paid taxes to him. When Pekah was king of Israel, he made an alliance with Rezin, the king of Aram, and both of them tried to force Ahaz, the king of Judah, to join them. The reason was the threat of Assyrians from the north. Ahaz did not accept the proposal, and therefore Israel and Aram threatened to start a war against Judah. In that situation Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-Pileser for help. This episode is recorded in 2 Kings 16:1-9 and Isaiah 7:1-17. The result was that Tiglath-Pileser attacked first to Aram and then to Israel and conquered parts of it.

About ten years later Assyria attacked again. King Shalmaneser and later King Sargon II conquered the land, and in 722 BC Samaria, the capital of Israel, was destroyed. A large number of people were killed and the rest taken into exile. That was the end of the northern kingdom. The ten tribes of Israel disappeared for ever.

The Southern Kingdom, Judah

In Judah the dynasties did not change after the first king, Rehoboam. All of its rulers were David's descendants. Perhaps one cohesive factor was the promise given to David (2 Sam 7), according to which "your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me". This messianic prophecy is repeated later throughout the Bible. Messianic expectations were placed especially on two of the following kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, and several prophets spoke about "the coming David" (especially Isaiah, Micah, Amos, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah).

As was mentioned above, the first crisis in Judah was the attack of Pharaoh Shishak in 925 BC, the fifth year of King Rehoboam's reign. However, the attack did not have a very big impact on the country, although Shishak did rob the treasures of the temple in Jerusalem. The

next notable ruler in Judah was King Jehoshaphat (870-847 BC). During his reign there was peace between Judah and Israel, and the two kings, Jehoshaphat and Ahab, planned a joint military campaign against Aram.

The only woman ruler in the history of Judah was Athaliah (845-840 BC). She was a cruel monarch and was killed by her own people. The next king was Joash (840-801 BC). He “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years Jehoiada the priest instructed him. The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there” (2 Kgs 12:2-3). This biblical estimation means that Joash was a pious but weak king. Aram threatened to attack Judah, and Joash was forced to pay tribute to the King Hazael.

The most important king in Judah was Hezekiah (715-687 BC). He lived in a period when the Assyrian pressure was at its heaviest. His father, Ahaz, had been given promises about the coming Messiah (Isa 7:1-17) and therefore great expectations were laid on Hezekiah. He was indeed a very good ruler. He organized the purification of the temple and reformed the Passover celebration (2 Chr 29-31). He strengthened walls of Jerusalem against the Assyrian threat and built a water tunnel in the city (2 Kgs 20:20). This tunnel has been found, and it is still possible to go through it. It runs from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam and is 550 metres long. In the middle of the tunnel a text inscribed by the builders reports that they hear voices of other builders and will soon meet them. In other words the tunnel was dug by two teams, who started at each end and then met in the middle.

When the kingdom of Israel was brought to an end by the Assyrians in 722 BC, Judah faced extinction as well. Assyria’s weakness, which proved to be temporary, caused a coalition to be formed against it in 714-711. The Philistine city of Ashdod led the group, and Jerusalem joined it. Sargon II put down the rebellion in 711. After that Judah had to pay tribute to Assyria, but it was not conquered. Judah appealed to Egypt and Kush for help, but they were attacked by Assyria. (See Isa 20.)

One of the most memorable events during King Hezekiah's reign was the attack of the Assyrians in 701 BC. It is particularly interesting, because we have a lot of information about it both in the Bible (especially Isa 36-37) and in extra-biblical sources. It seems that the Assyrian troops approached the two most important Judean cities, Jerusalem and Lachish, simultaneously. From Lachish we have plenty of archaeological data thanks to David Ussishkin, who directed the project at Lachish and found for example an Assyrian ramp, a number of tools and parts of helmets. The so-called Lachish Relief, which was found at Nineveh, is displayed at the British Museum, London. It depicts the conquest of Lachish in great detail. In addition, King Sennacherib's own report, written in a stone cylinder, has been preserved in the so-called Taylor Prism.

What happened in Jerusalem has been corroborated by the Greek historian Herodotus. The Bible tells that the angel of the Lord came and put to death a large number of Assyrian soldiers, and that this caused Sennacherib to cancel his plan to attack Jerusalem. According to Herodotus, a plague hit the Assyrian camp, rats chewed the leather parts of the weapons, and the Assyrians were unable to conquer the city.

Isaiah and Micah were the two most prominent prophets in Judah during the time of Hezekiah. Isaiah had close connections with the court. The battle mentioned above is a good example of this: King Hezekiah sent a prayer request to Isaiah, and the prophet gave him an encouraging answer. Like the other prophets, Isaiah preached a strong message, condemning the people's unrighteous ways and empty religious rituals which had no real meaning. Isaiah was given the greatest prophecies of the coming Messiah, and he was the first to predict the coming of the suffering servant of the Lord (Isa 53).

Hezekiah's son, Manasseh (696-642 BC), did not follow in the footsteps of his father. Under his rule Judah became a vassal of Assyria. He had to pay taxes to Assyria during what were hard times for Judah. The next important king in Judah was Josiah (640-609 BC). During his reign Assyria's power was diminishing, and Josiah was able to enlarge Judah northwards. The dream of a united nation sprang up again.

Josiah was even considered a likely candidate for the role of the Davidic Messiah. Josiah and Hezekiah were alike in that both men carried out a religious reform. The discovery of the book of the law in the temple (2 Kgs 22) triggered off the reform of Josiah. This book may well have been a copy of the Book of Deuteronomy.

The prophet Jeremiah, who was a contemporary of Josiah, began his ministry in 626 BC. The fall of Nineveh in 612 BC marked the end of the Assyrian Empire. When Assyria was weak and threatened by Babylonia and Media, its old enemy, Egypt, came to its aid. When the Egyptian Pharaoh Neko was marching northwards, Josiah tried to stop him. The battle, in which Josiah died, took place in Megiddo in 609 BC. The sorrow which his death caused was still in people's memory when the prophet Zechariah wrote one of his Messianic prophecies in Zech 12:11.

After Josiah's death Egypt took domination over Judah for a short period. However, in 605 BC Babylon defeated Egypt in the battle of Carchemish. After that the Neo-Babylonian Empire dominated the Middle East. Judah tried to shed the yoke of Babylon during Jehoiakim's reign (608-598 BC), but the consequence was that Babylon began to besiege Jerusalem. The reign of Zedekiah (597-586 BC), the last king of Judah, was chaotic. Finally Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem, destroyed its temple and took a large number of people into exile in 586 BC.

The exile and the return

Most of the inhabitants of Judah were deported to Babylon in 586 BC. Some countrymen of theirs, the prophet Daniel among them, had experienced the same destiny already in 605 BC. In 597 BC another group, which included the prophet Ezekiel, had had to leave their homeland. In addition to Daniel and Ezekiel, the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed his message to the exiles. All three had a message for Judah as well.

The exiled Judeans lived in relative freedom, but without permission to return to their homeland. The destruction of Jerusalem's temple was a huge national catastrophe, but more than anything, it was a religious disaster. The God of Israel had not been able to save his chosen people. The Babylonian gods were stronger than their God. This caused a profound religious reassessment. The Book of Lamentations describes this painful process, and many psalms contain prayers that are associated with it.

However, the Exile was also a blessing for the Judean people. They had no temple, and they were not able to perform sacrifices any more. Instead, a rich prayer tradition developed, and the synagogue institution came into being. The need to compile the Holy Scriptures arose as well. They had lost the temple, in other words their religious centre and the guarantee of the long tradition of God's presence among his chosen people. Now they started to put together their sacred writings in order to remember how God had guided his people throughout the preceding centuries.

Sooner or later, even the greatest empires collapse. Babylonia came to an end in 539 BC when King Cyrus of Persia defeated it. Cyrus, who treated the subdued nations humanely in general, gave the Jews permission to return to their homeland. He also gave them permission to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Still under Persian rule but allowed to lead relatively independent lives, a large number of Jews returned to Judea and began construction of the temple. The work was interrupted for a number of years, but finally, in 516 BC, the festive dedication of the House of God was held. This second temple has been called Zerubbabel's temple in honour of Zerubbabel, the governor of Judea under Persia. The two biblical prophets, who encouraged the people to continue rebuilding the temple, were Haggai and Zechariah.

After the construction of the temple Judea continued as an impoverished province of Persia. In the 5th century BC, during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. The last Old Testament prophet was Malachi, who ministered in the 5th century BC. All of them prophesied of the coming of the Messianic king.

2. The beginnings of the history of writing

The first steps in the ability to write were taken at the same time in Egypt and in Mesopotamia. The beginning of the Early Bronze Age, about 3000 BC, is when mankind moved from prehistory to history by discovering how to communicate by writing. The Egyptians developed the hieroglyph script and the Mesopotamians the cuneiform script. Both systems represent pictographic writing.

Alphabetic writing was developed by the Phoenicians in the 16th century BC, very near the area where the Israelites arrived some hundreds of years later. The earliest inscriptions found in Israel are from the 12th/11th century BC. Before that traditions were mostly passed on in oral form. It is probable that something was written as well, but proof of this has not been found.

Westerners tend to think that oral tradition is unreliable and that what has been preserved in written form is reliable. In Eastern thinking the opposite is true: oral tradition is considered reliable, literary tradition is not. The community was able to control the former, but not the latter. Oral tradition was passed on from generation to generation in accordance with strict rules. It was essential to preserve the content unchanged, in its original form.

Here are two examples of long-standing oral tradition. The following sentence is found in Tanzanian history, *“According to their oral traditions, the people of Ugweno had already established a political system dominated by ironsmiths sixteen generations ago.”* In other words, the tradition has been passed on from generation to generation for about 400 years and is still considered reliable.

In a small village in Sweden people were telling an ancient story according to which a man had been buried with a bearskin in a certain place. Nobody knew if the story was true, but everybody had heard it. Then archaeologists started to excavate at the site and found a man who had been buried with a bearskin one thousand years earlier! In this case oral tradition had remained unchanged for ten centuries!

The name of Israel appears for the first time in history in an Egyptian inscription called the Merneptah Stele. It is a war document written by Pharaoh Merneptah in 1208 BC. The Pharaoh writes that “*Israel is desolated, his seed is not.*” Another Egyptian source, the Wenamun story, from the 11th century mentions that in Byblos the role of secretaries was very important in royal courts. Byblos was an important seaport in Phoenicia. The word *byblos* means ‘papyrus’. This tells us that the ability to write was quite common in this period.

The oldest written text found in Israel is the Izbet Sartah inscription from c. 1100 BC. It includes a Proto-Canaanite alphabet, and the letters resemble the Old Hebrew alphabet. The text has been written on a piece of pottery vessel and is probably a pupil’s exercise. This kind of texts on clay sherds are called *ostracons*. The discovery was made in 1976. This text is important, because it comes from a site where one of the oldest Israelite settlements has been excavated.

Five inscribed arrowheads from the 11th century BC have been found near Bethlehem. Four of the arrowheads state “Arrow of ‘*Abd lb’t*”, and the fifth carries the text *Ben Anat*. This name is well known at Ugarit and Egypt as well as in the Bible. In the Book of Judges, Shamgar son of Anath was one of the minor judges (Judg 3:31). The word *lb’t* probably means ‘lionesses’. In one of the psalms of David (57:4) there is a prayer which combines lions and arrows. This information and location of the find near Bethlehem may point to some connections with David’s activities in the vicinity.

Another old and important inscription is the so-called Gezer Calendar from the 10th century BC, discovered in 1908. It describes monthly and bi-monthly periods and suggests what the farmer should do in each. The so-called Mesha Stele (or the Moabite Stone) from c. 850 BC was found in Jordan as early as 1868. We also mentioned earlier the Tel Dan inscription (House of David Stele) from c. 830 BC, discovered at Tel Dan in 1993. It is very important because in it the name of King David appears for the first time in an extra-biblical text.

These are the most representative examples of early Israelite inscriptions. They tell us that the ability to write was very probably known in Israel already at the time of the nation's settlement in the land of Canaan. If a schoolboy's exercise from the period of the Judges has been preserved, there must have been a wealth of other writings as well, but they have disappeared. The most common writing material was papyrus, which is very fragile. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that the majority of the ancient texts have been destroyed. Literary documentation must have become much more common in the period of the monarchy.

3. Canon of the Old Testament

The word “canon” is borrowed from Greek, in which it means ‘rule’ or ‘yardstick’. When we speak of the canon of the Bible, we are referring to the collection of the books which have been accepted as sacred scriptures, first in Judaism, then in Christianity. The Bible is not only a collection of ancient religious writings; it is also an inspired text with divine authority. We believe that it is a revelation of God himself, even though it was written by human beings. In this respect it differs from all other books. According to our Christian belief, the text of the individual books of the Bible has been written under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We also believe that he guided the process of deciding which books should be accepted into the biblical canon.

The oldest parts of the Old Testament existed originally as oral tradition. Later, probably at the time of the monarchy or even earlier, it became more common to write down memories of the history of the people, laws, religious practices and reports of wars. The biblical prophets wrote down messages which were given to them by the Lord (see Dan. 9:2).

During the Exile the Jewish people were particularly motivated to compile their sacred writings to remind themselves that God had led his chosen people in spite of the great disaster of the Exile. The first literary compilation may have been the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. It must have been ready no later than the time of Ezra and Nehemiah in the 5th century BC, although its origins were much farther in the past.

A Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, known as the Septuagint, or LXX, was completed in the 3rd century BC. At that time all of the Old Testament texts including the Apocrypha were ready. There are mentions of a collection of the sacred books dating back to the 2nd century BC, in other words the Maccabean period. As a result, at the beginning of the Christian era all books of the Old Testament were

well known and generally accepted. The Synod of Jamnia (Jabneh) in Palestine finalized the limits of the Jewish Holy Scriptures in the last decade of the 1st century BC.

There are four text editions of the Old Testament Scriptures that differ somewhat from each other: the preliminary phase of the so-called Masoretic Text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Qumran Texts, and the Septuagint. An ancient text form preserved by the Jewish people, the Masoretic Text represents the most original Old Testament text. In its original form it contained only the Hebrew consonants. The vowels were added from the 6th century AD on. This text form is the basis of most Bible translations today, and it is considered the most reliable and original text. However, the three later editions have also shed light to the understanding of some difficult passages.

The Samaritan Pentateuch was written using the Samaritan alphabet, which differs from the Hebrew alphabet, and was in general use before the Babylonian captivity. There are some significant differences between the Hebrew and the Samaritan versions. Found in 1947-49 close to the Dead Sea, the Qumran Texts – a huge collection of biblical and extra-biblical texts – were a sensational discovery (see also page xx). The text form differs somewhat from the Masoretic Text. The study of the Qumran manuscripts is still going on. The Septuagint is an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and therefore very important. It is not entirely identical with the Hebrew text. The Septuagint was the Bible of the early Christians.

The Hebrew Bible is divided into three parts: Law (Pentateuch), Prophets, and Writings (Hagiographa), in Hebrew: Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim. Jesus referred to all three, when he said to his disciples in Luke 24:44, "Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." In addition, the Greek version, the Septuagint, includes a collection of books known as the Apocrypha. These books are: Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom, Sirach (also called Ben Sira or Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, Additions to Daniel, and 1-2 Maccabees. They belong to the Roman Catholic Canon. According to most Protestant Churches it is useful to

read them, but they are not considered to belong to the canon of the Holy Scriptures.

4. The question of the authority of the Old Testament

In this chapter we ask what our attitude as Christians should be towards the Old Testament. Can we regard the Old Testament as the authoritative Word of God, although we give priority to the New Testament and although the Old Testament contains a lot of text material that is not valid for Christians any more.

The starting point is that the Old Testament was the Word of God for Jesus and the apostles. The New Testament acknowledges the authority of the Old Testament. Two passages in particular are often referred to in this connection: 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:20-21. The apostle Paul writes to Timothy, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”. The apostle Peter writes: “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Several other Bible passages could be quoted. The Old Testament was considered to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it was read as the Word of God. Later the church has formulated this view by saying that the Bible is totally human and totally divine. All Bible books were written by human beings, and they have real human and historical origins, which should be studied using normal scientific tools. But at the same time they were influenced by the Holy Spirit who guided the writers. For this reason the Bible is 100 % human and 100 % divine. Its human content cannot be separated from that which is divine.

From one point of view the entire Old Testament is authoritative, and each book is as important. However, there are many parts of the Old Testament that are not to be followed by us Christians. How can we distinguish between them? We can say that no part of the Bible is without authority but not every part of it is of equal importance. We cannot separate the divine from the human in the Bible, but it is possible to distinguish the normative from the incidental, the central from the peripheral.

Our foremost tool in making this distinction is the New Testament. It leads us to correct understanding of the Old Testament. From the standpoint of the New Testament we can say that we have no need to perform sacrifices any more, because Jesus was the final sacrifice for us. But the texts dealing with the various sacrifices in the Book of Leviticus are also important, because they show us the way to salvation in the old covenant and point to fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

By the same token, we need not observe the ritual food rules of Leviticus, because Jesus gave us a new rule, according to which all food is clean. “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean’” (Matt 15:17-18). Following his Master, Paul says, “One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him” (Rom 14:2-3).

To take another kind of example, let us look at what we should think about the Ten Commandments. Their basic meaning in the Old Testament is undeniable (Exod 20 and Deut 5). Keeping them was not the way to salvation; instead, they showed how the saved must live. In the New Testament several passages underline the importance of the Ten Commandments (e.g. Matt 5-7, Luke 18:20, Rom 13:9). Consequently, they belong to us Christians as well as to the people in the old covenant. But, keeping them is not the way to salvation for us either; they show how God’s people should live in this world.

The Old Testament contains many warnings, a great deal of encouragement and a wealth of comforting words to God’s people, Israel. The Christian church has always understood that the words given to the old covenant people belong to the new covenant people as well. As we read the Bible we may accept them as personal cautions, consolations and promises. They are God’s eternal words for us human beings.

One way to study the Old Testament is to look for typological models of Jesus Christ and his work. The early church used this method in interpreting the Bible, and actually this method is found in the Bible itself. We do well to remember Martin Luther, who said that we must search Christ in the Bible and that he is found everywhere in it. This helps us to understand the words of Jesus in Luke 24:44, “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Jesus can be found in the Old Testament in several different ways. The most common one is to look for prophecies that speak about him. There are a lot of predictions which the New Testament or the early church has interpreted as Messianic prophecies. Here are some examples: Gen 3:15, 49:10; 2 Sam 7:16; Ps 2:7-8, 22:16, 110:1, 4; Isa 7:14, 9:6, 11:1, Isa 53; Jer 23:5; Ezek 34:23; Dan 7:13-14; Micah 5:2; Zech 9:9.

The second way to find Jesus in the Old Testament is by using the typological method mentioned above. There are a lot of persons, institutions and events which are models or types of Jesus and the future salvation. The Book of Hebrews is the prime example of how this method is used. It tells us that Jesus is greater than Melchizedek and greater than Moses. He is our High Priest but also the sacrifice. Jesus himself proclaims that he is greater than Jonah and greater than Solomon (Matt 12:39-42). Other typological models are e.g. David, Elijah (of John the Baptist) and Elisha (of Jesus), Joseph, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Zerubbabel. All of them have some features that were fulfilled in Jesus.

There is also a third way to find Christ in the Old Testament. Regarding many passages where God himself is the subject, the testimony of the New Testament is that the passage actually points to Jesus. For example, in Ps 23 and Ezek 34 God is called a shepherd. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says about himself that he is the good shepherd (John 10:11). During his imprisonment John the Baptist asked if Jesus was the one who was to come, and Jesus answered him by pointing to two Old Testament texts (Isa 35:4-6, 61:1). The first text contains the following statements: “Your God will come... he will come to save

you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped...” Isaiah predicted what God would do, and now Jesus was fulfilling the prediction.

What is especially important in the Old Testament is its theological content. The historical events that are recounted are important as well, because they are the story of how God has acted in this world. But theology is more central than history in interpreting the Bible. Therefore we can call this method of Bible interpretation salvation-historical. Bible history is part of world history, but because it is in the Bible it is part of the history of God’s chosen people and his preparations for the salvation of mankind.

5. What can archaeology tell about the Bible?

Archaeologists study the human cultures and societies of the past. Sometimes archaeology has been called “the science of rubbish”, because it is interested in remains covered by the soil. Archaeological fieldwork consists of digging the ground and trying to make sense of ancient ruins and artefacts. The discoveries reveal important facts about human history and the ancient ways of life. Nowadays archaeologists work together with many other branches of science (e.g. anthropology, paleontology, biology and geography).

Past and present in biblical archaeology

The first steps of the modern archaeological research were taken at the end of the 19th century. Initially, the goal in most cases was to look for occasional treasures from ancient sites. A major breakthrough in archaeological methodology was made by Sir Flinders Petrie, an Englishman who studied Tell el-Hesi in southern Palestine between 1890 and 1894. He understood the importance of relative chronology in a place where there were many levels of settlement on top of each other. In the beginning of the 20th century several other archaeologists took up the same method. Later years have seen great advances in archaeological methodology, and at present many new tools of modern technology are being used.

Nowadays there are approximately thirty excavation projects each year in Israel. In addition, there are always several ongoing salvation excavations, because in connection with many building projects (road building, building of urban centres, etc.) remains of ancient settlements may be unearthed, and they must be studied before the work can go on. The main projects are conducted by the archaeological departments of such universities as the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University. All excavations are controlled by the Israel Antiquities Authority. As a rule, Israeli scholars direct the projects, but a few projects are carried out in collaboration with international

organisations. The actual digging is hard work and is carried out by volunteers from different parts of the world.

Methods of archaeological research

Archaeological fieldwork often begins with a **survey** of the area. Researchers walk through the area trying to find signs of old settlements. If they find pieces of pottery or something else, they are able to make conclusions about the approximate age and significance of the site. Quite often a large-scale survey gives so much data that a report of the archaeological epochs of the area can be written.

When a section of the area has been chosen for detailed archaeological research, **the actual excavations** can begin. Traditionally archaeological work has focused on **tells**. A **tell** is a hill which contains remains of ancient settlements. They are on top of each other: the older the settlement, the lower down it is. People used to build on top of the ruins of the former city. There may be even dozens of layers of old settlements on top of each other. A tell may therefore contain history from hundreds, even thousands of years.

How does an archaeologist determine the age of a find? He has many different **dating methods** at his disposal. At first he looks at the pottery found at the site. Every age had a way of its own in shaping and firing ceramic vessels. A specialist spots the differences and is able to date the clay objects according to their type. **Pottery typology** is widely used and is often the most reliable way to determine the period with which the excavation is dealing. **Stratigraphy** helps as well, because the layers, or strata, are in a chronological order. Radiocarbon dating can also be used. It is a technique used in laboratories, and the dating is based on the study of organic material (bones, trees, seeds, etc.). This method is usually accurate to within 50-100 years and can be used in dating up to 50,000 years. There are several other scientific methods for dating purposes: dendrochronology, potassium-argon dating, thermoluminescence dating, etc.

What does archaeology tell about the past?

Archaeology deals with the history of mankind. When archaeological research takes place in Israel or in other lands of the Bible (e.g. Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Iraq) we speak about biblical archaeology. Old Testament history from Abraham to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah covers approximately 1,500 years. These periods are called the Middle Bronze Age (2200-1550 BC), the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BC), the Iron Age (1200-586 BC), and the Persian Era (586-c. 300 BC).

The **Middle Bronze Age** is the time of the biblical patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). Archaeologically no signs of them have been found, but the overall picture which archaeology gives fits in very well with the Bible stories. Also several biblical names have been found. The **Late Bronze Age** is the time when the Israelites were in Egypt. There is no archaeological evidence of the Egyptian captivity of God's people. However, the period of the Hyksos is the only one in Egyptian history when foreigners – like Joseph in the Bible – were in a ruling position. The most likely candidate for the pharaoh of the exodus is Ramses II, who is very well known from historical sources. The Israelites arrived in the Promised Land at the beginning of the **Iron Age**. From this time on we have much more information based on archaeological research. The settlement of the Land is well evidenced, and in the era of the monarchy the existence of a number of biblical persons is documented in extra-biblical sources.

Can archaeology prove that the Bible is historically true? No, it cannot. On the other hand, it cannot prove that it is not historically true either. The Bible is true the results of archaeological research notwithstanding. The study of ancient ruins and remains reveals something of what has been written in the Bible, but it does not give access to everything in the biblical narratives. In spite of their randomness, the findings provide clues to what life was like in ancient times. The name of King David has been found, but the name of King Solomon has not. This does not mean, however, that David is a historical person and that Solomon is not.

The Bible is full of personal names, place names and descriptions of wars. Archaeologists have discovered most of the places mentioned in the Bible, several personal names have been documented, and many of the wars have been unearthed by the spade of the archaeologist. This proves that the Bible tells about real history; it is not a collection of fictitious stories.

Archaeological research is needed, because it provides a lot of information about the historical background of the Bible. It illustrates the world in which the biblical persons lived. It is extremely valuable in that it gives contemporary data about events, although the Bible text is often much younger than the event itself. That is why historians may say that archaeology provides primary evidence and the Bible secondary evidence of the past.

The most important discoveries

What, then, are the most important archaeological discoveries from the biblical point of view? It is a matter of taste. The following is a list of just a few significant findings.

The altar found on Mount Ebal by Adam Zertal from Haifa University was exactly like the one mentioned in Joshua 8. It is very rare to find a construction that is mentioned in the Bible. The altar can be dated to the 13th/12th century BC based on the pottery found at the site. The bones discovered around the altar belong to animals that are mentioned in Leviticus 11 as clean food.

Another sacrificial altar, part of Jeroboam's temple at Dan, which was discovered by Avraham Biran, should also be mentioned as one of the most important Bible-related discoveries. Jeroboam built this altar in the 930's BC when the kingdom was divided into two. The foundation and the steps leading to the altar can be seen today as well as some other structures.

The discovery of the name of David in a stele in Dan created a sensation, because it was the first time his name was found outside the Bible. There are some other biblical names in the stele as well. It was erected in the 9th century BC by an Aramean king, who claims to have defeated the House of David.

Some other texts were already mentioned in the chapter entitled “The beginnings of the history of writing”. The most important text discovery ever was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Qumran Scrolls. The first texts were found in 1948 in caves near the northern end of the Dead Sea. After that thousands of additional texts have come to light, and they have been under study until the present time. The scrolls were stored in pottery vessels and hidden in caves during the Jewish war against the Romans in 66-70 AD. They were written by people who lived in the deserted area close to the Dead Sea during the two last centuries BC and up to 66 AD. These people were very probably Essenes, a strict Jewish sect that separated itself from mainstream Judaism and temple worship. The Dead Sea Scrolls consist of a huge number of three types of writings: biblical texts, apocryphal texts, and the sect’s own regulations. The regulations give a good idea of what Judaism was like at the time of Jesus. The biblical texts are extremely important, because they pushed back the date of the earliest Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible by almost one thousand years. Before the Qumran discoveries the oldest manuscripts were from the 10th century AD. Now the scholars were able to see whether the texts had been changed during the intervening centuries. They found out that the texts had remained nearly unchanged. The copyists of the biblical texts had been extremely careful, and we can conclude that the Old Testament texts in our Bibles are reliable.

Some text fragments found in Israel have been written on potsherds, i.e. pieces of clay vessels, which were commonly used as writing material. These texts are called ostracons. The most famous collections are the Lachish ostracons, the Arad ostracons and the Samaria ostracons. All of them have some links with the Bible. The Lachish ostracons were written just before the Babylonian army destroyed the city in 586 BC. The ostracon no. 4 includes the text “we cannot see any

more the lights of Azekah”. It is nearly identical with Jer 34:7, “While the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah that were still holding out – Lachish and Azekah. These were the only fortified cities left in Judah.”

One of the most interesting links between archaeology and the Bible are the so-called six chamber gates discovered at Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer. According to 1 Kgs 9:15 these cities were built by King Solomon, and an identical gate dating back to the 10th century BC, in other words to Solomon’s time, has been found in all of them. Some scholars have claimed that the gates are from a later period, but their arguments are not convincing. Similar gates have been found at some other sites as well, for example at Lachish.

The excavations at Hazor have revealed a lot regarding the period of the Israelites’ settlement in the Land of Canaan. A huge Late Bronze Age city once stood at the site, but it was destroyed by a furious fire in the 12th century BC. Then, possibly after a short occupational gap, a very modest settlement was established at the site. The data from Hazor fits in well with the biblical story of Joshua 11. Joshua even emphasizes the burning of Hazor by telling about it twice.

We could add tens of examples to the list. However, the overall picture is more important than occasional discoveries. Many cities mentioned in the Bible have been found, there is proof about wars mentioned in the Holy Scripture, and several biblical names of individuals appear in extra-biblical texts. This means that biblical history is part of the actual history of the ancient Middle East. We will never find proof of everything mentioned in the Bible, but that is not necessary. The pieces which archaeology provides to the puzzle of history are enough proof of the historical nature of the Book.

6. The geography of the Land of Israel

Israel is located between Europe, Asia and Africa. Geographically it belongs to Asia (to the Middle East), but politically it has nowadays closer connections with Europe. The Great Rift Valley connects it with Africa. The most important ancient overland military and trade routes from north (Europe/Asia) to south (Africa) and from east to west had to pass through the Land of Israel because of its unique location between the sea and the desert.

The so-called Way of the Sea (e.g. Isa 9:1; in Latin: Via Maris) was the international main route through Israel. The other important north-south route through the plateau, east of the Jordan Valley, was called the King's Highway (e.g. Num 20:17). The main geographical regions from the west to the east in Israel are: the Coastal Plain, the Central Hill Country and the Jordan Valley.

The Coastal Plain reaches from the border of Egypt to Lebanon. Only Mount Carmel cuts it as it descends directly to the Mediterranean. The coast is very low and has always been unsuitable for ships. The only possible harbours were at Joppe and Acco, later also Dor. Nowadays the main seaport is Haifa, south of the Acco Plateau. The biblical name of the Coastal Plain is Sharon, which in the Bible is often a symbol of beauty (e.g. Isaiah 35:2). In the Old Testament period the area was settled by the Philistines. Their five major cities (Pentapolis), Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath, were located in the Coastal Plain. Nowadays the largest urban centre is Tel Aviv-Yafo.

The Central Hill Country is a mountainous area extending from Hebron in the south to Galilee in the north. The southern part is called Judea, the middle part Samaria and the northern part Galilee. Between Samaria and Galilee the Jezreel Valley cuts through a mountain ridge. Jerusalem is located in the Judean Mountains at about 800 metres above sea level. The highest mountains in Samaria reach up to 1,000 metres. The Hill Country is the area which the early Israelites first settled. Nowadays the area between the Judean Mountains and the

Jezreel Valley is inhabited by Palestinians. It is called the West Bank (of the Jordan River).

The Shephelah is the name of a rolling, hilly area in the south, between the Coastal Plain and the Central Hill Country. In biblical times it was the border between the Israelites and the Philistines. Shephelah has been translated in various ways in different Bible translations. NIV translates it “the foothills” in 1 Kgs 10:27 and “the western foothills” in 1 Chr 27:28. The most important city in biblical times was Lachish. Other sites mentioned in the Bible are for instance Gezer, Beth-shemesh, Timnah, Azekah and Moresheth-gath.

The Jordan Valley is part of the Great Rift Valley, which begins in Lebanon and continues through the Sea of Galilee (Lake of Gennesaret), the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, the Arava Valley and the Red Sea. From there it continues to East Africa through Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania down to Mozambique (or even Botswana). This unique phenomenon is at its lowest in Israel. The Sea of Galilee is about 200 metres below sea level and the Dead Sea as much as 400 metres below sea level. The Dead Sea is the lowest place on earth.

The Sea of Galilee is the only freshwater basin in Israel. It is about 20 kilometres long and 15 kilometres wide. Through the ages it has been the most important fishing area in the country. It is surrounded by mountains. In the ancient times the most important cities around it were Hammath, Rakkath and Kinnereth (Josh 19:35). In the New Testament times the most famous town was Capernaum, the home town of Jesus. Nowadays the biggest city is Tiberias.

North of the Sea of Galilee the most significant city in ancient times was Hazor. It is mentioned several times in extra-biblical sources. The Bible says that it “had been the head of all these kingdoms” (Josh 11:10). The northernmost city has always been Dan, which is located at the foot of Mount Hermon, the highest peak in Israel reaching to almost 3,000 metres. The north-eastern part of the country is nowadays called the Golan Heights.

Israel has no big rivers unlike Egypt (the Nile) and Mesopotamia (the Euphrates and the Tigris). A good description of this is found in Deut 11:10-12, “The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.” In this way geography defines Israel’s role as a people that is dependent on God alone.

The main crops in Israel are listed in Deut 8:7-8, “For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land – a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey.” Israel is still a land of agriculture, but nowadays citrus fruits are its main export products. Precision mechanics and diamond cutting are important sources of income as well.

The bedrock in Israel is limestone almost everywhere. It is found in various shades of colour, all of them light and soft, and it has been the most popular building material through the ages, even today. It is very easy to quarry, but the stone hardens after it has been taken out of the ground. For example the temple of Jerusalem was built of limestone. Today all buildings in Jerusalem must be faced with limestone blocks. Another clearly noticeable type of rock is black basalt, a volcanic stone which covers large areas of the northernmost part of the country. It originates in the ancient volcanoes of the Golan area.

7. Creation and the scientific world view

For many, especially for Westerners, the most difficult stumbling block regarding the biblical message is the conflict between the creation story of the Bible and the scientific world view. The discrepancy between them seems insurmountable. The Bible speaks about creation in seven days six thousand years ago, and scientists have told us for a long time that the age of the earth is 4,5 billion years. To believe in both seems impossible. Which view should we choose?

Different views concerning the problem

We can sketch four different possibilities as we seek to understand the relationship between science and the Bible. The first possibility is to say that the Bible is right and that science is wrong. According to this view, the Bible is the infallible word of God, and we should be very sceptical about what scientists tell us about the prehistory of the world. Supporters of this view are extremely critical of the evolution theory and all modern-day dating methods, for example the carbon-14 method. They claim that the earth is six thousand or at most ten thousand years old.

The second possibility claims the opposite: science is right and the Bible wrong. The modern scientific view of the world is a self-evident fact. The Bible is an old book which may have great religious value but which must not be regarded as a historical source. Supporters of this opinion consist of both atheists and men in the street but also of many theologians. Atheists and those with a secular philosophy of life do not attach any special value to the Bible, and liberal theologians study it only as a religious source, especially when it comes to the Book of Genesis.

The third possible way to search a solution to this dilemma is to think that there are two different truths, scientific and religious, and that they have no connection whatsoever. Let the scientists do their work and let the believers put their trust in the Bible, but to combine these

two is useless and wrong. To take an example from the world of the New Testament, advocates of scientific thinking could say that the resurrection of Jesus did not really take place, but that it can be true in the religious sense. Scientific truth and religious truth have nothing to do with each other. This view is quite common in the theological faculties of the West.

The author of this book does not support any of the above three views. The fourth possibility is to try to take both scientific research and the biblical account very seriously. Science has its validity, because in scientific research we use the brains which God has given us. As a result of God's creative work, man is naturally interested in researching the past of mankind and the essence of the world. Science is something that belongs to man's essential nature, and therefore it must be allowed to be done and developed. However, science may also give false results, because the people doing it are fallible. As a fallen creature man also uses his brains to oppose God. On the other hand, the Bible has been given to us by God, but its function is different from that of science. Unlike the defenders of the third view are thinking, science and the Bible do not contain opposite truths. Instead, they present different views on the same subject. Biblical history is not insignificant, because in it God reveals himself in human history. The resurrection of Jesus cannot be true and untrue at the same time. Although we cannot prove it scientifically, we can believe that it really happened.

How to understand the dilemma?

Now to the question itself. In the Christian world there are two main opinions concerning the problem of creation and science. One is close to the first view described above. Known as the creationist view, it takes the Bible very seriously, but does not trust science in this question. It points out that there are scientific arguments that contradict the evolution theory. Many proponents of this view argue that the world is just a few thousand years old. One recent variation of this view is called Intelligent Design. Its supporters lay more emphasis on scientific critique of the evolution theory than on defending the Bible.

Mainline Christianity, including the author of this book, represents the view that the world is, or at least may be, very old, and that there is nothing in the Bible to contradict this. According to this view, the first chapter of Genesis may well cover several million years. The Bible is historically reliable, but its first chapter has not been intended to be interpreted literally. It is more or less a poetic description of the creation. A literal interpretation leads into difficulties. For example, the sun was created on the fourth day. But how can days and nights be separated without the sun? However, the beginning of Genesis is incomparably valuable as a fundamental divine revelation of the creation of the world. The order in which animals and human beings were created is in agreement with the findings of science. The supporters of this view may or may not accept the evolution theory, but they all agree that scientific research is a valuable God-given tool.

The age of the world is, or at least can be, 4.5 billion years, and the age of the universe 13.7 billion years. God has had time to do his creative work. “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (2 Pet 3:8, see Ps 90:4). Naturally, this interpretation raises many questions, like all other interpretations.

One big question is the age of man. According to the Bible, Adam was created from the dust. According to science man has existed for a very long time, and human beings are descended from the hominids who, in turn, are descended from the apes and they again from the lower animals. Isn't the evolution theory, then, in an irreconcilable conflict with the biblical view? Yes, it is. However, if we try to take seriously both science and the Bible, we should look for a solution.

One possible way to think is the following. Everything we know about the hominids, such as *Australopithecus africanus* and the Neanderthal man, belongs to the biblical category of the living creatures who were created on the sixth day. We could say that they were created in the morning of that day. Adam and Eve were created in the evening of the same day. There may or may not have been a link between them. The former lived thousands, even millions of years ago. The latter were created possibly not more than ten thousand years ago, because we

know from the archaeological point of view that agriculture and cattle raising, the occupations of Cain and Abel, are not older than that.

To sum up, it is possible to think that science tells the truth about the origins of the world and the origins of man, and that the Bible tells the same truth with different words. In order to clarify this, we can imagine two different pictures of man, one made by a scientist, let us say a biologist, and another made by an artist. The former may write down many complicated physical and chemical formulas, but the latter paints a portrait of the subject. Both of them may be true, but seemingly they have nothing in common. However, both have the same subject or theme and both give a true interpretation of that, true but totally different from the other. In the same way, the modern scientific world view may tell the same story about the prehistory of the world as the Bible, but it has a different way of describing it.

Finally, let us remember that the considerations presented here are just considerations. Nobody was present when God created the world. As Christians we believe that the Bible tells us enough for us to be able to believe in God. What it does not tell is not so important from the point of view of our faith. But thinking about these things and studying them can be both interesting and worthwhile. Only God knows what is true.

8. Old Testament research history and methodology

The Jewish tradition has used two main ways to interpret the Old Testament: allegorical and typological. Allegorical interpretation means that the text is seen to have both a literal meaning and a deeper meaning. The text may be merely a reflection of the real intention of the text. Typological interpretation means that some persons or institutions or events in the Old Testament are types or models of something which is coming much later, in other words of the Messiah and his redemptive work.

The Church Fathers of the first centuries AD adopted methods that were similar to those used by the Jews. In addition, they emphasized salvation-historical and eschatological views of the Bible. According to the salvation-historical interpretation, God has revealed himself in the real history of his people. The eschatological interpretation of the Bible illuminates the end times and emphasizes that the prophecies of old will be fulfilled during the final phase of world history.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was one of the greatest Old Testament scholars in church history. He underlined the literal meaning of the Bible, but used also the typological method of interpretation that had been very common since the early Church. For him the Old Testament was absolutely the Word of God, and it proclaimed Jesus Christ in all its parts. This is one of the invaluable heritages of the Lutheran Reformation.

The so-called **Age of Enlightenment** in the 18th century gave birth to modern biblical exegesis. During the following century critical scholars, especially in Germany, took distance from the traditional Christian way of studying the Bible. They started to research biblical texts in the same way as secular books. Several new methods were developed, and different sources behind the Old Testament books were discovered. The first famous scholar of this era was Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). He is best known for a book entitled *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*. In it he claims that the Old Testament was written relatively late and that therefore the historical information it contains

cannot be trusted. Even today Old Testament scholarship is partly based on the theories of Wellhausen and some of his contemporaries.

After Wellhausen it has become customary to claim that there were several different sources behind the Old Testament. As for the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), the four hypothetical sources that are traditionally listed are: the Jahwist, the Elohist, the Deuteronomist, and the Priestly Writer. This has been called the JEDP Source Hypothesis or the Documentary Hypothesis. The Jahwist's narrative is said to date back to the early Monarchy (the 10th-9th century BC). The Elohist's narrative is usually dated to about a century after J, i.e. the 9th-8th century BC. The Deuteronomist document corresponds roughly to the Book of Deuteronomy. It was written in the 7th century, in the period of King Josiah. The Priestly source combines laws and customs from various periods of Israel's history. It belongs to the post-exilic period, i.e. the 5th century BC.

The historical books of the Bible have been divided into two sources. The Deuteronomistic History Work consists of the Books of Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. The Chronistic History Work consists of the Books of 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. Some of the ideas contained in them can also be seen in a number of prophetic books of the Bible.

What should we think of the relevance of these source theories? It depends on how they are used. They may serve as useful tools as we seek to understand better the differences in the text. However, nowadays their dating and their dividing lines are questioned by a number of scholars. They cannot be considered strictly reliable sources any more, and they cannot explain the message of the Old Testament.

The methodological tool developed by Wellhausen and others is called **the Historical-Critical Method**. It is divided into textual criticism, literary or source criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism. Textual criticism concentrates on the study of the original text form of

the Bible. Literary criticism looks for the different sources behind the biblical text. Form criticism analyzes the various literary forms of the text, and redaction history is interested in the influence of the editor(s) on the text.

The historical-critical method has dominated Bible exegesis up to the present time. However, several new methodological tools have been developed. In most cases, they have not replaced the historical-critical method; instead, they have been used beside it. They are not as concerned about discovering the various stages behind the text as they are to understand the available text form as such. Narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism, structuralism, and the empirical model approach are some of these new methodological tools.

Is the historical-critical method a good or bad method in biblical exegesis? It depends on how it is used. In principle it is a useful tool. It is necessary to try to understand what the most original text form of the Bible is. There are sources behind the text and different forms in the text. The study of those forms and sources may help the student to understand the text better than before. Traces of the work of the editor can be found in the biblical books, and these in turn may give us new insights into text. My conclusion is that the historical-critical method is a relevant way to study the Bible.

There is, however, a negative side to how this method has been used. It has led exegetical research very far from the Bible's own intent, and it has often been used in ways that have done much damage to the message of God's word. In searching for different sources theologians have sometimes entirely missed the actual meaning of the text. They work with the hypothesis that they are dealing with a very young text. This is most unfortunate as far as trust in the text's historical reliability is concerned. If you overemphasize the significance of the different forms of the text, you can be led astray and end up understanding the text wrong. For these reasons some biblical scholars reject this method or try to develop something else instead.

As was mentioned above, nowadays many scholars take the biblical text as it is without spending too much time in trying to clarify its

history of origin. Admittedly, trying to understand the origins of the text is useful, but because of its hypothetical nature this method may give little reliable information about the text itself. Furthermore, when we use the Bible in a church, it is important to remember that the majority of Christians have accepted it as such for two thousand years, and that the Christians who read it today in their homes have the same attitude. Biblical scholarship can and must offer new ways to understand the word of God, but it should not distance itself too far from the traditional attitude of ordinary Christians throughout the ages. That is why we sketch out some of the most important ways of interpreting the Bible in the next chapter.

9. How to interpret the Bible?

A good starting point is to recall how the early church interpreted the Old Testament. It regarded it as God's word and tried to find Jesus Christ in it. This was also the model of the Reformation. The main principles can be summarized as follows: the Bible must be taken literally as the word of God. Its main message is the account of Jesus Christ and salvation through him. The special emphasis of the Lutheran reformation was that the doctrine of righteousness is the most central issue in the Bible. In other words, we are saved by faith and by grace alone, not by deeds.

The traditional Lutheran emphasis is that the Bible is clear and easy to understand. This is a very important principle, although we know at the same time that there are many very difficult passages in the Bible. This principle of easiness and simplicity means that everybody can understand the word of God in the right way. Anyone can find the way to salvation and understand the most important points of Christianity without any theological education. The Holy Spirit opens the Word, and accepting this does not require any special knowledge or intelligence.

The Bible is both easy to understand and extremely deep and inexhaustible. It can be understood correctly by using common sense, but the most learned theologian may feel that he has merely wet his feet in the ocean of the biblical message. The most central message is clear and understandable for everybody, but the Holy Book is so rich that there is enough material for study for ordinary Bible readers and theologians alike for the rest of their lives. Everybody must accept the fact that there are a lot of passages in the Bible that are difficult or impossible to understand well enough.

The following principles may help the reader and student of the Bible to understand it better. The examples, which illuminate ten good rules of Bible study, are taken both from the Old and the New Testament.

9.1. Read the context of the verse or passage

Each separate word in the Bible is God's word, and in many cases the Bible gives the correct and exact answer to our questions. Taking the verse out of its context (the verses surrounding it) may sometimes lead us astray. Therefore, in order to understand the text as correctly as possible, it is wise to read the context and try to understand how it illuminates that particular passage.

The story of Jacob in Genesis 32 is a good example. If you read only verse 24, you may wonder about the identity of the "man" who is wrestling with Jacob. But when you read on, you realize that the "man" was God. You will understand the significance of this event, when you read what happened before and what took place afterwards. Jacob's problem was his broken relationship with his brother Esau. He had to wrestle with God before he was able to face Esau.

In Exodus 20:5 we find a one-sided picture of God, "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." The continuation reveals the other side of God, "...but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments."

Ecclesiastes 3:20-21 seems to be in conflict with other Bible passages, "All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" When we remember that the book was probably written by King Solomon after he had become estranged from God, it is easier to understand these words. However, at the end of the book he speaks with a different tone, "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Eccl 12:13-14).

Finally, an example from the New Testament. Romans 11:29 reads, "...for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable." This passage has often been understood to refer to the spiritual gifts which God gives to the

believer. This is not a very serious misunderstanding, but if we read the context we can see that the goal of the verse is elsewhere. It teaches about Israel's destiny. God will never reverse the call he has given to his chosen people. This verse says nothing about spiritual gifts. It speaks about the call of Israel and – interpreted typologically - about the call of a believer.

9.2. Take the Bible literally unless the style or the text itself tells you otherwise

Normally we follow the rule “read it as it has been written and believe that it has been written, and you will be given as it has been written”. Mostly the literal meaning is the correct meaning. Avoid trying to find first a deeper meaning.

However, sometimes the text requires some other explanation. If the style is poetic, it must be understood as a poetic text, and the rules of poetry differ from those of narrative text. If there is a saying or a proverb in the text, it must be understood as a saying, not literally. Sometimes the context gives a hint of an interpretation other than a literal one.

Here are some examples of poetic expression. In Judges 5:20 we read, “From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera.” This is a poetic account of the battle which the previous chapter describes in the narrative style. The message is that God helped his people in the battle against Sisera's troops. But everybody understands that the planets had nothing to do with this. The description is symbolical, not realistic.

The second example is from Job 38:4-6, “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” Here God speaks to Job beautifully, poetically about the creation of the world. We know that the world has neither footings nor a

cornerstone. “The morning stars sang together” is a poetic description as well. But the message is clear: God is the creator and Job a human being.

The Book of Psalms is full of poetic expressions. Proverbs is a book that consists, naturally, of proverbs, and the reader is reminded about the special nature of proverbs. In Proverbs 30 expressions like this are repeated, “There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand.” The reader may ask which is right, three or four – but in vain. This is a typical construction that is called parallelism. The same thing is said twice in two different ways. All poetic Bible texts use this construction, and it must not be interpreted too literally.

1 Kgs 7:23 is a description of the metal water basin which King Solomon put in his temple. The text says, “Measuring ten cubits from rim to rim... it took a line of thirty cubits to measure around it.” Nowadays we know that if the diameter is 10, the circle is 31,415926, etc. Is the Bible wrong? No, it tells the truth with sufficient accuracy, not with mathematical exactness. It uses everyday language, not scientific terminology.

Then two examples of sayings from the New Testament. According to Mark 13:2 Jesus prophesied about Jerusalem’s destiny, “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.” When we go to Jerusalem, we can look at the foundation of the temple Jesus spoke about and see that there are still some stones on top of each other. Was Jesus wrong in his prediction? No, he used a common saying, in the same way we might if we wanted to say that something has been destroyed totally.

Sometimes we read in the Gospels that “the whole city came to see Jesus”. Is that right? Is it true that every person living in Capernaum was present? I doubt it. The meaning is simply that a large number of people wanted to see Jesus and that the streets were full of citizens. We might use the same type of expression. If a very important person came to our town and a lot of people went to see him, we could say that the whole town was there.

In Matt 12:40 Jesus speaks about his death and resurrection comparing it with the story of the Prophet Jonah. Jesus says, “The Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” But if we count from Good Friday to Easter Sunday morning, there are only two nights, not three. The meaning is that Jesus will be in the tomb during three days, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

9.3. Pay attention to the salvation-historical line of the Bible

If you understand the salvation-historical line of the Bible, you may avoid some misunderstandings. From this perspective we know that the first chapters of Genesis (so-called Primeval history, Gen 1-11) form a basis for the biblical message. The creation, the fall and the first promises of the coming Messiah are foundational to the correct understanding of the world and of God. Abraham and the promises given to him (Gen 12:1-3) are the following important phase in God’s plan to save mankind. God has chosen a certain land and a certain nation as he prepares the coming of the Messiah. Through him the world will be blessed. Genesis as a whole is essential for the proper understanding of the salvation-historical message of the Bible.

The next stage is the slavery of God’s people in Egypt. The nation is formed there, and the promise given to Abraham keeps the faith of Israel alive. The Exodus, the escape from Egypt and the conquest of the Promised Land, is a central theme in salvation history. It is a cornerstone in the Old Testament, because it tells about God’s saving work on behalf of his people. The Exodus in the Old Testament can be compared with what happened at Golgotha in the New Testament: God’s sovereign act to save his people.

In the Book of Exodus we read about the giving of the Ten Commandments and the instructions for building the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant. The Book of Leviticus contains instructions on how to approach God through the sacrifices. These guidelines reveal the way to salvation and give advice on how to live. The commandments show the way to a good life but not to salvation. Salvation comes through

the sacrifices and by grace. Numbers and Deuteronomy describe the years of wandering through the wilderness towards the Promised Land.

The Book of Joshua is the story of the settlement of the Promised Land. God has fulfilled his promises. The Book of Judges is a tragic description of the events which led Israel to forsake the Lord, its God. After this period all the books in the Old Testament tell about Israel worshipping false gods instead of the true God. Time and again God sent prophets to warn his chosen people and to call it back to its Lord. The Books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles tell about the period of the monarchy and the divided kingdom. Finally God had to punish his people and send it into exile to Babylon. This could have meant the end for the nation, but it didn't, because God still had plans for his people. The end of the Old Testament speaks about the return from Babylon and the rebuilding of the temple and the land.

We find the message of God's good plan for his people in all the books of the Old Testament. Already in the dawn of mankind he promised to send the one who would "crush the head of the serpent". Later on the promise of this coming Messiah became increasingly clear. He will be a descendant of Abraham. He will come from the tribe of Judah. He will be a King from David's royal line. And last but not least: he will be the suffering servant of the Lord.

The central message of the Bible is the message of salvation. In the Old Testament the focus is on the people of Israel and promises of the coming Messiah. Israel is the chosen people, not because of its obedience but because of God's choosing. This is clearly expressed in Deut 9:4-6, "Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people."

From the very beginning the Bible teaches that salvation comes through grace, not through deeds. Abel was not better than Cain, but he was chosen by God. Noah was not better than his contemporaries, but he "found favour in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen 6:8). Abraham was just one of the people living in Ur of the Chaldeans (Isa 51:2), but God chose him to be the ancestor of his chosen people. At first Abraham

did not believe that God could give him a child, but God gave him the faith that was needed. He was standing outside his tent and counting the stars in the sky when faith was given to him. Then “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). This is one of the key verses in the Bible. Paul cites it when he is teaching about justification by faith, the central message of his letters (Rom. 4:3-5). And 1,500 years later these Bible verses became a turning point in world history. The Reformation changed the world, and the doctrine of justification by faith became again the focal point in the message of the Christian church, thanks to Martin Luther’s teaching.

Everything in the Bible must be understood in this light. God is holy and righteous. He demands righteousness from us. Only absolute obedience is enough for him. But – nobody is obedient enough. Everybody is a sinner. Therefore we need a sacrifice; we need to be reconciled with God. He saves us for his own sake (Isa 43:25). His grace is our only possibility to be saved.

9.4. Understand the difference between the law and the gospel

If you don’t understand the difference between the law and the gospel, you cannot interpret the Bible correctly. This issue has caused a lot of confusion and misunderstanding.

In the Bible “law” is everything that commands, advises, forbids, exhorts, binds, challenges or warns. The Ten Commandments form the core of the law. All calls to repentance by the prophets are law. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is law. The innumerable exhortations of the Apostle Paul in his letters are law.

“Gospel” in the Bible is everything that promises, presents, gives or proclaims God’s grace. It is something that has been given to us unconditionally. We cannot do anything to get it. It comes from outside of us and can only be accepted or rejected. Its main content is the forgiveness of sins. It proclaims the fulfilled work of Jesus.

The law has two purposes. Firstly, it shows the way to a good life. If you keep the law, your life will be good, and if everybody keeps it, life in the society at large will be good. It is the law of life itself. It is written in our hearts, and everybody is able to understand it. Even non-Christians can understand it in some respect (see Rom 1:19-20). It is not only a suggestion on how to live; it is God's holy will. However, it is not the way to salvation.

Secondly, the law shows us that we are lawbreakers. This is the second purpose of the law. The law shows us that we are sinners. Nobody can keep the law, if it is understood in its real meaning. We may not be murderers, and we may not have committed adultery, but there is a lot of sin in our thoughts, motives and attitudes. Nobody can control his words in such a way that he never says anything bad (see Matt 12:36-37). If we understand the law in this way, it condemns us. The Apostle Paul writes, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (Rom 3:20). The law pursues us to a dead end where we have only one possibility to be saved: the gospel.

The gospel has only one purpose: to proclaim that we are free from the judgment of the law. The essence of the gospel is Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins. Already in the Old Testament we see the message of the gospel. It is everywhere. God reveals himself as a merciful God, who accepts man unconditionally, by faith. Sacrifices are the instruments through which man can have a share in forgiveness. Several texts, e.g. in the prophetic books and the Psalms, tell us about God who is merciful and forgiving.

If we confuse the law and the gospel, our understanding of the Bible is led astray. On the one hand, the danger is to think that we are able to fulfil the law. Trying to do that is an endless job, and you can never be sure if you have done enough. On this road you cannot have security of your salvation, because you cannot be sure that you are good enough. On the other hand, if you think that as a Christian you don't need the law any more, you may end up committing sins without any hesitation. Then you are in danger of becoming totally estranged from the real life in Jesus Christ.

Taking both the law and the gospel seriously is not easy, but it is the only way for the Christian. As a result, there is a certain tension in his life, but it is a healthy, useful tension. Both the law and the gospel tell the truth about me. I am a sinner who cannot save himself, but my sins are forgiven because Jesus has reconciled me with God. This is a balanced view and the way to a sound understanding of the Bible.

9.5. Remember that the New Testament interprets the Old Testament correctly

As a matter of fact, the Old Testament contains the entire message of the Bible. But some parts of the message are still “in bud”, and the fulfilment, the “flower” is seen in the New Testament. The Old Testament teaches about salvation by grace, but in the New Testament we see the final formulation of the actual doctrine. The Old Testament predicts the coming of the Messiah, and the New Testament tells about his actual coming.

Many things that were predicted in the Old Testament were fulfilled by and in Jesus Christ. We don’t need sacrifices any more. Jesus declared all the foods clean. Nor do we need a visible temple with all its regulations, because Jesus is our temple. The salvation-historical meaning of the Old Testament ark of the covenant no longer applies, because Jesus is now our “ark of the covenant” (see Rom 3:25).

The Ten Commandments (Ex 20) are the central ethical rule in the Old Testament. The value of the Decalogue is undiminished in the New Testament. It is the universal law for mankind and forms the basis for all ethical thinking.

The command to observe the Sabbath day is an exception. In the Old Testament the significance of the commandment is clear. The chosen people were told to keep the Sabbath day, and it was and would be a sign between God and his people (Ex 32:13). However, in the New Testament its importance seems to diminish. Jesus heals on a Sabbath, and he opposes the Pharisees who demanded that it be observed very

strictly. Jesus proclaims, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Paul must have got his teaching principles directly from the Lord as he writes, “One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom 14:5). The New Testament seems to make it clear that the first Christians moved the Sabbath day to Sunday because of the resurrection of Jesus. Nothing less could have made them do that.

We would not be able to understand the Messianic message in some Old Testament passages without the clear evidence of the New Testament. Ps 16:8-11 is a good illustration of this. We would not know that it speaks about the Messiah without Acts 2:25-28, where Peter explains that David is prophesying about Jesus Christ in this psalm.

Matt 2:15 claims that the prophet predicted about the Messiah, when he wrote, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” This is a quotation of Hos 11:1. However, Hosea talks about Israel, not the Messiah. How should this be understood? The answer is that Jesus fulfilled in himself what Israel was unable to fulfil. Jesus is the New Israel.

9.6. The difficult passages should be interpreted in the light of the clear passages

There are a lot of difficult passages in the Bible. Sometimes the best advice is – according to Martin Luther – to raise one’s hat and go on. Maybe you will understand it the next time. But you may also find other Bible texts that tell about the same things, and they may shed light on the difficult one.

It is hard to understand why God punished the early mankind by sending a worldwide flood and destroying almost everybody. How can God, who is merciful and forgiving, be so cruel? 2 Pet 3:6-7 gives us the answer, “By water also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of

ungodly men.” The flood was a type of the last judgment. Through it God demonstrated to the world that sin is a very serious thing. But he also promised not to destroy this world again before the day of the last judgment.

Another example could be the prophecy in Joel 2:28-32. It is not immediately clear which period it refers to. But when we read Peter’s explanation in Acts 2, we realize that its fulfilment took place on the day of Pentecost.

When we read Psalms, we find expressions such as “Whatever he does prospers” (Ps 1:3). Is it true that whatever the righteous man does will prosper? Reading on we find the wicked man, and we are told that “His ways are always prosperous” (Ps 10:5). This looks like a contradiction. To understand what is behind these opposite statements we need to study the Bible in its entirety. Then we will find out that prosperity comes from God but that the life of God’s people may also include difficulties and misfortunes, even poverty.

Gen. 49:10 is quite difficult to understand, if we are not familiar with the overall message of the Bible. The Messiah will come from the tribe of Judah and he will be King. In Matt 1:3, 6, 16 we see that Jesus was descended from Judah and King David. In Phil 2:9-11 and many other passages we are told that the Jesus will be the Highest Ruler and that everybody must obey him.

Many Old Testament characters had several wives, for example David and Solomon. The Bible does not say in the actual stories whether this was right or wrong. The reader may wonder about the Bible’s attitude to polygamy. But if we read what the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, teaches about marriage and family, we know how such passages should be interpreted. The creation story, Jesus himself and the Apostle Paul tell us that marriage is the union of one man and one woman and that all other combinations are sin.

One more example from the New Testament. In 1 John 3:8 we read, “He who does what is sinful is of the devil.” This seems to be in contradiction with Bible passages which teach that Christians are still

sinners. However, 1 John 1:8 reads, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Therefore the words of 1 John 3 must be interpreted so that if somebody sins continuously, openly, without any thought of repenting, then this shows that he is living without God.

9.7. Study the historical background of the text

Knowing the historical background of a given text is not necessary in order to understand the passage correctly, but in most cases it deepens our knowledge. Sometimes it also helps us to avoid misunderstandings.

If you read in Exod 1:8 that “Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt”, you may think that this happened soon after the Israelites had come to Egypt. But if you know that they were in Egypt probably about 400 years, you understand the verse better. In addition, if you know that the king mentioned here is very likely Ramses II, you have established a real connection to world history.

If you understand the role of the Assyrian empire in the 8th century BC, you may understand Isaiah 36-37 better. Assyria was the undisputed superpower of the world, and all other nations had to bow down to it. Therefore tiny Jerusalem had no chance of resisting Assyria’s attack – except by God’s supernatural help. We have a lot of archaeological evidence about the event.

The third example comes from Daniel 11. It is full of historical information which becomes much clearer to the reader, if he knows who were the kings that are mentioned in that chapter. The kings of the South refer to Ptolemaic rulers and the kings of the North to Seleucid rulers. Interestingly, the mighty king in Dan 11:3 is Alexander the Great. He is present also in Dan 8:5, 21.

9.8. Ask simple questions about the text

Good questions are often very simple ones. What, where, who and why are the most useful questions. Ask them about every text you read. Consider what has happened before the passage and what happens after it. What happens in the text you are reading? What is the main message of the text? Where did it take place? What do you know about the geographical circumstances? Who are the persons in the text? Why are they there instead of somebody else? What else do you know about them? Why are they doing what they are doing?

Try to read the text with your heart and soul. What would you like to do, if you were one of the persons mentioned in the text? Who would you like to be? What can you learn about God in this text? What does it teach about man in general? Should we take it as moral advice? Asking this kind of questions about the text you are studying makes it possible to go much deeper in your understanding of it.

9.9. Accept the fact that you don't understand everything

Deut 29:29 is a good rule to follow, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."

God is both a hidden and a revealed God. There are things that we don't know. God is greater than we and he has not revealed everything about his purposes towards us. There are secrets which we cannot open.

But all things that are revealed are for us that we should believe them. Accepting this helps us to have a humble attitude before God's word. We must remain true to the Christian faith which we have adopted, but we should also accept the fact that we don't have the final truth. There may be misunderstandings and errors in our knowledge. The final truth is in God's word, and we personally are in possession of only a part of that truth.

9.10. Accept the Bible as God's word and live accordingly

Understanding the Bible is not a scholarly question; it is an existential question. It is not a philosophical issue; it is an issue of life and death. You must read the Bible critically, but more importantly, you must let the Bible criticize you. You cannot say about the Bible what is right and wrong in it, but the Bible can say this about you.

A scholar once said that his problem is not so much with the Bible texts that he does not understand as with the texts he does understand. If you know the right way and don't take it, you commit a sin. The Bible shows the right way, but it also shows the way to forgiveness of sins. If you accept the Bible as God's word for you, you will follow Jesus with all of your heart. And you will live in his grace every day.

10. A brief overview of the Old Testament books

In this chapter the main themes of each Old Testament books are presented in one or two sentences. Some information about the dating of the book will also be given, if such information is available.

Genesis is divided into two main parts: Primeval History (chapters 1-11) and Patriarchal History (12-50). The first part deals with the creation, the fall, the first promises of the Messiah, the flood, and the tower of Babel. The second part tells about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons.

Exodus describes the time the Israelites spent in Egypt and the way they escaped from slavery. The wilderness wanderings begin. The Ten Commandments are given at Sinai.

Leviticus is a story of the sacrifices and the other rules and regulations which God gave to his chosen people.

Numbers also describes the wilderness wanderings and the Israelites' disobedience to God.

Deuteronomy deals with the final phase of the wilderness wanderings and tells about the death of Moses.

Joshua is a description of the conquest of Jericho and the settlement of the Promised Land, which took place in the 13th and 12th centuries BC.

Judges tells how God's people began to serve false gods and forgot their own God. God sent them leaders who were called judges and who ruled in the 12th and 11th centuries BC.

Ruth is a beautiful story about a Moabite woman, who joined God's people.

1-2 Samuel is the story of Samuel and the beginning of the Monarchy in the 11th and 10th centuries BC. The first kings of Israel, Saul and David, are introduced.

1-2 Kings continues the story of the Monarchy and tells about the division of the Kingdom after King Solomon. It ends with the destruction of Judah in 586 BC. Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings are called the Deuteronomistic History Work.

1-2 Chronicles tells the same story as the Books of Samuel and Kings but from a somewhat different viewpoint.

Ezra and Nehemiah continue the history of Judah in Babylonia and especially the return from the exile in the 6th century BC. 1-2 Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah are called the Chronistic History Work.

Esther is fascinating story of a young Jewish woman during the Persian rule. Esther became the queen of Persia and was able to save his people from annihilation. The roots of the Purim festival are found in this book.

Job is a famous story of a man who wrestled with God in the midst of terrible ordeals.

Psalms is a song and prayer book that has been used throughout history by both Jews and Christians.

Proverbs is a collection of timeless proverbs and wise sayings about life in general.

Ecclesiastes is a book of profound considerations about the meaning and meaninglessness of life.

Song of Songs is a beautiful love story.

Isaiah is the first prophetic book. It was written in Judah in the 8th century BC. It contains some of the most important Messianic prophecies.

Jeremiah was a prophet at the turn of the 7th and 6th centuries BC and ministered immediately before the exile of Judah.

Lamentations does not belong to the prophetic books, but it has been placed after Jeremiah because the books were probably written by the same person. Lamentations describes feelings after Jerusalem's destruction.

Ezekiel was a prophet during the exile in the 6th century BC. At the end of the book there is a long narrative of Jerusalem's future.

Daniel lived during the exile as well. His book has been called apocalyptic, because it contains prophecies about the future. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are called the Major Prophets.

Hosea begins the series of the Minor Prophets. He wrote in the 8th century BC in Israel. His message is that God loves his people although it does not deserve it.

Joel was probably a contemporary of Hosea. He ministered in Israel telling about the coming judgment and the blessings of God.

Amos, who worked in Israel, was a contemporary of Hosea and Joel. He blames his people for their luxurious and godless lifestyle.

Obadiah is the shortest biblical book, written probably in the 6th century BC in Judah. It deals with the destiny of Edom.

Jonah is a story of a prophet in the 8th century BC, who was sent to Nineveh but refused to go. He was thrown into the sea, and his life was saved in the stomach of a great fish. Later he went to Nineveh, whose inhabitants repented of their sins as a result of Jonah's preaching.

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah in Judah in the 8th century BC. He prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem and the restoration of God's people.

Nahum prophesied in Judah about the destruction of Nineveh in the 7th century BC.

Habakkuk was also a prophet in Judah in the 7th century BC. In his short book he asks why God is silent, although the enemy is approaching.

Zephaniah was a contemporary of Nahum and Habakkuk in the 7th century BC in Judah. He prophesied to his own people but also to other nations.

Haggai was a prophet after the exile in 520 BC. He encouraged his people to rebuild the temple and promised that the glory of God would come back to his people.

Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai. Together they encouraged the people to complete the temple. His book contains some of the most important Messianic prophecies.

Malachi is the last of the Minor Prophets. He ministered in the 5th century BC. He predicted the day of the Lord and prophesied about "the prophet Elijah who will come", i.e. about John the Baptist.

PART II

THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

11. Africa in the Bible (Eero Junkkaala)

The Bible was written in the Middle East by Jewish people. The original languages are Hebrew (the Old Testament), Aramaic (Dan 2:4b-7:28) and Greek (the New Testament). The Old Testament covers geographically the areas from Northern Africa to Mesopotamia. The New Testament message spread through Anatolia to Greece and Rome.

In this chapter we will have a look at what the Old Testament writes about Africa. The name Africa does not occur in the Bible at all, but some African nations and geographical areas are mentioned. The most common reference is to Egypt (in Hebrew *Mizraim*), which is mentioned approximately 680 times in the Old Testament. The next important African geographical name is Cush with 30 references. Other such names are Put, Lud (Ludim/Lubim) and Pathros, and probably Ophir and Sheba.

The role of **Egypt** is sometimes positive, sometimes negative from Israel's point of view. Often it is mentioned as the country where the people of Israel went during famines to get grain. The first such story in Gen 12:10 tells about Abraham. The most famous one is the one in which the brothers of Joseph travel to Egypt (Gen 42). Thanks to the River Nile, Egypt was a storehouse of grain for the entire known world. Israel had no big rivers and was more dependent on rain water (see Deut 11:10-12). A nilometer was a means for measuring the water level of the Nile during the annual flood season. Pictures of nilometers have been found in various parts of the world. In some areas people had to pay taxes according to the reading of the nilometer. Three mosaics depicting nilometers have been found in Israel, and the most remote picture of one is in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Egypt is described almost always as a hostile nation from Israel's point of view. The four hundred years which the Israelites spent in Egypt was a time of "slavery" and oppression (Ex 1:11). Their escape from Egypt is the most important story of rescue and redemption in their history. "The Lord who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt" was a common title of God (e.g. Jer 23:7). Isaiah and some other prophets warned the people not to look to Egypt for help (e.g. Isa 30-31).

On the other hand, there are a few texts which contain promises of blessing to Egypt. The most important one is in Isa 19. It ends like this, "The Lord will strike Egypt with a plague; he will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the Lord, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and the Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.'" (Isa 19:22-25). This very special text seems to point to the future.

Some African scholars think that the long period which Israel spent in Egypt left a marked African impact on the Jewish religion. The Israelites may very well have taken some African ideas with them when they started to wander towards the Promised Land. But the African influence should not be exaggerated. First of all, Egypt was a hostile land and the Hebrew people had their own religion and were not inclined to borrow from pagan religions and foreign nations. Secondly, Egypt was not a typical part of Africa. Its culture and history were unique, and it was one of the oldest civilizations in the world. There are major differences between the ancient history of Egypt and that of the other African countries.

A more interesting link to real African life is found in **Cush**. In older Bible translations Cush has been translated "Ethiopia". This is because the Septuagint translated Cush as Ethiopia and Josephus used the same name. Modern translations use either Nubia, Sudan, Ethiopia, or Cush. It has been even suggested that Cush should be translated "Africa".

The historical kingdom of Cush was one of the earliest civilizations in the Nile River Valley. It ruled the area from 1050 to 350 BC, but the Cushite people lived there already much earlier. Geographically it covers the area of modern Sudan and probably also parts of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia.

In the Bible Cush seems to be a country which is located south of Egypt (Isa 18:1-2) or even in the southernmost part of the known world (Esth 1:1). The first mention of Cush is found in Gen 2:13. It is one of the several names that describe the location of Eden. Some of these names point to Mesopotamia but some, like Cush, to Africa. Therefore we do not know the exact location of Eden. The next time Cush is mentioned is in the table of nations in Gen 10:6, which identifies the sons of Ham as “Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan.” The common opinion is that the Hamites represent Africans in the table of nations. This is only partly true, because there are also several names that do not belong to Africa in the list of Ham’s descendants (Canaan, Babylon, Assyria and the Philistines).

Later Cush is mentioned as a strong military power (e.g. 2 Kgs 19:9) and a wealthy nation (Isa 45:14). A prophetic word promises that Cush will one day bring gifts to Jerusalem: “At that time gifts will be brought to the Lord Almighty from a people tall and smooth-skinned, from a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers – the gifts will be brought to Mount Zion, the place of the Name of the Lord Almighty” (Isa 18:7). Also Ps 68:31 describes the good future of Cush.

Put is definitely an African nation, but its location is disputed. Sometimes it has been translated “Libya”, but this is problematic because it is mentioned alongside Lud, which could also be Libya. Put is mentioned in the table of nations in Gen 10:6 and in six other passages: 1 Chr 1:8, Jer 46:9, Ezek 27:10; 30:5; 38:5 and Nah 3:9, almost always together with Cush. **Lud/Ludim/Lubim** is referred to 12 times: Lud: Gen 10:22, 1 Chr 1:17, Isa 66:19, Ezek 27:10 and 30:5; Ludim: Gen 10:13, 1 Chr 1:11 and Jer 46:9; and Lubim: 2 Chr 12:13; 16:8, Dan 11:43 and Nah 3:9. **Patros**, which is mentioned in Gen 10: 14, Jer 44:15 and Ezek 29:14, refers to Upper Egypt. The location of **Sheba**

(1 Kgs 10:1) is not certain. It may refer to a part of Ethiopia or Somalia, but a very likely alternative is the southernmost part of Arabia.

Concluding, we can say that Africa is present in the Old Testament mostly through the names “Egypt” and “Cush.” Egypt has a central role in the texts, but its history differs a lot from the history of the other African countries. Therefore we cannot see it as very typically African. Cush is a better candidate to represent African people in the Bible. However, it is mentioned mostly in lists of several countries.

The promises of blessing to Egypt (Isa 19:22-25) and Cush (Isa 18:7 and Ps 68:31) are the most special passages concerning Africa. Are these prophecies being fulfilled today? The number of Christians in Africa has been increasing faster than in any other part of the world. In 2009 there were 447.2 million Christians in Africa, and in 2010 the figure is estimated to be 470.6 million. In Europe the corresponding numbers are 556.3 million and 560.8 million. It is interesting to note that Europe is not mentioned in the Old Testament at all.

12. Oral tradition in the Old Testament and in the African Religion (Andrew A. Kyomo)

Introduction

The Old Testament in the Christian Bible is the same as in the Hebrew Bible, only the order of the books differs. We Christians understand the Old Testament to be the life story of Israel, “the people of God.” Israel was promised a Messiah, and Christians believe that Jesus was that promised Messiah. Judaism and Christianity may differ in their understanding of the outcome of its historical drama, but they both agree on the unique character of the history with which the Old Testament deals.

Briefly speaking, the greatest event of Israel’s history was the Exodus from Egypt. The Jewish people understood their vocation and destiny in the light of this revealing event which of course strengthened their concept of themselves as a “Chosen People.” This heritage was first orally transmitted by being reiterated in numerous ways in hymns and songs and particularly remembered in the annual Passover celebration. Jews had both an oral and a written tradition.

In African religion, the term “oral tradition” refers not only to oral transmission of tradition but also to the content of what is transmitted—a world view and a way of life. African oral tradition asserts that there is a Supreme Being who is the source of life and makes life itself meaningful.

Oral Tradition in the Old Testament

Oral basically refers to something that is “uttered by word of mouth.” Oral tradition for Old Testament people meant that, before the written literature in the form of the book (OT), the Word of God was uttered by the mouth. The knowledge of the Word of God was communicated from mouth to mouth, from person to person, from one generation to the next.

In fact, when we read the Pentateuch, we realize that its written form reflects a long history of oral tradition. The tradition was handed down orally by poets and storytellers. The starting point in the Old Testament is the chosen nation of Israel. This nation arises when Abraham is promised that his offspring will be innumerable. His grandson fathers the 12 tribes of Israel. Israel's sense of itself as a nation arises when they, a helpless band of slaves in Egypt, are saved from bondage. Yahweh, the God of Israel, had heard the cries of His people. The historical drama unfolds in the book of Exodus as it tells how God enabled the Israelites to be freed from the bondage of slavery. They crossed the Reed Sea in a miraculous way. That event was a triumph for Israel's God.

According to tradition, the author of the Pentateuch (the "Five Books") was Moses. However, "the dominant theory held by scholars is that the Pentateuch is a composite work in which various major literary strands have been artistically combined during the course of transmission through the generations."¹ According to this hypothesis, the Pentateuch is a combination of various literary traditions which originate from several sources that have been labelled J, E, D, and P. ²Thus, "these strands of tradition were woven together in various stages until the Pentateuch reached its present form about 400 B.C.E., the time when the Jewish people were under the leadership of Ezra. At that time, the Torah became the constitutional basis of the restored community of Israel."³

Generally speaking, oral tradition in the OT dwells mainly on the following themes:

1. The promise (by Yahweh) to the patriarchs.
2. The liberation of Israel from Egyptian bondage.
3. The manifestation of God at Sinai and the giving of the law.

¹ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983), p. 21.

² J stands for Jahwist; E for Elohist; D for Deuteronomistic Tradition; and P for Priestly Work. See also Anderson, 1986: 22.

³ Bernhard, *Understanding the Old Testament*, p. 21.

4. The providential guidance in the wilderness.
5. The inheritance of the Promised Land.⁴

The enthusiastic oral recitation of the above themes was a common practice among ordinary Jews.

I remember well that, during the early years of my childhood, I enjoyed hearing stories told by my sisters and my grandmother. They had memorized the stories and explained them by using body language. When the story concerned animals like lions, hares, elephants, etc., they imitated the animal sounds and other characteristics. A number of these vivid stories were stamped into my mind. I still remember some of them, and I retell them to my own children.

Most children today lack time to listen to stories told by their parents and grandparents. In the evening, when the families are waiting for supper, stories are no longer available in many homes. Parents seldom take time to sit with their children to tell them funny stories or to share some experiences with them. Thus, informal learning is rarely available.

I had the privilege of visiting the Holy Land (Israel) in 1977 for two and a half months. Special arrangements were made so that I could stay in some Jewish homes. I learned that it was customary for Jewish parents to take time after supper to talk to their children about their history, religious matters, etc. Oral tradition was very much alive and somehow a necessity! The parents' habit of passing on knowledge in the form of history, religious instructions, etc., was considered very important. That was a challenging reminder to me.

Going back to our topic, oral tradition in the OT extends to the prophets. In their role as prophets, they were regarded as persons through whom God spoke to the people.

Israel's prophetic movement belongs inseparably to the creation of Israel's nationhood, the time when kings and queens sat upon the thrones of Israel and Judah. The prophets were members of communi-

⁴ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

ties that kept alive an oral tradition. Their message was taken seriously because they were known to be “the people of Yahweh.” The people of Yahweh – the prophets – emphasized (especially during a crisis) that God was at work even in the tragic career of Israel. For example, from the breaking up of the Davidic kingdom the people were punished for their repeated faithless behaviour in spite of prophetic warnings summoning them to turn from their evil ways (2 Kings 17:13).⁵ Ignoring the message perpetuated through oral tradition was regarded as an act of disobedience. The disobedience deserved a severe punishment from Yahweh.

Probably, the most important task of the prophets was that they prophesied the coming of a Messiah. The word “messiah” literally means “anointed”; it reflected the ancient practice of anointing, and thereby consecrating a person for a particular office, such as prophets and kings (1 Kings 19:16; cf. Isaiah 61:1).⁶ The corresponding Greek term is “the Christ” (*ho Christos*), used in the New Testament (e.g. Mark 8:29).

Historically speaking, David’s death gave rise to the hope that a Messiah (Anointed One) would come, who would be of David’s lineage, the Messiah who would reunite politically the tribes of Israel and would restore Jerusalem to a position of prestige among the nations (cf. Isaiah 9 and 11).⁷ However, this distorted tradition among the Jewish people ended up in rejecting Jesus as the prophesied Messiah. We Christians know and believe that Jesus was the Messiah and the Founder of the Church (although Christians believe His kingdom is not of this world, but is a heavenly and eternal one). Christ’s Church is engaged in the evangelization of the whole world. Christians, then, must take seriously message of the OT because it illuminates the promise of the Messiah, a message that is worth passing on (indeed is commanded that we pass it on) to future generations.

⁵ Ibid., p. 255.

⁶ Ibid., p. 233.

⁷ Ibid., p. 233.

Oral Tradition in the African Religion

African Religion (AR) is unique when compared with other world religions. We use the word “African Religion” here in the singular form because, according to Laurenti Magesa’s study, there are so many common factors in most African religions. AR has no written scriptures like Hinduism, Judaism, Islam or Christianity. It survives and will continue to survive without sacred writings. Why? The answer is that it is communicated holistically. The faith of an indigenous African is a “revealed” one from the Supreme Being through the ancestors. The Supreme Being is the source of life. This life flows down through the spiritual world of the ancestors to the physical world (planet earth). Laurenti Magesa clearly and simply says:

For Africans, religion is far more than “a believing way of life” or “an approach to life” directed by a book. It is a “way of life” or life itself, where a distinction or separation is not made between religion and other areas of human existence. If one is to speak of “revelation” or “inspiration,” it is not to be found in a book, not even primarily in the people’s oral tradition, but in their lives. Herein lies the “notoriety” or “incurability” of African religiosity noted by Mbiti and others. For Africans, religion is quite literally life and life is religion ⁸

Magesa quotes Cardinal Paul Marella who says, “African Religion belongs to humanity.... It is ‘a very clear manifestation of an inherent religious endowment within human nature.’”⁹ For Africans, oral tradition is all about life itself – a holistic one that covers the whole life of a person – mentally, spiritually, and physically. ¹⁰Thus, for the African

⁸ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997), p. 33.

⁹ Ibid, p. 35.

¹⁰ This emphasis on viewing human life holistically was also important to Jews and Christians. The African church can therefore make a contribution to theology by affirming this. In fact, Luther and Calvin sought to reintroduce a holistic understanding of human existence as a corrective to the medieval Western world’s adoption of the Neo-Platonic idea that the material world

Religion, says Magesa, “all principles of morality and ethics are to be sought within the context of preserving human life and its ‘power’ or ‘force’.”¹¹ Old people (Africans), who are believed to have wisdom, say that the spoken word is more suitable than the written word in the search for truth. Of course, as Nkemnkia says, “The written form has its own fundamental value in helping to preserve ideas and concepts, in assisting us to memorize them, and by providing a way of making them available to other thinkers for reflection in different times.”

¹²The place of oral tradition in African Religion is crucial because the main principle of African Traditional Thinking consists of oral utterings as the result of the “experience of life,” through which we arrive at the principles and the ultimate foundations of human existence.

There is a belief that the authors of the moral order in a society are the ancestors who exist in the spiritual world. They are believed to be aware of what is happening in the physical world. When the laws and customs are observed in the right way, the ancestors can and will protect and prolong the life of the society in all its aspects. In other words, the ancestors are the custodians of the morality of the tribe or community; hence ethical conduct is determined by reference to them.

The impression we now get concerning the ancestors is that they became a “blessing” when those who live in a community adhered to the laws and customs in the right way. But if behaviors were not in keeping with the laws and customs, the ancestors became a “threat” and some kind of a reconciliation had to be sought. In this context, Bénézet Bujo says that “life can only be enjoyed in its fullness when the ancestors are remembered and honored.”¹³ The criterion for good

(the body) was degraded, but the spiritual world (the soul) was exalted. The Bible supports no such dichotomy between body and soul.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 38.

¹² Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia, *African Vitalogy: A Step Forward in African Thinking* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), p. 30.

¹³ Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 23. The author of this article thinks it is important for Christians to distinguish witchcraft and sorcery from traditional healing, a

acts and bad acts is simply this one: Anything which sustained and enhanced life was a good act, but anything which diminished life was a bad act. Therefore, the morality of an act was determined by its life-giving potential.

Bujo perceives the role of ‘good’ ancestors in the spirit world positively as far as oral tradition approves this. He writes:

The drive towards life is the inspiration of all African religions, often expressed in terms of identity, both individual and groups, which must be preserved at all costs. Here we begin to understand the supreme importance of the past for the African: for the secret of life is to be found above all in the hallowed attitudes and practices of the ancestors. In their wisdom is to be found the key to a better and fuller life, and it is therefore crucial that the rites, actions, words and laws which the ancestors have bequeathed to their descendants be scrupulously observed: they are the indispensable instruments of salvation. The way a person treats this inheritance is decisive, for life or for death. The ancestral traditions are gifts of God, they have a truly sacramental character. The life-giving traditions of the past must determine the present and the future since in them alone is salvation to be found.¹⁴

The writer of this article is convinced that if African Christians also maintain the AR’s positive image of good ancestors, they will not experience any contradiction as they come across the New Testament teaching of the communion of the saints. Connected with good ancestors, we have the concept of Proto-Ancestor. One of the unique oral distinction lost now even among some African Christians. Christians properly note that sorcerers in the past engaged (and engage even today) in cursing and destroying their clients’ enemies. Nevertheless, some traditional healers have not practiced witchcraft; instead, they have solely focused on healing their patients. In fact, they have contributed to the knowledge of medicinal plants, etc. The author has personally interviewed many traditional healers who believe that they were called and instructed by God in the healing arts, often via visions.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

traditions in the African Religion is that the good ancestors yearned and aspired to be perfect in their lives but could not reach that perfection. However, they longed for the coming of one who would fulfill this “dream,” or “aspiration.” The New Testament’s authors of the first four books understood that Jesus was the Messiah who was prophesied by the OT prophets. Likewise, African scholars (theologians) have come to regard Jesus as the One who fulfilled this dream two millennia ago. Bujo, who is one of them, says:

If Jesus Christ is Proto-Ancestor, source of life and happiness, our task is to bring to realization in our lives the memory of his passion, death and resurrection, making of that Saving Event the criterion for judging all human conduct. Jesus Christ becomes the sole centre of attraction, drawing all things to himself (John 12:32), and, through his cross, consecrating the whole of that African humanity for which the ancestors so earnestly yearned. This consecration is the goal of the absolute commitment of Jesus of Nazareth to the restoration of human dignity. He vigorously defended the rights of the weak, of women, of children, and identified himself with outcasts and sinners. The salvation which Jesus brought must not be seen simply as a revelation of his dignity; Jesus emphasized that he came as messiah in order to bring fullness of life at every level.¹⁵

Yes, Jesus, the Messiah, and the Proto-Ancestor corrects and perfects the traditional morality of Africa. What happens is that the moral perspective is no longer limited to any class of people or status, or even color; it extends to the entire human race, in loving service of the Supreme Being (God). Christians, who are followers of Jesus, see Him as *the* Model as far as morality is concerned. Let us give Jesus Christ priority as Proto-Ancestor, bearing in mind that He came so that fullness of life might prevail. Naturally, Jesus did not come only to be an example. He came also and especially to be the Savior and Redeemer, and it is only through his work on the cross that we can be saved.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

In this context, Bujo makes an interesting appeal: “Modern Africans can only follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ if they see in Jesus, not some proud tyrant, but rather the Proto-Ancestor whose last will was an appeal for human love and for untiring effort to overcome all inhumanity.”¹⁶ Is it possible to succeed in our struggle against inhumanity? Obviously, by our own power, it is impossible. Success is possible if “the human can no longer be separated from the divine. The Incarnation reached its unique and once-and-for-all fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Jesus, which established him as the Proto-Ancestor par excellence, the unique source of life.”¹⁷

Like in the Old Testament, prophets have existed also in the sphere of African Religion. At my home place of Isoko village, Ileje District, (Mbeya Region), Mashasha Mushani was an outstanding prophet. He prophesied about the coming of white missionaries to Isoko. He identified the very place where they would settle. The prophecy was retold orally regularly. Surprisingly enough, about thirty years later, white missionaries did arrive at Isoko. The prophecy of Mashasha was fulfilled.

As a rule, the prophets in the AR were in the front line in advocating African moral values and ethical behavior because they were vital, existential, holistic, relational, anthropocentric and mystical. The prophets were in line with the ancestors in protecting the society from corruption. Using popular terms, we could say that they were watchdogs of the moral behavior of the individual, the family, the clan and the entire society. Members of the society knew that if they violated the moral code, punishment in various forms could be expected. The difference between the biblical prophets and the African prophets was that the former proclaimed God’s revelation under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The latter may have been used by God as well, but their words were not authoritative in a similar way. But even they may have conveyed his love and concern.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.91.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 107.

What is happening all over the continent is that followers of the African Religion come in contact with the Gospel, the Good News. What they actually hear is not a message of a new God; what is new to them is the **name of Jesus Christ**. Therefore, missionary pioneers did not bring to Africans a new God; what they brought was the news (Gospel) that **Jesus** is the Savior and that he came to save the whole world.

Conclusion

Today, many people have a scientific world view and rely on archaeological knowledge and research findings, but these cannot replace the role of the message of the OT or the oral tradition in AR. There is power in the oral tradition, when information is uttered by the mouth. Written literature is the product of oral tradition. For example, the story of Israel's sojourn in Egypt was orally passed on from generation to generation before being written down. Another example is the account of the plagues (Exodus 7-12) which received its final form in the hands of the Priestly Writer (P) who incorporated the Old Epic¹⁸tradition (J) into the overall narrative framework. Thus, finally, the oral tradition covered the five themes as indicated above.

As in ancient Israel, belief in African Religion is also orally oriented. It is unlikely that this belief is "washed away" by the Christian faith. It can even be argued that African conceptions of God (Supreme Being), the world and morality, continue to penetrate Christianity in Africa.¹⁹ Bujo has quoted John M. Waliggo who cements this point as he writes, "Despite the phenomenal spread of Christianity in Buganda, many expressions of African Religion, such as divination and the use of healing practices continue, even though they are expressly forbidden by Christianity."²⁰

¹⁸ Old Epic means the combination of sources from a Judean source (written during the United Monarchy c. 950 BCE) and an Ephraimitic or North Israelite source (c. 850 BCE).

¹⁹ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion*, p.18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19. With reference to Christians forbidding healing practices, the

We can conclude by saying that oral tradition in African Religion is still relevant and alive among its followers as well as among Christians. I highly recommend that African Christians re-commit themselves to handing down the OT and NT narratives to their children in the home. In other words, Christians need to continue the oral tradition more intentionally. In addition, I appeal to African youth to understand that right action leads to a good life. However, following Christ (the Proto-Ancestor) is the way to real life. Christ is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). Our morality should be based on what Jesus wants us to do. Our salvation is found in Jesus who died on the cross and raised on the third day.

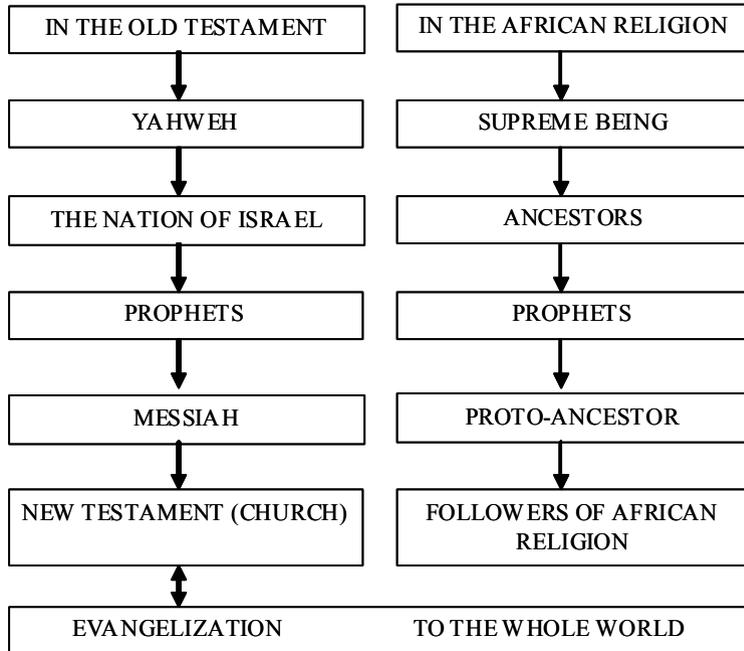
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author of this article wishes to call attention to footnote 14 above. If what is being practiced seeks destruction, it should be forbidden; if what is being practiced is life-affirming, it is legitimate to believe that it comes from God.

APPENDIX

Oral Tradition in Practice



This diagram shows the “length” of the oral tradition in both OT and the AR. Through the New Testament (THE CHURCH), the oral tradition in the form of EVANGELIZATION to the whole world continues until the end of the history of this planet Earth (when JESUS CHRIST returns).

13. The Concept of offering in the Old Testament and in the church today (Joshua Chussy)

1. Introduction

The Term “offering”

The word “offering” has been defined as

- ‘the act of making an offer’;
- ‘a presentation made to a deity as an act of religious worship or sacrifice; an oblation’;
- ‘a contribution or gift, especially one made at a religious service.’

The Old Testament has two basic terms for offering. In Hebrew these are *minhâ*, which means a ‘gift’, and *qôrbân*, which implies ‘brought near’, namely to the altar. The offering includes the tithe (*ma’ăšēr*), the firstfruits (*bikkûrîm*), the wave-offering (*těnûpâ*), and the heave-offering (*těrûmâ*). Our main source in chapters 1-3 is G. A. Anderson’s article *Sacrifice and sacrificial offerings* (The Anchor Bible Dictionary – Volume 5, 1992: 873-879).

Sacrifice (*zābah*, which means ‘to slaughter’) was just a part of offering, whereby the oblations (animals, liquids and grains) were brought to the altar (*mizbēah*) and burnt. It did not matter whether they were burnt wholly or partially. Other sacred donations, which were brought to the altar but were not burnt, were not sacrifices but just normal offerings.

The Origin of the Idea of Offering

The Bible does not definitely show the origin of the offering. But the moral and spiritual nature of man is revealed in the history of the Fall. The failure of Adam and Eve to obey God as they were tempted to eat from the prohibited tree of ‘*knowledge of good and evil*’ led to

separation from God. *“So then the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate”* (Gen 3:6). Their eyes were opened: they were conscious of their own shame, they sensed the evil in themselves, and they realized that their transgression had brought about an alienation from God.

The sacrifices that were offered do not appear to have originated in any express command of God, although he may have intimated to Adam himself, as to Abel, his acceptance to such offerings, which was an expression of their faith in God. Since they were wise, they probably knew how to please God by giving of their substance as a token of their devotion to God.

Later on, making an offering became an obligation, an institution of God. It was no longer a human option, a voluntary act of worship, as in the case of Abel (Gen 4:3-4) and Abraham (Gen 14:18-20). The first mention of God ordering an offer was when he ordered Abraham to offer his only son (Gen 22:1-10). In time it became a part of the Mosaic law (Exodus 20:24) and the Jewish religious tradition.

2. The purpose of offering

Generally speaking, every type of offering had a specific purpose. The main purposes can be listed as follows: to promote fellowship with God, to atone sin, and to secure the economic balance of the temple for its mission.

To promote fellowship with God

At first after creation, God and man enjoyed good fellowship. Adam participated in recreation by keeping and perpetuating what God had created, and he even named creatures that God had created. In that sense, God and man had a very close fellowship. This fellowship broke soon after the fall of man, and God started to look for man

asking ‘*where are you?*’ (Gen 3:9). That is when man began to seek God’s favour by doing something good to repair the broken fellowship.

Looking at the offerings made by the sons of Adam, we realize that there was a hidden secret that convinced them to offer their substance to God as a sign of recognition and fellowship. The decisive factor, however, was Abel’s faithfulness in making an offering which God could accept. Cain’s offering showed his unfaithfulness and was not accepted (Gen 4:2-4).

Of the two sons of Adam, only Abel enjoyed true and good fellowship with God. Therefore, those who are faithful to God always enjoy true and good fellowship with Him. No matter what the circumstances, God is always with them. This fellowship is found when somebody is on God’s side; then God is on the side of that ‘somebody’ whoever he or she may be. “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.” (Gen 4:7)

To atone sin

The fall of man brought the wrath of God against the sinner. Some of the evil deeds that are mentioned are violence (Ezek 8:17-18), taking advantage of widows and orphans (Exod 22:22-24), adultery (Ezek 23:27) and covetousness (Jer 6:11-13), idolatry (Deut 9:15-16) and those unmentioned ones, which are against the directives of the Ten Commandments. Original sin had entered mankind, making the entire human nature sinful.

The life of the worshipper was stained by sin, but God provided a way for cleansing by allowing the substitution of the pure life of a victim without spot. Through it men could make atonement for their souls (Lev 17:11). Therefore, in the Old Testament sacrifice as a part of the general offering was a significant element in putting a sinful person right with God.

To secure the economic balance of the temple for its mission

According to the Old Testament, the temple was the place where the temple servants were expected to earn their living. Whatever was brought to the sanctuary as an offering to God, especially the tithes of every produce and all the herds, was given to the Levites in return for their service (Num 18:20-32). In addition to that, the poor and the needy and the temple itself with all its services were dependent on the gifts of the people (Exod 35:5-19; Isa 58:6-9). Therefore, offerings were also aimed at and necessary for taking the temple's mission towards the desired goal.

3. The types of offering

The types of offering can be divided into two categories, depending on their purpose and outward form: sacrificial offerings and sacred donations.

3.1. Sacrificial Offerings

The offering becomes a sacrifice if the item offered is slaughtered or poured out on the altar to be burnt. Other types of sacred items offered to God which are brought to the sanctuary and even sometimes presented at the altar, but are not burnt at the altar are not sacrifices. That is a general characteristic which differentiates them from other sacred offerings/donations.

Technique of Sacrificing

According to the Pentateuch, the sacrificial act consisted of six basic steps which can be divided into two groups:

- a. Those which were performed by lay people who offered an animal**
 - i. Bringing the animal to the sanctuary*
Only domestic animals were required for sacrifice.

For a burnt offering, a male or female animal was chosen from the herd or flock, or, alternatively, a bird (turtledove or pigeon) could be offered. For a peace offering, a male or female animal was needed from the herd or flock. For a reparation (or guilt) offering, a ram was always needed, except for the Nazirite who had to bring a lamb. This special requirement could be converted into an equivalent in silver (Lev 5:15).

ii. *Laying of hands on the head of the animal*

This was accompanied by the confession of sin. The hand-laying rite was a basic part in the process of atonement in the expiatory sacrifices. It meant that the life of the flesh was stained by sin, but God allowed the substitution of the pure life of a victim without spot.

iii. *Slaughtering the animal and washing the insides of it (Lev 1:6,9)*

It was the laity's responsibility, and it took place at the opening of the tent of meeting, a spot where they could witness the Lord's consumption of the sacrifice.

b. *Those which were restricted to the priests alone*

The priests were the only people who had access to the holy place of the Lord where the sacrifices were performed.

iv. *Sprinkling of the blood of the animal*

The way the blood was manipulated varied from sacrifice to sacrifice. With the burnt offering and peace offerings, the blood was splattered around the altar, while in purification blood was first daubed on the horns of the altar, and then, in the case of the ruler or commander, the rest was poured out at the base of the altar. For the priests or the entire congregation, the blood was sprinkled seven times before the veil of the sanctuary and put on the horns of the inner incense altar. The rest was poured out at the base of the outer altar.

v. *Burning the sacrifice*

The priests were responsible for bringing the animal to the altar, for they were the only ones with access to the altar. They arranged the acceptable parts of the offering upon firewood in order to be burnt in the proper manner. Everybody would then experience the consumption of the offering as an ‘offering by fire of pleasing odor to the Lord’ (Lev 1:7-9).

vi. Disposing of the remains

The burnt offering had no disposal rite. The entire sacrifice was burnt at the altar. In the case of the peace offering, anything left over could be eaten on two days and burned only on the third day, while in the case of the purification offering, the remains had to be eaten on the same day (Lev 7:16-18).

Types of Sacrifices

There were four main types of sacrifice amongst the Hebrew religious rites: burnt offering, purification offering, peace offering and reparation offering.

Burnt Offering

The Hebrew term for burnt offering is *‘ôlâ*, literally ‘an offering of ascent’ or ‘an ascending offering’. The noun is used with its cognate verbal root *ha’âleh ‘ôlâ*, ‘to make ascend an *‘ôlâ*’.

The *‘ôlâ* was entirely burnt on the altar, and so it gave smoke. Its ascent was directed towards the heavenly realm, wherein the deity was thought to have ‘inhaled’ it. It was generally offered with an accompanying cereal and drink offering (Num 15:1-10). The purpose of this kind of sacrifice was to attract God’s attention and invoke his presence for a particular ritual occasion, especially when needing his response to an urgent plea. Also it was purposed for an atoning function, Lev 1:4, and it was regarded as a gift to the deity that consumed a *‘soothing odor’*. The daily sacrifices for the deity are described in Exod 29:38-42 (cf. Num 28:3-8; Ezek 46:13-15). The sacrifices took place both in the morning and the evening at the entrance of the tent of meeting, whereas the deity presented himself among the people.

Peace Offering (šēlāmîm)

The translation and interpretation of this sacrifice has been bothering many Old Testament scholars in the sense that three terms refer to it: *zabah*, *zibhê-šēlāmîm*, and *šēlāmîm*. Some scholars have said that the *šēlāmîm* seems to be a special type of an earlier *zabah* sacrifice. This should not be understood to imply that *zābah*, ‘slain sacrifice’, refers to any slain sacrificial animal. In spite of its name, which is quite general, this sacrifice designation often occurs in the pair *zābah* and *ôlâ*. In this type of usage there can be no doubt that *zabah* refers specifically to the *šēlāmîm* offering, and that the Hebrew root for *šēlāmîm* (*šlm*) means ‘peace’. In certain cases the noun formed from this Hebrew root refers to the covenantal relation.

This type of offering is broken down into three categories: the *tôdâ*, which is a thanksgiving; the *neder*, which is an avowed sacrifice; and the *nēdābâ*, which is a freewill offering. Besides constituting the basic form of sacrifice on feast days, the *šēlāmîm* also played an important role in rituals of lamentation and thanksgiving that are so prominent in the Psalms. Very close to *šēlāmîm* are *pesah*, ‘pass over’, and *millû’im*, ‘ordination sacrifice’. Although the *pesah* sacrifice is prepared in a different manner (only roasted according to Exod 12:9), it is a sacrifice which all Israel must consume. The *millû’im* is prepared almost exactly like the *šēlāmîm*, the significant difference being that the blood is applied to the ear, thumb, and toe of an Aaronic priest.

The *pesah*, *millû’im* and *tôdâ* sacrifices were all to be eaten on the very day in which they were offered, while the other *šēlāmîm* rites were not obligatory, and so the prescriptions for consumption and disposal of the remains were more lax.

The difference between the *ôlâ* and the *šēlāmîm* is that the *ôlâ* was the sacrifice that constituted the basic nourishment for the deity while the *šēlāmîm* nourished the people. The rabbis even labeled one application of the *šēlāmîm* sacrifice the ‘celebration sacrifice’ (*šalmê-šimhâ*).

The *šēlāmîm* were emblematic of moments of joy or celebration, and they were in certain circumstances banned on days of public mourning.

But such ritual practice does not seem to have uniformity to Israel, for on other occasions *šēlāmîm* were offered at a time of public mourning (Isa 22:12-14).

Purification Offering (hattā't)

This kind of offering in the Hebrew language means “sin offering”. Therefore, when a sinner repents, he expects to be forgiven. But the scope of this offering is a bit wider. Sometimes in the Old Testament those who offered a *hattā't* offering did not expect forgiveness; rather, they expected to be cleansed. Even more importantly, the *hattā't* offering was also used in situations that had no relation to sin. For example, consider the cases of the parturient (Lev 12), the person suffering from a discharge (Lev 15), the Nazarine who completes a vow of substance (Num 6), or the installation of the new altar (Lev 8). In these examples, the sacrifice served as a purifying or purging agent instead of removing sin.

Some Bible texts show that the same kind of offering is intended to mediate forgiveness to the sinner (Lev 4:20, 26, 31). At the same time, forgiveness is intended to stop up the consequences of sin. But it should be realized that purification is the final step of forgiveness so that a person can live a pure life and have fellowship with God. Therefore, it does not matter whether this offering is intended for forgiveness of sins or purification of the sinner. What matters is that the consequences of sin are stopped by making such an offering.

Reparation Offering ('āšam)

This type of offering is translated “guilt offering”, because the root of *'āšam* can often mean ‘to feel guilt’ after committing a violation and sinning unintentionally in regard to any of the holy things of the deity. It functions as a payment for the violation and the damage that may have been caused by a person’s profanation of the sacred item. This offering can be converted into a monetary equivalent and simply be paid.

A reparation offering is required when:

- i. An act of misappropriating or misusing an item of sacred value has taken place (Lev 5:14-16);
- ii. A sin has been committed inadvertently (Lev 5:17-19);
- iii. A person has sworn falsely in regard to damage done to another person (Lev 6:1-7);
- iv. A leper is in need of the rite of purification (Lev. 14);
- v. A Nazirite, who has become unclean, needs to renew his vow (Num 6:10-12);
- vi. A person has had a sexual relationship with a slave who has been betrothed to another man (Lev 19:20-21)

According to Lev 5:14-16, the one feeling guilt for misusing a sacred item or name through false swearing is charged the price of the sacrificial animal and one-fifth of the animal's value is added as a penalty. A Nazirite brings an *'āšam*, the land donor provides the equivalent of the entire value of the land plus an additional twenty percent of its value. The leper should only bring the *'āšam*, for it was believed that the leper might have offended the deity.

3.2. Sacred Donations

In this group of offerings, things were brought to the altar annually in recognition of God's share in productivity. Firstlings of clean animals and firstfruits were brought to the sanctuary and the altar. Tithes and the first sheaves and the first dough were also brought to the altar. It has been said that "*The purpose was not to consecrate the rest of the crop, but to deconsecrate them, meaning that whatsoever they possessed was for God until the first portion had been offered and accepted in lieu of the whole*". The same idea is found in Psalm 24:1, which speaks about God's creatorship of the earth and the fullness thereof. In that sense, the general concept is that nothing belongs to a human being as his/her own possession unless a tithe of its substance is submitted to God. It was understood in this way, and the people of Israel acted accordingly. This meant that whatsoever was consecrated

was meant for God, and not for human use except for the priests who were representatives of God. Thereafter, no more restrictions limited the use of the remainder. Every portion of the offering was presented as a token at the altar and then taken for use by the priests.

Concerning the general concept of offering in the Old Testament, the Israelites concentrated themselves much in an outward action because they were always trying to fulfill what the law has directed saying, *“And you shall again obey the voice of the Lord, and keep all his commandments which I command you this day”* *“If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of it”* (Deut 30:8, 16). Fulfilling the law did not help to draw themselves near to God. They were still afar from him as said in Isa 29:13, *“Because this people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote”*

In that sense said above, they were afraid of the consequences that would come after violating the law, but not God. The consequences are proclaimed in Deut 30:17 saying, *“But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you this day, that you shall perish; you shall not live long...”*

Going up to the New Testament, there is a huge difference in a sense that, people are no longer frightened by the Old Testament consequences of violating the law because the New Testament people are in the new age of grace as we shall see it ahead.

The following section will be dealing with the concept of offering in the church today, basing its roots in the New Testament, especially the teaching of Jesus Christ and his disciples and its achievement as well.

4. The concept of offering in the New Testament and in the church today

The New Testament has opened the door of grace by changing the difficult ritual practices of the Old Testament to simple and easy ones. In the Old Testament, one had to give something valuable, depending on the type offering, as a part of religious worship; in the New Testament all types of sacrifices are centered in the body of Christ who was the one and only Lamb of God. What is required by God in the New Testament is just to believe in Jesus Christ. His atoning work and teachings are enough for the salvation of the one who believes. We are only required to equip the church to perform its duties through sacred donations as we shall see below.

4.1. Offering in the New Testament Canon and the Situation in the Church Today

Sometimes people seem to think that the time of offerings in accordance with Old Testament law ended abruptly. This is a faulty perception, for it took some time for the system to change. During the time of the composition of the New Testament, the former practices were still going on. Even Jesus himself, the Lord of the Covenant, offered in the temple together with others to fulfill the law (Matt 17:24-27). The disciples were still bound by the law of Moses, even the Apostle Paul (Acts 21:17-26). But the writer of Hebrews is trying to instill the desire for change in his readers. In chapters 7-10 he covers various topics, opening their minds and making them ready to accept the change.

When we reflect on the general concept of offering we can base our thinking on several categories. We start with the sacrificial offering and continue with sacred donations.

Sacrificial Offering

Jesus is a turning point concerning all types of sacrificial offering. He is spoken of as the slain lamb of God, whose precious blood takes

away the sins of the world, especially those of the believer (John 1:29, 36; 1 Pet 1:18; Rev 5:6-10; 13:8). He is also spoken of as a passover lamb (1 Cor 5:6-8) and as a sin offering (Rom 8:3).

In the Old Testament, God tried to make a turning point by substituting a sacrificial animal instead of going through with the sacrifice of a human being. Instead of allowing Abraham to offer Isaac, who was his only begotten son according to his covenant with God, God told him to sacrifice a ram instead (Gen 22:1-14). The New Testament takes us to the final turning point when God allows Jesus to be crucified as a once-for-all atonement for our sins. No more blood need be shed, because Jesus was a fully atoning sacrifice for everybody all over the world to the end of the ages (Heb 9:15-17; 10:4-10; 13:12).

Those who believe in Jesus Christ, when they hear his words, feed on him, his body and his blood, through the Spirit. There is no doubt of what happens through his words and the tokens of bread and wine which he instituted through an equally Spiritual manner, because we are told to believe in him alone for our salvation. We always invite Jesus to be the only living sacrifice for us when we hear his word (Mark 9:7, Matt 18:19-20) and partake of the Holy Communion (John 6:55-56). He is the only sacrifice of the New Covenant. He was offered once for all to the end of the ages, and nothing more is needed.

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans says, "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercy of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship*" (Rom 12:1). He wanted to promote Christian ethics, which are grounded not in law but in God's mercies, and are a grateful response for his grace. The sacrifice that is acceptable to God is a living sacrifice, total devotion to God, a life lived for God.

Sacred Donations

Sacred donations, such as tithes, firstfruits, wave offerings and a portion of each year's harvest, are usually brought to the church as a part of religious worship. Some people used to bring maize, clothes, pigs, sometimes cows, cocks, hens, vegetables, rice, eggs, money,

peas, and whatever they possessed either for a tithe, firstfruits or part of the harvest. The problem which we experience as far as sacred donations are concerned is that many congregants fail to bring the required percentage of their possessions and thus are unfaithful to the Bible. It has become a custom for them to do so, and their heart is not compelling them to give.

Sacred donations are used to enable the church to meet such needs as paying a salary to servants of God in return of their service in the church (Matt 10:9-10), buying building materials and other materials for the church (Exod 35), and implementing the church's diaconal function by sharing with those who do not have enough (Rom 15:25-27; Gal 2:10; 1 Cor 16:1-4). Some believers accepted this principle and offered to give their possessions to the church. For example, Paul reports about the offering of the Macedonians saying, "*...they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means*" ... "*they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us*" (2 Cor 8:3-5).

Some people were not as eager to give their possessions for Christ's mission. Therefore, the Apostle Paul tried to persuade them to give as much as they could in order that the church's purpose might be fulfilled (2 Cor 9). It seems that they were not ready to offer their possessions though they knew that they were supposed to offer them for the mission of the church. Paul is instructing them to give willingly, "*Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*" (2 Cor 9:7).

Therefore, sacred donations were important for the church's stability, just as they were in Old Testament times. Now believers were supposed to give gifts cheerfully and according to their means to fulfill the purpose of the church.

4.2. The Concept of Offering in the Church Today

The Concept of Sacrifice in the Church Today

Concerning the issue of sacrifice, sometimes people do not understand the meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Sometimes this is due to traditional religious beliefs that have been passed along from generation to generation. Therefore, some Christians fail to cut the bonds of their traditional religion and instead continue to maintain their strong religious clan ties. Thus, even if they accept Christianity, they still hang onto their traditional religious beliefs.

During the burial ceremony, some people used to slaughter animals such as a cow or a sheep and pour some blood on top of the tomb expecting it to be shared by the spirit of the deceased. Sometimes this goes hand in hand with shaving their heads, because according to their beliefs they are blowing out catastrophes of death. Then they take the hairs and get rid of them by throwing them to a baobab tree or any other big tree or bush. Normally, the hair of those who will mourn for forty days is shaved, but the rest of the mourners are not necessarily shaved.

According to my interviews, in African traditional religion there is a sense of sharing spiritual affairs between the living and the dead. People strongly believe that the dead are so close to God that they can act as mediators between God and those who are still living. They build tombs in order to mark the place where a relative is buried so that it is easier for them to remember him/her and conduct the customary ritual practices at the site.

Building of tombs is not forbidden in the Bible. Jesus was buried in a tomb which had been prepared by Joseph of Arimathea for himself (Matt 27:57-60). The tomb has a threefold purpose: preservation of the corpse, it is a sign of respect to the dignity of human beings, and it marks the burial site of the deceased. Doing something extra on it in connection with ritual practices is illogical and has been prohibited since the Mosaic era, for it is abhorrent to God (Deut 18:9-14). For Christians the only logical communion is between Jesus Christ, who

lives forever, and the people who are alive, not with the dead people, for he is the living sacrifice who has restored a good communion of the living people with God.

This African traditional religion has had a deep effect on the beliefs of Christians. Traditional superstitious rituals are performed not only by non-Christians but also by some Christians. Such people sometimes have marks of skin cuts on their bodies, and sometimes buboes/nods on their bodies are tied either with a dark or red piece of cloth. They do this believing that they are protecting themselves from the wrath of evil spirits. But the reality remains the same: the offering and their devotion is good for nothing. It is just like worshipping other gods.

The only true security and protection comes from Jesus Christ. He himself once said, *“I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”* (John 10:9-11). So whoever looks for security in other gods or names is totally lost, for *“...there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

Most of the people today who have accepted Jesus Christ as their saviour and who worship in Christian churches in great numbers are still attached to other faiths. They have not devoted themselves completely to Christ, for they are still performing traditional ritual practices as if they were not satisfied by the sacrifice made through the body of Jesus Christ. They make vows to idols and sacrifice animals, especially when they are praying for rain when it is late. They slaughter cocks, hens, goats, cows, and sheep and whatever else they have been ordered to bring by witch doctors. Some are told to make cuts on their skin in order to protect themselves from catastrophes caused by evil spirits, and so on.

There are special places run by witch doctors where people go for superstitious purposes. For example, “Nyumba nitu”, (which means

'the dark house' in the Bena language,) and "Kigonzile" village are special places for ritual practices.

The name Kigonzile originates from the Hehe language verbal phrase "Igonzile imwene", which means that someone 'has stretched him or herself'. This is a reference to the bodily action of someone who is dying. When there was a sick person suffering from a critical illness, the hope for his/her survival was easily lost. Therefore, he/she was left alone near the burial place to die slowly. No one helped the sick person by stretching his/her body when dying. The same place was used to communicate with evil spirits, who were told, "Here is our fellow who is coming to you, just receive him/her".

There are some people who do not want to involve themselves with other gods. I belong to that group, because I am satisfied with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is difficult to know about others which of them worship the one true God, because true worship rises from the heart of the worshipper. Being together in the church does not mean that all have a common object of worship. That is why Joshua, the son of Nun, proclaimed in the midst of the people saying, "...*as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*" (Josh 24:15b). He knew that people had to make their own decisions in their hearts, to choose whom they wanted to serve. Their historical background was not enough to convince Joshua that they would serve the Most High God. He believed that the decision could be made by a person at any time and that the decision had nothing to do with either the nation's historical background or belonging to the chosen nation of the Most High God. This is how it is even in our church today. Since "*God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth*" (John 4:24), the unity of congregants has nothing to do with the individual's true worship in the church. Everyone should stand firm on his or her own before God when worshipping. What is important is to answer oneself these questions, "Whom am I serving?" and "How am I serving?"

The Concept of Sacred Offerings in the Church Today

In the light of my experience in the church, people are divided into four groups: the first group is made up of those who understand well the concept of offering and carry it out faithfully; the second group is made up of those who understand the concept but do not want to carry it out; the third group is made up of people who understand it but fail to carry it out because of economic difficulties; and the fourth group is made up of those who do not understand the concept, especially those who are not nurtured in Christian families.

Those Who Understand the Concept and Live Accordingly

This is the group of faithful Christians who usually bring their offering to the church as a part of their worship. Sometimes they bring it during working days, and sometimes on Sundays. They are compelled intrinsically to offer to God faithfully. Sometimes they bring the first salary they get in their business, or cash tithes. If they are farmers, they bring their firstfruits or tithes of their harvest, or items from their shop or an animal from their flocks. These people recognize God as the provider of everything they possess. Therefore, they know how to offer the portion which belongs to God. Their goal is to make the church self-supporting so that it can perform its mission.

Those Who Understand the Concept but Fail to Live Accordingly

These people have enough knowledge of what offering means but they do not want to put the concept into practice. They have just decided to give what they have planned, not caring about biblical directives. They do not even try to figure out the amount to offer in proportion to what they earn. If the pastor speaks of it, some people even start looking for another church in the hope of finding a place where there is not much emphasis on offering. They think that instead of being given to God offerings are meant to profit pastors, evangelists and other parish workers. Therefore, they try to show their obedience by giving a minimal percentage of their possessions for the sake of companionship with other Christians and for common social interests.

Those Who Understand the Concept but Fail to Live Accordingly Due to Economic Difficulties

In this small group we find widows, orphans, lonely old people and disabled people who wish to offer according to the directives of the word of God but fail to do so because of economic reasons. Sometimes they even pledge in their envelopes by faith to offer a certain amount to God, but are not able to fulfill what they desire to give. These people need support from society so they can run their lives with the help of the possessions which we have shared. They are neither demanded to pledge their offering nor bound to do what they are not able to do.

Those Who Do Not Understand the Concept

This very small group of people has not been raised in Christian families. They have been converted into the Christian faith and need to be nurtured in this new-found faith in order to know how to worship God with their hearts as well as with their possessions. They are eager to learn quickly about spiritual affairs and the Christian faith; therefore, they are easy to teach to be good Christians before they opt to join one of the above groups.

In our church we have four kinds of offerings: tithes offering (of everything that a Christian may possess, including harvest), firstfruits, diaconal offering and thanksgiving offering. They are known as sacred donations to the church. But the diaconal offering is aimed at assisting people who are asking for help from the church in order to solve some problems. The average collection for diaconal purposes amounts is fifty thousand per Sunday. As for the thanksgiving offering, it is always dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit, who impels people to thank God for something special that He has done for them; there is no special day for that. The average thanksgiving collection per Sunday is forty-five thousand. The tithes offering fluctuates depending on the economic status of those who come to the church each Sunday; the average is seven hundred thousand per Sunday. The church's income is still low compared to its needs. Giving is on the rise, but our expenses are rising even more rapidly. That is why we say

that the church is experiencing a heavy burden in the implementation of its mission, because the majority of churchgoers do not want to offer faithfully.

Generally speaking, it seems that the door of grace has opened the door for laziness to some people. They are not offering as they should, because a merciful God does not punish them immediately. Some of them believe that they will offer faithfully tomorrow, and therefore they always end up spending most of their earnings on their own wants and needs, leaving the church poor. They are regular churchgoers, but they have not really committed themselves to Christ. Instead, they seek the company of believers in order to share common social interests, including seeking honour during burial services and good cooperation in social issues.

5. Conclusion

The Old Testament concept of offering seems to be very complicated and too severe in practice especially as far as sacrifices are concerned. Blood needed to be shed in order for people to worship God perfectly. Sometimes when somebody refused to obey the rules of offering, the consequences were immediate. Due to that, the people of the Old Testament were afraid to violate the God's directives of offering. There arose, however, a problem of offering only to fulfill the law and not being intrinsically motivated to do so. According to Psalm 40:6, God rejected the offering which was given extrinsically, "*Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.*" People were punished repeatedly for violating the law, but also blessed before long when they were obedient to the law.

In the New Testament at the very beginning of the mission work of the church a severe immediate punishment that frightened people came as a consequence of the disobedience of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). They died instantly after their betrayal had been exposed. After that, during the new covenant, it seems that the grace of God obscures the reality of the punishment of individual sinners. It is

expected to be postponed until the judgment day at the second coming of the Lord Jesus (Matt 13:24-30; 25:31-46). Of some Christians the saying is true: Much grace, much laziness! But whoever obeys the words of Jesus receives an abundant blessing from God including true peace of mind, hope and harmony in his/her life, while the unfaithful will always have a tension in their minds because of the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts them of sin.

Due to unfaithfulness in offering, the economic state of the church remains poor, and some people who are called to serve God do not accept the call because of it. Even the servants of the church do not like to encourage their children to choose serving God as a response to his call because of economic reasons. The parents do not want them to experience suffering as they have. There is no excuse for unfaithful Christians – as long as they remain in the Christian faith – if they impose the burden of suffering on the servants of God (Mal 3:8-9, 16-17; Matt 25:45; Acts 5:4d).

The church needs to carry on teaching people the acceptable way of serving the church with their possessions so that the church would no longer have to suffer as it is suffering right now. The church should also establish a number of projects, depending to the opportunities available at the time, to create means of self-support and to decrease the burden of suffering of the servants of God.

Due to the existing situation, most of the churches' servants in most of the areas of Tanzania in general and Iringa in particular are suffering from economic crisis, and it is becoming difficult for them even to subsist from day to day. In addition, the needy people, the poor, the orphans and the very old people cannot be given material support by the church which is regarded as a refuge for such people. Even if they are given help sometimes, the help they get is not enough, because what is brought to the church today is not sufficient to meet the need. Therefore, we are still facing the great challenge in our church today of living alongside Christians who are not faithful in offering. The result is that the work of the church suffers greatly, because much of the church servants' time as responsible persons in their families goes to thinking about the challenges and difficulties of life. But if people

will give faithfully and appropriately, they will certainly facilitate the working environment of the churches' servants.

The concept of offering is well known by most Christians in our church today. Problems arise as a result of disobedience to the word of God when what has been ordered is rejected. It is good to keep on encouraging people to be faithful in offering their tithes, firstfruits and thanksgiving so that the "storehouse" could have enough to run the mission of the church all over the world.

6. Reference books

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14. The use of the Old Testament in the life of the African Christian church: case study of Iringa (Peter Fue)

Introduction

When the author of this book requested the members of the Faculty of Theology at Tumaini University to participate in co-writing a book on 'Introduction to the Old Testament' I felt unable to do so on grounds that I am not an Old Testament scholar. My immediate response was that this should be done by some other colleagues of mine. But later on I realized that having been a Christian and a pastor for many years, I can make a contribution for others to read and digest. I therefore thank Rev. Dr. Eero Junkkaala for his brilliant invitation for African contributions to his publication.

I have chosen to write on how frequently the Old Testament text is being used by ministers as well as laity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT). The reason for this choice is just to see how much Christians enjoy using Scripture, and the Old Testament in particular. I have come to realize two problems: the first is the psycho-spiritual malaise that is the result of the use of the Old Testament (and some New Testament) portions which discriminate other people in the name of God. The second is the unnoticed distinction between the Testaments: the false notion that Scripture is by nature unitary. Both parts of the Bible are used interchangeably as if they did not differ, or perhaps people see the differences but do not take them seriously. Oftentimes a preacher will call the '*word of a Prophet*' the '*word of Jesus*' without making any distinction or giving an explanation.

The approach I took was to collect data from ministers and laity alike. I also consulted denominational calendars to see how much the churches use Old Testament texts. The calendar of Scripture Union (Tanzania), an interdenominational organization, was also consulted. I also reviewed a few books.

The result of the study is interesting. Both ministers and laity seem to have same views on the use of the Old Testament, and both groups give similar reasons. The discussion that follows is meant to be both an encouragement to Christians to use the Old Testament and a remedy on how to use it properly.

I welcome both students of theology and laymen to read in the name of Jesus.

Book reviews

It was difficult to secure literature on the subject. This was to be expected because few African writers have dared to highlight this challenge. Most of us are products of the Western theological alignment, and we have translated Scripture in a wholesale manner instead of looking at it and translating it from the African point of view. We have treated Scripture as a Word that came straight from the mouth of God without passing through a cultural medium.

Paul J. and Elizabeth Achtemeier (1962:11 ff) defend the legacy and authority of the Old Testament because it is the root of the Christian faith. In it we find the nature and destiny of the Church.

In a similar manner, Robert Paul Roth (1973:143 ff) explains about the unitary nature of Scripture and its authority, not because of the theory of inspiration and infallibility, but because of its story of promise which is worth believing. Not every story is like that; but the story of God's love in the Old and New Testament has been believable for generations.

Again, attempting to discuss the question on how much African Christians use the Old Testament, Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz (1997:45 ff) contend that Africans feel good about seeing the Old Testament in their daily life. The reason given is that parallel connections exist between African oral literature and the Old Testament. Such similarities as in proverbs, sayings, stories, myths, songs,

prayers and the like have become good vehicles of wisdom and soul to Africans.

Laurenti Magesa (1997:44 ff) says that Africans love to use Old Testament literature because of their worldview which combines the divine and the universe. The invisible world is seen and translated through creation, and cannot be separated. Now this kind of worldview can be seen in the Old Testament, where God and his manifestations are seen in and through creation. Preaching or hearing preaching from the Old Testament carries the African home.

Kwesi A. Dickson (2000:145 ff) says that the African Christian has the right to honour the use of the Old Testament especially with the view that the Old Testament tallies with other world religions, African religion being one, in believing in one God, the creator of everything. In other words, the Old Testament seems to be closer to African religion. In the Old Testament Africans get some flavour of their religious background.

Despite this wide use of Old Testament Scripture, Kwesi A. Dickson is of the view that there exists an ongoing apathy towards the Old Testament (and the New as well) in the minds of African Christians. This apathy is a product of scholarship and liberation movements. This move should not be condemned as a mere hatred of 'the Word of God' but a just misunderstanding of racist, sexist, oppressive and segregative culture and character towards non-Jews and women that dominated the Old Testament world and its people. Liberated African theologians (ministers and laity together) would not understand a 'copy and paste' evangelization any more. Dickson is of the opinion that there is a need for a re-writing or re-interpretation of some portions of Scripture, both Old and New Testament, in order to revive the spirit of reading and enjoyment of Scripture without reservations.

Kwesi A. Dickson's view is supported by Hannah W. Kinoti and John M. Waliggo, (1997:25 ff) who think that in spite of the love of the Old Testament among indigenous African Christians, in time there will develop a spirit of rebellion if discriminative and oppressive texts are not re-worked. Texts like Genesis 12 where Abram was given a land

that was other peoples' property, texts that portray God as condoning war (e.g. Deut. 20), the talion formula (Ex. 21:23-27 and Deut. 19:21), sexist texts such as the one on covetousness against one's wife and not one's husband (Ex. 20:17), or texts that condone slavery. All these, and many others, deserve such attention.

This understanding of the Old Testament is also echoed in the field study carried out in Iringa Municipality on how frequently ministers and lay Christians use the Old Testament in their churches.

Method of study

The first method of study was to scrutinize available literature. But I also consulted some church calendars in order to see the official use of Old Testament texts. I examined the Catholic calendar and Lutheran, Moravian and Scripture Union calendars. The new denominations do not use Scripture calendars.

Then I used a questionnaire in the case of literate respondents. But I also discussed the subject with several respondents. I collected data from 9 pastors, 6 evangelists and 25 other persons, most of whom are theological students or church elders in ELCT. One of the pastors belongs to the Tanzanian Assemblies of God (a Pentecostal Church). Thus, my findings came from three sources: ministers, laity and church calendars.

Two guiding questions were used:

1. Personal preferences regarding the use of Old Testament texts
2. Reasons for doing so

The results of the study were as follows:

Ministers

All the ministers who were consulted have served the Church for more than four years. As to personal preferences regarding the use of the

Old Testament Lutheran ministers said they used the Old Testament alongside the New. But they do so without any a priori prioritization of the Testaments. For them the Old and the New Testaments are ‘the Word of God.’ This is very much so because the Church calendar chooses morning and evening texts which liturgically determine the use of Scripture. Then the exposition of the texts will extend to and fro to cover both Testaments according to need.

For the Assemblies of God pastor, the choice of texts depended on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So whether the text is from the Old or the New, in his opinion the choice depends on the Spirit.

The reasons given were:

- i. The choice of the Holy Spirit.
- ii. The Bible is a united history of God’s salvation. The Old Testament is the foundation of the New; and the New is the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s prophecies. Everything begins with the promise of Abram’s call, and points to the work of the Cross. Pastor Joshua Chussy had this illustration, “The Old Testament is like the way, while the New Testament is like the light. Now the light shines on the way. Without the way the light has no meaning; but alternatively, without the light a person cannot find the way.”
- iii. Pastors Oswald Ndelwa and Joshua Chussy both expressed the close relationship between the Jewish culture in the Old Testament and the African culture. Ndelwa sees a very close connection between life phenomena: marriage, birth rituals, bereavements, occupations (farming and animal husbandry), children, etc. Chussy expresses his love of the Old Testament, because in it God speaks to him directly, providing guidance and giving not only promises of blessings but also admonitions. According to him there is no way a person can live happily without obedience to the law of God. God demands allegiance from people, and people want to see God. The Old

- Testament is a theatre of action between God and man leading to a social and spiritual transformation.
- iv. The problem of misunderstanding the segregative culture, language and individuality of the Jewish writers against people of other nations was raised. But the Assemblies of God pastor insisted on holding to modern exegetical interpretations instead of the past Western-oriented ones which carried colonial undercurrents. For example, the pastor felt that it is problematic to defend God's unvarying love of a rebellious Israel only for the sake of the doctrine of pre-election, and allow Israel to invade areas and ruthlessly kill other peoples of God without being brought to justice.

Laity

The lay people consisted of evangelists, theological students and church elders of different parishes in ELCT. The majority of the laity came up with five reasons for using the Old Testament (listed in the order of preference).

- i. More than 50% expressed enjoying the Old Testament exclusively because it is 'the Word of God.' It is an obligation. However, they do so selectively, preferring certain books over others, those that are easy to understand – Psalms, Proverbs, creation stories, the Exodus story, the ark of the covenant, Ruth, Joshua, and similar stories where God is seen to be the actor. The reason given was that the stories reflect a scenario similar to the one they are experiencing today.
- ii. The idea of God as a parent and they as his children appeals to them. The Old Testament shows the actual love and providence of God.
- iii. They love to hear sermons on the Old Testament, especially by renowned preachers who provide well-

prepared expositions. The Old Testament is to a large extent very difficult to comprehend. It is old literature, and it takes a lot of time to read it. Thus they need someone to summarize it for them in order to understand it.

- iv. The laity also explained that they love hearing about the parallels between the Old and the New Testaments and seeing the history of God’s salvation unfold.
- v. A few respondents, especially Ms. Dorothy Lubawa and Mr. Egidio Chaula, said that they look for discriminative or racist texts in Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments, when they educate others (these are teachers). In other words, they do so not for the honour of God but in order to criticize Jewish culture and the colonial evangelists.

Church Calendars

Four calendars were studied in order to see the extent of the use of Old Testament texts. The table below has this data (percentages in brackets).

	OT	NT	TOTAL
Roman Catholic	231 (28.48%)	580 (71.52%)	811 (100%)
Moravian	638 (48.58%)	674 (51.42%)	1311 (100%)
Lutheran	367 (48.29%)	393 (51.71%)	760 (100%)
Scripture Union	210 (57.69%)	154 (42.31%)	364 (100%)
Total	1445 (43.16%)	1901 (56.84%)	3346 (100%)

The numbers show how many Old Testament and New Testament passages were suggested for daily readings. The Lutheran church had chosen 12 preaching texts and the Moravian church 31 texts from the Old Testament. The Roman Catholic Calendar suggested only New Testament texts for the Sunday service.

When the Assemblies of God pastor was consulted and asked to produce a sequence of preaching texts in his daily work, he provided a selected list of 21 main texts he preached on during one month as follows:

8 OT Texts (38%): Ezekiel, Isaiah, Lamentations, Deuteronomy, Malachi, Haggai, Isaiah and Exodus. None were used on a Sunday.

13 NT Texts (62%): 1 Corinthians (*Sunday*), 2 Corinthians, Matthew, Colossians

(*Sunday*), Mathew, Luke (*Sunday*), Colossians, 1 John, Philipians, Hebrews,

1 Corinthians, John, and Mark.

These figures show the following:

- i. The percentage of the overall official use of the Old Testament texts in churches is 43 %. For the Lutherans and Moravians the percentage is just over 48 %. The figure for the Assemblies of God is 38 %.
- ii. As for the Sunday service preaching texts, the Moravians use the Old Testament two and a half times more than the Lutherans (31/12). Catholics do not usually use it, and the same is true about Scripture Union.
- iii. Scripture Union uses Old Testament texts in calendars to the tune of 57 %.

Concluding remarks and recommendations

1. The impression we get from the study is that the Old Testament is, on average, used quite extensively in churches. The

percentage of use in the Catholic churches is 30 % and in the Protestant churches 50 %.

2. The Old Testament is used side by side with the New. In other words, neither one is used exclusively. The Testaments co-exist and function together. This is an evidence that African Christians know how to use Scripture; they realize that the Old Testament points to the New, while the New is embedded in the Old.
3. There is a need for Bible scholars in Africa to paraphrase the Old Testament to make it more readable.
4. Attention needs to be paid to problems in the Bible on matters such as gender equity, or oppressive and stereotypical attitudes towards people of other nations in the name of God. It remains a fact that such maladies exist even today all over the World in both religious and secular circles. But it is even more painful to realize that these evils are being cherished by holy books, and are therefore justified in the name of God. An ordinary mind would not hesitate to retrieve the age-long call by Marcion (2nd century AD) to delete such texts from was to be Holy Scripture. Similar opinions have also been voiced by Kwesi A. Dickson, Hannah W. Kinoti and John M. Waliggo.

A re-writing would be a dangerous option. What perhaps could be possible would be to make a re-interpretation of Scripture based on choices made by Christians at large. This would be like initiating a new religious movement, but history would only be repeating itself. What Jesus did was to initiate the re-interpretation of the Jewish scriptures and law. The goal and purpose of the Bible did not change. God continued to be the centre and focus of Jews and Christians alike.

Thus, when an interpretation is made, it must be remembered that the God of the fathers of faith and of Jesus Christ remains the same. The Old and the New Testaments will still be retained, just as a nation that changes its constitution does not lose its sovereignty and identity. Parties come and go. Govern-

ing bodies emerge and subside. But the national goals remain the same and the national spirit remains unchanged.

The West may not be suffering very much from such biblical-based racism or oppression, partly because changing anything in Holy Scripture would be tantamount to changing its culture and political history. But with time the changes will be evident to everybody in the West or anywhere else in the World. Scriptures can be interpreted in a different way, but the will of God that is expressed them will not change.

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List of respondents

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PART III

THE OLD TESTAMENT FROM BOOK TO BOOK

In this chapter the entire Old Testament is covered in the form of introductions to the individual books. All 39 books are dealt with. With each book we ask: What is the central message? What do we know about the historical situation? What does the book say about the Messiah? Some significant passages of each book are discussed as well.

15.1. Genesis

The Greek word *Genesis*, which means ‘beginning’, is used in the Greek (Septuagint) and Latin (Vulgate) versions of the Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible calls it *Bereshit*, ‘in the beginning’, according to the first word of the book. In many languages it is called The First Book of Moses. The Five Books of Moses are known as the Pentateuch. The Jews use the name Torah.

The question of Mosaic authorship has been a controversial topic among theologians. In the modern, historical-critical scholarship the issue is not discussed, because the entire text is thought to be of a much later origin and to have nothing to do with Moses, if there ever has been such a historical figure. According to many conservative scholars, Moses may well have written the text of the Pentateuch (except the story of his own death) or at least parts of it. We can think that the text is based on the work of Moses and the message God gave to him, but the text in its present form is of a later origin. In any case we can consider the text to be a reliable description of the history of Abraham and his descendants. Traditionally, the primeval history in chapters 1-11 has been understood as a prophecy which was given by

God to the writer of the book. It can be called prophecy looking backwards.

Genesis can be divided into eleven parts using the so-called *toledoth* formula. Toledoth can be translated ‘beginnings’ or ‘accounts’ or ‘genealogies’. After the introduction to the entire book these *toledoths* are the following:

2:4-4:26	The account of the heaven and the earth
5:1-6:8	The account of Adam’s line
6:9-9:29	The account of Noah
10:1-11:9	The account of Shem, Ham and Japheth
11:10-26	The account of Shem
11:27-25:11	The account of Terah
25:12-18	The account of Abraham’s son Ishmael
25:19-35:39	The account of Abraham’s son Isaac
36:1-36:43	The account of Esau
37:1-50:26	The account of Jacob

Another way is to divide the Book of Genesis into two parts:

Gen 1-12	The Primeval History
Gen 13-50	The Patriarchal History

The Primeval History

The Primeval History is a most basic part of the Bible. It starts with an account of the creation of the world, the fall of humankind, and the first promises of the coming Messiah. It then goes on to tell the stories of the Flood and the building of the tower of Babel. Historically this is the part of the Bible which cannot be placed into any specific age in world history. It belongs to the dawn of mankind. The modern reader faces the question of the relationship between the biblical creation narrative and the scientific world view. That question was discussed in chapter 7 of this book.

Genesis begins with the expression “**in the beginning**”, in Hebrew *bereshit*. Another biblical book, the Gospel of John, begins in the same way, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Here we meet the doctrine of *pre-existence*. This verse means that the Word (*logos* in Greek), in other words Jesus Christ was with God before he became a human being. Speaking about the birth of Christ we often use the word *incarnation*, which refers to his becoming flesh (John 1:14). The Old Testament basis for this biblical doctrine is found in the personified Wisdom of Proverbs 8:22-31. It refers to Wisdom which has often been identified with Logos in the New Testament. The doctrine of *pre-existence* is also found in e.g. John 8:56-58, Col 1:15-20 and Heb 10:5-7.

Actually we find this truth also hidden in the first word of Genesis. The word *bereshit* is formed from two words: *be* and *reshit*. The former one means ‘in/through/for’ and the latter ‘beginning/firstborn/head’. As we read in the New Testament how Paul is glorifying Jesus Christ in Col 1:15-20, we see that he uses all these possible translations of the first word of the Bible. Everything has been created in Jesus, through Jesus and for Jesus, and he is the beginning, the firstborn and the head. This Christological Hymn is praising Jesus Christ, who was with God already before becoming a human being.

The first two chapters of Genesis contain **two different creation stories**. The first one, 1:1-2:3, is often called the Priestly creation story. It describes the creation of the world in six days. On the seventh day God rested. On that day there was no evening – so perhaps we are now living that day. The order of creation is nearly identical with what science says about the origins of the earth and man: water, dry land, living creatures in the sea, living creatures on the ground, and finally, man. The second creation story, 2:4-24, is commonly said to belong to the Jahwist source. It differs distinctly from the first one. Central to it is the creation of man.

There are several other creation narratives in the Bible, e.g. Psalms 8; 19:1-6; 104; 139:13-18; 148, Job 12:7-10 and Job 38.

The creation stories of the Bible are not the only ones. As a matter of fact, almost every tribe and nation has their own narratives about the creation of the world. Most African tribes have creation stories of their own. The most famous literary ones in the ancient world are the Atrahasis Epic and the Enûma Eliš. They have many similarities with the biblical story but also several striking differences. They represent a polytheistic world view which is contrary to the monotheistic biblical story.

The world described in the biblical creation narrative follows the ancient Oriental concept of the world. It has the following features:

- the earth is a flat plate
- above it was an expanse (*raqia*), sky (like a ceiling), Gen 1:6
- under it was water, Ps 24:2 (also above it, Ps. 148:4, 2 Kings 7:2), Gen 1:7
- there are pillars under the earth, Ps 75:3
- there are stars in the expanse, Gen 1:14-18

The Bible, however, is not bound up with this view; instead, it speaks the language of ancient times. Let us take an example from our own usage. We often say that the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening. Actually this is not true. The sun does not rise nor set. The globe rotates, not the sun. But we understand that it is a just an everyday phrase.

Here are some central issues from the creation narratives of Genesis:

God created man...

- a) in his own image (1:26)

This does not mean that God looks like a human being. God created man to be an object of his love, somebody to communicate with. Animals cannot communicate with God, but a human being can. We can speak to God, and he can speak to us. We can accept his love but also reject it.

- b) good (1:31)

This means that everybody is unique and infinitely valuable. There are no two identical eyes or fingerprints in the whole world. Nobody has been created bad. No matter if we are male or female, rich or poor, black or white, young or old, healthy or disabled, learned or uneducated, we are all equal before God – and should be in the eyes of other people as well.

c) male and female (1:27; 2:24)

Sexuality is a gift of God. His original idea was that man should be attracted to woman and woman to man. Sexuality is a beautiful and attractive thing, and its purpose is to bring happiness to the life of a man and a woman. Sexual fulfilment was intended to be limited to marriage between one man and one woman. God also intended marriage to last until the death of one of the partners. The husband and the wife form a new family in which they are the most important persons for each other. Marital fidelity is the absolute will of God. Gender equality is inherent in that man was created male and female.

d) to rule over every living creature (1:28)

Man was created to rule over other creatures. As human beings we are equal with each other, but animals are not equal with us. In the Western world it should be emphasized that human rights are more important than animal rights. We should be allowed to decide what to do with farm-raiding foxes, and the existence of a few flying-squirrels should not be enough to stop a road-building project. In the East and in the South, perhaps the opposite should be emphasized: animals are God's creatures as much as we, and we have a responsibility to take care of them.

e) to work the land and to take care of it (2:15)

First of all, God created work to be a blessing. It is good for us to work and to earn our living by doing something. Laziness is not good for us. Secondly, God has given us brains and an ability to study and to do research and scientific work. As God's creatures we are interested in finding out what the world and life is all about, and we want to understand them. Thirdly, promotion of development and culture belongs to this sphere. We should develop ourselves, our circumstances and the entire world. We are also called to take care of nature and to think of future generations. Therefore, fourthly, conservation of nature is one of the challenges that follow from creation. In Tanzania it could mean for example replanting of trees. Former generations

have cut down too many trees, and because of deforestation and the resulting erosion much of nature has suffered. The forests keep the environment green and bring more rains to the area. Teaching about environmental issues, such as fighting pollution and using sustainable agricultural practices and renewable resources is extremely important for the future generations. A change for the better could be started by teaching that waste must not be left lying around. Instead, it should be kept in specially designated places and disposed of as soon as possible.

The Ivorian Rev. Dr. Soro Soungalo writes about family relationships, “At the core of all family relationships is the union between a man and his wife. Genesis 2:24 makes it clear that marriage requires leaving one’s parents in order to create a new family. It is fine for a man to live with his parents as long as he is single. But when the time comes, he must separate from them and enter into a new relationship with his wife. Doing this requires autonomy, working at a relationship, full responsibility and maturity. This new type of union is very different and very much stronger than that of parents and children. Traditional African ideas do not always agree with this biblical concept. At times, in fact, they make a true union almost impossible. For example, in many African cultures, the man does not leave his father and mother... One positive aspect of the traditional African concept of marriage is the strength it gives the extended family and the sense of community it encourages. A nuclear family on its own is weak.” (ABC, p. 12)

George Kinoti of Kenya writes about Christians and the environment that “study of creation satisfies our desire for knowledge and provides solutions for practical problems such as hunger and disease... The natural world is important to God. He took care to protect animal life when he sent the flood, and he entered into a covenant not only with Noah but also with ‘every living creature’... God commanded human beings to care for and protect his precious creation. Thus believers cannot ignore what is happening to it today.” Then he continues by writing about the overuse of land, the loss of forests, water pollution, the loss of species including fish, climate change, the loss of the earth’s shield (the ozone layer) and pollution by chemicals. Rapid population growth is a special problem in Africa, but the enormous increase in the consumption of resources and the use of polluting

technologies are the special problems of affluent countries. He concludes that if we are obedient to God and look after his creation, we must not ignore what is happening. Christians should be encouraged to take proper care of their own fields and to participate in community protection of common water and grazing resources. Christians should also support national and international policies and laws that regulate environmental management and the use of natural resources. (ABC, p. 616)

The fall of man described in Genesis 3 is the next important – and sad – phase in human history. The devil took the form of a serpent (a snake) and said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” This has been the fundamental question throughout the history of mankind. The devil asks, “Did God really say?” If a man or a woman begins to suspect God’s word, the devil has gained his first victory. Actually, its question to the woman included a lie, and this is another typical feature in its activities. God did not say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’. Instead, he said, ‘You may eat from all trees except one’, and this is a big difference. The entire paradise is ours to enjoy, but we must also learn that God has placed some restrictions on its use.

Man fell into sin, and from that moment on sin has been part of human nature. This state of sin resulting from the fall of Adam and Eve is called original sin. We are all sinners from birth, as Ps 51:5 points out, “Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” In the New Testament the key verse is Rom 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” This means that everybody is a sinner, not only the robbers and thieves but also the most honourable people and the best Christians – all of us are sinners.

Because we are sinners, we cannot save ourselves. But God has provided for our redemption, as we see in Gen 3:15. Traditionally Gen 3:15 has been regarded as **the first Messianic prediction** in the Bible, and this verse is sometimes called the Proto-Gospel. According to it, the seed of a woman will crush the head of the serpent. The serpent is

a symbol of Satan, the opponent of God. The seed of a woman (!) will overcome it.

The Fall causes the modern reader to ask one big question. How is it possible that something bad came to the good world which was created by God? We have no satisfactory answer to this question. We must stick to the fundamental truths that are revealed in the Bible. God is Almighty and he is good. He is the creator of everything. For some reason he allowed personal evil, the devil, to come to his world. But it is extremely important to remember that God is greater than Satan. In many other religions there are good gods and evil gods, and you never know which are stronger. We have only one God, who is Almighty and good. Satan has been subdued by him.

The Flood was the result of sin that was running rampant in the world. Noah and his family were the only ones who were saved. They were saved by grace, not because of their goodness or good deeds. “Noah found favour in the eyes of God” (Gen 6:8) is a clear indication of this. The word “favour”, in Hebrew *chen*, means ‘grace’. Theologically and symbolically, the Flood anticipates the Last Judgment (2 Pet 3:6-7, Matt 24:37-39).

A special question which may come up in the African context is found at the end of Gen 9. From the table of nations in Gen. 10 one can conclude that the Japhethites belong to the countries of the West, the Hamites to the countries of the South, and the Semites to the countries of the East. After the flood, Noah became drunk and Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father’s nakedness. Among the western people there is nothing unconventional about this, because nakedness is seen everywhere. But in southern and eastern cultures the impact is the same as in Genesis: something very shameful happened. After this occasion Noah cursed Canaan. The reader wonders “Why Canaan, why not Ham,” and is given no answer. But the African reader may ask, “If the descendants of Ham have been cursed, does this mean that the Africans are cursed?” The answer is: No, they are not. First of all, Ham also represents several nations that are not in Africa at all. Secondly, Ham was not cursed, Canaan was, and Canaan has nothing

to do with Africa. Instead, the curse has to do with godless nations that oppose Israel, God's chosen people.

The Patriarchal History

When we come to Genesis 12, we move from Primeval to Patriarchal History. Now, for the first time, we can speak about historical dates and geographical areas. The period of the biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, belongs to the Middle Bronze Age in the Middle East. God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans in southern Mesopotamia. The route he took was a common trade route. First he travelled north to Haran following the River Euphrates and then south towards the Land of Canaan. The first place where he stopped in the Promised Land was Shechem.

Gen 12:1-3, where **the call and promises given to Abraham** are recorded, is a very significant Bible passage. Abraham was promised a land, a nation and a blessing. The blessing referred to the coming Messiah. In order to come to this world as a human being he had to have a land where to live and a nation which to belong to. The land would be the land of Canaan, later Israel, and the nation was made up of the descendants of Abraham, later the Jews.

Another significant passage is Genesis 15, which tells about justification by faith and the covenant between God and Abraham. This covenant was one-sided: its fulfilment was totally dependent on God. And when God made the covenant Abraham was sleeping!

Genesis 17 teaches about circumcision, which is a covenant between God and his people, Israel. Traditionally, circumcision has been practised among some other nations as well. In the African context it should be pointed out that traditionally circumcision of women has never been allowed. Mutilation of the female genitals is a violent practice that is damaging to a woman's sexual, physical and mental health. As Christians we should remember that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Gal 5:6). In Christianity

it is not circumcision but baptism that is an outward sign, a step into the membership of the new covenant people of God.

Rev. Sicily Mbura Muriithi of Kenya writes about mutilation of the female genitals, “It is performed on girls aged three to sixteen years, usually in unhygienic environments using crude and unsterilized instruments such as a kitchen knife, razor blade, piece of glass or sharp nail. Physical side effects of the operation include infection, internal bleeding and the transmission of blood-borne infections like hepatitis B and HIV. Thus the operation can be fatal. There is also potential loss of sexual function. Possible negative psychological side effects are a sense of anxiety, humiliation and betrayal, and long-lasting trauma due to the terror experienced during the operation” (ABC, p. 37).

The promises of land, nation and blessing which had been given to Abraham were passed on to Isaac and Jacob. Wrestling with God (Gen 32:22-31) was a turning point in Jacob’s life. He had deceived his brother Esau and had escaped to a foreign country. He lived there for more than twenty years, but at last decided to return and ask for his brother’s forgiveness. Before meeting him Jacob met God by the River Jabbok. After hours of wrestling Jacob still would not give in. He said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” Then God blessed him there. Who wrestled with Jacob? According to Genesis a man or God, according to Hos 12:4 an angel.

Jacob got twelve sons who became the forefathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. The principal character among his twelve sons is Joseph. He was forsaken and left for dead by his brothers, but God led him to Egypt. There he gradually, through many different phases, rose to a very high status in the Egyptian administration. In this role he was later able to save his brothers from starvation. However, the promises about the Messiah were not passed on through Joseph but through Judah (Gen 49:10).

Genesis ends with the story of Joseph’s death. The last detail mentioned about him is his request to be buried in the Promised Land (Gen 50:25, 26). This later took place, and it is noteworthy that his burial is

mentioned three more times in the Bible (Ex 13:19, Josh 24:32, and even Heb 11:22). This highlights the importance of respecting the body of a dead person and the burial place. In Africa this is self-evident, and in the Western world the cemeteries are often also very well cared for. In traditional African religions dead bodies or dead persons may have been worshipped in a way that is not biblical.

The role of ancestors is central in traditional African thinking. Those who die at a mature age do not cease to be members of the community but continue to play an active role in the lives of their descendants. Yusuf Turaki of Nigeria writes that “ancestors are believed to be custodians of kinship, religion, morality, ethics, and customs and are expected to bless the community when traditional customs and beliefs are upheld. It is believed that ancestors are capable of influencing the destinies of the living for good or ill, depending on how the living have treated them. This belief has given impetus to ancestor worship, which ranges from a simple pouring of palm wine accompanying a petition to elaborate animal sacrifices with festivities.” Turaki goes on to say that some African theologians have proposed that Jesus should be presented as an African ancestor. According to him, this idea is not without merit, but it may also include the danger of limiting the work of Jesus to the role of an ancestor. Together with the Book of Hebrews we could say that Jesus has come to fulfil the African ancestral cult and has taken the place of its ancestors. (ABC, p. 480)

African funerals may include rituals for cleansing the widow or the house, and these rituals may include activities which we as Christians cannot approve. These ceremonies may even demand the spouse of the dead person to have sexual intercourse with a relative of the deceased in order to protect himself or herself from the deceased coming to seek sexual union, which is believed to be both possible and dangerous. (see ABC, p. 1462)

In chapter 14 of Genesis we have the first clear typological model of Messiah. Melchizedek, the King of Salem, blesses Abraham and Abraham gives him a tenth of everything. According to the New Testament, Melchizedek is a type of Jesus (Heb 7). Other types or

models of the Messiah are Adam (Rom 5:12-21) and Joseph (Matt 2:13-15).

15.2. Exodus

Exodus is the Latin form of a Greek word which means ‘departure’. The central topic is the departure of Israel from Egypt. In Hebrew the name is *we’elle shemot* which are the first words of the book (‘These are the names’). In many languages the name is The Second Book of Moses. Chapters 19-24 of Exodus have been called The Book of the Covenant. It is one of the central passages in the Pentateuch.

The content of the book can be divided as follows:

Exod 1:1-15:21	Departure from Egypt
Exod 15:22-18:27	Wilderness wandering and arrival at Sinai
Exod 19-24	The covenant at Sinai
Exod 25-31	Instructions for building the tabernacle
Exod 32-34	Worship of the golden calf
Exod 35-40	Building of the tabernacle

The Book of Exodus begins with a list of the sons of Jacob, thus establishing a connection with Genesis. But soon it notes, “Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt” (Exod 1:8). Four hundred years pass in these few verses! This is the time when the Hebrew people were in Egypt, away from the Promised Land. Historically the period is the Late Bronze Age. We have no direct archaeological evidence of the Hebrews being in Egypt, but we do have several indirect hints. Exod 1:11 mentions the building of two Pharaonic cities, Pithom and Rameses, by the Hebrews in Egypt. It was Pharaoh Ramses II (1279-1213 BC) on whose orders these cities were built. This tells us that these cities were built during the final phase of the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt.

God called Moses to lead his chosen people out of Egypt. The call of Moses (Exod 3) was very important. The holy name of God appears

for the first time. Moses asks the name of God and gets the answer, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exod 3:14). In Hebrew this phrase, *Ehje asher ehje*, is as much against the grammatical rules as in English. Instead of giving a proper name, God uses the verb *haja*, ‘to be’. The phrase means ‘I am being that I am being’ or ‘The One Who Always Is’. It is an expression of the continual presence of God.

Having been called by God, Moses began to deliver his people from the hands of the Egyptians. Before that he had been educated for 40 years in the Egyptian court and for another 40 years in the wilderness. For the following 40 years he was to be the leader of the Israelites (Acts 7:23, 30, 36).

God sent **ten plagues** to liberate his people from the Egyptian slavery. In addition to Exodus, these are referred to in Ps 78:42-51 and Ps 105:28-36. In ancient Egyptian documents there are texts that mention similar plagues. The following is an interesting example of trying to explain these plagues: In July there is a lot of rain in Ethiopia and southern Egypt. This brings a huge amount of red mud to the river so that the water looks like blood (the first plague). This causes the fish to die. They do not eat eggs of frogs any more, and the number of frogs increases massively (the second plague). A big river with huge amounts of dead fish is an ideal breeding place for gnats (the third plague) and flies (the fourth plague). The dead fish spread bacteria and the very hot climate in October-November causes disease and kills livestock (the fifth plague). In January the water level in the river drops, and some flies spread disease causing boils (the sixth plague). At the end of January and February hailstorms sometimes hit Egypt (the seventh plague). March-April is the time when locusts swarm throughout the land (the eighth plague). *Chamsin*, the hot desert wind, sometimes carries so much sand and dust that everything darkens. This happens mostly in March (the ninth plague). In 2010 some biblical scholars found out that there was a drastic change in climate in Egypt in the 13th century BC. They connected this with the story in Exodus and came up with explanations that are similar to those presented above.

Of the ten plagues by which God tested Pharaoh, the most important was the last one, the plague on the firstborn. During this plague the people of Israel were able to escape from Egypt. This event marked also the first Passover in history. The blood of a lamb on the doorframes of the houses protected the Israelites from destruction (Exod 12).

After crossing the Red Sea the Israelites began their wilderness wandering. At Mount Sinai God gave them the Ten Commandments to guide them on how God's people should live in this world (Exod 20). But because nobody can keep all the commandments, God also gave instructions for sacrifices. The people of Israel were also given instructions on how to build a tabernacle and the holy vessels in it. The tabernacle (or tent of meeting) was made up of a tent with two parts (the holy place and the holy of holies) and a courtyard around it.

The most important item in the tabernacle was **the Ark of the Covenant** (Exod 25:10-22). Above its cover and between the two cherubim over it God was to meet with Moses. This holy vessel was built of acacia wood and covered with gold. Similar religious vessels have been found in the tombs of Egyptian kings. In the most famous tomb, that of Tutankhamon (1333-1323 BC), there were two similar vessels, which are now located in the Cairo Museum in Egypt. A jackal sits on the cover of one of the portable boxes (cf. the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant).

Inside the Ark of the Covenant there were the two tablets of law and later also a jar of manna and Aaron's rod that blossomed. The other vessels in the tabernacle were a table on which the bread of the Presence was stored, and a golden lampstand.

Chapter 32 marks a tragedy in Israel's history. When Moses was on Mount Sinai, Aaron and the people got tired of waiting for him to come back, made a golden calf and worshipped it. They did not understand that this was a grievous sin, and when Moses returned God ordered him to punish the people. The only ones who stayed true to the Lord were the Levites.

The Messiah can be found in the rituals and vessels of this book. The Day of Passover is a reminder of Easter Day. The message of blood as a means of salvation begins here. As the blood of a lamb on the doorframes saved the people then, so will the blood of the Lamb of God save us. The bread of the Presence reminds us of Jesus who is the bread of life. The lampstand reminds us of him who is the light of the world.

The cover of the Ark of the Covenant is a special typological allusion to the Messiah. It is the place where people could meet God. In Hebrew the cover of the Ark is *kapporet*, which comes from the verb *kipper*, ‘to atone’. In the New Testament the corresponding Greek word is *hilasterion*. It occurs twice in the New Testament, in Heb 9:5 and in Rom 3:25. The former has been translated in the NIV Bible “the place of atonement” and the latter “a sacrifice of atonement”. Martin Luther translated this word “the seat of mercy”, which is still the translation in many languages. Rom 3:25 refers to Jesus Christ. He is our *hilasterion*, the place where God can be met.

15.3. Leviticus

The Latin name Leviticus condenses the main content of the book into one word. The book deals with the ministries of priests and Levites. The Hebrew name is *wajjiqra* which are the first words of the book (“And he called”). Everything in Leviticus is part of what took place at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exod 19-Num 10).

Leviticus can be divided as follows:

Lev 1-7	Regulations for sacrifices
Lev 8-10	The Aaronic priesthood
Lev 11-15	Rules for clean and unclean things
Lev 16	The Day of Atonement
Lev 17-27	Regulations for holiness

Leviticus 1-7 contains the regulations for sacrifices. The burnt offering, the grain offering, the fellowship offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering are the sacrifices which were ordered by God for his people. Each sacrifice had a special meaning and purpose. All except the grain offering were blood sacrifices.

For Westerners it is difficult to understand the idea of **blood sacrifices**. People in Africa understand it much better, because in traditional African religions sacrifices are very common. Almost every tribe and ethnic group in Africa seems to have had a traditional sacrificial system of some sort. The animals that were sacrificed were generally domesticated animals: cattle, sheep, goats and chicken. Thus there was a close connection between the sacrificial animal and the person making the offering. The animal had to be carefully chosen. It had to be perfect in every respect, with no birth defects or injuries. This custom is not very far from the biblical sacrificial system. This close connection tells us that the idea of a blood sacrifice is so deeply human that only secular Westerners do not understand it any more. God gave these orders to the old covenant people, because they had to learn that “it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life” (Lev 17:11). God’s ultimate purpose was to send his only Son to give his life for the atonement of our sins.

The priesthood belonged to the Levites and the sons of Aaron. Moses and Aaron were Levi’s descendants (Exod 2:1; 4:14). Moses ordered the Levites to take care of the materials used in the tabernacle. Lev 8-10 and Num 1-4 and 18 explain the ministry of the Levites in more detail. If somebody who was not a Levite tried to perform priestly duties, he was put to death. The Levites served between the ages of 25 to 50. After this they could help the Levites in their priestly duties, but they themselves were not allowed to do the work any more (Num 8:24-26).

The Tanzanian Rev. Dr. Anastasia Boniface-Malle writes concerning this biblical principle: “Unfortunately, in many situations in Africa, leaders seem to think that once they have taken office they have to hang on to that office until they die, as if no one else were capable of

leading or serving the nation or the church. The pattern that is laid out here is a healthier one.” (ABC, p. 179)

In the New Testament Christ changes the order of priesthood. Jesus himself is the High Priest and all Christians are “priests” in the sense of common priesthood (1 Pet 2:9). Everybody has the right and duty to preach the gospel, to pray for people and to call them to Jesus Christ. In addition, some Christians are called to serve the church as ministers. Jesus called the twelve apostles, and later on different types of other ministries came into being: e.g. *presbyteros* (elder), *episkopos* (overseer, bishop), *diakonos* (deacon) and *poimen* (shepherd).

One central idea in Leviticus is the holiness of God, which dwelt in the tabernacle. This God called Israel to be “for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). A warning example of mixing the unholy and the holy is given in Lev 10 in the narrative of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu. They “offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his commandment. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord” (Lev. 10:2).

The regulations concerning clean and unclean food are found in chapter 11. It contains a detailed discussion of why some animals were clean and some others unclean. The following explanations have been suggested: (1) The division is purely arbitrary, and it tested the obedience of the people; (2) The animals associated with pagan cults were unclean; (3) The major reasons for the regulations had to do with hygiene and health. The unclean animals were not safe to eat. All of these three explanations have great shortcomings. The most likely explanation is: (4) what can be regarded as “normal” and “whole” and having “integrity” was clean, and creatures that disturbed these boundaries, were considered “abnormal”. Thus unclean animals symbolize disorder, mixture and untruth. Clean animals symbolize order, wholeness and integrity and point to God’s holiness.

Lev. 11:44-45 is the key to the understanding of this division into clean and unclean. Israel as a nation was to separate itself from its polytheistic neighbours. God had limited his choice among the nations

of the earth to Israel, and in like manner they had to limit their choice to clean animals. The distinction between unclean and clean animals mirrored symbolically the distinction between the rest of the nations and Israel. It was a constant reminder to Israel of the fact that it was to be a holy nation. (It was not superior to the other nations, nor were the clean animals “superior” to the unclean ones.) Holiness was to show itself not only in adherence to dietary regulations but also in every other facet of life.

What should we say about these taboos and Christians? The borders of Israel have exploded, and now the gospel belongs to all nations; in the same way the borders of food taboos have exploded, and now all the foods are declared clean. Jesus says this explicitly in Mark 7:14-23. This was taught to Peter (Acts 10:9-23), and Paul writes about it in Rom 14:1-3, 14. 1 Cor 8 teaches what our attitude should be towards Christians whose views on things of this sort differ from ours.

The ministry of the priests centred on taking care of the offerings. They served in the tabernacle. Once a year, on **the Day of Atonement** (in Hebrew *Jom Kippur*), the high priest went into the Most Holy Place taking blood with him (Lev 16). He was to sprinkle it on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. As was mentioned above, in Hebrew this place was called *kapporet*, which is derived from the word *kipper*, ‘atonement’. On that day there was also a ritual, in which a goat was sent into the desert. Before that the people confessed their sins, they were symbolically placed on the goat which took them into the wilderness.

Israel’s three big yearly festivals – the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and the Feast of Tabernacles – are presented in Lev 23. These festivals are also dealt with in Ex 23, Num 28:9-29:40 and Deut 16:1-17. All three have connections with agriculture, but their content is deeply religious. Passover, which was celebrated in April, reminded the Israelites of the day of Exodus. Pentecost was at first a harvest feast, and it was celebrated in May-June when the first crops were harvested. Later it also got the meaning of Law-giving Feast. The Feast of Tabernacles reminds the people about the wilderness wandering when they lived in huts. Passover has

derived its Christian meaning from the events of Easter, Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Pentecost became the day of the pouring of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Christian church. The Feast of Tabernacles has no special Christian content, but it has been connected with the Messianic Kingdom (Zech 14:16-21).

In this book the message of the Messiah can be seen in what is taught about the priesthood and the offerings. According to the Book of Hebrews Jesus is our High Priest, but he is also a sacrifice for us (Heb 9:11-12). The text of the Day of Atonement contains a strong message of the ministry of Jesus as well. He is the scapegoat who has taken away our sins (John 1:29).

15.4. Numbers

The name Numbers is derived from the name that is used of this book in both the Latin and the Greek Old Testament. It refers to the counting of the people (census) in this book. The Hebrew versions have used the opening words of the book *wajedabber* ("And he spoke") or *bemidbar* ("In the desert"). This book describes how the Israelites put the law into practice. Before long we see that they broke the commands of the Lord time and again.

Numbers can be divided into three parts:

Num 1:1-10:10	The final events at Sinai
Num 10:11-20:13	Wandering from Sinai to Kadesh
Num 20:14-36:13	Wandering from Kadesh to the area east of the Jordan

The first question that arises when we study the Book of Numbers is **the number of the Israelites** wandering in the desert. Chapter 1 contains a report of the first census. According to it there were 603,550 men "twenty years old or more". According to this the total number should have been between two and three million. Is it possible that so many people could have been wandering in the desert at the

same time? It may be possible, but it is not very likely. Sometimes millions of people have moved from one place to another, but it is extremely rare and usually not organised. A common answer to the problem of the huge number of Israelites has been to point out that the Hebrew word for “thousand” (*eleph*) also means ‘unit’, ‘clan’, ‘tribe’ or ‘chieftain’. If we accept some other translation instead of ‘thousand’, the problem is solved.

At the end of chapter 6 we read about **the Aaronic blessing**, which had an important liturgical role in Old Testament times. It was later incorporated into the Christian church liturgy. Similar expressions can be found in other Old Testament texts as well (e.g. Ps 4:6; 67:1; 118:26). Blessings in God’s name have also been found in Mesopotamia. In Israel one such blessing was discovered in an archaeological excavation in Jerusalem. Gabriel Barkay, who was leading excavations in the Valley of Hinnom, found several Iron Age burial sites from the 8th and 7th centuries BC. In one tomb there was a silver amulet with a text that is almost identical with Num 6:24-26, except that it is a little shorter. It is the oldest biblical text ever found.

In Num. 22-24 we meet a strange person called **Balaam son of Beor**. He was a Moabite seer. God asked him to bless Israel. At first he refused but later accepted the job and blessed Israel. There is a prophecy of the coming Messiah in the middle of this blessing, “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel... A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city” (Num 24:17, 19).

In the excavations at Deir Allah in 1967 scholars found a text with portions of Balaam’s prophecy. It dates back to the 9th or 8th century BC. His name also appears in the text. This means that Balaam was very famous and that his message was told from generation to generation. The name of Balaam son of Beor occurs in the New Testament as well, although in peculiar contexts. In Jude 11 and Rev 2:14 Balaam is mentioned as a warning example of those who lead God’s people astray. This may be a reference to Num 31:16 which says that Balaam, in spite of his good ministry, led people to worship Moabite gods.

As we look for the Messiah in Numbers we should take a look at chapter 21. Venomous snakes attacked and some Israelites died. They prayed to God, who told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. “Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live” (Num 21:8). This story is the background to a central New Testament passage, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14-16).

15.5. Deuteronomy

The name Deuteronomy, which comes from Greek, consists of two words: *deuteros*, ‘second’. and *nomos*, ‘law’. In other words, the name means ‘The second law’. In Hebrew the name is *‘ella haddebarim* from the first words of the book (“These are the words”). The book contains Moses’ speeches to the Israelites in the land of Moab.

The Book of Deuteronomy can be divided as follows:

Deut 1:1-4:43	Moses’ first address
Deut 4:44-28:68	Moses’ second address
Deut 29:1-30:20	Moses’ third address
Deut 31:1-34:12	From Moses to Joshua

Nowadays the most common scholarly opinion is that the Book of Deuteronomy is the first part of the so-called **Deuteronomistic History Work**, which is a hypothetical compilation of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. The basis for this theory is that the theological emphasis of Deuteronomy seems to be the same as in the other six books. The main features of these Deuteronomistic elements are the following: 1) Israel is not to serve other gods besides Yahweh, Israel’s God; 2) If Israel is not obedient to God, it will be punished and expelled from its own country; 3) All of Israel (the

northern and southern tribes) belongs to God's chosen people; 4) The Levites are priests, who are to serve God in the place which God has chosen (= Jerusalem).

It is possible that some time in the 6th century BC a redactor or a group of people compiled the sacred writings of the history of Israel and added some remarks to them. The Deuteronomistic History Work contains ancient traditions, but its final form may have been the work of one or more redactors, and this source (or the group or the individual who finalized it) is called the Deuteronomist. We can call these particular biblical books parts of the Deuteronomistic History Work, but it is not probable that the main part of the text was written in the 7th or 6th century BC. The biblical narrative in these books includes authentic and reliable information of the earliest periods covered in the books. Influences from later periods can be seen in the form of the Work.

Deuteronomy has several parallels with the Book of the Covenant (Ex 19-24). Both also have many similarities with other ancient texts like such as the Codex of Hammurabi and the Hittite Treaty from the second millennium BC. It has also similarities with the Aramaic Treaty and the Neo-Assyrian treaty corpus. The common features suggest that the biblical text is very ancient.

The Book of the Law, which was found during Josiah's reform in the 620's BC, could have been the text of Deuteronomy.

The Ten Commandments appear for the second time in the Pentateuch (Deut 5:1-22). The first time was in Exod 20. One central topic in the book is the so-called Jewish credo in Deut 6:4-9. The Jews call it Shema Yisrael ('Hear, O Israel') or Shema, and its main message is "The Lord our God, the Lord is one." (In Hebrew: *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad*.) This is the most important Jewish prayer even today.

The familiar saying "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" appears for the first time

in Deut 8:3. In this way the people were taught that they must not forget the teachings that were given during the wilderness wandering. Jesus used this verse when he opposed the devil in the desert (Matt 4:4).

Deuteronomy contains descriptions of the goodness of the Land of Israel. Deut 8:7-9 lists the main fruits and crops of the land. This list is valid even today. Deut 11:10-12 describes the land itself. It differs from the land of Egypt, because it has no great rivers. Therefore it is more dependent on God who gives water from heaven.

Chapter 18 deals with two important issues. There is a strict warning about spiritism and witchcraft, “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord.” (Deut 18:10-12).

Writing about witchcraft Samuel Waje Kunhiop of Nigeria says that in most African societies it is the traditional way of explaining any untimely death. It is also held to be ultimately responsible for such things as infertility, the break-up of a friendship or marriage, the failure to win promotions, and political setbacks. This is a deep-seated belief even among many nominal Christians. Many live in fear of being bewitched by envious relatives or friends. Kunhiop emphasizes that some stories should be interpreted rather as proof that there is a profound belief in witchcraft than as proof of its power. However, demonic powers are a reality. Therefore the people of God are warned to have nothing to do with anything related to demonic activity. Believers also need to understand that evil may be a result of sin. For example, those who are promiscuous have only themselves to blame if they contract HIV/AIDS. Finally Kunhiop reminds the reader of the fact that God is always greater than the demonic powers. The cross of Jesus has disarmed the demonic forces and stripped them of their power. “The Christian does not live as if there are no evil spirits and witches, but lives with the full conviction that the devil and his forces have been conquered. The joy of being a Christian is that our God is sovereign over all evil forces.” (ABC, p. 374)

The second topic in chapter 18 is a prophecy given by Moses. According to it God will raise up for them a prophet like him from among their brothers (Deut 18:15-17). This is a prophecy about the Messiah. He was “the prophet like Moses” (see Deut. 34:10), but greater than Moses (Heb 3:1-6, see also John 1:21).

Deut 21:22-23 is another passage that was fulfilled by Jesus. The text tells us that “anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse”. Paul writes to Galatians, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’” (Gal 3:13-14).

The last point we mention about Deuteronomy is the teaching in Deut. 29:29, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.” This is an important principle regarding Bible reading. We cannot understand everything. But what we do understand, we must adhere to.

15.6. Joshua

We have studied the Pentateuch (‘The book with five parts’), i.e. the Five Books of Moses. Sometimes the Book of Joshua has been added to this group, and then it has been called the Hexateuch (‘The book with six parts’). It is more commonly Joshua is considered to be part of the Deuteronomistic History Work.

The Book of Joshua can be divided as follows:

Josh 1	Joshua’s call
Josh 2-5	Israel arrives into the Land of Canaan
Josh 6-12	The conquest of Canaan
Josh 13-22	The land distributed between the tribes
Josh 23-24	The covenant at Shechem and Joshua’s farewell speech

Historically the Book of Joshua coincides with the beginning of the Iron Age. The previous period, the Late Bronze Age, was the time when the Israelites were in Egypt. In the land of Canaan there were a lot of Canaanite tribes, and each city had a king of its own. The Amarna Letters refer to this period of the Canaanite city states. As was mentioned earlier (chapter 1 in part I), the period of the Exodus and the Israelite settlement is historically quite controversial. But, as was also stated earlier, there are no reasons to give up the traditional view according to which these events took place at the beginning of the Iron Age.

The Book of Joshua tells the story of the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land. God had promised the land to Abraham several hundred years earlier. During the time of Jacob the children of Israel moved to Egypt. This time of “captivity” lasted about four hundred years (Gen 15:13, Ex 12:40, Acts 7:6). During all of those years in Egypt the Israelites had the promises about their own land, but only the promises, not the land itself. The tradition of the promises given to Abraham was passed on from generation to generation in the foreign country. It kept up hope and was a source of encouragement. “The life in captivity is extremely difficult, but one day we will get the land.” They had to walk by faith, not by sight. The Book of Joshua tells about the fulfilment of this expectation. When the land had been conquered, Joshua kept his farewell speech. Its key message was this, “Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed” (Josh 23:14).

In chapter 1 God encourages the fearful Joshua. The challenge given to Joshua was not easy. Moses had been a charismatic and authoritative leader during many decades. He had given his leadership to Joshua, and now he was dead. A large crowd of people was not easy to lead. There were formidable enemies on the other side of the Jordan River. In that situation God told Joshua that he was to be strong and courageous. He could gain strength from the promises given to Moses. The word of God would help him stand firm.

It is not easy to hand over leadership to a successor, trusting that he will continue the job, perhaps not in the same way but in his own way. David Oginde, a Kenyan pastor, writes in connection with Josh.1, “The African continent is in a serious leadership crisis. Almost every change of leadership is accompanied by strife. Either there is no suitable successor or the handover is full of fights and struggles. This is true not only in national politics but also in the corporate world and most certainly in the church. It is rare to hear of a smooth handover of leadership or, even better, a gradual one in which new leaders build on the foundation of their predecessors and move the nation, organization or church to greater heights of growth and development. Men like Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Nelson Mandela of South Africa, who have voluntarily handed over leadership of their nations, stand out as lighthouses in a dark night, not because what they did was unusual, but because it is unusual in Africa.”(ABC, p. 257)

The first trial which Joshua had to face was the conquest of Jericho. God led spies to meet a Canaanite woman, Rahab, who was called a prostitute but who would help them. Later this Rahab joined the family of an Israelite, and in the New Testament she is mentioned as an example of great faith (Heb 11:31 and Jam 2:25). Crossing the Jordan was the first miracle which God performed in the Promised Land.

The battle of Jericho is one of the most famous battles in the Bible, because of the very unusual way it was conquered by just marching around the city and blowing on trumpets. Archaeologically the conquest of Jericho has long been an example of the problems that exist between archaeology and the Bible. Jericho’s wall mentioned in the Book of Joshua has not been found. In the light of excavations it seems that there was no big city at the site during the Late Bronze Age, the period of the Canaanites. However, some remains of the city have been discovered, and it is not very unusual that ancient remains vanish during centuries-long gaps in the settlement of a site. The excavations at Ai are problematic as well. No Canaanite Late Bronze Age city has been found. It is likely that Ai was only a tiny outpost of Bethel.

The conquest of Jericho was meant to show the Israelites who was giving the Promised Land to them. It was not Joshua and his military might, it was God alone. The story of Ai contains another important teaching. The sin of Achan was punished in an extraordinary manner. In his case God wanted to show his people what he thought about sin. Sin is always a very serious thing, and it needs to be punished. The forgiveness of sins delivers us from punishment. Normally sin is not punished in this life; punishment is postponed to eternity. The case of Achan is an exception: the purpose of this object lesson was to help the people, who were settling for the first time in the Promised Land, to understand the seriousness of sin as clearly as possible.

Chapter 8 describes the building of the altar on Mount Ebal. It seems that no wars have been fought in that area. Probably some descendants of Abraham were still living there. Archaeologists have found a very early Israelite cultic site on the mountain, and it is very likely the one built by Joshua.

Excavations at Hazor are, on the other hand, a good example of how archaeology and the biblical narrative tell the same story. A huge Canaanite city collapsed at the end of the Late Bronze Age, as was told earlier in this book. The altar on Mount Ebal is one of the most amazing discoveries from this same period, and in this case archaeology and the Bible fit very well together.

The latter part of Joshua (chapters 13-22) describes the division of the country between the twelve tribes of Israel. All of them, except the Levites, were given a portion of the Promised Land as an inheritance. The Levites were given only some cities. The Lord was their heritage and they were to get their living from the gifts which people brought to the tabernacle, later to the temple.

The modern reader of Joshua wonders about God's orders to kill people. Can this be the loving God who gave the commandment "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13)? In this case it is important to realize that we are dealing with a very special phase in salvation history. The arrival of the chosen people in the Promised Land was a one-time

occasion. God knew that war against the enemies of his people was the only way to secure the survival of his people and of faith in him.

Another aspect to consider is that God used wars when he was putting his plan into practice. In Isaiah 10 he sends Assyria against Israel, but later allows a disaster to hit Assyria as a punishment. We do not always understand God's thoughts and plans, but we believe that he is right in everything he does. Finally, as we consider the difficult question of killing and suffering in this world, we should look at Golgotha. God sent his only Son to suffer and die for us. Death and suffering are difficult to understand, but because God's only Son had to experience them, they may include some secret blessing.

Where is the **Messiah in the Book of Joshua**? Actually the name "Joshua" means 'Saviour', and in the Septuagint it is translated "Jesus". This means that Joshua is one of the numerous Old Testament types/models of Jesus Christ. According to a typological interpretation both Joshua himself and the entire Exodus event are models of the redemptive work of Jesus. Joshua led the people to the Promised Land, and in the same way Jesus is leading us to heaven (Heb 4:8-13).

There are also some small hints about the messianic message in Joshua. The scarlet (red) cord in Rahab's window has been interpreted to symbolize the blood which the Israelites smeared on their doorframes on Passover day. And this blood, again, speaks about the blood of Jesus that saves us.

Josh 20:6 is an interesting passage. Chapter 20 gives instructions about the cities of refuge. If somebody who had killed man accidentally and unintentionally was able to escape into a city of refuge, he was safe. Jesus Christ is our "city of refuge". We may escape to him, and in him we are saved and safe. There is also another typological picture in this story. The refugee could not leave the city before "the death of the high priest who is serving at that time". The message of the death of the high priest frustrated the plan of the "avenger of blood". We proclaim the death of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, and everybody who believes this will be free. Therefore we can say that in this Bible verse we meet the secret message of the Messiah in two different ways.

15.7. Judges

It is not entirely clear what the word “**judge**” means here. It is used about the leaders of Israel before the time of the monarchy. It has been suggested that the Hebrew word *sofet* could be understood to mean local kings. The most probable interpretation is, however, that the judges were some kind of “charismatic” leaders, some of them military commanders, some more “civilian” leaders. The meaning that is familiar to us (‘judge in a court of law’) is not the correct interpretation.

The judges were mostly local leaders of Israel, and their times of ministry may have partly overlapped with each other. The entire period of the judges lasted probably less than two hundred years. The judges are often said to have ruled for 40 or 80 years. These round numbers may mean that some of them ruled for one generation and some others for two. In the Bible the span of a generation is said to be 40 years, but in reality the length of one generation is about 25 years. For these two reasons we cannot calculate the length of the period of the judges by merely adding their years together. **Historically** we are not far from the settlement period; in other words we are between the 13th and the 11th centuries BC.

Spiritually, the time of the judges was **a tragic period**, because the Israelites abandoned the faith of their fathers. The text sums it up like this, “After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them” (Judg 2:10-12).

It feels very odd that something like this could happen to God’s chosen people so soon after the wonderful time when the promises concerning the land were fulfilled. The reader may at first wonder how this can be. But if he or she then thinks about his/her personal walk as a Christian, it becomes more understandable. Isn’t it very common that although God has given us great blessings and helped us in many

situations, when the first misfortunes come we forget him and start asking where he is? We human beings are like that, our human nature is sinful, and it is very easy for us to forget God. Therefore God must send his servants to call us to repentance. The only possibility to be saved is by God's grace.

After the first battles, which the Book of Joshua tells about, the Israelites lived among the Canaanites. The Israelites settled in the Central Hill Country, and the Canaanites lived in the valleys. But in many regions they lived as neighbours close to each other. They began to communicate and befriend each other. This in itself was not wrong, because they were connected by their humanity. But when their religions began to get mixed, that was a fatal development.

The following judges and enemies of Israel are referred to in the book:

Othniel (3:7-11)	against Aram
Ehud (3:12-30)	against Moab
Shamgar (3:31) a	against the Philistines
Deborah and Barak (4:1-5:31)	against Hazor (the Canaanites)
Gideon (6:1-8:35)	against the Midianites
Abimelech (9:1-57)	tried to establish a monarchy at Shechem
Tola and Jair (10:1-5)	
Jephthah (10:6-12:7)	against the Ammonites
Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (12:8-15)	
Samson (13:1-16:31)	against the Philistines

How can we find **links with the Messiah** in a book like this which tells about one of the darkest periods in the history of Israel? The message about him is almost hidden in this book. In chapter 9 there is a fictional story of trees that went out to anoint a king for themselves. They suggested this position to the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine, but all of them declined. Finally they found the thornbush, and it agreed to be their king. The thornbush is a low, modest and spiny small plant. The others were big and famous national trees of Israel. We meet the thornbush again in the crown of thorns on the head of

Jesus as he suffered at Golgotha. There may be a tiny link between these two stories.

The account of Jephthah's daughter in chapter 11 is one of the most difficult and strange stories in the Bible. Jephthah had made a vow to the Lord that if God gave him victory over the Ammonites he would sacrifice to the Lord as a burnt offering whatever came out of the door of his house on his return. He triumphed, and when he returned home who should be the first to come from his house but his daughter, his only child. Both father and daughter seemed to think that the only choice was to fulfil the promise given to God.

The modern reader may think that Jephthah could have said to God that what he meant was an animal, not his daughter, and that he could have asked God to give him another possibility. But this was not the case in the world of that time. According to Deuteronomy, people were not required to make vows, but once they were made they became binding obligations (Deut 23:21-23). We can think that Jephthah's mistake was to make the vow, but once it was made he could not change it. A promise given to God is a very serious thing.

This terrible story has another dimension, when we read it in the light of the entire biblical message. There is another Old Testament story about sacrificing an only child. Abraham was asked by God to sacrifice Isaac, his only son (Gen 22). The request seemed inconceivable. In the end Abraham did not have to kill his son, because God himself provided the lamb for the burnt offering. This lamb on that mountain was a ram. But later Jesus was "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Abraham did not have to sacrifice his only son, but God had to. Jephthah did not have to – perhaps – sacrifice his only child, but God had to. These stories of sacrificing an only child remind us of God's redemptive work in his Son, Jesus Christ.

In Judges 13 we meet an angel, who foretells Samson's birth. The name of the angel is "beyond understanding" or "wonderful". "Wonderful" is the name that is predicted in the book of Isaiah to be one of the names of the coming Davidic, Messianic King, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his

shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6). Angels in the Old Testament have sometimes been interpreted to have been Jesus in his pre-existential form. This is one such case.

Finally we take a look at the history of Samson. He was one of the mightiest leaders of Israel during the period of the judges. He was given to the Lord since birth, but his career was not very religious. Actually he had the kind of relations with many women that were not at all suitable for a man like him. Towards the end of his life a woman by the name of Delilah found out the secret of his great power. She betrayed him and gave him over to the Philistines. They pierced his eyes and took him to a prison. Finally he was bound to pillars in a temple. Now Samson prayed the last prayer of his life, “O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more.” Then he reached toward the two central pillars and pushed with all his might. The building collapsed and everybody died, including Samson. This last prayer of Samson brings to mind another last prayer in the Bible, the prayer of a robber on the cross (Judg 16:28, Luke 23:42).

15.8. Ruth

The Book of Ruth is a lovely story from the time of the Judges. There was a family from Bethlehem in Judah: Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. There was a famine in the land, and the family moved to the neighbouring country of Moab. Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. After ten years the sons died as well. Later the situation in Judah became better, and Naomi wanted to return to her homeland. She suggested that her two daughters-in-law stay in their own country and return to their mothers. Orpah did, but Ruth said to her mother-in-law, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth.

Ruth started to work on a field owned by Boaz, a relative of Naomi's husband. After some time Naomi suggested to Ruth that she could ask if Boaz as a relative would agree to become her kinsman-redeemer, who would help her by providing better life conditions. When another, closer relative of Naomi's would not take Ruth, Boaz had the right as the next kinsman-redeemer to have her. Boaz married Ruth, and later she gave birth to a son, who was named Obed. Obed became the father of Jesse, who became the father of David.

After the Book of Judges the Book of Ruth is like a pearl in the Bible. There are no wars or battles, no betrayals or adulteries, only gentleness and fidelity, solidarity and love. What could be the purpose of this book? It describes good women in the patriarchal world, and it teaches about right attitudes and good relationships. It also has a strong message that a woman of gentile birth can become a member of God's people. In other words, human beings are equal regardless of gender, race or ethnic and religious background.

From **the salvation-historical point of view**, however, the key message is found in the last words of the book, "Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David." The history of the chosen people now moves from the tragic period of the judges to the age when David will be born. And Messiah will be a descendant of David. The first chapter in the Gospel of Matthew lists this genealogy and shows that Ruth, a gentile woman, became a foremother of Jesus Christ.

In addition, the motive of kinsman-redeemer in the Book of Ruth contains a messianic message. Jesus is our kinsman-redeemer, and therefore we are free and provided for by him.

In the African context the story of Ruth arouses interest in two issues: the situation of refugees and the question of widow inheritance. In Africa there are millions of **refugees** both outside and inside their own countries. The Bible emphasizes the importance of taking care of refugees. Celestin Musekura of Rwanda writes that the African church should meet the immediate need of refugees for security, love, food, shelter, water, medicine and clothing. A Rwandan proverb says, *inda irimo ubusa ntigira amatwi* ('an empty stomach has no ears'). We

should also meet their spiritual needs and encourage them to share in our worship and fellowship. Their insight can enrich the Christian experience in churches, and they can become missionaries in their new communities. Musekura emphasizes that the church should also teach refugees to help themselves. They should learn to dig wells and learn skills and trades that will sustain them. It is also important for the church in Africa to be involved in searching for solutions to the problems which produce refugees. They should make initiatives for democracy, peace and justice, human rights, reconciliation and leadership. (ABC, p. 321)

An African-American professor, Mae Alice Reggy-Mamo, writes about **widow inheritance**. In the Old Testament there are practices and laws concerning the levirate union (Gen 38:6-10, Deut 25:5-10), but in the New Testament it is not mentioned any more. As a matter of fact, widow inheritance is in conflict with the Christian viewpoint that death ends the marriage union (Rom 7:2). In African tradition several types of marital unions are open to a widow. For example, a widow may become the legal wife of a close relative of the dead husband. The children born in this union inherit through the new husband, who is their legal father. In a Christian marriage the contract should be absolutely dissolved by the death of one partner. However, it is very important in the church that the widows are given the support they need. In the New Testament the older widows served the church and were compensated for their labour (1 Tim 5:3-16). (ABC, p. 323)

15.9. 1-2 Samuel

The Books of Samuel describe the history of Israel from the birth of Samuel to the end of the reign of King David. Historically we are in the 10th century BC. 1-2 Samuel are part of the Deuteronomistic History Work. The Books of Samuel can be divided as follows:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1 Sam 1-7 | Samuel and his time in Shiloh |
| 1 Sam 8-15 | Birth of the monarchy in Israel, Saul as the first king |
| 1 Sam 16- 2 Sam 1 | David's way towards the throne |

2 Sam 2-8	David as the king of Israel
2 Sam 9-20	Solomon becomes the next king
2 Sam 21-24	Narratives of David and Solomon

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, mentions four different books of Kings: 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. We don't know who wrote the Books of Samuel, but Samuel is a central character in them. Textual criticism (see chapter 8 in part I) of the Books of Samuel is important, because the Hebrew Masoretic text and the Septuagint differ quite a lot, and the Qumran manuscript is closer to the latter.

The Congolese writer Nupanga Weanzana says about the books of Samuel that reading them could help many Africans to understand their own situation, because they tell about many issues that are relevant in Africa today: hunger of power, social exploitation, sexual abuse, intrigues in the centres of power, political alliances and political assassinations. They tell about similar changes that Africa has undergone when it has experienced the slave trade, colonization, the rise of independent autocratic states, and democratization. (ABC, p. 326)

The birth of Samuel is the story of the childless Hannah and her prayer in Shiloh. Hannah's prayer (1 Sam. 2) is one of the important prayers in the Bible. She understood deeply what God is like, when she prayed, "The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour."

Samuel was the last judge and the first prophet, thus beginning the period of prophets in the history of Israel. He was the leader of Israel in the 11th century BC, and his special task was to anoint the two first kings of Israel. 1 Sam 8 describes the conflict between the people and Samuel: the people wanted a king, but Samuel did not. Samuel thought that God is and will be the king and that no other kings are

needed. The Israelites, however, wanted to have a king because all nations around them had one. Finally God surprised Samuel by telling him to anoint a king for Israel.

The first king of Israel was **Saul**. He was chosen by God, and in the beginning he served God faithfully. Later on Saul was disobedient to God, and his life became very unstable. Samuel anointed a new king, David, although Saul was still nominally on the throne. Saul began to persecute David, and David had to flee him from place to place. Finally, King Saul took his own life on Mount Gilboa in a battle against the Philistines.

The fight between David and Goliath is one of the most famous in the Bible (1 Sam 17). Goliath was a huge Philistine warrior, and he challenged the Israelites to a duel. Nobody dared face him except young David. Although Goliath was a giant and had formidable weapons, David was able to win the duel by a slingshot. The story emphasizes that David was victorious, because he trusted God. This almost unbelievable story has found support in archaeological excavations in Gath, the home town of Goliath. Archaeologists found a small inscription with Goliath's name on a clay tablet, for the first time outside the Bible.

David was anointed king of the southern tribes in Hebron and later king of the entire nation. He conquered Jerusalem and made it his first capital. He also enlarged the country so much that Israel under his rule was a mini-empire, extending from the Brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates for the first and only time in its history.

Although David was one of the best rulers of Israel, there was one point in his life when he failed miserably (2 Sam 11-12). He fell in love with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. He sent Uriah to a place in the battle where he was certain to get killed and then took Bathsheba for his wife. It seems that David himself did not understand at all that he had sinned grievously before the prophet Nathan came to him and told a story about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had a very large flock of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little lamb. This lamb was very dear to him, like a daughter. Entertain-

ing a traveller, the rich man did not want to take one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal. Instead, he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for his guest. Listening carefully to this story David burned with anger against the rich man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die!" Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

What David did to Bathsheba is similar to what happens in Africa very often. Somebody with power seduces a woman and rapes her. This is not unknown in the Western world either. Writing about the African situation, Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri of Malawi says that rape is a big problem on the continent. According to her, some say that rape happens because women are inherently morally weak. This argument is false, for both men and women are equally affected by sin. Sometimes women are raped, because men want to punish them for not respecting men's authority. Many men believe that they can demand sex, because women are there to serve them sexually. They refuse to listen when women and girls say no. Men can even see women as toys, whose job is to provide fun for them. In all these cases men do not respect women as individuals and images of God, whose feelings and will must be taken into consideration. Phiri points out that there are even those who believe that men rape virgins and children, even infants, because sex with them will cure one who is HIV-positive. This cruel habit has nothing to do with truth, and all that happens is that the innocent victim is infected with HIV/AIDS. (ABC, p. 393)

What is told about David's fall is both interesting and educational. The Bible tells not only about the best characteristics of its important characters but also about their sins. It is a realistic book, and it tells about life as it is. All of us have our virtues and our vices, strengths and weaknesses. In the case of David, we are also told about confession of sins and forgiveness. Two psalms tell about David confessing his sins (Ps 32 and 51). Although God forgives our sins absolutely, without any preconditions, sometimes sins have consequences. This was also the case in the life of David's family.

The story of Mephibosheth is a telling example of David's good characteristics (2 Sam 9). One day David asked, if there was anyone

still left of the house of Saul, because he wanted to show them kindness for his friend Jonathan's sake. He was answered that there was one man but that he did not count, because he was disabled, crippled in both feet. At that time disabled people were usually considered worthless, as is the case in many cultures even today. David asked his servants to bring this man to his palace. When Mephibosheth was brought to David, the king called him by name and said, "Don't be afraid!" Mephibosheth's first words were, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" This sentence reveals what he thought about himself. The dog was considered a despicable animal, and a dead dog much more so. Then King David promised that from that day on Mephibosheth could eat at the king's table and live in his house. This attitude of David's reminds us of God's attitude towards men. In the Book of Revelation Jesus calls us to come and eat at his table (Rev 3:20).

From the salvation-historical viewpoint, the key chapter in the Books of Samuel is 2 Sam 7. David got the idea that he should build a temple to the Lord. In all likelihood this idea was aroused because the surrounding nations had temples for their gods. David realized that he was living in a splendid palace while God's ark remained in a tent. God said to him regarding his plan, "Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Sam 7:5, 11, 16). This is the first clear prediction of the coming Messiah, who will come from among David's descendants and will be the King who will rule forever. From this passage on almost every book in the Old Testament tells about the Messiah as a Davidic King.

The question of David's and his reign's historicity has been discussed, as was mentioned earlier. Until some years ago no written mention of David had been found outside the Bible. In addition, the Jerusalem of his era, the 10th century BC, seems to have been a very tiny city. Archaeologically very few things pointed to the existence of a large empire with Jerusalem as its capital. A few recent discoveries have changed the picture. The name of David has been found in an inscrip-

tion at Tel Dan. After that small hints of his name have also been discovered in two other, older inscriptions, in the Mesha Stele and in the Shishak Inscription. Excavations in Jerusalem have revealed some huge foundation stones that speak about a big building, perhaps a palace. Also a large retaining wall on the slope of the Ophel Hill very probably dates back to the time of David.

15.10. 1-2 Kings

The Books of Kings describe the history of Israel from David's death to the destruction of Judah in 586 BC. These books can be divided as follows:

1 Kgs 1-2	David's successors
1 Kgs 3-11	Solomon's reign
1 Kgs 12-2 Kgs 17	The history of the Divided Kingdom to the destruction of Israel
2 Kgs 18-25	Events in Judah up to its destruction

In the Septuagint 1-2 Kings are called 3-4 Kings, because 1-2 Samuel are 1-2 Kings. The Books of Kings have been arranged chronologically so that they cover the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel and compare them with each other. We can make a chronological list of the kings and count the length of their reigns. To arrive at the correct total number of years of each king is, however, difficult, because some of their reigns may have overlapped, and we don't know how their first and the last years should be counted. In spite of that it is possible to make a reconstruction of the chronological order and reigns of the kings. Such a list is found at the end of this book. Assyrian and Babylonian documents indicate that we are dealing with historical events. Several kings of both Israel and Judah are mentioned by name in these texts.

The period of David and Solomon has been called the Golden Age of Israel. During that time, in the 10th century BC, the nation was at its largest, extending from the Brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates.

Several new cities were built, and the reign of King Solomon saw the construction of the temple in Jerusalem. The first temple, which is sometimes called Solomon's temple, was built in about 960 BC on Mount Moriah. That was where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:2). Many centuries after Abraham David bought the site (2 Sam 24:18-24; 2 Chr 3:1).

Solomon was famous for both his wisdom and his wealth. Many people came from afar to listen to him. One of them was the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10). We don't know for sure the location of Sheba, but most probably it was situated in the southernmost part of Arabia (present-day Yemen) or in the Horn of Africa (present-day Somalia or Ethiopia). The Ethiopians have ancient traditions about the relationship of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. They claim that a son, Menelik, was born as a result of their encounter, and that he became king of Ethiopia and brought the Ark of the Covenant to his land. This story has no historical basis.

Solomon used huge quantities of gold when he built his temple. Sometimes it has been asked, whether it was possible to own such a wealth of gold. But when we read stories of other ancient kings in Babylonia, Assyria and Egypt we see that it was very common for royal courts to have enormous quantities of gold and other precious items.

King Solomon married many foreign women. It was a common in the world of that day for kings to give princesses to be wives of other kings. Solomon should have remembered that God had given clear orders for the king in Deut 17. The king was told not to acquire great numbers of horses, not to take many wives, and not to accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. He was also told to be obedient to God's law and follow it. All of these orders Solomon broke. Therefore God said that he would take the kingdom from him, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom

from him, but I will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen” (1 Kgs 11:11-13). Interestingly, the reasons given for saving the people are David and Jerusalem. “David” must refer to “the promise given to David”, because it was prophesied to him that the Messiah would come from among his descendants. But why Jerusalem? A thousand years later it was the city where the Messiah was crucified and all of humanity was redeemed. Consequently, we could say that “for the sake of David and Jerusalem” means “for the sake of Jesus and Golgotha”.

It has sometimes been asked what the biblical view is on polygamy, because both David and Solomon had many wives, and in the case of David the Bible doesn’t seem to condemn it. It is important to remember that the Bible has given clear rules for marriage both in the creation story (one man and one woman) and in Ten Commandments (“You shall not commit adultery”). Although it is not repeated time and again, God’s law remains. To act against it is sin.

Isabel Apawo Phiri from Malawi writes that “the majority of African women theologians do not support polygamy because it dehumanizes women. It shows a lack of respect for the dignity of women as full human beings, created in the image of God. Polygamy does not value a woman as a person, but only for what she can produce for her husband. Most evangelical denominations encourage monogamous marriage as God’s ideal form of marriage. Nevertheless, they are prepared to baptize converted polygamists and accept them as members of the church who are free to partake of Holy Communion.” (ABC, p. 430)

After Solomon’s death the Kingdom was divided into two: the northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. **In Judah** the Davidic dynasty ruled throughout its history. Its first king was Rehoboam. He wanted to rule the entire nation like his father Solomon, but because he was not willing to lighten the heavy tax burden which Solomon had imposed, the northern tribes did not accept him as their king. Only the tribe of Judah accepted him. The capital was Jerusalem, which was left on his side of the border.

The most famous rulers of Judah were Hezekiah in the 8th century BC and Josiah in the 7th century BC. Both of them were, according to the biblical account, good kings who “did what was right in the eyes of God”. They carried out religious reforms. During Hezekiah’s reign the Assyrians made attacks on Judah and Jerusalem. The story is told in 2 Kings 18-19 (and Isaiah 36-37). The heaviest battle was fought at Lachish. The Bible mentions it in passing, but archaeology has revealed a lot of facts about it. Archaeologists have found remains of Assyrians helmets, sling stones and arrow heads at the site. In addition, a very large relief, made up of thirteen panels and describing this battle, was discovered in Nineveh. Most of the panels are now at the British Museum in London. Besides, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, wrote a report describing the battle, and it has also been found. Actually this battle at Lachish between Assyria and Judah is the best documented battle mentioned in the Bible. The biblical story concentrates on Jerusalem. The Bible tells about a miracle: the angel of the Lord put to death a large number of the Assyrians, and the rest returned to Nineveh without attacking Jerusalem. The Greek historian Herodotus writes about this battle as well. He says that a plague hit the camp of the Assyrians, killing a lot of people. Then rats bit through the leather parts of the weapons of the Assyrians, and they were not able to attack Jerusalem. In other words, the same story is told twice from different angles.

There are also other archaeological discoveries that have to do with Hezekiah. A wall seven metres wide has been found in Jerusalem in the modern-day Jewish Quarter. It was built during Hezekiah’s time to protect the city against the Assyrians in 701 BC. For the same reason Hezekiah built a water tunnel leading into the city. This tunnel, which is almost 600 meters long and which was dug very deep in the rock, is a fascinating demonstration of engineering skill. The digging was started from both ends at the same time, and although the tunnel has many curves, the diggers found each other in the middle. An inscription on the wall of the tunnel tells the story. The tunnel led water from the Gihon Spring, located in the Kidron Valley outside the city, to the pool of Siloam in the Tyropoeon Valley inside the city walls. When

enemies would surround the city, they would not be able to find the tunnel giving water to the people in the city. This tunnel, which is known as Hezekiah's tunnel, is mentioned in 2 Kgs 20:20 and 2 Chr 32:2-4. It was discovered by E. Robinson in 1838 and later explored by Ch. Warren and P. H. Vincent.

The text written on the wall of Hezekiah's tunnel is one of the longest and most important Hebrew texts from the period of the monarchy. It reads as follows:

"... and this was the matter of the tunnel: While [the hewers wielded] the axes, each man towards his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be he[ar]d, there was hear]d a man's voice calling his fellow; for there was a fissure in the rock on the right and [on the left]. And on the day it was tunnelled through, the hewers struck [the rock], each man towards his fellow, axe against axe. And the water flowed from the spring towards the pool for one thousand and two thousand cubits. And a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the heads of the hewers."

In Israel the dynasties changed several times. Most of the rulers were given the biblical verdict that they "did evil in the eyes of the Lord". The history of the Northern Kingdom ended in 722 BC, when the Assyrians attacked Samaria and conquered it. The history of the Southern Kingdom ended in 586 BC, when Babylonia's conquered it.

The first king of Israel was Jeroboam, who had served in Solomon's court but then had had to escape to Egypt. He was called to rule the northern kingdom and made Shechem his first capital. He also built two cultic sites, one at Bethel and the other one at Dan, in the southern and northern ends of his kingdom. Archaeologists have found remains of Jeroboam's temple at Dan.

The most prominent king in the 9th century was Ahab. He built a huge palace at Samaria. Parts of this building have been found. A large number of ivory objects have also been found in the area.

The most famous prophets of the 9th century BC were Elijah and Elisha. They ministered in the Northern Kingdom. The well-known story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal took place on Mount Carmel. The prophets and Elijah fought a religious duel over who was the real God. Elijah challenged the followers of Baal saying that “if the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him”. They decided that the god who answered by fire was God. The narrative in 1 Kings 18 describes the tension that was common in Israel over many centuries.

Elisha was the successor of Elijah. Both of them performed miracles, but strikingly many of the miracles took place during Elishah’s ministry. He healed Jericho’s waters (2 Kgs 2:19-22), fed a poor widow (2 Kgs 4:1-7), restored a boy to life (2 Kgs 4:8-37), fed a hundred people (2 Kgs 4:42-44) and healed Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1-27).

The miracles Elisha performed remind us of the miracles of Jesus. It is no coincidence that Jesus’ miracles were much greater. For Jesus to perform similar wonders as one of Israel’s greatest prophets was a sign to his contemporaries that he also was a prophet, yet greater than any of the earlier prophets – the Messiah. The New Testament compares Elijah with John the Baptist. We can conclude that Elijah was a type of John the Baptist and that Elisha was a type of Jesus.

Kingsley E. Larbi of Ghana writes concerning sickness and healing that divinities and ancestors are mediators of health. “While diseases are regarded as having both natural and supernatural sources, ultimate causality is assigned to the supernatural. God can send disease, but more commonly diseases are understood to be caused by evil forces (such as witchcraft and sorcery) or to be a result of one’s own evil deeds. A permanent cure requires a redemptive ritual to deal with the spiritual factors that made someone vulnerable to the disease. Hence the office of the traditional priests has always been associated with divination, diagnosis, healing and exorcism.” Larbi also says that we should understand that also devoted Christians may fall sick and that it is right to pray for sick people, but that God will not heal everybody. “African Christians must realize that God reserves the sole prerogative to heal. Not all the sick in the days of Jesus were healed, nor were all

the dead raised to life like Lazarus. Whether Jesus chooses to heal or not does not change the fact that he is Saviour and Lord. Consequently, we must seek him for who he is and not merely for healing.” (ABC, p. 447)

15.11. 1-2 Chronicles

Originally Chronicles was a single book, and its Hebrew name was *divre hajjamim*, ‘the events of the days’. In the Septuagint and the Vulgate the name is *paraleipomenon*, which means ‘that which has been left out or left to one side’. In other words, it contains things that were not told in Samuel and Kings. In modern scholarship Chronicles is counted among the so-called Chronistic History Work together with Ezra and Nehemiah. 1-2 Chronicles begins with Adam and ends with Jerusalem’s conquest in 586 BC. However, the first chapters are devoted almost entirely to name lists, or genealogies to be more precise.

Chronicles was written probably around 400 BC. The most important sources are the books of Samuel and Kings, because it follows these quite accurately. The main differences are: 1) Chronicles deals only with the history of Judah; 2) the temple in Jerusalem has a central role; 3) it emphasizes that punishment always follows from disobedience to God; and 4) King Solomon is presented as an ideal king. Nothing at all is said about his fall.

Chronicles can be divided as follows:

1 Chr 1-9	From Adam to the children of Israel
1 Chr 10-29	The history of David
2 Chr 1-9	The history of Solomon
2 Chr 10-36	From Rehoboam to the Exile

15.12. Ezra

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah form only one book in the Hebrew Bible. It is also very closely connected with Chronicles. Nowadays all of them are considered to belong to the so-called Chronistic History Work. Ezra and Nehemiah tell about the time when a remnant of Judah returned from the Exile and started to rebuild Jerusalem. The main characters, Ezra and Nehemiah, lived in the 5th century BC, and their books belong to the last historical phase in the Old Testament.

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah can be divided into three parts:

- Ezra 1-6 The restoration work of Judah after the Exile (6th century BC)
- Ezra 7-10 The ministry of Ezra in Jerusalem (5th century BC)
- Nehemiah 1-13 The ministry of Nehemiah in Jerusalem (5th century BC)

Ezra begins by telling about an order that was given in 539 BC by Cyrus, king of Persia. The king's declaration gave the Jews permission to return to their own country and to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The work began under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 3:8, Joshua in Zech 3:1). The book lists those who returned from the Exile and describes the beginning of the restoration of the temple. An opposition arose, and the work was interrupted for almost twenty years, until 520 BC. Two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, encouraged the people to continue, and the temple was completed in 516 BC (Ezra 6:15). The text of Ezra 4:8-6:18 has been written in Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 7 moves the narrative to the history of Ezra himself and to the 5th century BC. There we have a copy of a letter which King Artaxerxes had given to Ezra in 457 BC (Ezra 7:12-26). The Persian king gives a decree allowing Ezra and his fellow countrymen to return to Jerusalem to rebuild it. Ezra is introduced as "a teacher well versed in the Law of

Moses” (Ezra 7:6). The end of the book deals with the sin of marrying “foreign women”, in other words non-Jews (Ezra 9-10).

15.13. Nehemiah

As was mentioned above, the Books Ezra and Nehemiah belong together and tell about the same period, the 5th century BC, when Jews were given permission to go back to their own country after the Babylonian Exile.

Nehemiah lived in Persia, the empire which had allowed the Jews to return to their home country. Nehemiah served as the king’s cupbearer. He found out that Jerusalem in his remote homeland was in ruins, without walls around it. That made him very sad, and he took the matter to the Lord in prayer. Because nobody was doing anything to change the situation, he decided to try. He asked for the king’s permission to go to Jerusalem, and the king granted his request. This is the starting point of the Book of Nehemiah.

The book is a fascinating story telling how Nehemiah encouraged the inhabitants of Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls. He organized everything and believed that the task could be completed.

Nehemiah has often been used as an example of how to build God’s congregation in the world. He started his project by praying. Next he took upon himself the responsibility to act but not without drawing up detailed plans beforehand. He made an analysis of the situation. Then he encouraged the people to start the work. He divided the job between several groups of people so that everybody knew exactly what to do. He met opposition and other problems openly and never wavered from the goals he had set for himself.

In Neh 8 Ezra reads the law to the people and explains what it means. The people started to weep, when they heard the message of Ezra. Then Nehemiah said: “Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Neh 8:10). In Neh 9 there is a long prayer of Nehemiah in

which he confesses his own sins and the sins of his people. This is one of the great prayers in the Old Testament, together with the prayers of Moses (Num 14:13-19), Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10) and Daniel (Dan 9:4-19).

15.14. Esther

In the Hebrew Bible the Book of Esther belongs to Writings and is usually the last of the five scrolls allocated to festivals, called *Megillot*. The books of Ruth and Esther are the only ones in the Bible that are named after a woman.

Esther is not very well known among Christians, but for the Jews it is one of the most important biblical books. It contains the reason for the celebration of the Purim festival.

The Book of Esther tells about a beautiful Jewish woman, who won a “Miss Persia” beauty contest and became Queen of Persia. Esther did not tell the king that she was a Jew, because Jews had a bad name in Persia. A man named Haman rose to a high position in the Persian government, and he demanded that everybody should kneel down before him. Mordecai, who was a relative of Esther’s, refused, thus giving Haman an excuse to ask the king for a decree to destroy all the Jews. Mordecai then asked Esther to help her people. Esther risked her life, when she went to the king without being summoned. Her plan was to organize a banquet for the king and Haman and there plead for her people. At the banquet the king found out what Haman had been plotting without his permission. Haman was hanged and the Jews were saved. At the end of the book the Jews are given permission to destroy their enemies. The Jewish Purim festival is celebrated in memory of these events. Purim comes from the word *pur* which means the lot that was cast as Haman was planning to destroy the Jews (Esth 3:7).

Some scholars have contested the historical reliability of the Book of Esther. There are some historical difficulties (e.g. the number of provinces mentioned in 1:1 seems to be too high), and the book raises

some moral questions (e.g. how could the Jews be so cruel against their enemies). On the other hand the book contains a number of Persian words and sayings that speak for its authenticity. The Xerxes mentioned in the book is Xerxes I (in Hebrew text: Ahasuerus), who ruled Persia in 486-465 BC.

The Purim festival is celebrated in memory of the salvation of the Jews. Esther is the only book in the Bible in which the name of God is not mentioned. There is also no mention of prayers. In spite of all that, the book is a strong testimony to God who saves his people in times of distress. It illustrates the situation in Persia, where it was not allowed to be a Jew and show faith in God publicly. Throughout the book we can find hidden references to God, e.g. in 4:14, one of its key verses. Mordecai says to Esther, “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish.” “Another place” means that God will find some other solution. Esther is one of the many types of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, because she was ready to offer her life to save her people. In the end she did not need to do that – but Jesus needed to.

15.15. Job

Job is a world-famous book of suffering. We do not know when it was written, because it does not contain any historical references. Various dates have been suggested, from the 10th to the 3rd century BC. There are several parallel narratives in ancient literature, especially in Mesopotamian texts. However, Job is the best-known of them.

The Book of Job can be divided as follows:

Job 1-2	Introduction to the book
Job 3-27	Dialogues between Job and his friends
Job 28	Only God has real wisdom

Job 29-31	Job's long speech
Job 32-37	Elihu's speech
Job 38:1-42:6	God speaks to Job
Job 42:7-17	Job is restored to health and prosperity

The name Job may mean 'to be an enemy' or 'Where is my father?'. Both of these possibilities illustrate the message of the book. Its main topic is the problem of *theodicy*, the question why a righteous man has to suffer. The book has both narrative text (at the beginning and at the end) and poetic text.

At the beginning Job is presented by God to Satan. God allows Satan to test Job. What Job had to go through was terrible. His first reaction was, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." Later he began to rebel against God, and he despaired to the point of asking why he had been born at all.

Three friends came to comfort Job. There are long discussions between Job and these friends. The advice that the friends give is sometimes good, sometimes bad. The problem was that they did not listen to Job. Job got irritated with them. Finally, God answers Job, rebuking him in a long speech, which highlights the wonders of creation and nature. It seems that this has nothing to do with Job's suffering. But the end of the book tells that everything turned to the good in Job's life. This happened after God had shown Job who he is. God is God and Job is just a man. God can do what he wants, and what he does is always right, although we may not understand it. Satan's temptations resulted in God's victory.

Ivorian scholar Issiaka Coulibaly writes about suffering, "Everyone who reads the Bible must have noticed the important role suffering plays in it. We cannot miss the sufferings of Israel, of the prophets, of Jesus Christ himself and of the apostles. The subject is so common that we get the impression that the Christian life cannot be separated from suffering. But what is even more astonishing is that suffering and joy are so often mentioned together that it seems that joy flows naturally from suffering... Does it encourage them to seek out suffering in the hope of gaining some benefit? No! None of what has been

said suggests that suffering is good in itself. No one can tell the sick that their sickness is a blessing because something good will come of it. Nor can we tell refugees that they should be happy to have experienced war because God can and will change their situation. No, suffering is an evil that we should fight with all our strength. This is why the Bible teaches that there will be no pain and suffering in the new world order that God will set up at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ... Faced with suffering, we need to affirm our confidence in the love and tenderness of our God and Father. It is he who allows us to experience these tests. For our good, he also provides a way of escape from these trials... It is true that we cannot say, 'Blessed suffering!' Such a statement would be a contradiction of the word of God. However, in God's hands, trials can become a tool to purify, to mature and to strengthen his children." (ABC p. 585).

15.16. Psalms

Psalms is a prayer book which consists of 150 psalms. They deal with all human aspects of life from gratitude to suffering and from envy to desire of revenge. The name of the book is in Hebrew *tehilim*, and in Greek *psalmos*.

Older anthologies from which psalms have been taken are e.g. the psalms of David (3-41, 51-70, 138-145), the psalms of the Sons of Korah (42-49, 73-83), the psalms of Asaph (50, 73-83), the songs of ascents (120-134), the so-called Egyptian Hallel (113-118), and the other Hallel psalms (146-150).

If a psalm is ascribed to David, this does not necessarily mean that David himself has written it. The Hebrew expression *le David* can mean "to David" or "for David". Some of these psalms seem to have been written before the time of the first temple (e.g. 132), some during the existence of the temple (e.g. 5, 48) and some after the destruction the temple (e.g. 69).

In the Masoretic text the Psalms have been divided into five books as follows:

I book: 1-41
II book: 42-72
III book: 73-89
IV book: 90-106
V book: 107-150

Each book ends with a doxology. The division into these five books has probably been patterned after the five books of Moses.

In the research history of psalms the two important names that should be mentioned are Hermann Gunkel and Sigmund Mowinckel. Gunkel's main idea was that every psalm has its place ("Sitz im Leben" = place in life) in the cultic life. Mowinckel's finding was that several psalms were connected with the king's ascension to the throne (e.g. Ps 47, 93, 96, 97, 99 and 146). Later scholars have developed these themes. The origins of the psalms and their exact dating are still quite uncertain.

The 150 psalms have been grouped in different ways in different Bible translations. The Septuagint and the Vulgate combine Psalms 9 and 10 and divide Ps 147 into two parts. Peshitta, the Syrian translation, has preserved Ps 151, which has also been found in a Qumran manuscript.

Here is a list of some the themes that appear in the Book of Psalms:

Laments (e.g. Ps. 6, 10, 13, 25, 31, 38, 39, 42, 44, 56, 60, 88 and 142)
Praise (e.g. 33, 47, 65, 66, 93, 96-100, 111, 113, 114, 117, 134-136, 145-150)
Confession of sins (e.g. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143)
The Word of God (especially 119)
Revenge (e.g. Ps. 9:18-21; 11:6; 35:1-6; 54:7; 58:7-9; 137:8-9)
David fleeing from Saul (18, 34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 142, cf. 1 Sam 18-27)
Zion psalms (e.g. 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122, 132 and 137)
Exodus psalms (e.g. 106, 107)

Messiah in Psalms (e.g. Ps. 2, 16, 22, 89, 110 and 118)
Hallelujah psalms (113-118)

Tokunboh Adeyemo of Nigeria writes that in African traditional religions worship is rarely directed to the Supreme Being directly. Instead, sacrifices are offered to the divinities and ancestors that are believed to be mediators between God and people. Worship is utilitarian. The African people do not thirst after God for his own sake alone. In biblical worship the object is God alone. Worship flows from gratitude, and it proclaims God's greatness and glory. (ABC, p. 251)

As an example we can mention Ps 119 which is filled with praise of God's word. Its 176 verses make it the longest psalm (the shortest is Ps 117). It is also an alphabetic psalm, which means that every 8th verse begins with a new letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The psalm uses synonyms for God's word: law (*tora*), word (*davar* and *imra*), statute (*edut*), judgment (*mishpat*), decree (*hukkim*), command (*mitzvah*), precept (*pikudim*), way (*derech*,) and path (*ora*). The word of God brings joy (16, 24, 35, 47, 54, 77, 92, 103), is not too heavy (32, 45), protects from sin (9-12), helps to answer mockers (42), gives knowledge and understanding (66, 71, 73, 99, 100). The word is meditated on before dawn (147), all day long (97, 164), and during the night (55, 62, 148).

As examples of the Messianic psalms we can mention psalms 2, 110, and 118. In Ps 2:2 we find the word *mashiach*, 'the Anointed One'. This word occurs 39 times in the Old Testament, mostly referring to a king, sometimes to a priest (Lev 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22) and a prophet (1 Sam 12:3, 5). In Ps 89:38, 51 it refers to the people of Israel and in Dan 9:25 to the Messiah. This Anointed One is "my son" (Ps 2:7, see 2 Sam 7:14, Acts 13:33 and Heb 1:5; 5:5). He will get the nations for his inheritance and the ends of the earth for his possession (2:8, 9). Psalm 2 was sung to the king, but it contains a very strong Messianic message.

Ps 110 is the most frequently cited psalm in the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ (Mark 12:36-37; 14:62; cf. 16:19, Acts 2:34-35; 7:55, Rom 8:34, 1 Cor 15:25, Eph 1:20, Heb 1:13; 5:6; 7:17, 21

and 1 Pet 3:22). It contains two Messianic predictions, in verses 1 and 4. Jesus fulfilled them, because he is both king and priest (prohibited in 2 Chr 26:16-19), and Melchizedek (Gen 14) is one of his types.

Ps 118 belongs to the so-called Egyptian Hallel. Jesus and the disciples may have sung this very psalm before going to the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:26). There is a very strong Messianic message in verses 17-22. Verse 118:26 contains a central Jewish prayer, *Baruch haba beshem adonai* (“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”). The same acclamation appears in Mark 11:9-10 and Matt 23:39. See also Rom 11:25-26, Zech 12:10.

15.17. Proverbs

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of proverbs and sayings which are an expression of general human wisdom. Similar proverbs are found in the wisdom literature of other nations, especially that of ancient Egypt. The traditional view is that the Book of Proverbs was compiled by King Solomon (1:1) but that the individual proverbs and sayings represent different sources and different times. Prov 25:1 says that the ensuing proverbs of Solomon were copied by the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah. Prov 22:17-24:34 is very similar to the proverbs of the Egyptian Amenemotep.

Every nation has a heritage of proverbs. They are wise sayings about life and the way it should be lived among other people. Their simple form makes them easy to remember and pass on to future generations. The biblical proverbs belong to this category. But they are also part of God’s word and therefore more important. From the biblical viewpoint they are part of God’s law. In other words, they show the way to a good life, not to salvation. The central theme of the Book of Proverbs is “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”. It shows the way to real wisdom.

The Book of Proverbs can be divided into five parts: (1) 1-9, (2) 10:1-22:16, (3) 22:17-24:34, (4) 25-29, (5) 30-31.

The song of the Divine Wisdom in Prov 8:22-31 is especially important. This personal Wisdom was at God's side when God created the world. It has been asked in Jewish wisdom literature why the creation story uses the plural form of God when it says, "Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness" (Gen 1:26). Jewish scholars have concluded that this refers to God's Wisdom who was with God. This wisdom, in Hebrew *chokma* in Prov 8:12, has been "at the beginning", *bereshit*, in Prov 8:22. During the era between the Old Testament and the New Testament, Jewish literature, especially The Wisdom of Ben Sira, The Book of Baruch and The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, developed the theme and linked this Wisdom with the Torah, the Word of God. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the Word of God was translated with the word *Logos*, which means 'word' or 'reason' or 'wisdom'. Psalm 33:6 says that "by the word of the Lord were the heavens made".

With all of this in mind it is easy to understand why the first Christians understood Jesus Christ to be the Wisdom of God that is referred to in Prov 8:22-31. The clearest expression of this is found in the Logos hymn in John. 1:1-3, "In the beginning was the Word (Greek *logos*), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." This doctrine of *pre-existence* can be found in other New Testament passages as well, for example in Col 1:14-20.

15.18. Ecclesiastes

This book belongs to wisdom literature in the Bible. Its Hebrew name is *Qoheleth*. The Jews read this book during the Feast of Tabernacles, and it belongs to the so-called festival scrolls (*Megillot*). It differs from the other biblical books in that it presents a very pessimistic view of the world. Traditionally it has been thought that King Solomon wrote the book. The narrator is a king, who had everything that life can provide but who lost track of God's purpose for his life. With this

in mind it is natural to think that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, although it may have been written or edited later by somebody else.

The book can be divided as follows:

1-2	What's the point?
3-5	A look behind the scenes
6:1-8:15	Is God fair?
8:16-12:8	Closing counsel
12:9-14	The author's conclusion

The central message of this pessimistic book seems to be expressed at the very beginning, "Meaningless! Meaningless! says the Teacher. Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!" Scholars have searched for similarities between this book and other texts from the ancient Middle East, but only a few comparable details have been found. Some parallels have been found from Hellenistic philosophy, but nothing really concrete. The book ends, however, with a very biblical-sounding statement, "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Eccl 12:13, 14).

What, then, is the actual message of this book? And why has it been accepted into the canon of the Scriptures? We can find two different levels in Ecclesiastes. The superficial level is the message about the meaninglessness of life. But the deeper level is the message about the fear of God, a message that is found in all wisdom literature. The Books of Kings leave a difficult question open: how could Solomon, the wisest man in the world, fall so badly towards the end of his life. Ecclesiastes provides us with the answer. It refers to all the sins of Solomon, but also makes it plain that the king found meaning for his life in the fear of God and in obedience to his commandments.

15.19. Song of Songs

The name of the book in Hebrew is *sir hassirim*, the Song of Songs. It is the fifth part of *Megillot*, the festival scrolls, and it has been read at Easter time. Its place in the biblical canon has been controversial because of its many erotic descriptions. It was accepted into the Hebrew canon, because it was thought that it is a description of the relationship between God and Israel. Later Christian tradition has also interpreted it allegorically saying that the book describes the relationship between Christ (the bridegroom) and the Church (the bride). However, in its original meaning the Song of Songs is a love story. It has also many parallels in ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature.

Even this book has been attributed to Solomon, but this view is untenable, although the name of Solomon is mentioned several times (3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12). The last reference shows that the writer is not Solomon. The Song of Songs is a story of a man and a woman, who were in love with each other but who were not sure if they could have each other. This book has a place in the Bible for two reasons. First of all, it describes love between a man and a woman as something good and beautiful. God has created us as sexual beings, and therefore sexuality is a natural and necessary part of human life. To neglect sexuality is to neglect something of God's good creative work. Secondly, we can also see this love story as a description of the deep unity of Jesus and the church. But the allegorical interpretation is secondary.

Eritrean pastor Tewoldemedhin Habtu writes about the Song of Songs that it is difficult to keep the balance between two ends of the things, especially concerning our God-given sexuality. "On the one hand, we are told by society – at least in its traditional or conservative manifestations – that it is taboo to talk about sex. On the other hand, we are bombarded with the glamour of sex in the electronic and print media. The advent of information technology has simply stepped up the rate of this bombardment and widened its range."

According to Habtu “we live in an age when the institution of marriage and marital fidelity are being attacked from all sides and sexual promiscuity – whether pre- or extramarital – is being put on a pedestal. Various sexual perversions are now being promoted as nothing more than inherent biological propensities. In the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is decimating our continent and much of the world, the best solution offered is often the use of condoms for what is called ‘safe sex’.”

“In the midst of the mess that we find ourselves in,” Habtu continues, “the Song of Songs comes as a reminder to the basics as regards the understanding and expression of human sexuality... The natural reading of the book brings out the message that sexual desire is God-given and beautiful when practised in the context of a heterosexual, committed and loving relationship.” (ABC, p. 797)

Isabel Apawo Piri of Malawi writes about weddings and *lobola*, which means ‘bride wealth’, that among the African churches there are various opinions with regard to this custom. Some refuse to marry a couple if *lobola* has not been paid. Others have banned the practice because of its links to African traditional religion and because the parents of prospective brides have abused the system by asking for large gifts. (ABC, p. 799)

15.20. Isaiah

Isaiah begins a new section of the Old Testament: the prophetic books. They are normally divided into two parts: four major and twelve minor prophets. There are several others who are called prophets in the Bible (e.g. Moses, Miriam, Deborah, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Ahijah and Shemaiah), but these sixteen can be called canonical prophets. Prophecies are known outside the Bible as well. The most famous extra-biblical prophecies are the one about Eshnunna from the 19th century BC in Babylon, the prophecies found in the Mari archives from the 18th century BC and some Neo-Assyrian prophecies from the

7th century BC. Although there are some similarities in the form of the prophecies, there are also clear differences. The spirit of man or demons can cause similar phenomena as the Spirit of God. In the Bible all true prophecies are inspired by God and are therefore authoritative as God's revelation.

The prophet Isaiah lived in the 8th century BC during the reigns of Uzziah (786–735 BC), Jotham (750–735 BC), Ahaz (734–715 BC) and Hezekiah (715–687 BC), who were all kings of Judah (Isa 1:1).

His book can be divided into three parts:

1-39	“First Isaiah”
40-49	“Second Isaiah”
50-66	“Third Isaiah”

Traditionally Isaiah has been regarded as the work of one author, Isaiah himself. But it was noticed quite early that it seems to be divided into three parts and that these parts seem to illustrate different ages of the history of Israel. Nowadays most scholars are of the opinion that these three parts have been written during different periods of time. The first one (*Proto-Isaiah*) belongs to the prophet's own time, the second one (*Deutero-Isaiah*) could have been written at the time of the Exile, and the third one (*Trito-Isaiah*) after the Exile. Much more complicated divisions have been presented as well.

The division into “three Isaiahs” is based on the style and historical context of the text. For example, the beginning of Isa 40 seems to have been written after Jerusalem's destruction. The text reads, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.” The occurrence of the name Cyrus (Isa 44:28 and 45:1) also points to the conclusion that the text was written much later than during Isaiah's lifetime. Cyrus ruled in the 6th century BC. It has also been pointed out that the name Isaiah never occurs in chapters 40-66.

Some scholars do regard the book as a unity and consider that it was written by the prophet himself. Should this be true, it means that Isaiah predicted the destruction and rebuilding of Jerusalem long beforehand. The supporters of this view argue that as there are prophecies concerning the Messiah, there can also be prophecies of Jerusalem and Cyrus. A scroll of the entire book of Isaiah was discovered among the Qumran texts. In that manuscript there is no division between chapters 39 and 40.

The Assyrian Empire ruled the Middle East in the 8th century BC. The Book of Isaiah reflects that situation and being under the threat of Assyria. The distinctly historical passages illustrating this are chapters 7-9 and 36-37 (cf. 2 Kgs 18-20). The first one describes the Syro-Ephraimite war in the 730's BC. Syria/Aram with King Rezin and Israel/Ephraim with King Pekah wanted to invite Judah to join their union against the threat of Assyria. Ahaz, who was king of Judah, did not agree to this plan, and therefore Aram and Israel launched an attack against Judah. Ahaz then sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, and asked for his help (2 Kgs 16:7). In 734-733 Tiglath-Pileser conducted two military campaigns in Aram and Israel. And some time later, in 722 BC, Assyria defeated Israel decisively.

Isa 36-37 describes an Assyrian attack to Judah in 701 BC. Several extra-biblical documents tell about it as well. King Sennacherib himself wrote an account (preserved in the so-called Taylor Prism) in which he tells the story of the conquest of Judah. The famous Lachish Relief portrays the battle of Lachish during the same war. Archaeological excavations at Lachish have revealed many details of the battle as well (see chapter 1 in part I and 15.10. in part III).

Isaiah's prophecies about the Messiah are the most important in the Old Testament. The Messiah is presented as a child of the House of David, as a branch of Jesse, as the servant of the Lord, and as a miracle maker.

Chapters 7-9 describe the historical situation in the 8th century BC, but they also contain distinct prophecies about the Messiah. During the Syro-Ephraimite war the prophet Isaiah went to King Ahaz to encourage him and to tell him that God would save his people. Isaiah requested Ahaz to ask the Lord for a sign. Ahaz was not interested in signs like that. Then the prophet said to the king, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isa 7:13-14). We don’t know how this prophecy was understood in that situation, but in any case many Messianic expectations were placed on Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz. He was a good king, but he was not endowed with all the attributes of the Messiah. Isa 9:1-7 contains another prophecy with such references to the Messiah as “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace” and “he will reign on David’s throne”.

Scholars have discussed the meaning of the word “virgin” in Isa 7:14. It is in Hebrew *almah* and it occurs seven times in the Old Testament (Gen 24:43, Ex 2:8, Ps 46:1; 68:26, Prov 30:19, Isa 7:14 and 1 Chr 15:20). In all these verses *almah* refers to a virgin. The Septuagint and the New Testament (Matt 1:23) use the word *parthenos*, which has the same meaning.

Chapter 11 begins with the text about “a shoot” that will come up from the stump of Jesse and from a Branch that will bear fruit. This is another prophecy about the Davidic King; the first one is found in 2 Sam. 7. Isaiah 11 begins with the first coming of the Messiah (11:1-3) and continues with his second coming (11:4-5).

The most referred-to passage of Isaiah concerning the Messiah is chapter 53. Its description of the suffering servant of the Lord is the clearest text in the Old Testament about the Messiah. He “was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isa 53:5). In Jewish tradition this text has often been interpreted collectively. The Jewish people are seen as the suffering servant of

the Lord. In the Aramaic Targums there are also Messianic interpretations of this text. For the first Christians this passage was the most important proof of the fact that Jesus Christ was the suffering Lord. It is quoted and referred to several times in the New Testament, e.g. Matt 8:17; 27:57, Mark 9:12, Luke 22:37, John 12:38, Acts 8:32-33, Rom 10:16, 2 Cor 5:21, 1 Pet 2:24-25. The pierced Messiah of Isa 53:5 can be found also in Ps 22:16 and in Zech 12:10.

Isa 35:4-6 and 61:2-3 are also referred to several times in the New Testament (Luke 4:16-21, Matt 11:2-6 + Luke 7:18-23, see also Matt 5:1-11 and Luke 6:20-23). Jesus himself quoted this passage. In Isaiah these texts speak about God, but Jesus says that they refer to him. This is just one example of the many passages in which Jesus claims to be God. The miracles performed by Jesus were Messianic signs, and they were meant to prove to the people of his time that he was the Messiah.

15.21. Jeremiah

Jeremiah prophesied in Judah in the 7th and 6th centuries BC. He was called to be a prophet in 626 BC, the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, king of Judah. He ministered just before the Exile and warned the people of the impending fall of Jerusalem.

The original form of Jeremiah is not easy to determine, because it is much shorter in the Septuagint than in the Hebrew Masoretic text. One manuscript of Jeremiah found in Qumran is also shorter than the text we have in our Bible. The style of the book is close to that of the Deuteronomistic History Work. Scholars have debated whether the entire book was written by the prophet himself or whether parts of it or the entire text has come from some other source. Our starting point is that it was written by Jeremiah.

Jeremiah can be divided as follows:

Jer 1-24	A survey of Jeremiah's ministry
Jer 25:15-38 and 46-51	Prophecies of judgment
Jer 26-36	Jeremiah's life and message
Jer 37-45 and 52	Events in Judah under Zedekiah's rule

Some narrative passages in Jeremiah contain extra-biblical material. Two of them are found in the Lachish Letters, inscriptions written on pottery sherds, which were used as letters. Lachish Letter no. 3 mentions "a prophet" who discouraged the people. Jeremiah was accused of exactly the same thing (Jer 38:4). Another connection between Jeremiah and archaeology is found in Jer 34:7. Lachish Letter no. 4 contains this text: "We cannot see any more the lights from Azekah." Babylonian troops had launched an attack on Judah. Azekah was the nearest city north of Lachish. Jeremiah writes, "While the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah that were still holding out – Lachish and Azekah. These were the only fortified cities left in Judah."

Archaeologists have found several seals or seal stamps with names of persons mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah. The best-known is Baruch, son of Neriah (Jer 36:4). The others are Gemariah, son of Shaphan (Jer 36:10), Jerahmeel, a son of the king (Jer 36:26) and Seraiah, son of Neriah (Jer 51:59).

Because Jeremiah warned people of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, he was discredited as a politically suspicious person. However, the prophet predicted not only the fall of Judah but also the return from the Exile after 70 years. More than any other prophetic book, the Book of Jeremiah reveals the inner struggles of a prophet. His job was not easy, and his message was not accepted.

Jeremiah also prophesies of the coming Messiah, for example like this, "I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness" (Jer 23:5). This messianic hope was thought to be fulfilled when the righteous king Josiah

ruled the land (640-609 BC). The messianic name mentioned above is in Hebrew *Jahve sidgenu*. The name of Zedekiah (597-586 BC), the last king of Judah, means ‘Jahve is my righteousness’. In spite of his name, Zedekiah was not a righteous king.

The new covenant made by the Lord with Israel and Judah is one of the central topics in Jeremiah (e.g. chapters 30-31). Jer 31:31-34 is quoted in the New Testament in Heb 8:8-12. Jesus himself said at the last meal with his disciples, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20).

15.22. Lamentations

Traditionally, this short book has been attributed to Jeremiah. Therefore it has been placed in the Bibles after Jeremiah. In the Jewish tradition Lamentations belongs to the festival scrolls (*Megillot*), and it is read on the anniversary of the destruction of the first and the second temple. Several other ancient texts resemble the Book of Lamentations.

The five chapters of this book are five separate poems, and their form is known as a lament. The structure of the book is unusual, because chapters 1-2 and 4 have 22 (the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet) verses with three lines each, and each verse in these chapters begins with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 has 66 verses, and each group of three verses begins with the same Hebrew letter. Chapter 5 also has 22 verses, but unlike the others it is not an *acrostic*. Some Psalms, for example Ps 34 and 119, are acrostics as well.

Lamentations can be divided as follows:

Lam 1	Jerusalem’s suffering
Lam 2	The Lord’s anger
Lam 3	The compassion of God
Lam 4	The horrors of a siege
Lam 5	‘Remember, O Lord’

Lamentations describes the situation after Jerusalem's destruction. It asks one of the most difficult questions: How is it possible that God's people are subjected to so much suffering? The tone is desperate, but towards the end there is a glimmer of hope. Although God has allowed his people to go through difficult experiences, he will save them in the end.

Lamentations can be very useful in comforting those who are depressed. It gives a possibility for identification with the author, and it encourages the reader to think that there may be light at the other end of the tunnel. Especially helpful is chapter 3, in which the reader can identify with the author's deep anxiety and follow his affliction from verse to verse and ask the same questions with him. At last in verse 21 light begins to dawn, "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.'"

The writer is weeping because of Jerusalem's destruction. There is a similarity between Lam 3:48-51 and Matt 23:37-39 (Luke 13:34-35), where Jesus mourns the destiny of Jerusalem.

15.23. Ezekiel

Ezekiel was a prophet who ministered in Babylon during the Exile. He had been brought there in 597 BC with the second group of deportees. He dates the beginning of his ministry to the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin (Ezek 1:2), that is 593 BC. The focus of the prophet's message is on judgment until 33:21. Then he is told about Jerusalem's destruction, and the latter part of the book is dominated by the message of grace and comfort.

The book begins with a vision of God's glory (Ezek 1-3). Later the prophet sees the glory of the Lord leave the temple of Jerusalem (Ezek

8-11). At the end of the book the glory returns to the new temple (Ezek 40-48). In the middle of his book the prophet predicts judgment for foreign nations (Ezek 25-32).

Predicting the judgment of Jerusalem Ezekiel prophesies in a quite mysterious way to King Zedekiah, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! It will not be restored until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs; to him I will give it” (Ezek 21:26-27 or in some translations 21:30-32). What makes this message strange is the question of the hats and the singular and plural forms. The king should have only one hat, a crown, but two hats, a turban and a crown, are commanded to be taken off. The turban is the headgear of a high priest, not of a king. This combination of two hats is given to the one “to whom it rightfully belongs”. “To whom it belongs” is a Messianic expression already in Gen 49:10. According to the New Testament, Jesus is both king and high priest (e.g. 1 Tim 6:15, Rev 17:14 and Heb 8).

The Book of Ezekiel is full of visions and therefore not very easy to interpret. Ezek 34 presents a picture of shepherds and sheep. God himself is a good shepherd who takes care of his people. One day he will send them another shepherd, a new David, “He will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken” (Ezek 34:23-24). Jesus associated himself with this prophecy when he said, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11).

The last chapters of Ezekiel (40-48) contain a vision of the future temple. It is not easy to decide which temple it speaks about. There are three alternatives. Firstly, it could mean that the second temple will be built after the destruction of the temple of Solomon, and in that case it could refer to the so-called Zerubbabel’s temple. But its dimensions are not compatible with that temple. Secondly, it could be a prophecy of the temple that will be built in the end times in Israel. However, other Bible passages do not lend support to this view. Thirdly, and this was the interpretation of Martin Luther, it is a symbolic picture of the

Christian church in this world. This explanation arouses many questions as well, because there are several details in the text that are difficult to fit in with the description of the temple. On the other hand, the end of the book could point to that particular temple, when the secret of the temple and the city is revealed, “And the name of the city from that time on will be: the Lord is there” (Ezek 48:35). We conclude that Ezekiel may have been intended to prophesy about the future real temple, but God has fulfilled the prophecy by establishing his church, which is his temple in this world (1 Cor. 3:16, Eph. 2:21).

15.24. Daniel

The Book of Daniel belongs to the category of apocalyptic books because of its many visions. The text of Daniel is written partly in Hebrew (1:1-2:4a + chapters 8-12) and partly in Aramaic (2:4b-7:27).

Like Ezekiel, Daniel was a prophet who acted as God’s spokesman in Babylon. Daniel had been brought there in 605 BC with the first group of deportees. Scholars have not been able to agree when this book was written. Traditionally it has been dated to the time of Daniel in the 7th and 6th centuries BC. The majority of scholars today think that its final composition cannot have taken place until after 164 BC, because it contains a lot of exact information about the Hasmonean period and because the last ruler it introduces is clearly Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC).

If we believe that God can give exact prophecies about the future, we can hold on to the traditional view.

After being taken to Babylon, Daniel was trained and educated at the highest level. He studied the philosophy, religion and language of Babylon and was later promoted to a high position in its administration. He was very loyal to Babylon and its rulers with one exception. When he was asked to worship the king instead of God, he refused. He was thrown into a den of lions, but God saved him from death.

When Persia conquered Babylon and the rule of the world changed hands, Daniel was able to continue to serve this new empire. This shows how well he had performed throughout his career and how loyal he was to the authorities.

The most central prophecy of the Messiah is found in Daniel 7:9-14. Daniel saw a vision where “one like a son of man” came with the clouds of heaven and was given authority, glory and sovereign power. All peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him.

The beginning of chapter 9 contains the prayer of Daniel. It is one of the great prayers in the Bible. The end of the chapter tells about “sevens” or year-weeks. It is possible to try to calculate the year of the coming of the Messiah. The starting point could be 457 BC, when King Artaxerxes gave a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 7:11). Adding seven “sevens” to sixty-two “sevens” we get 69 year-weeks. This multiplied by seven makes 483. Moving 483 years forward from 457 we arrive at 26/27 AD. This may well have been the year of the “Anointed One”, the year of Jesus’ baptism and the beginning of his public ministry of. About the last, seventieth year-week we read in Dan 9:27 that “in the middle of that ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering”. This fits in well with the date of Jesus' crucifixion in 30 AD.

Chapter 11 is an amazing description of rulers after Daniel’s own time. The first one introduced here has traditionally been interpreted to refer to Alexander the Great who lived in 356-323 (Dan. 8:5, 21 and 11:3). The historian Josephus (Antiquities XI, 8:4-5) writes in the 1st century AD that when Alexander the Great approached Jerusalem (in 332), the High Priest of the city got a message from God in a dream telling how to receive him. He did as God had instructed and read to the Emperor what prophet Daniel had written about him. According to Josephus, Alexander was very moved by what he heard and left Jerusalem untouched.

Dan 11:5-45 tells the story of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties which ruled the Middle East from 323 to 164 BC. The Seleucids are

described as the kings of the North and the Ptolemies as the Kings of the South. The last king that is mentioned (11:36-45) is Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC), who has sometimes been called the Antichrist of the Old Testament.

At the end of the Book of Daniel there are encouraging words: “Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of those wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand... As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.” (Dan 12:9-13).

The Minor Prophets

In the Jewish Bible the twelve Minor Prophets appear as one book.

15.25. Hosea

Hosea begins the series of the Minor Prophets. He wrote in the 8th century BC in Israel. His message is that God loves his people, although they do not deserve it. Hosea’s own life is an example of this, because he married an unfaithful woman. The word “adultery” has two different meanings in Hosea and in the books of many other biblical prophets. Its first meaning is to be unfaithful in the marriage, and secondly it refers figuratively to the unfaithfulness of God’s people.

The book of Hosea can be divided into two parts:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Hos 1-3 | The life of the prophet with his unfaithful wife as a symbol of Israel |
| Hos 4-14 | The unfaithfulness of Israel (sometimes called Ephraim) |

Hosea’s ministry took place during the reigns of Jeroboam II (787-747 BC) and his successors in Israel. The bad situation in the country is

described in 2 Kgs 14-17 and Hos 4:1-3. Hosea criticizes strongly the idolatry of the northern kingdom. He condemns the worship of a calf idol in Samaria in his sermons (8:5-6; 10:5). This situation was a continuation of the idolatry that was begun by Jeroboam I, when he erected two temples with golden calves at Dan and at Bethel (1 Kgs 12:25-33).

Hosea's message is directed especially to the priests, the prophets and the royal house. As leaders of the people they bear the heaviest responsibility. Because of their evil ways God will send a punishment and allow the Assyrians to come and conquer the land (8:10; 10:6). The book is full of descriptions of the sins of Israel. It challenges the people to return to God. But it also contains a message of God's love and favour to the people that has turned back to him (2:1-3; 14:5-10).

Where is the Messiah in the book of Hosea? Three passages have a Messianic message, although we would not be able to find them without the help of the New Testament. Of the first one there can be no doubt. The promise of the eternal Davidic king is repeated in Hos 3:5. For the two others we need to remember the typological interpretation rule: persons, people, institutions or events in the Old Testament may be models or shadows of something that is fulfilled or somebody who appears in another salvation-historical period. Jesus is the "new Moses" and "greater than Solomon", and he is the "new Israel". What Israel could not fulfil is fulfilled in him.

With this principle in mind we can understand Hos 6:2 and 11:1. Both of these verses are quoted in the New Testament. The former tells about Israel's destruction and renewal, "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence." The following verse adds, "Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth." When Apostle Paul writes in 1 Cor 15:4 that Christ "was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures", he very probably has Hos 6:2 in mind. The restoration on the third day did not happen to Israel; instead, it took place at the resurrection of Jesus.

Hos 11:1 is quoted in Matt 2:15. The Old Testament clearly speaks about Israel, but the New Testament speaks about Jesus. A typological interpretation opens this mystery. God called Israel as his “son” from Egypt, and in the same way he called his Son, Jesus, out of Egypt. In both cases a man named Joseph had a central role.

15.26. Joel

The Book of Joel does not offer any clear hints about the historical period it belongs to. Therefore scholars have different opinions concerning its time of writing. All kinds of periods have been suggested. The most common are: 8th century Judah, 8th century Israel, or some point during the post-exilic era, from the 6th to the 4th century BC. The message of the Day of the Lord is similar with that of Amos and links the book to Israel in the 8th century BC. On the other hand, the texts about Israel’s destruction seem to point to the post-exilic era.

The two main parts of the book are (there are two different ways to number the chapters):

Joel 1-2 (or 1:1-2:27) The locust invasion
Joel 3-4 (or 2:28-3:21) The Day of the Lord

Locusts have been and still are a serious threat in many parts of the world, especially in Africa. One swarm can contain up to ten billion individual locusts. A single locust can travel 5,000 km during its lifetime. A swarm can devour in one day what 40,000 people eat in one year. In a 1958 visitation Ethiopia lost 167,000 metric tons of grain, enough to feed more than a million people for a year. These examples tell how devastating a locust invasion described in Joel 1 can be. The book’s message, however, is to warn God’s people about an enemy that will destroy their land.

Verses 1:11-12 list the most common crops and fruit trees in Israel: wheat, barley, vine, fig tree, pomegranate, palm and apple tree. The

famine described here is a warning signal from God about the Day of the Lord which is approaching. The text in 2:1-11 brings to mind the Book of Revelation (e.g. ch. 9) in the New Testament. It is an apocalyptic message about the coming judgment.

The main message of Joel is a call to national repentance. But God also promises to repay his people for the years the locusts have eaten (2:25). The Day of the Lord is not only the day of judgment, it is also the day when the Spirit of the Lord will be poured out (2:28-31, in some translations 3:1-5). This text is quoted in the New Testament (Acts 2:16-21). It is part of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, and the people around them were wondering what was happening. Peter's explanation was, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour my spirit on all people.'"

Joel writes in 2:23, "Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you a teacher for righteousness." The word "righteousness" can also be translated 'rain', but in this case the former alternative is more likely. In Jer 33:16 we read about the Messianic king, "This is the name by which it [or "he"] will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness."

15.27. Amos

Amos was also a contemporary of Hosea and ministered in Israel. He blames his people for their luxurious and godless way of life. Amos was a shepherd and fig farmer, who lived in Tekoa in Judah, but God called him to preach to Israel. Tekoa is located 16 kilometres south of Jerusalem, not far from Bethlehem. Amos was not trained in any of the prophetic schools, but God called him to preach to his contemporaries anyway. His ministry took place during Uzziah (or Azariah), king of Judah (786-735 BC), and Jeroboam II, king of Israel (787-747 BC).

The Book of Amos can be divided as follows:

Amos 1-2	Judgment on foreign countries and Israel
Amos 3-6	The prophet calls Israel to repentance
Amos 7-9	The prophet's five visions

Jeroboam II's reign in Israel seems to have been a time of prosperity and security. However, most of the wealth was in the hands of the leaders, and the ordinary people were deprived of their fair share of it. In addition, the poor people were oppressed. Taking and giving of bribes was a special problem (Amos 5:7-12).

Religiously the period was very confused as well. Outward forms of worship were observed and sacrifices were performed, but the people's heart was not in them. Therefore Amos preaches such harsh words, "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:21-24).

Amos proclaimed his message at Bethel and was fervently opposed by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, who told him, "Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom" (Amos 7:13). Another important cultic centre seems to have been Gilgal.

The historical situation fits in well with a text which was discovered in Kuntillet Ajrud in southern Negev. The Kuntillet Ajrud text is a famous inscription which dates back to a period when paganism and monotheism were mixed in Judah. Here is an excerpt, "Amaryau said to my lord... may you be blessed by Yahweh and by his Asherah. Yahweh bless you and keep you and be with you". 2 Kgs 13:6 tells also about Asherah worship. Another extra-biblical source that has connections with the book of Amos is the Mesha Stele from Moab. Mesha, king of Moab, is mentioned in the Bible (2 Kgs 3:4). There are many

similarities between the Book of Amos and the Mesha Stele. The inscription mentions Kemosh, a Moabite god (cf. 1 Kgs 11:33), and also a goddess called Ashtar-Kemosh.

The messianic message of Amos is to be found at the end of the book. After proclaiming God's judgment and punishment he surprises the reader by saying, "In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be." The last verse completes this message of hope, "I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them", says the Lord your God" (Amos 9:11-15). This text is quoted in Acts 15:16-18. Acts 15 is a story of the apostles' meeting in Jerusalem, where heated discussions took place over the role of the gentiles in God's kingdom. Simon Peter found a biblical argument from Amos 9:11, 12 proving that also non-Jews may enter the kingdom of God. Jesus is the one who will repair "David's fallen tent". He has given God's kingdom to this world.

15.28 Obadiah

Written probably in the 6th century BC in Judah, Obadiah is the shortest book in the Bible. It deals with the destiny of Edom. The historical situation is quite clear. When the Babylonian army was besieging Jerusalem in 588-586 BC, Edom used the opportunity to attack Judah as well. The message against Edom is very similar to Jer 49:7-22. This event is also reflected in Ps 137:7 and Lam 4:21-22. The Book of Obadiah may have been written soon after the Exile.

The first part of the book, 1:1-14, proclaims judgment on Edom. Then 1:15-16 widens the perspective to all other nations. The end of the book, 1:17-21, is a promise to Judah. Mount Zion will be the centre of God's blessing (cf. Isa 2:2 and Micah 4:1). The last words of Obadiah are, "And the kingdom will be the Lord's." The message of the kingdom of God and of Jerusalem as a place where the message will be proclaimed refers to the Messiah. Jesus brought God's kingdom to

this world, when he died, was resurrected in Jerusalem and sent his Holy Spirit to give birth to the church.

15.29. Jonah

The Book of Jonah is not a typical prophetic book. It is more like a short story about a prophet by the name of Jonah, who lived in Israel in the 8th century BC. Jonah is mentioned also in 2 Kgs 14:25, during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (787-747 BC).

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, but Jonah rebelled. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria that was hostile to Israel. Therefore it is understandable that Jonah did not want to go there. He boarded a ship for Tarshish in the port of Joppa. In other words, he went in a totally wrong direction. There was a storm, and he was thrown into the sea. Miraculously, he was saved in the stomach of a great fish.

Much of the Book of Jonah is taken up by his prayer (ch. 2). It is a thanksgiving psalm to God who had saved him. Jonah is presented as a very capricious person, who is never satisfied with God. In the end he went to Nineveh, and in spite of his attitude the people in Nineveh repented when they heard his message of repentance. Historically we don't know anything like this ever happened in Nineveh. Sometimes it has been argued that an eclipse in 763 BC could have caused a panic among the people in Nineveh and given an opening for Jonah's sermon. The destruction of Nineveh took place in 612 BC.

The story of Jonah is well known because of the miraculous events it tells about. For the same reason many scholars think that it is a work of fiction without any historical reliability. If we believe that God is able to perform miracles, the ones in this book may well be his doing. Jesus refers to the story of Jonah as fact, when he speaks about his death and resurrection (Matt 12:39-41). In other words, Jesus exercises his authority in defence of the authenticity of this book. The story of Jonah can even be seen as one of the Old Testament typological models of Jesus.

The main message of the book is clear. It is a protest against narrow, nationalistic Judaism and a challenge to engage in mission work. God's message belongs as much to the Gentiles as to the Jews. Today the Book of Jonah reminds us that we have a responsibility to preach the gospel to everybody, not only to our own church members. We should also try to find ways of reaching those who have never heard about Jesus Christ.

15.30. Micah

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah in Judah in the 8th century BC. His ministry took place during the reigns of Jotham (750-735 BC), Ahaz (734-715 BC) and Hezekiah (715-687 BC). The prophets Amos and Hosea were his contemporaries in Israel.

Micah's hometown was Moresheth-gath in the Shephelah. His message is connected with the invasion of Judah by King Sennacherib of Assyria in 701 BC (see Jer 26:18-19). All the places that are mentioned in Micah 1:8-16 are in the Shephelah, where Sennacherib destroyed the cities according to his own report. Lachish is mentioned here as well as in Isa 36:1-2.

The book of Micah can be divided as follows:

- Mic 1-3 Message regarding the sins of Samaria and Judah
- Mic 4-5 Message regarding deliverance
- Mic 6-7 Message against Israel, and the coming restoration

Like his contemporaries Isaiah and Amos, Micah preaches against corruption among the leaders of the people, priests and prophets. He demands moral and ethical change in those whose responsibility it is to teach others. The same message is preached to both Israel and Judah. God's judgment will fall on them unless they repent. What does God expect man to do? "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8).

The messages of judgment and salvation alternate in Micah's text. Mic 4:1-4 is strikingly similar to Isa 2:2-4. God will punish sin, but he is also merciful and compassionate. The end of the book is a good example of this, "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (Mic 7:18-19).

The Messianic message is present in many ways. The clearest example is the prophecy of Messiah's birthplace, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrahtah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labour gives birth..." (Mic 5:2-3). This was the prophecy which guided the wise men to Bethlehem and the new-born Jesus. Bethlehem was also the birthplace of King David. Now a new Davidic king was coming from the same town. In addition, Mic 5:3 connects the birth of the Messiah only with his mother (see Isa 7:14).

Jerusalem has a central role in Micah's prophecies, "Kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem" (Mic 4:8). This refers to the new Davidic kingship. The promise in Mic 4:2 can also be understood in this light, "In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." This is the role Jerusalem had, when Jesus came to the city, died there, rose on the third day, ascended to heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit.

References to the Messiah can also be seen in verses 2:13 ("one who breaks open the way will go up before them") and 5:5 ("he will be their peace").

15.31. Nahum

Nahum predicted the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, in Judah in the 7th century BC. Nineveh fell in 612 BC. Another historical event mentioned in the book is the destruction of Thebes (3:8-10). It was destroyed by the Assyrians in 663 BC. From these facts we draw the conclusion that the book was written between 663 and 612 BC.

The book of Nahum can be divided into three parts as follows:

- Nah 1 A poetic declaration of judgment
- Nah 2 The destruction of Nineveh
- Nah 3 A description of Nineveh compared with Thebes

The book begins with a promise of the Lord to his people and all who trust in him, “The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.” (Nah 1:7). It then continues by describing the sin of Nineveh. Chapter 1 ends with good news, “Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!” This message is repeated in Rom 10:15, as Paul quotes Isa 52:7, “As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” This good news is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel message cannot be heard without those who proclaim it, but not all are obedient to God.

Ashurbanipal, the king of Assyria, destroyed Thebes (No-Ammon) in 663 BC. Nahum predicted that Assyria would fall as well. This took place 50 years later, when the Babylonians and the Medes conquered Assyria.

15.32. Habakkuk

Also a prophet in Judah in the 7th century BC, Habakkuk begins his short book by asking, why God is silent when the enemy is approaching. This enemy, Babylon, is referred to by the name “Chaldeans”.

The book can be divided into three parts:

Hab 1:1-11 Habakkuk's first complaint
Hab 1:12-2:20 Habakkuk's second complaint
Hab 3 Habakkuk's prayer

The book is a dialogue between Habakkuk and God. It deals with a very difficult question: How is it possible that God's people suffer and that an evil nation like Babylon is allowed to destroy God's chosen people. One answer to Habakkuk's question is, "Wait" (Hab 2:3). God's plan will be fulfilled, but the timing is in his hands. The book of Habakkuk has been very important for the people in Exile. They were comforted by the message that nothing happens unless God allows it to happen.

In Habakkuk's prayer the tone is different. The prophet is not complaining any more; instead, he is praising God. He ends his prayer by glorifying God and declaring his faith in God's goodness in the midst of great difficulties, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour" (Hab 3:17-18).

One central verse is Hab 2:4b: "The righteous will live by his faith." It is quoted in the New Testament in Rom 1:17, "The righteous will live by faith.", and in Heb 10:38: "My righteous one will live by faith." This was one of the key verses for Martin Luther when he found the grace of God. He understood that righteousness is not something we should try to reach by works but something we are given by God as a free gift. And we accept this gift by faith.

In Hab 3:13 we read, "You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one." The anointed one is in Hebrew "*hamasiah*", the same word that is used of the Messiah. In the Old Testament it refers mostly to priests or kings but sometimes clearly to the Messiah (e.g. Ps 2:2 and Dan 9:25). Hab 3:13 may be a reference to the Messiah as well.

15.33. Zephaniah

Zephaniah was a contemporary of Nahum and Habakkuk in the 7th century BC in Judah. He prophesied to his own people but also to other nations. His ministry took place during the reign of Josiah (639-609 BC).

The book can be divided as follows:

Zeph 1:1-2:3	The coming of the Day of the Lord
Zeph 2:4-14	Message to the foreign nations
Zeph 3:1-8	Message to Jerusalem
Zeph 3:9-20	Message of the future salvation

Josiah carried out a religious reform and cleaned the temple from idolatry (2. Kgs 22-23). Zephaniah's message may have influenced this process. The prophet predicts that the king's sons will be punished for their proud way of life (Zeph 1:8). These words may have been addressed to Jehoiachin, who according to Jeremiah lived in such a way (Jer 22:13-19).

Zephaniah warns the people of Jerusalem about Babylon's threat. Actually the biggest threat is not Babylon, it is God's impending judgment.

In chapter 2 Zephaniah prophesies against Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush and Assyria. Many of these predictions were fulfilled, when Babylon waged war against these southern small nations in the 580's BC. The destruction of Assyria had already taken place in 612 BC.

In chapter 3 the prophet at first preaches against Jerusalem, but his message is changing, and the end is full of grace and promises like in many other prophetic books. Before proclaiming good news to Jerusalem Zephaniah predicts that the other nations will one day serve the Lord. The following words contain a distinct mission perspective, "Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder. From

beyond the rivers of Cush my worshippers, my scattered people will bring me offerings” (3:9-10). Surprisingly, the land of Cush is the only gentile nation that is mentioned. In some Bible translations Cush is “Ethiopia”, in some others “Nubia”. It means the area south of Egypt. It may include even a big portion of Eastern Africa. These prophecies have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, when the gospel has been preached all over the world.

A Messianic hint can be seen in verse 3:15: “The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you.” Verse 3:17 contains a wonderful promise to everybody: “The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”

15.34. Haggai

Haggai was a prophet after the Exile. He encouraged his people to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The date of the message of Haggai is told with exceptional accuracy. It is the second year of the Persian king Darius, in other words 520 BC, and all four speeches of Haggai were given within four months. Darius I, also known as Darius the Great, reigned in 522-486 BC. The historical background to this text is found in Ezra 4:24-6:15.

Like his contemporary Zechariah, Haggai encouraged the two leaders of the temple’s construction: Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest. Zerubbabel belonged to the royal line. His father was Shealtiel, the son of king Jehoiachin or Jeconiah (2 Kgs 24:15, 1 Chr 3:18-19, Matt 1:11-13). According to 2 Chr 3:19 his father was Pedaiah, who was Shealtiel’s brother. Joshua (also called Jeshua) was the leading priest and a key person in the construction process. He was also given special messages through Zechariah (Zech 3 and 6:11-13).

Cyrus II of Persia (550-529 BC) had proclaimed in 539 BC that all Jews could return to their own country and start rebuilding their temple

(Ezra 1:1-4). The work began in the second month of the second year after their arrival, in other words in 538 BC (Ezra 3:8). However, because of opposition the work stopped for many years and began again in 520 BC (Ezra 4:24). The temple was completed and dedicated in 516 BC.

Hag 2:7-9 is an important passage, “I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the Lord Almighty. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the Lord Almighty.” Here we have one more Messianic hint. This is the temple to which Jesus arrived. Herod the Great enlarged the temple, but it was in fact the same one, the second temple. Its glory will be greater than that of the first temple, and Jesus is the one who will bring peace.

15.35. Zechariah

Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai and faced the same challenge in encouraging the temple builders. The date is the same as Haggai’s, 520 BC, the second year of the Persian king Darius I (522-486 BC). Zechariah was the son of Berekiah and the grandson of Iddo. Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 say that he was the descendant of Iddo. It was not rare to skip one or more generations and still call a person somebody’s son. That is why Jesus could be called the son of David. Iddo was one of the priests who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel and Joshua (Neh 12:4).

This book can be divided into two parts:

Zech 1-8	The visions of Zechariah
Zech 9-14	The future history of Jerusalem

Scholars are debating whether both parts of the book were written by Zechariah. His name is mentioned only in the first part, and many

scholars think that the latter part is from a later period. It has even been claimed that the latter part should be divided into two: Deutero-Zechariah (9-13) and Trito-Zechariah (14). It is not untenable to regard the entire book as the work of one and the same author.

The first part contains several visions of the prophet. Their purpose is to encourage the people of Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. This encouragement is directed at two men in particular: Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest. Some of these visions are difficult to interpret, but many of them contain eschatological scenes, such as this, “‘Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will be its glory within’” (2:4-5 or 2:8-9, depending on the translation). In this part there is also a famous sentence, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty” (4:6).

Zechariah contains some of the most important Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. In chapter 3 Joshua is installed as high priest. In this position he is also a type of the Messiah. Even his name is the same, Jeshua. He is a symbol of something that will come. The one who comes is “my servant, the Branch”. This same expression is used of the Messiah in Isa 11:1 and Jer 23:5. The Lord promises to “remove the sin of this land in a single day” after the Branch has come. There is only one day in world history when the sin of the land and every human being was removed – the day Jesus died at Golgotha.

Zech 9:9-11 tells about a king, who rides on a donkey. All four gospels quote this text, when they tell the story of Jesus’ ride to Jerusalem one week before Passover (Matt 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-38 and John 12:12-19). Zech 9 continues to say that “he will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.” This is a reference to the kingdom of God which is much larger than the land of Israel. Israel’s borders at one time extended to the Euphrates River, but God’s kingdom begins from the river and reaches the ends of the earth.

Zech 11:4-13 is a story of two shepherds. One of them is detested by the people and the sheep. He gets angry with the sheep and wants to quit. Then he says, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." The text continues, "So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me: 'Throw it to the potter – the handsome price at which they priced me!' So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter." There is a very special change of persons in this story. At first thirty silver coins were paid to the shepherd, but then it turns out that it was the price for the Lord! In other words, the shepherd was the Lord himself! When Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus and got his thirty pieces of silver, he must have remembered this story, and it dawned on him whom he had just betrayed.

Zech 12 speaks about the house of David which "will be like God" (12:8). Verse 10 is interesting, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son." Again we have a change of persons, between "me" and "him", who seem to be the same person. He is the one who has been pierced, but he is also the speaker, the Lord. Other Old Testament verses that speak about the pierced Messiah are Ps 22:16 and Isa 53:5.

Zech 13:1 continues, "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity." Again we have a reference to that special day when God removed sin.

The last chapter, Zech 14, brings us to Jerusalem and tells that the day of the Lord is coming. On that day the Lord himself will go out and "his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem." And later, "Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him" (14:4-5). If we compare this with Acts 1:9-11, we can conclude that Jesus, who ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives, will come back "in the same way" and at the same place.

15.36. Malachi

Malachi is the last of the Minor Prophets. He ministered in the 5th century BC. His name means ‘my messenger’ or ‘my angel’. The book begins with the judgment of Edom, like the Book of Obadiah. Malachi is complaining especially about the priests of his time. The right attitude of the priests should be, “For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction – because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty” (2:7).

Malachi also makes it clear to married couples that it is not the Lord’s will to break the marriage, because “‘I hate divorce’, says the Lord” (2:16).

Malachi predicts the day of the Lord and prophesies about the coming of “the prophet Elijah” (4:5-6 or 3:23-24, depending on the Bible translation), in other words of John the Baptist. The following may be a hint of the Messiah, “Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come’, says the Lord Almighty” (3:1). Jesus is the Lord who came into Jerusalem’s temple, the temple that was already in existence during Malachi’s lifetime. Jesus is also “the sun of righteousness” which “will rise with healing in its wings” (Mal 4:2 or 3:20).

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Appendixes

Archaeological periods

Neolithic period	10000-4200 BC
Chalcolithic period	4200-3300 BC
Early Bronze Age	3300-2300 BC
Middle Bronze Age	2300-1550 BC
Late Bronze Age	1550-1200 BC
Iron Age I	1200-1000 BC
Iron Age II	1000-586 BC
Persian Period	586-332 BC
Hellenistic Period	332-167 BC
Hasmonean Period	167-63 BC
Roman Period	63 BC-324 AD

Kings of Israel and Judah

Israel (The Northern Kingdom)

Jeroboam I	930–909 BC
Nadab	909–908
Baasha	908–885
Elah	885–884
Zimri	884
Omri	884–873
Ahab	873–852
Ahaziah	852–851

Judah (The Southern Kingdom)

Rehoboam	930–914 BC
Abijam	913–910
Asa	910–870
Jehoshaphat	870–846
Jehoram	846–845
Joram	851–845
Ahaziah	845

		Athaliah (queen)	845–840
Jehu	845–818	Joash	840–801
Jehoahaz	818–802		
Jehoash	802–787	Amaziah	801–786
Jeroboam II	787–747	Azariah (Uzziah)	786–735
Zechariah	747		
Shallum	746	Jotham	750–735
Menahem	746–737		
Pekahiah	737–736	Ahaz	734–715
Pekah	736–732		
Hoshea	732–722	Hezekiah	715–687
		Manasseh	687–642
		Amon	641–640
		Josiah	639–609
		Jehoahaz	609
		Jehoiakim	608–598
		Jehoiachin	598
		Zedekiah	597–586

Egyptian dynasties and rulers

LATE PREDYNASTIC PERIOD c. 3000 BC
 Narmer

EARLY DYNASTIC PERIOD 2920-2575
 1st Dynasty 2920-2770
 Menes...

2 nd Dynasty	2770-2649
3 rd Dynasty	2649-2575
OLD KINGDOM	2575-2134
4 th Dynasty	2575-2465
5 th Dynasty	2465-2323
6 th Dynasty	2323-2150
7 th /8 th Dynasty	2150-2134
FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD	2134-2040
9 th /10 th Dynasty	2134-2040
11 th Dynasty (Theban)	2134-2040
MIDDLE KINGDOM	2040-1640
11 th Dynasty (all Egypt)	2040-1991
12 th Dynasty	1991-1783
13 th Dynasty	1783-c.1640
14 th Dynasty	
SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD	1640-1532
15 th Dynasty (Hyksos)	c.1585-1542
16 th Dynasty (minor Hyksos)	
17 th Dynasty	1640-1550
NEW KINGDOM 1550-1070	
18 th Dynasty	1550-1307
Ahmose	1550-1525
Amenhotep I	1525-1504
Thutmosis I	1504-1492
Thutmosis II	1492-1479
Thutmosis III	1479-1425
Hatshepsut	1473-1458
Amenhotep II	1427-1401

Thutmosis IV	1401-1391
Amenhotep III	1391-1353
Amenhotep IV/Akhnaten	1353-1335
Smenkhare	1335-1333
Tutankhamon	1333-1323
Aya	1323-1319
Haremhab	1319-1307
19 th Dynasty	1307-1196
Ramses I	1307-1306
Seti I	1306-1290
Ramses II	1290-1224
Merneptah	1224-1214
Seti II	1214-1204
Amenmesse	
Siptah	1204-1198
Twosre	1198-1196
20 th Dynasty	1196-1070
Sethnakhte	1196-1194
Ramses III	1194-1163
Ramses IV	1163-1156
Ramses V-XI	
THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD	1070-712
21 st Dynasty	1070-945
22 nd Dynasty	945-712
Shoshenq I/Shishak	945-924
Osorkon II	924-909
23 rd Dynasty	c. 828-712
24 th Dynasty	724-712
25 th Dynasty	770-712
LATE PERIOD	712-332
25 th -30 th Dynasties	
GRECO-ROMAN PERIOD	332 BC-395 AD

Assyrian rulers

Ashurnasirpal	883–859 BC
Shalmaneser III	858–824
Shamsi-adad	823–811
Adad-nirari III	810–783
Shalmaneser IV	782–773
Ashurdan	772–756
Ashurnirari V	755–745
Tiglath-pileser III	745–727
Shalmaneser V	762–722
Sargon II	722–705
Sennacherib	704–681
Esarhaddon	681–669
Ashurbanipal	668–633
Ashuretililani	629–627
Sinhariskin	626–612
Assuruballit	612–609

Babylonian rulers

Nabopolassar	626–604 BC
Nebuchadnezzar	604–561
Evil-merodach	561–559
Neriglissar	559–555
Labashi-Marduk	555
Nabonidus	555–539

Persian rulers

Cyrus II/Cyrus the Great	550-529 BC
Cambyses II	529-522
Darius I/Darius the Great	522-486
Xerxes I	486-465
Artaxerxes I	465-424
Darius II	423-405
Artaxerxes II	404-359
Artaxerxes III	358-338
Darius III	338-333

