



**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**COURSE CODE: CRS815**

**COURSE TITLE: PROPHETIC BOOKS AND  
WISDOM LITERATURE**

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**CREDIT UNIT: 3**

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# **COURSE GUIDE**

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## Introduction

CRS815 Prophetic Books and Wisdom Literature is a one Semester 3 credit unit course. It will be available toward the award of the Postgraduate degree in Christian Religious Studies. The course is also available to anybody who is interested in the study of the place of Prophecy and Wisdom in Old Testament Christian theology. The course will consist of 14 units and it will examine Historical origin, nature and development of Prophecy in Israel and a reading of some books of the Major and Minor Prophets (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea, etc.). It will also examine a theological study of themes in Wisdom Literature including the five major Wisdom books – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Songs of Solomon, and with occasional references to Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon. The material has been especially developed for students in African context with particular focus on Nigeria.

There are no compulsory prerequisites for this course. The course guide tells you briefly what the course is all about, what you are expected to know in each unit, what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through these materials. It also emphasizes the need for Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs). Detailed information on (TMAs) is found in a separate file, which will be sent to you later.

There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to this course.

## What you will learn in this course

The overall aim of CRS815: Prophetic Books and Wisdom Literature will lead you to the study of the origins and development of the Prophetic Movements in Israel, paying attention to their presence in the Historical Books and in the Prophets. You will learn about the cycles of Prophecy in Israel, the role of prophecy in Israelite society and the relevance of Prophecy in African Society.

You will also be exposed to the theological ideas found in Wisdom Literature with a particular emphasis on God, creation, redemption and the whole concept of theodicy.

Wisdom Literature is a part of Old Testament theology which in turn is part of Biblical Theology. Therefore, our study of the theological themes of Wisdom Literature will include the witness of Wisdom to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Your understanding of Wisdom Literature will equip you to explain the Christian faith to other people – Christians and non-Christians.

You will find Wisdom Literature to be an enriching study as you benefit from insights of other Biblical theologians.

## Course Aims

The aim of this course (CRS815 – Prophetic Books and Wisdom Literature) is to expose the origins and development of the Prophetic Movements in Israel, paying attention to their presence in the Historical Books and in the Prophets. It also discusses Ancient Near Eastern background, sources, origin and principal genres of Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament, Structural and stylistic analysis of selected passages; Development of principal themes and proverbs in Africa etc.

This will be achieved by:

- Introducing you to the Historical origin, nature and development of Prophecy in Israel and a reading of some books of the Major and Minor Prophets (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea, etc.)
- Exposing you to the cycles of Prophecy in Israel
- Revealing the role of prophecy in Israelite society from the point of view of the Covenant.
- Examining the relevance of Prophecy in African Society
- Introducing you to the Methodologies and Currents in Wisdom Literature
- Discussing the nature and attributes of God in Wisdom Literature
- Exposing you to the realities of Wisdom in creation and redemption and the endowments of God to humanity.
- Analysing the importance of suffering and adversities in the practical outworking of Wisdom in humanity's relationship to the God and to one another.
- Attempting to discover the hidden meaning of theodicy – why do the righteous most-at-times suffer and the wicked sometimes prosper? And to explore the provisions made in Wisdom Literature for overcoming adversity and for the triumph of good over evil.
- Equipping you with a better understanding of the dynamics of Wisdom in both human and divine matters.
- Analysing the future of Wisdom Literature in African context.

### Course Objectives

To achieve the above course aims, there are set objectives for each study unit, which are always included at the beginning. The student should read them before working through the unit. Furthermore the student is encouraged to refer to the objectives of each unit intermittently as the study of the unit progresses. This practice would promote both learning and retention of what is learned. Stated below are the wider objectives of this course as a whole. By meeting those objectives you should have achieved the aims of the course as a whole.

On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Define prophecy
- State the Historical origin, nature and development of Prophecy in Israel and a reading of some books of the Major and Minor Prophets (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea, etc.)
- Analyse the role of prophecy in Israelite society from the point of view of the Covenant
- State the relevance of Prophecy in African Society
- Define the Methodologies and Current in Wisdom Literature
- Define the nature and attributes of God in Wisdom Literature especially the theological issue of theodicy.
- Analyse the importance of wisdom in humanity's relationship to God and to one another.
- Become conscious and work towards the future of Wisdom Literature in African context.

### Working through this Course

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read recommended books and read other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Each unit

contains self-assessment exercises, and at points during the course you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of this course there is a final examination. Below you will find listed all the components of the course and what you have to do.

### **Course Materials**

Major components of the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignment File
5. Presentation Schedule

In addition, you must obtain the materials. You may contact your tutor if you have problems obtaining the text materials.

### **Study Units**

There are three modules, eighteen study units in this course, as follows:

#### **MODULE 1: PROPHECY IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES**

Unit 1: Historical Origin, nature and development of Prophecy in Israel

Unit 2: The Former Prophetic Books

Unit 3: The Role of Prophecy in Israelite Society from the point of view of the Covenant

#### **MODULE 2: THE LITERARY/CLASSICAL PROPHETS**

Unit 4: The Neo-Assyrian Period

Unit 5: Early Pre-Exilic Prophets

Unit 6: late Pre-Exilic Prophets

Unit 7: The Neo-Babylonian Period

Unit 8: The Exilic Prophets

Unit 9: The Persian Period

Unit 10: The Post-Exilic Prophets

### MODULE 3: WISDOM LITERATURE AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES

Unit 11: Issues in Wisdom Literature

Unit 12: The Place of Wisdom in Old Testament Theology

Unit 13: Theology and Moral Discourse in Proverbs

Unit 14: Theodicy and the Sovereignty of God in Job.

Unit 15: Cosmology and Anthropology in the Testament of Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes).

Unit 16: Theology and Praise in the book of Psalm.

Unit 17: Relationship and Redemption in Canticles (Songs of Solomon).

Unit 18: Development of Principal Themes and Proverbs in Africa

Please note that Module 1 introduces you to the concepts of Prophecy and Wisdom in the Old Testament. The next Module 2 addresses the Major and Minor Prophets in Israel, the crisis that brought them the limelight and their message/theology. Module 3 takes you through the theological contents and the practical outworking of Redemption in the various Wisdom books of the Old Testament canon – Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, the Psalms and Songs of Solomon, occasionally referring to Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon.

Each unit contains a number of self-tests. In general, these self-tests question you on the material you have just covered or require you to apply it in some ways and, thereby, help you to gauge your progress and to reinforce your understanding of the material. Together with tutor marked assignments, these exercises will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

#### Textbooks and References

The student is encouraged to buy the under-listed books (and more) recommended for this course and for future use.

1. *The Holy Bible* (RSV or NIV).
2. Adeyemo, T. *African Bible Commentary*. Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006.
3. Ahiamadu, A.E. *Biblical Hermeneutics – Methods and Tools for Interpreting and Applying the Bible to Africa – A Postcolonial Maximalist Approach*. Enugu: SIVC, 2012
4. Albright, W. F. “The Goddess of Life and Wisdom” *AJSL* 36 (1919-1920) 258-94.
5. Bromiley, G.W. (ed) *The Encyclopaedia of Christianity 2 A-D* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.



6. Bullock, C. Hassell. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*. Moody Publishers: Chicago, 2007.
7. Hill, Andrew E. and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
8. Hinson, David F. *Old Testament Introduction 2: The Books of the Old Testament*. SPCK: London, 1974.
9. Janzen, Waldemar *Old Testament Ethics – A Paradigmatic Approach*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994.
10. Nyoyoko, V. G. *A Thematic Guide to the Old Testament Literature*. Port Harcourt: University Press, 2012.
11. Perdue, Leo G. “Wisdom in the Book of Job” in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, eds Leo G. Perdue et al (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1993).
12. Perdue, Leo G. *Wisdom and Creation. The Theology of Wisdom Literature*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
13. Rahner, K. *Encyclopaedia of Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 2000).
14. Schultz, Samuel J. and Smith, Gary V. *Exploring the Old Testament*. Oasis International Ltd: Jos, 2001.
15. Waltke, Bruce K. *An Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.

### **Assignment File**

In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the Assignment File itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

### **Presentation Schedule**

The *Presentation Schedule* included in your Course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of tutor marked assignments and attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit all your assignments by the due date. You should guard against lagging behind in your work.

### **Assessment**

There are two aspects to the assessment of the course. First are the tutor marked assignments; second, there is the written examination. In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply information and knowledge acquired during this course. The assignments must be submitted to

your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment File. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark.

At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final three-hour examination. This will also count for 70% of your total course mark.

### **Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAS)**

There are fourteen major marked assignments in this course. You need to submit all the assignments. The best five (i.e. the highest five of the fourteen marks) will be counted. The total marks for the best four (4) assignments will be 30% of your total mark.

Assignment questions for the units in this course are contained in the Assignment File. You should be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials in your set textbooks, reading and study units. However, you are advised to use other references to broaden your viewpoint and provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

When you have completed each assignment, send it together with form to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given. If, however, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is done to discuss the possibility of an extension.

### **Final Examination and Grading**

The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises and tutor-marked problems you have come across. All areas of the course will be assessed.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

### **Course Marking Scheme**

The table shows how the actual course marking is broken down.

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Marks</b>
Assignment	Four assignments, best three marks of the four count at 30% of course marks

Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Table 1: Course Marking Scheme

**Course Overview**

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Unit	Title of work	Week's activity	Assessment (end of unit)
	Course guide	1	
<b>Module 1</b>			
Unit			
1	Historical Origin, Nature and Development of Prophecy in Israel	1	Assignment 1
2	The Pre-classical (Former) Prophetic Books	2	Assignment 2
3	The Role of Prophecy in Israelite Society from the point of view of the Covenant	3	Assignment 3
4	The Relevance of Prophecy in African Culture	4	Assignment 4

**Module 2**

Unit			
1	The Neo-Assyrian Classical Prophetic Era	5	Assignment 5
2	Early Pre-Exilic Prophets	6	Assignment 6

3	Late Pre-Exilic Prophets	7	Assignment 7
4	The Neo-Babylonian Classical Prophetic Era	8	Assignment 8
5	The Exilic Prophets	9	Assignment 9
6	The Persian Classical Prophetic Era	10	Assignment 10
7.	The Post-Exilic Prophets	11	Assignment 11

### Module 3

Unit			
1	Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Old Testament Wisdom Literature	12	Assignment 12
2	Sources, Origin and Principal Genres of Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament	13	Assignment 13
	Theology and Moral Discourse in Proverbs	14	Assignment 14
3	Cosmology and Anthropology in the Testament of Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)	15	Assignment 15
4	Theology and Praise in the book of Psalm.	16	Assignment 16
5	Relationship and Redemption in Canticles (Songs of Solomon)	17	Assignment 17
6	Development of Principal Themes and Proverbs in Africa	18	Assignment 18
7	REVISION	19	
8	EXAMINATION	20	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	19 wks	

Table 2 : Course Overview

### How to Get the best from the Course

In distance learning the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to the lecturer. In the same way a lecturer might give you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your books or other material. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points.

Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives enable you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the units you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course.

The main body of the unit guide you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from a Reading section.

Remember that your tutor's job is to assist you. When you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this *Course Guide* thoroughly.
2. Organize a study schedule. Refer to the '*Course overview*' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you chose to use, you should decide on it and write in your dates for working on each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they lag behind in their course work.
4. Turn to *Unit 1* and read the instruction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the '*Overview*' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.

8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you can keep yourself on schedule.

9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any question or problems.

10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in the *Course Guide*).

### **Tutors and Tutorials**

There are 8 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and locations of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignment, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor if:

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,
- You have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises'
- You have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and to ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

### **Summary**

CRS815 intends to introduce you to the Prophetic Books and Wisdom Literature. Upon completing this course, you will be able to answer questions such as:

- Trace the origin and development of prophecy in Ancient Israel
- What is the role of prophecy in Israelite society?

- What is the relevance of prophecy in African society?
- What is the meaning of Wisdom Literature?
- Why do the righteous suffer in the midst of a seeming prosperity of the wicked?
- How is theodicy critical in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God?
- Among others.

**MODULE 1: PROPHECY IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY****Unit 1: Historical Origin, nature and development of Prophecy in Israel****Content**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Study
  - 3.1 Meaning of Prophet/Prophecy
    - 3.2 Origin, Nature and development of Prophecy in Israel
    - 3.3 Prophecy and Apocalypse
    - 3.4 The Message of the Prophets
    - 3.5 Interpretation of Prophecy
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References / Future Reading

**1.0 Introduction**

The Christian division of the Old Testament has the following as historical books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. These books are divided into two groups in the Hebrew Bible as follows:

1. Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are included among the prophetic books and are known as Former Prophets.
2. The rest are included among the Writings.

There are sixteen books from Isaiah to Malachi which are known as the latter (literary/classical) prophets. Included in this group are two books belonging to the Writings in the Hebrew Scriptures – Lamentation and Daniel. Three of the books – Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are called the Major Prophets because of their length. The remaining twelve are quite short and are known as the Minor Prophets. This unit

**2.0 Objective**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Explain the content of the Prophetic Books
- Discuss the meaning of prophet/prophecy
- Trace the origin and development of prophecy in Israel
- Analysis different types of prophetic oracles
- Distinguish apocalyptic literature from the main genre of prophetic literature

**3. Main Body**



### 3.1. Meaning of Prophet/Prophecy

The term “prophecy” is the noun form of the English verb “prophesy.” Prophecy is derived from the Greek verb *prohemi* meaning “to say beforehand” connoting that a prophet is one who speaks before an event comes to materialization. Waltke has observed that the English term “prophet” glosses the Hebrew term *nabi*, which is rendered *prophetes* (“one who speaks for a god and interprets his will to man) in LXX (2007:805). *Nabi* is used in the Old Testament to designate a person called and consecrated by God to be his spokesperson (2 Kings 9:1; 2 Chron. 12:5; Jer. 1:5); implying that a prophet is the human mouth of God.

Four terms are frequently used for individuals in the Old Testament, both men and women, who demonstrated prophetic traits: *ish ha-elohim* “man of God”, *roeh* “seer”, *hozeh* “visionary”, and *nabi* “prophet.” Man of God denotes the prophets as pious, devoted and godly (Deut. 33:1; 1 Sam. 9:6; 2 Kings 8:11). A seer or visionary had the ability to discern beyond ordinary people. The prophet was one who spoke on behalf of another, in this case on behalf of the living God.

Prophecy is more than “foretelling or prediction of what is to come.” The main concern of the prophet was not the prediction of events far distant from their own day. Though they announced the future, yet it was the immediate future. Prophets were not primarily predictors of future events; instead, they were the spokesmen for God to their own contemporaries.

### 3.1. Self-Assessment Question

- What is the meaning of the term “Prophet?”

### 3.2. Origin, Nature and Development of Prophecy in Israel

Prophecy was not uniquely Israelite or Yahwistic rather; it was a general phenomenon in the ancient world of the Bible. Prophets appear in many religions and culture including those of the ancient Near East. For the Nomads (Arabs), the seers played important role. Revelations were received through dreams and pre-sentiments. Num. 22 – 24 may respond to the Arabic *kahim*. Seers were not necessarily associated with a sanctuary. Seers could serve as priest, magicians, and clan leaders (seen as inspired). Oracles came through the visions they saw e.g Balaam. They speak in poetic form. This was associated with a deity or demon.

For settled life – prophetic expression was associated with vegetation/fertility cults – ecstatic prophets at sanctuaries or royal courts, best designated by the Old Testament expression *nabi* (1 Kgs. 18:19ff; 2Kgs. 10:19; cf. Jer. 27:9) – common in Palestine.

For Sumerians, term for ecstasy is translated to mean “the man who enters heaven.” In *mari*, *apilum* “answerer”. There were male and female prophets – termed *apihum* or *muhhum* and *muhhutum*. Their means of revelation is through oracles – omens, dreams, visions, ecstasy. They have the royal court as their audience while their message content is connected to ritual activity, military matters, or building projects. They may encourage or be critical.

It should be remarked that all peoples of the ancient Near East have known diviners, seers or sorcerers who claim to penetrate the divine realm and to forecast the future (Deut. 18:9-13; 1 Kgs. 18:19, 25, 40).

### DEVELOPMENT OF PROPHECY IN ISRAEL

From the onset of Israelite history, prophets often held the reins of leadership. Moses is a good example of this by qualifying to lead the people by virtue of his prophetic office. Deborah later emerged as a prophetic leader during the period of the judges. Samuel was favoured with a personal message from God. He was the great reformer of the prophetic order, and encouraged schools of the prophets. Apart from Moses, Samuel is reputed as the best example of a prophet prior to the monarchical era in Israel.

The pre-monarchic prophetic era was one of the stages of the pre-classical/non-literary prophecy in Israel. The moment Saul was anointed king over Israel, the role of prophet became one of adviser to the king. Evidences of this are prevalent throughout the ancient Near East. There are no books dedicated to the prophecies of the pre-classical prophets, though scattered oracles occur in the historical books. The book of 1 Samuel has a record of Samuel's service to Saul. 2 Samuel shows Nathan's prominence in the administration of David. Elijah equally served as the mouthpiece of God during the time of Ahab though it is doubtful if he was an employed counsellor of King Ahab. The intended audience of the pre-classical prophet was generally the king; hence the messages were specifically designed to the circumstances of the royal court.

The literary/classical prophets were the spiritual successors of the pre-classical prophets. Classical prophetic era is the most familiar phase of Israelite prophecy. The books known as the prophetic books of the Old Testament are all collections of the oracles of classical prophets. Eighth century marked the beginning of classical prophecy during the reign of Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel. The foremost examples in the north were Amos and Hosea while the southern kingdom had Micah and Isaiah. Most of the oracles of the classical prophets were directed to the general public, though many of them continued to have

specific messages for the king. Below is a summary of the development of prophecy in Israel adopted from Hill and Walton (2000:405)

### **DEVELOPMENT OF PROPHECY IN ISRAEL:**

PERIOD	FUNCTION	AUDIENCE	MESSAGE	EXAMPLES
Pre-monarchy	Mouth piece	People	Natural guidance, maintenance of Justice, spiritual overseer	Moses & Deborah
	Leader			Transition Samuel
Pre-classical	Mouth piece adviser	Kings & Court	Military advice, pronouncement of rebuke of blessing	Nathan
				Elijah
				Elisha
				Micaiah
				North – Jonah
South – Isaiah				
Classical	Mouth piece social/spiritual commentator	People	Rebuke concerning current condition of society; warnings of captivity, destruction, exile and restoration, call for justice and repentance	The writing prophets. E.g Jeremiah
Message – could be forth-telling or foretelling				

### **3.2. Self-Assessment Question**

**Trace the development of prophecy in Israel.**

### **3.3 Prophecy and Apocalypse**

Within the genre of classical prophecy are some recognizable variations of style. The most significant is the subcategory of apocalyptic literature, which found its entry to the prophetic books as early as Isaiah (24-27) and became prominent with Daniel and Zechariah.

Apocalyptic literature shares a number of characteristics with prophetic literature hence it is difficult to define. Yet, it should be remarked that apocalyptic literature is rich in the use of symbolism, visions, conversation with spiritual beings, and cosmic catastrophe leading to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

The apocalyptic literature's use of symbolism has often created confusion and uncertainty for interpreters. This is even more so by the mistaken treatment of vision of a prophet as the message of a prophet. It should be noted that the vision was not the message but the occasion for the message. Using Zechariah 1 as an example, the vision is of horses in a grove of myrtle trees. The conclusion that the Israelites listening to Zechariah were to keep their eyes on the myrtle trees and be alert for a group of horsemen and riders is seriously

misleading. The message was that the Lord was still concerned about Jerusalem – as the text makes eminently clear (vv. 14-17) and not that there would be horses among the myrtle trees. Moreover, in Zechariah 5, the vision is about carrying off to Babylon a measuring basket with a woman in it. Observe that this was the vision, not the message. While the message is not so clearly stated in this text as in Zechariah 1, but verse 6 gives the information necessary to deduce that the message concerned a purging from the sin of idolatry.

Knowing the meaning of a prophetic message does not depend on an interpretation of everything in the vision or even an understanding of the chronological placement of the events of the vision. The features of the vision are incidental; they are not the message. It is equally unfortunate that some interpreters lay much emphasis on the symbols. Yet, it cannot be assumed that every object in a vision has symbolic value, and when the meaning of a symbol is not given in the text, the interpreter must be cautious in supplying such a meaning. It is possible that symbols are used to conceal rather than to reveal (Hill and Walton, 2000:407).

Obviously, the prophet was given a message God that he was expected to relate to his audience. The seer in apocalyptic prophecy was often given a vision of what was to come and the message was deduced from the information received in the vision. This should be done with caution since the vision was not the message but the occasion for the message.

### 3.3. Self-Assessment Question

- Give a description of apocalyptic literature.

### 3.4. The Message of the Prophet

The prophetic messages arose from given historical situations and were addressed primarily to those occasions or persons. For a fair understanding of their true significance, it is important to isolate the fundamental principle from the immediate context. For instance, a prophet may prophecy from a given context in the history of Israel, but the abiding truth enshrined in the message would remain for all time. It is also necessary to distinguish between the message of the prophecy and the fulfilment of the prophecy. The message is found in the proclamation of God's word to the contemporary audience while the fulfilment comes in the unfolding of history. Every prophecy had a message as soon as it was proclaimed, independent of its eventual fulfilments. It will therefore be erroneous to seek for potential fulfilment of a prophetic oracle while overlooking the inspired message of the word of God.

The prophetic message came to the prophets as oracle, an analysis of the different oracles in the prophetic literature is necessary for understanding the message of the prophets. Four major kinds are discussed:

1. Indictment oracles – An indictment oracle gives a statement of the offense. Before the exile, indictment oracles focus primarily on idolatry, ritualism, and social justice. After the exile, the emphasis shifted to confrontation on the people's failure to give proper honour to the Lord.

2. Judgment oracles – these are oracles that describe punishment coming because of offense. Judgment was usually political in nature and projected for the near future. Pre-exilic judgment oracles were primarily political and projected for near future. Post-exilic emphasis interprets current crises as punishment.
3. Instruction oracles describe how the recipients were to conduct themselves. Pre-exilic instruction oracles emphasised the need to return to God by ending wicked conduct. Post-exilic instruction oracles were more specifically addressed to particular situation.
4. Hope oracles generally offered hope, not for the generation that the prophet addressed but for a future generation of Israel. This hope and restoration was usually given after the judgment had come. Pre-exilic emphasis was presented and understood as coming after an intervening period of judgment. Post-exilic emphasis was presented and understood as spanning a protracted time period (an example is Dan 9).

In all, the message of the prophets had a common understanding of God and His character. They consistently called all people to worship the God of Israel only. All the prophets repeatedly condemned sin and encouraged repentance. They frequently reminded the people of God's grace and love for them in making a covenant with them and the demands of the covenant. Although they delivered many messages of doom and destruction, the prophets also saw a future of peace, righteousness and blessing.

### 3.4. Self-Assessment Question

- Explain the different kinds of oracle found in the prophetic message.

### 3.5. Interpretation of Prophecy

Since the meaning of some verses is not clearly spelled out, frequently interpretations and commentaries vary. Problems of interpretation are found within the text such as the language, the poetic nature of many prophecies and the use of symbolism. Problems can also arise when the reader is not aware of the historical situation surrounding the prophet's message and from the fact that people come to the biblical text with different theological presuppositions. The primary goal of interpretation is to understand what God communicated through each prophet. Sound principles of interpretation are needed in order to guard against being led astray by false doctrine or wild speculation. This can be achieved through historical and grammatical research into the meaning of the text. Fortunately, many good translations of the Hebrew Bible and many commentaries, study Bibles, and concordances are now available to help the average person clarify difficult passages.

The following steps are guide one can follow to interpret a prophetic book:

1. Begin by reading through the whole book at once and answer question such as: who was the prophet preaching to? Who was the king at this time? What were the prevailing political, social and religious conditions during this period?

2. Divide the book into topical sections in order to get an outline of the prophet's message; noting the problems he preached about, the logical sequence as he attempts to convince the people and how each section fits into the whole.
3. Study individual passages in more detail. The difficult poetry or symbolism in a verse can be compared in two different translations or do a word study using the concordance.
4. When interpreting messianic prophecies, be cautious not to read New Testament fulfilment back into the Old Testament.

### **Self- Assessment Question**

Discuss the steps necessary for the interpretation of the prophetic book.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

Prophecy was a general phenomenon in the ancient world of the Bible. Prophecy in Israel spanned through from the time before the monarchic period to the monarchy and even after the exile. This has categorized as the pre-classical and classical prophetic periods in Israel's history. The message of the prophet came mainly through oracles such as indictment, judgment, instruction and hope. Care must be taken in interpreting the prophetic books because the meaning of some text is not clearly spelled out.

### **5.0 Summary**

Prophecy proclaimed the word of God. This was expressed in two ways, which accord with the sections of the prophetic books in the Old Testament – the pre-classical/former/non-literary prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings); the classical/late/literary prophets (the major and the minor prophets). There were prophets in evidence throughout the period of the Old Testament.

Apocalyptic literature is a sub-genre of the prophetic book and shares a number of characteristics with prophetic literature. It is rich in the use of symbolism, visions, conversation with spiritual beings, and cosmic catastrophe leading to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

The prophetic messages arose from given historical situations and were addressed primarily to those occasions or persons. Oracle was the main medium through which the prophetic message was communicated to the prophet.

The meaning of a prophetic text is not always clearly spelled out, hence the need for sound principles of interpretation in order to guard against being led astray by false doctrine.

The next unit will discuss the cycles of prophecy in Israel.

### **6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments**

Critically examine the development of prophecy in Israel.

**7.0 References / Future Readings**

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**MODULE 1: PROPHECY IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY****Unit 2: The Former Prophetic Books****Contents**

**1.0 Introduction****2.0 Objective****3.0 Main Body**

3.1 The Deuteronomic History

3.2 The Book of Joshua

3.3 The Book of Judges

3.4 The Book of Samuel

3.5 The Book of Kings

**4.0 Conclusion****5.0 Summary****6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments****7.0 References / Future Reading****1.0 Introduction**

The books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther are included in the English division of the Old Testament as historical Books. The Hebrew arrangement has Joshua, Judges, and the books of Samuel and Kings among the prophetic books and refers to them as “Former Prophets.” That they are referred to as prophetic suggests that these books are primarily theological in nature rather than chronological. While the role of the prophets in these books will not be overemphasized, it is important to note that the books share a prophetic view of history in which cause and effects are tied to the blessings and curses of the covenant.

**2.0 Objectives**

**By the end of this unit you should be able to:**

- Explain the Theory of the Deuteronomic History.
- Understand the Purpose and Message of Joshua
- Discuss the cycles of the Judges
- Survey the institution and growth of Kingship in Israel

**3.0 Main Body**



### 3.1. The Theory of Deuteronomistic History

The theory of Deuteronomistic history is essential to the understanding of the Former Prophetic Books hence its introduction at this point. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, source critics adopted the approach of subjecting Joshua - Kings to the same kind of analysis used on the Pentateuch, thereby identifying identical sources of JEDP. Other biblical scholars denied the JEDP sources; instead, they maintained that these books were made up of small, originally independent literary units woven together by an editor or series of editors. Martin Noth (a long time Old Testament Professor) adopted and defended this latter view in 1943. In his theory, the books of Deuteronomy to Kings are classified as exilic work called "Deuteronomistic History." According to Noth, these books are designed to show how the theology of Deuteronomy was reflected in Israel's history. The Deuteronomistic theology upholds that obedience to the law is blessings while disobedience is curses. The main characteristic of these books is that they share with the book of Deuteronomy a common perspective on history and theology. That is, Israel's history is viewed in terms of loyalty to the covenant. The Message of these is brought out by a formulaic phrases – "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD," "walked in the ways of Jeroboam," etc. Thus, failure to depart from the sins of Jeroboam is used as a yardstick for condemnation of northern kings and for southern kings, inability to measuring up to the faithfulness of David, reforms toward centralized worship in Jerusalem etc.

#### Critics of Deuteronomistic history:

The Deuteronomistic approach has resulted to many commendable insights over the years yet some aspects need to be reconsidered. One of such aspects has to do with the dating. While there is no objection to the fact that the books from Joshua to Kings share the perspective of Deuteronomistic theology as its foundation, many scholars who view Deuteronomy as compiled to promote the reform of Josiah's reform around the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Ref. II Kings 22-23; II Chron. 34-35) are thereby forced to date the book around 550 BC. Conservative scholars are yet to be convinced of this late date of Deuteronomy, instead, Moses' authorship is upheld. There is also no evidence to accept single authorship. The book of Kings for instance mentions sources; hence it seems likely that editorial suggestion is possible.

#### 3.1: Self-Assessment Exercise

- Explain the Theory of Deuteronomistic history
- Evaluate the Theory of Deuteronomistic history in the light of conservative scholarship.

### 3.2: The Book of Joshua

#### Authorship and Date:

Although the book is anonymous i.e. no inscriptions of the author, there are views or opinions as to the probable authorship. Traditional view from the Talmud (source of Jewish law) with support of some rabbis (Rashi, David Kimchi) attributed the authorship to Joshua the son of Nun, the successor of Moses who led Israelites into the Promised Land. But modern scholars have attributed the authorship to a Deuteronomic writer of the sixth century BC. Their argument is based on the obvious continuities in thought, subject matter and style between Joshua and Deuteronomy. They see the book of Joshua as a logical conclusion of the Pentateuch and think in terms of the Hexateuch. Martin Noth specifically contended that Joshua was the work of a single theologian, the “Deuteronomist” who wrote after the fall of Jerusalem to explain the events of 722 and 586 BC

#### The Person of Joshua:-

Joshua was called by God to function as Moses successor (1:1-9). His name is a translation of the Hebrew word **vy** which means “helper” or “saviour”. He was originally called Hoshea but Moses changed it to Joshua meaning “the Lord saves” (Num.13: 8,16). He was a courageous and godly leader. As a leader, God was with him and he enjoyed the same stature that Moses did 1:9,16-18; 3:7; 4:14 6:27; 10:14; 11:15,23. The entire nation of Israel vowed loyalty and obedience to him (1:16 – 18; 24:16 – 18). Throughout his ministry, he spoke and acted with authority.

#### Structure and Content of the book

Chapters 1 – 12 are narrative accounts of Israel’s military conquest of the land – their battles, success and failure, victory and defeat.

Chapters 13 – 22 are narrative accounts of the settlement in the land and their prosperity; the sharing of the conquered land between the twelve tribes; the stability and unity of the people.

Chapters 23 – 24 are accounts of Israel’s renewal of ancient covenant with God; Joshua’s dismissing the people to enjoy their inheritance; Joshua’s farewell speech at Shechem admonishing the people to fear God and not to contaminate themselves with the idol practices of the Canaanites.

## Purpose:

The book of Joshua gives information as to how Israelites entered and settled in the land promised to Abraham. It reveals how the Israelites crossed the Jordan River under the leadership of Joshua and how they struggled to conquer cities and countries in the land of Palestine. Joshua's success of conquest rests on his obedience to carefully heed the instructions given the book of the law (Jos.1: 7ff) and his dependence and faith in God. God indeed intervened on behalf of Israel in different circumstances to bring about their victories. The conquests and settlement of Israel in the land was a form of punishment by God to the inhabitants of the land (Canaanites) – a fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham (Gen.15: 16).

The book of Joshua is meant to teach that God is always faithful to his promises. Secondly to show that although God's gifts are free, we must struggle by faith to take hold of them. Thirdly, to show that God's leadership and protection in this part of the history of Israel has brought about their successes.

The book of Joshua gives us the basic principles of human relationship with God. These principles rest on *faithfulness and obedience*. Victory and success accompany God's people when they follow him faithfully. The book of Joshua validates Moses' claim in Deuteronomy 28:1-14 that God would bless his people when they remained faithful to the Mosaic covenant.

Although the promises and incentives God held out to Joshua in 1:2-9 were not fully realized in his life time, yet they entered the land, which would be a base of operations for them to achieve their God-given purpose in history. Israel's entrance into Canaan was essential to God's further plans and purposes of His kingdom of priests (Ex.19:6). Thus, the purpose of their entrance was: to be a light to other nations –source of blessing to those who come in contact with them (Isa.42:6); and to be a testimony of how glorious it can be to live under God's governing hand.

## Theology of the Book of Joshua

### Land

The land is the central revolving point of the covenant. For there can never be a nation without a land for settlement and inheritance. The book of Joshua emphasizes the possession of the Land –*to properly worship God*. Proper worship of GOD can only take place in the land of their possession e.g. *Israel in exile* (Ps.137). The Land in context was God's gift to Israel and so it belongs to God, and never belongs absolutely to Israel. The land though is a gift, sacred, blessed and fruitful, yet it could become a source of temptation with the tendency to forget

God at prosperity (Dt.8:7-14). The demand for its first fruits to be given to God indicates God is the owner (Deut. 14:22 – 29; 26:9 –16). The possessing and retaining of the land depends on Israel's obedience to the law (Deut. 30:15 – 20; 32:46 – 47; Jos.23:9 –13, 15 – 16).

### Rest

When Israel has finally possessed the land, they would “rest” from wanderings, enemies, struggles, journeys etc. “Rest” was a gift to a new generation (Deut.12:10; 25:19cf. Jos.21:44; 23:1). Complete rest depends on the obedience of Israel to the instruction of God **to destroy all**.

### God

God's appeal to Joshua to enter the land of Canaan reminds him of who He is:

- God as possessor of all things (1:2-3) –sovereign over all universe.
- A promise fulfilling God.
- One who does not only send, but **leads** by his presence and power.
- Holy God who does not tolerate sin –he war against sin, which is an insult to his holiness. This is because sin destroys people whom God loves and desires to bless.

In waging war with sin, God uses people, Himself or forces of nature. God often uses people as disinfectants or antiseptics in his war against sin. Thus God used Israel like a broom to sweep a filthy society, purging out sin in the camp. In judging the Canaanites God was performing surgery on the human race to remove a malignancy. That was why God dealt severely with sin in Israel (Josh.7). God's love for Israel led him to purge out the sin in the camp so that it would not destroy the whole nation.

Sometimes God uses himself or Angel to wage war against sin (5:13-15). Though he is unseen, he leads his people against their enemies. Sometimes he uses forces of nature to fight for his people e.g. restraint of waters of Jordan (3:14-17); shaking the city walls (6:20); hail from heaven (10:11); lengthening the hours of a day (10:13-14). These instances of divine intervention are powerful demonstrations of the might of God unleashed against the forces of evil.

### Man

The book of Joshua reveals the character of man as –being rebellious toward God e.g. Achan's rebellion against God's will concerning “the ban” (*herem*,Josh.7). Secondly, man is

limited in power. Human beings are naturally helpless and so depend on God to succeed. For example, whenever the Israelites forgot their natural helplessness and presumed to go against their enemies in their own strength and wisdom, they failed (Josh.7:2-5; 9:14). This then shows that, it is only as people submit to God's authority does he work in and through them to demonstrate his supernatural strength. Thirdly, man is enslaved to sin. This is evidence in man's natural inability to overcome evil influences and to break out from the domination of his own sinful nature e.g. Israel's consistent stray from God toward the way of the flesh.

### 3.2: Self-Assessment Question

- Discuss the theology of the book of Joshua.

### 3.3: The Book of Judges

#### Authorship and Date:

Though the book is anonymous, traditionally it is believed that prophet Samuel wrote it with the help of his students. This is because the content of the book has a prophetic undertone. Recent scholarships attribute it to the Deuteronomistic History. The consensus today is that the book comprises narratives that may have been composed nearly contemporary with the events and put in a theological literary setting by a compiler at a later date. So, for instance, the song of Deborah (Judges 5) is frequently dated to the pre-monarchical period, while the narrator's refrain, "In those days Israel had no king" (e.g., 17:6, 18:1), gives clear evidence that at the time he was writing the nation had a king. This suggests that the book's composition involved a process that may have consumed several centuries. This does not make the book of judges or any book of the Bible less inspirational.

#### Content of the book:

The book of Judges continues the story of Israel's conquest and gradual occupation of the whole land. It tells the stories and legends of Israel's time of tribal life in Palestine. It gives information about the exploits of twelve judges during the period of Israel's settlement on the land. These judges were really not legal judges but military/war leaders. They were people God marked out charismatically as leaders in times of Israel's great need – battles with enemies/oppressors – and led the tribes to victory because of their recognized authority as war leaders; they also exercised power in legal disputes between tribes (4:4-5). These judges are classified as major and minor judges.

Major judges:- Othniel, Ehud, Barak/Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson.

Minor judges:- Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon.

**Structure of the book:**

Chapter 1 – 2 describe the situation of Israel after the death of Joshua: Because Israel has no leader or national figure who could direct and teach them the way of the Lord, some tribes did not keep the instruction of God to destroy all the inhabitants of the land allotted to them rather, they settled in Co-existence with the inhabitants who in turn became snare to them (1:21,27 – 33). They became apostate (2:11ff).

Chapters 3 – 16 tell the stories of the twelve judges

Chapters 17 – 21 give legends about the two tribes of Dan and Benjamin, their idolatry and atrocity.

**Purpose/ Message:**

Judges records Israel's **spiritual apostasy** caused by their disobedience to God's command regarding the Canaanites (1:8-10). This has made Israelites turn from God to the gods and practices of the Canaanites. They tolerated, admired and worshiped the gods of the Canaanites at their altars (2:11-13, 17, 19; 17-18). The reason for the decline was because the older generation did not pass the knowledge of God on to their children (2:10). So the new generation did not know God and his Law (2:6-3:7; 8:34) –*no enforcement of the law*

The consequence of this spiritual apostasy led Israel to:

**National disorganization** evidenced in political disintegration and deterioration of national unity.

**Social chaos** as evidenced in tribal hostility, self-interest, disregard for the law (5:17-18, 23;8:5-8; 12:1-6; 18:24-25). There was increase in immorality, and anarchy prevailed as everyone did what he wanted.

The book of Judges magnifies God's grace toward sinners. God's periodic warnings and raising of judges and the giving of his Spirit as special endowment with supernatural power were a manifestation of his grace. There were six periods of Israel's oppression and deliverance:

1. 8 years oppression by the Mesopotamians –Othniel as deliverer 40yrs(3:7-11)
2. 18yrs oppression by the Moabites -Ehud as deliverer 80yrs (3:12-21)
3. 20yrs oppression by the Canaanites -Barak/ Deborah as deliverer 40yrs (4-5)

4. 7yrs oppression by the Midianites - Gideon as deliverer 40yrs (6:1-10:5)
5. 18yrs oppression by the Ammonites –Jephthah as deliverer 6yrs (10:6-12:15)
6. 40yrs oppression by the Philistines –Samson as deliverer 20yrs (13-16)

This cycle of events shows that in contrast to Israel's unfaithfulness, God was gracious to his rebellious people. God did not allow them lose their national identity because of his covenant with Abraham to bring blessing to the world through his descendants (Gen. 12:3). Therefore, God delivers his people when they **cry** to him –*not when they repent, except 10:10ff*. The oppression of Israel was seen as God's discipline for their apostasy. This discipline is a blessing in disguise –affliction causes Israel to return to God. Thus, God's discipline was both educative and punitive. Discipline does not mean hatred or abandonment but love.

At the death of Joshua, Israel had not yet been fully established as a stable and secure nation, for the land has not yet been completely conquered. Israel then, operated on tribal confederacy, with each tribe having its leader because there was no central government. Each tribe was politically operating an independent policy, though unified by their national identity religiously. The lack of political unification led to the lost in contact and identity with one another and a degree of mixture with people around them, assimilating some of their cultures, hence the beginning of their apostasy.

### 3.3: Self-Assessment Exercise

- What is the purpose/message of the book of Judges?

### 3.4: The Book of Samuel

#### Title, Authorship and Date

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel fall together naturally as a unit and originally constituted a single book in the Hebrew Bible. Samuel was probably divided into 1 and 2 early in the Christian era; perhaps through the Septuagint which combines the books of Samuel with the books of Kings under the title "Kingdoms". Jewish tradition names Samuel as author of these books. This is because of Samuel's dominant role in the establishment of the monarchy. Some recent scholars view 1–2 Samuel as part of the larger "Deuteronomistic History." The events described in the book took place in the last half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC., and the early part of the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC., but it is difficult to determine when the events were recorded. There are no particularly persuasive reasons to date the sources used by the compiler later than the events themselves, and good reason to believe that contemporary records were kept. (cf. 2 Sam.

20:24-25). If the books are part of a larger “Deuteronomic” work, the compiler would have worked late in the period of the divided monarchy.

### Content of the Book”

The book of Samuel (1 & 2) gives the history of the early monarchy in Israel from the moral or prophetic point of view.

**1 Samuel** is about Israel’s quest for a king and God’s approval of Saul. The strong desire for a royal leadership by the Israelites was influenced by their lack of national leader (king) like other nations. Under King Saul, the nation of Israel was established as a kingdom and became stabilized as compared to the anarchical days of the judges.

**1 Samuel 1-7** presents the birth of Samuel who would stand in the transition between anarchy and monarchy.

**1 Samuel 8-31** narrates the ascendance of Saul as king of Israel at Israel’s pre-matured demand. Though the quest was not in accordance with the plan of God, yet God acceded to it.

**2 Samuel** continues the narrative of the Israelites monarchy and reveals how God appointed King David for the nation of Israel. It tells the significant role played by prophets during the transition period and their moral exhortations to the kings. Under King David, the kingdom of Israel was expanded through his military campaigns.

**2 Samuel 1-4** narrates David’s rule at Hebron.

**2 Samuel 5-10** narrates David’s prosperity

**2 Samuel 11-21** shows David’s decline (moral)

**2 Samuel 22- 1 kgs.2** narrates internal wrangling in David’s family –the struggle for the throne among his sons (Adonijah and Solomon).

### Purpose/Message

The book of Samuel gives the history of the establishment of the Davidic covenant. Davidic covenant was established by God and not by men. The description of the Davidic covenant:

- What did God promise? – 2 Sam. 7:9 = subordination to Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:2-3) Departure from Abrahamic – 2 Sam. 7:12.



- Was it a conditional or unconditional covenant? 2 Sam. 7. No. (but need for integrity and uprightness before God). Also: 1 Kgs. 2:4, 6:12 & 9:4-5 – God spoke to Solomon about the covenant. 1 Kgs. 8:25 reveals Solomon's understanding of the covenant.
- What impact did the Davidic covenant have on the rest of Israel's history?
  - The failure of Solomon – Divided monarchy with one tribe under the control of David's line. Note: God's act of grace.
  - Hope of the Davidic line – sustained (2 Chron. 21:7, 9ff; Ps. 89).
  - Foundation of the Messianic theology – Jer. 33:14-22; Isa. 11:1.

### 3.4: Self-Assessment Exercise

- Evaluate the concept of the Davidic Covenant.

### 3.5. The Book of Kings

#### Title, Authorship and Date:

In the Hebrew Bible, 1 & 2 Kings were considered as a single book. They provide history of the kingdom from the time of Solomon to the time of the Babylonian captivity. The author is not known, but traditional view (Talmud) attributed to Jeremiah since there are similarities in style of writing (2Kgs 24:18 – 25:30 cf Jer. 52). Going by the traditional view, there is the possibility that Jeremiah must have used sources available to him to write the books. Those who discount this tradition argue that books of Kings bear the mark of a single author or compiler who was an eye witness of the fall of Jerusalem. It is held that this writer skilfully spliced many historical sources into a unified script to portray the two Kingdoms' "covenant failure" and the divine rationale for foreign exile. They view 2 Kings 25:22-26, 27-30 as later additions to the book. Alternatively, 1 – 2 Kings is understood to be the work of the so-called Deuteronomistic school of thought.

#### Contents of the book of Kings

**1Kings** accounts for the glorification and division of the kingdom of Israel under Solomon.

**2Kings** accounts for deterioration and deportation of the divided kingdoms, i.e. *it continues the account of the divided monarchy to the deportations of 722 and 586BCE.*

#### Purpose/Message

The fundamental purpose of Kings Narrative is to complete the written history of Jewish Kingship as a sequel to the book of Samuel. The book of Kings was written to the divided and declining monarchies of Israel and Judah. Kings is a historical record of the main acts of the kings of Israel and Judah from the glory of Solomon's United Kingdom to the shame and judgment of the divided kingdom. Written from the prophetic point of view, Kings stressed the idolatry and immorality that brought down the judgment of God (1kg 11:1ff) on Israel. Both the Northern and Southern kingdoms were in a state of political disunity, gross immorality and idolatry after the death of Solomon. The books relate the history of Israel's united and divided monarchies in their "covenant failure". The narrative focuses on the figures primarily responsible for covenant keeping in Israel – the Kings and the prophets. The prophets with their divine oracles functioned as the conscience of the monarchy.

### **3.5. Self-Assessment Question**

Discuss the relationship between Kingship and prophecy in ancient Israel.

## **4. Conclusion**

In this unit, attention has been given to the books of the Former Prophets. The books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are treated as historical books in the English canon but are viewed as prophetic in the Hebrew canon. Each of these books has been isolated and discussed, paying attention to the title, authorship and date of the composition, the structure/content and purpose/message.

## **5. Summary**

This unit has discussed the Former Prophetic books otherwise known and the Pre-classical prophetic books. The Theory of Deuteronomistic History – designed to show how the theology of Deuteronomy was reflected in Israel's history has been explained as the basic foundation for the study and understanding of the books of Former Prophets. The theology of Deuteronomy upholds covenant loyalty- obedience brings blessings while disobedience brings curses.

The book of Joshua shows us how victory and success accompany God's people when they follow him faithfully. It thus validates Moses' claim in Deuteronomy 28:1-14 that God would bless his people when they remained faithful to the covenant.

Judges records Israel's spiritual apostasy caused by their disobedience to God's covenant with them.

Samuel introduces the transition between the pre-monarchical and monarchical prophetic era. It reveals the failure of King Saul as a result of disobedience, the initiation of the Davidic covenant and its impact on the rest of Israel's history.

Kings relate the history of Israel's united and divided monarchies in their "covenant failure". The narrative focuses on the figures primarily responsible for covenant keeping in Israel – the Kings and the prophets. The prophets with their divine oracles functioned as the conscience of the monarchy. In the next unit, we shall examine the role of prophecy in Israel.

### 5. Tutor Marked Assignments

Critically assess the role of Samuel in the establishment of ancient Israel's monarchy.

### 6. Reference / Future Reading

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## MODULE 1: PROPHECY IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

Unit 3: The Role of Prophecy in Israelite Society from the point of view of the Covenant

### Contents

#### 1.0 Introduction

The Hebrew word translated as "covenant" is *berit*. The etymology of the Hebrew *berith* is not entirely certain. It is probable that the word is derived from three Akkadian roots - *biritu*, which has the common meaning "fetter," *birit*, meaning "between," implying that covenant is an arrangement between two or more parties; and *baru* "to see" which may suggest that the word could be translated as "obligation." If these root ideas are to bind, covenant is that which binds together the parties with rights/privileges and obligations. This, at any

rate, is in harmony with the general meaning and usage of the word in the Old Testament. The prophets speak directly about the specific covenants, or they allude to them extensively throughout their writings. This section focuses on the Prophetic books and the covenant motifs, and the role of Prophecy in the ancient Israelite society.

## 2.0 Objective

**By the end of this unit you should be able to:**

- Know the different covenants in the Old Testament
- Explain how the different covenants are expressed in the prophetic books
- Survey prophetic movements in Israel
- Discuss the role of prophecy in ancient Israelite society.

## 3.0 Main Body

### 3.1 Prophetic Books and the Covenant Motifs

The prophets speak directly about the specific covenants, or allude to them extensively throughout their writings. This section focuses on the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and new covenants as addressed by the prophets. The covenant motif appears in both the Major and the Minor Prophets, especially in conjunction with the people's disobedience to the covenant stipulations as they were set forth in the Ten Commandments.

#### 3.1.1. The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15:8-18; 17:1-14)

In the Abrahamic Covenant covenant God promised a land and descendants to Abraham, who was commanded to "keep" the covenant (Gen. 17:9,14) and was given circumcision as the sign. One way the concept of covenant comes to the forefront is through the use of the covenant formula, which appears in three versions with particular variants: (i) "I will be your God"; (ii) "You will be my people"; (iii) "I will be your God, your will be my people." God through Isaiah exhorts his people not to fear because, after all, they are Abraham's offspring and thus they are the recipients of the power and presence of God (Isa. 41:8-10).

The Minor Prophets focus on sin, judgment and restoration as their main themes. The people's sin is connected to the inability to keep the Mosaic covenant no doubt but the Abrahamic covenant is the promise of the return to the land following the judgment through the exile (see Hos. 11:11; Joel 3:18-20; Obad. 20; Mic. 7:20; Zeph. 3:20). The only occurrence of the covenant formula in the Minor Prophets is found in Zechariah's message of restoration: "I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness" (8:8).

The presence of the promise here is important because it occurs after the return from the Babylonian exile, and thus it could have an important eschatological nuance.

### 3.1.2 The Mosaic Covenant

Mosaic Covenant refers to God's covenant with Israel at Sinai (Horeb). Following the recital of divine acts and the call to obey, God constituted Israel a "peculiar treasure," a "kingdom of priests," and a "holy nation," and gave them the stipulations that would guarantee the continuance of fellowship between them and their God. The covenant was ratified by a covenant sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood ([Ex 24:4-8](#)). From time to time in Israel's history the covenant was renewed. The most important renewals were those on the plains of Moab ([Deut 29](#)), at Shechem in the days of Joshua ([Josh 24](#)), in the days when Jehoiada was able to restore the Davidic line of kings under Joash ([2 Kings 11](#)), in the days of Hezekiah ([2 Chron 29:10](#)), and in the days of Josiah ([2 Kings 23:3](#)).

The Ten Commandments are the first part of a three-section of the Mosaic Law, and they represent the most important teachings of this covenant. The first four commandments had to do with one's relationship with God, the last six commandments had to do with one's relationship with his parents and neighbors. The Major Prophets list sinful violations of these six commandments throughout their works but more emphasis is given to the first four commandments (Isa. 2:8, 20; 30:22; 31:7; Jer. 8:19; 10:5, 14; 16:18; Eze. 6:9, 13; 8; 36:25-26). Another important aspect of the Mosaic covenant that is repeated throughout the prophets is the sign of this covenant - the Sabbath ([Exo. 31:13-17](#)). According to Isaiah, those who keep the Sabbath are considered blessed, please God and will have their sacrifices accepted on God's altar (56:2, 4, 6-7). Through Jeremiah God reminds his people not to bear a burden on the Sabbath day but to keep it holy; failure of which will bring God's judgement in the form of the destruction of Jerusalem (17:21, 22, 27). Ezekiel speaks of Israel's rebellion against God in terms of profaning the Sabbath or disregarding the Sabbath (20:13, 16, 21, 24; 22:8; 23:38; 22:26). On the other hand, Ezekiel prophesies about a future time of restoration when the Levitical priests will keep God's Sabbaths holy (44:24). During this time people will worship during the Sabbath, they will bring sacrifices and offerings (46:3, 4, 12).

The Minor Prophets remind the people of their responsibility to keep the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant but mostly condemn the people for breaking the covenant (Hos. 6:7; 8:1; 12:1). Israel's idolatry is sometimes couched in language of spiritual adultery, with Israel accused of "whoredom"

(Hos. 2:5; 4:15; 5:3; 6:10; 9:1). The people's failure to keep the Sabbath is not mentioned directly in the Minor Prophets. Mention of the Sabbath is found only in twice the Minor Prophet by Hosea and Amos respectively. In Hosea God promises to put an end to Israel's Sabbaths (2:11), while in Amos the people mention the Sabbath only in their desire for it to be over so that they might engage in deceitful business practices (8:5).

### 3.1.3 The Davidic Covenant

God gave a promise to David that his descendants should have an everlasting kingdom and be known as his sons. It has been observed that whereas the Mosaic covenant had the structure of a suzerain-vassal treaty, the Davidic covenant is a grant/royal covenant whose promises are articulated in 2 Samuel 7:8-16. Some of the promises made to David in the covenant found fulfilment during David's lifetime (2 Sam. 7:9-11a) and some will find realization after David's death - an allusion to the messianic hope. It is the Messianic concept that the Major Prophets like Isaiah (9:6-7; 11:1-2, 10; 55:3-5), Jeremiah (23:5-6; 33:15, 17, 20-26), Ezekiel (34:23-24; 37:24-25). Minor prophets like Hosea (3:5), Amos (9:11), Micah (5:2, 4) and Zechariah (3:8-10; 6:9-15) equally share the Messianic motif of the David Covenant as they envisage a future time of restoration in which the royal covenant will be fulfilled by the eternal reign of a Davidic king.

### 3.1.4 The New Covenant

Several passages in the prophets, but most explicitly in Jeremiah, speak of a new covenant in the messianic age ([Isa 42:6; 49:6-8; 55:3; 59:21; 61:8; Jer 31:31,33; 32:40; 50:5; Ezek 16:60,62; 34:25; 37:26; Hos 2:18](#)). The promises of the new covenant are made explicit in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The language of the covenant making is similar to that used with the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 15:18) and the Mosaic covenant (Exo. 34:10; Deut. 5:2). This covenant is labeled "new" to differentiate it from the old ones and also to indicate that it will have new features not included in the previous covenants. The fact that the new covenant will be different from the old covenants can be found from the expression "not like the covenant I made with their fathers" (Jer. 31:32). It should also be observed from the Jeremiah 31:32 that the new covenant was needed not because the form or function of the old was flawed, but because of the people's failure to obey it.

The specific stipulations of the new covenant are enumerated in Jeremiah 31:33-34. The Mosaic Law was written on tablets of stone (Exo. 31:18) which could be broken (Exo. 32:19), lost (2 Kings 22:8), burned (Jer. 36:23) or drowned (Jer. 51:63); the new covenant is written on the heart and is permanent. The central motif of the new covenant is the knowledge of the LORD. The prophets emphasized that knowing God meant obeying the

covenant stipulations (see Hos. 4:1-2, 6; 6:6). Ezekiel emphasized that the institution of the new covenant in the hearts of the people is possible only through the presence of the Spirit of God in the people's heart. God promises to give the people a new heart and to put his Spirit within them (Eze. 11:19; 36:26).

### 3.1. Self-Assessment Exercise

List the different covenants in the Old Testament and explain how the different covenants are expressed in the prophetic books.

### 3.2 Prophetic Movements in Israel

#### Prophetic movements in the book of kings

The first mention of a prophet whom God had used to mediate his kingdom was Samuel. He was a prophet par excellence. Thus, prophetic movement came into being when priests and kings had failed in their responsibility. Though there was indication that bands of prophets were in existence, but the inception of the structure of true prophet began with Samuel. His role was to anoint and advise kings on matters of leadership and management. Prophet was specifically assigned to palaces and courts as advisers.

Just as priestly movements were instrumental in leading people in the worship of God, both in sacrifice and song, prophetic movement leads the way in understanding the mind of God and calling on the people to worship God in holiness and obedience. Prophets were often called *God's servants, men of God, and sons of the prophets*. They were the mouthpieces of God. They spoke words from God. True prophets were called by God to speak for him. They function both as foretellers i.e. to foretell future events and forth tellers i.e. proclaiming God's word publicly by explaining the past, elucidating the present, and disclosing the future. They were vehicles for communicating divine predictions.

Prophets who played prominent role from the time of God's anointed king (David) to the exilic period were: Natan, Ahijah, Shemaiah, Azariah and Hanani, Jehu, Elijah and Elisha, Jonah son of Amittai, Isaiah son of Amoz, Huldah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel, Jeremiah, Obadiah. God raised these prophets as extra ordinary leaders to

address issues of idolatry and immorality in the life of Israel. The prophets called Israel unto obedience to the law of Yahweh but their obstinacy led into captivity.

Israel was deserted by God and allowed to suffer the reproach of domination by a people worshiping pagan gods. This humiliation was the result of their sin against Yahweh their God. By virtue of the historical and cultural context, it was obvious that Israel would sin against God. The glory and influence of Solomon and the relations that existed between Israel/Judah and other surrounding nations (Moabites, Edomites, Arameans, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians) have contributed greatly to the fall of Israel and Judah. The *primary and ultimate* sin was the sin of **idolatry**. This implies a rejection of the Torah and the covenant of God (2kgs.17:1-15). To reject God and his covenant was to leave a vacuum in community life that could be filled only by mutual abuse. This rejection brought about the horizontal sins –abuse of the poor, prostitution, drunkenness etc. This was the period that prophets were raised as mouthpiece of God to proclaim and warn kings, priests and people of the consequences of their action. This was the period when prophetic evaluation and indictments of the monarchy and the political and religious institutions of Israel were carried out. Thus, the disaster of 722BC, the debacle of 605, 597 and 586 BC with the destruction of the temple was inevitable.

Ezekiel was active in Babylon writing about the hopelessness of exilic Jerusalem and the people of Judah. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi and a number of anonymous prophets continued both orally and in writing to function as prophets after the exile. Daniel too was called a prophet, though modern scholars would consider the book apocalyptic and a product of the second century B.C. in its present form.

### 3.2. Self-Assessment Exercise

Do a survey of the prophetic movements in Israel.

### 3.3. The Role of Prophecy in the Israelite Society

Prophets played very influential role in delivering God's word to his people and other nations. They were instruments or vehicles through whom God delivered his word. While they are often thought of as merely predictors of the future, the truth is that they did more of forth-telling (preaching) than fore-telling (predicting). Part of the confusion on this matter is the English use of the word *prophet* in the sense of economic prophets, weather prophets or other types of forecasters. this had led to a very limited view of what constituted the task and mission of the



biblical prophets, whose job it was to communicate God's will to man – as if their only task was to provide humanity with a reservoir of passages full of predictions about the future. The message of the prophets has at least five major characteristics:

- a. The prophets were first and foremost preachers of the Law of Moses. They were God's delegates to summon the people to return to God and to believe the good news of the promise-plan of God
- b. The prophets were also social reformers calling for justice, fairness and righteousness in all levels of the society.
- c. They were announcers of God's judgment as well as his optimists about God's present and future salvation.
- d. Apart from their ministry to the ancient Israelite community, it should be acknowledged that the prophets were God's messengers of the oracles for the Gentile nations who also needed to hear the word from God for those days and for the future.

### **Contemporary Relevance of Prophecy**

Just as the prophets announced the moral law of God to their generation, the same law continue to address the present society, for the nature and character of God has not changed, diminished or been offered at a discount rate. The predictions of the prophets equally have serious impact of contemporary society. Indeed, the Messiah will come a second time just as the prophets foretold he would come the first time. It should be noted that the second coming will be an expression of both the wrath and the love of God – two topics that must receive a balanced representation to be fair to the prophetic message. Therefore, the prophets call for faith, obedience and repentance is still very relevant today.

### **3.3.Self-Assessment Exercise**

Discuss the relevance of prophecy in ancient Israel and contemporary society

#### 4.0 Conclusion

The concept of the Old Testament covenant is integral to the understanding of the prophetic books. While a covenant can be a simple pact or treaty between two people (Gen. 21:27; 1 Sam. 18:3), God's covenants with Israel are broader in focus and generally contain promises that God made on their behalf. The prophets frequently make direct or indirect references to four specific covenants: Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and the New Covenant. The covenant motif is dominant both in the Major and the Minor prophetic literatures; as the prophets consistently call Israel to faithfulness to the covenant with God that they may rip the benefits thereof.

#### 5.0 Summary

Thus far, this unit has discussed four out of the covenants God made with the people of Israel; namely: Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and the New Covenant. This treatment is as a result of their dominance in the prophetic books. It described how the motif of the covenant is expressed by both the Major and Minor prophets. The unit also reveals how prophets played important roles the life of Israel by the way they mediated covenant enforcement. They reminded the people the terms of the covenant, their responsibility and the implication of not meeting up to the obligations of the covenant they have signed in with God.

The next unit will be focused on the Pre-classical prophetic era in Israel's history.

#### 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

- i. Trace the development of the prophetic movements in Israel.
- ii. Mention the different covenants in the Old Testament and explain how the different covenants are expressed in the prophetic books.
- iii. Examine how the different covenants are expressed in the prophetic books

#### 7.0.

Ahiamadu, A.E. *Biblical Hermeneutics – Methods and Tools of Interpreting and Applying the Bible in African – A postcolonial maximalist analysis*. Enugu: SIVC, 2012

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## **MODULE 2: THE LITERARY/CLASSICAL PROPHETS**

### **Unit 1: Early Pre-Exilic/Eighth-Century Prophets**

#### **Contents**

##### **1.0 Introduction**

##### **2.0 Objective**

##### **3.0 Main Body**

###### **3.1 Jonah**

###### **3.2 Amos and Hosea**

### 3.3 Micah

### 3.4 Isaiah

## 4.0 Conclusion

## 5.0 Summary

## 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

## 7.0 References / Future Reading

### 1.0 Introduction

This unit is the beginning of Module 2 in our study of Prophetic books. The theme of the module is Literary/Classical Prophets. This module is a follow-up of Module 1 which concentrated on the Pre-classical Prophets. Module 2 focuses on the activities and collection of oracles of prophets who emerged from the eight century during the reigns of Jeroboam II in the north and Uzziah in the south up to the time of captivity and return. They are called “literary prophets” because their oracles were collected and put into writing.

### 2.0 Objective

**At the end of this unit, you should be able to:**

- List the classical prophets.
- Identify the early pre-exilic prophets
- Appreciate the writings of the early pre-exilic prophets
- Discuss the message of the early pre-exilic prophets
- State the relevance of the early pre-exilic prophets to contemporary readers

### 3.0 Main Body

#### Early Pre-Exilic Prophets

Ancient prophecies survive, obviously, only because they were put into writing. Who did this and when and why are long-debated topics in OT study. Moreover, Critical scholars have long argued that Hosea, Amos and indeed all the collections in the classical prophets grew over time as later tradition bearers kept the ancient words alive by stripping them of much of their specificity concerning their time and place and by adding words of later prophets and even their own words to update them. In any case, the words of the prophets, not their deeds, now stand front and centre in the prophetic movement. This section is focused on the earliest of the literary prophets – Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah which emerged in the eight century

BC. There are two main ways of deciding the date for the writing or collection of the prophetic books. Primarily, majority of the Prophetic Books provide a date of some sort in their superscription and/or refer to events datable from ancient history of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia or Greece. These data can be useful in determining the date of the writing of a prophetic book. Secondly, knowledge of the History and the surrounding ancient Near East can be instrumental to determining the time of writing.

### 3.1. Jonah

#### Background

Generally, most scholars begin introduction to the prophetic literatures with the book of Amos. This is because there is some dispute concerning the dating of the book for lack of certainty about who was its author. Observe that it written in the third person, and no author is identified anywhere in the Bible. As has been noted above, it should be expected that either Jonah or someone getting information from Jonah would have to have written the book – that is, someone from the “sons of the prophets” (c.f 2 Kings 2:3).

Therefore, instead of the general norm, it has been deemed necessary to begin this section with the book of Jonah based on three considerations: 1) the early date assigned to Jonah by the writer of Kings (2 Kings 14:25), 2) the books emphasis upon the prophetic career, and 3) the transitional nature of Jonah’s prophecy from the pre-classical to the classical model. The book of Jonah is unique among the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Unlike other prophetic books, the book of Jonah is not a collection of the oracles of the prophet; it relates an episode in the life of the prophet. Within the Old Testament, prophet Jonah is mentioned outside the book only in 2 Kings 14:25 in reference to the reign of Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel in the first half of the eighth century B.C.

Not much is known about Jonah. Both Jonah 1:1 and 2 Kings 14:25 identify him as the son of Amittai, and Kings gives the further information that he was from Gath-hepher, a town in lower Galilee about three miles northeast of Nazareth ion the ancient tribal claim of Zebulun. The Prophet Jonah had two prophetic messages to deliver to two different nations – Israel and Assyria. The Bible says very little about his prophecies concerning Israel and does not record his exact word (2 Kings 14:25). The book of Jonah describes the prophet’s ministry to the Assyrians in Nineveh early in the reign of Jeroboam II.

Being set in the first half of the eighth century B.C., the events of this book came at a time of great optimism for the northern kingdom of Israel. The Assyrian Empire that had waxed strong in the ninth century had entered into decline, leaving Jeroboam II free to regain much of the territory that had belonged to Israel during the times of David and Solomon. This expansion ushered in greater economic prosperity than at any previous time in Israel’s history. It was towards the close of the century that the Assyrian Empire resurgent as the strongest political force the world had known and the Northern kingdom was overtaken and its people deported.

#### Outline

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1. God's first call and Jonah's attempted escape           | 1:1-16    |
| 2. God's rescue of Jonah and Jonah's thankful response     | 1:17:2:10 |
| 3. Second call and Nineveh's response to Jonah's preaching | 3:1-9     |
| 4. God's rescue of Nineveh and Jonah's angry response      | 3:10-4:5  |
| 5. The object lesson and God's right to compassion         | 4:6-11    |

### **Message of Jonah**

The message of the book of Jonah is brought home in the two discussions concerning Jonah's anger (4:3-4, 8-9). In both cases, Jonah's anger was focused on the mechanism of God's grace. In 4:3-4 Jonah was angry that God's grace was applied, because, he would have insisted, Nineveh did not deserve any more chances. In 4:8-9, Jonah was angry that he lost the benefit of God's gracious protection, although, as God pointed out, he had done nothing to deserve it. While Jonah selfishly had compassion on the plant that gave him shade in the hot desert outside the city of Nineveh, he did not want God to be merciful to the people of Nineveh. This account therefore, shows the depth of God's compassion.

### **Major Themes**

#### **1. God's Compassion**

It has been stated above that the compassion of God and his sovereign will to perform acts of compassion is the major focus of the book. Jonah who was trying to run away from God ended up in the belly of a large fish sent by God to swallow him and there, prayed for God's help (2:1,7). The prophet recognized God's unmerited compassion towards him yet did not want God to be compassionate to the underserving Assyrians in Nineveh. God, in his sovereign freedom, had compassion on Nineveh and did not destroy them in response to their repentance.

#### **2. Anger**

The anger of God is assumed to have begun the whole sequence of events in the book of Jonah. The wickedness of Nineveh inspired the wrath of God to move into action. By contrast, Jonah affirmed that God was slow to anger (4:2), though he himself certainly was not. Jonah's anger appeared to rebuke God, who, in Jonah's estimation, was not angry enough about the right things. Righteous anger is balanced by compassion, and God did just that.

#### **3. Theodicy**

Theodicy is the philosophical and /or theological defence of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil. Though theodicy is a common theme in the Old Testament but the book of Jonah presents it in a different dimension. Typically, the Israelite concerned about theodicy asked the question that was posed by God to Jonah: "Do you have a right to be angry?" (4:4-9); this is because the Israelites were often puzzled by the suffering of the righteous. In the narrative of Jonah, however, the question was reversed, for it concerns God's compassion toward the wicked. The question is resolved by the book by affirming God's sovereignty not to be angry or, better, to be "slow to anger." The justice of God is not negated by the offering of extensions by grace. This was the same answer given in Habakkuk and is

reflected in New Testament theology as well in places such as Romans 3:25 and Matt. 20:15. Nevertheless, god is not obligated to offer extension endlessly. His just punishment will eventually be carried out (cf. Jer. 13:14; Ezek. 7:1-9).

### 3.1. Self-Assessment Questions

Justify theodicy as one of the themes of Jonah

#### 3.2.1. Amos

##### Background

**Amos** is the third book of “the Twelve,” or the Minor Prophets. Chronologically, Amos whose name means “burden bearer” stands first among the writing prophets, an older contemporary of Hosea and Micah. He made his living as a fruit grower and a manager of shepherds in the small village of Tekoa about six miles south of Bethlehem (1:1). He was instructed by God to go to the northern nation of Israel and warn them that God would spare His judgment no longer (7:8, 14, 15). Amos courageously went though he had not been trained in the prophetic schools of his day, he withstood the condemnation of the high priest at the temple at Bethel (7:10-17) and the unbelief of his audience. Having heard from God, Amos saw it as a duty to share the message. (3:8).

Dating the book of Amos at first would seem to be an easy task. The superscription (1:1) provides three bits of evidence: His ministry occurred during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel two years before the earthquake. The reign of these kings extended over a period of more than four decades. The exact dates for Uzziah and Jeroboam II vary some two to seven years depending on the source consulted. Concerning the reference to “the earthquake,” archaeological discoveries at sites like Samaria and Hazor attest such destruction by earthquake, and the mention of the natural disaster in Zechariah (14:5) suggests that the earthquake was long remembered in Israel. Nevertheless, attempts to pinpoint the year in which the quake occurred are highly speculative. Hence, the dating of Amos’s prophetic activity is assigned to the general time period between 760 and 750 B.C.

The biblical records of the reigns of Uzziah (or Azariah) and Jeroboam II are found in 2 Kings 14:7-15:7 and 2 Chronicles 26. This was an era of political and economic stability in the two kingdoms. Israel and Judah managed a peaceful coexistence; territorial borders were expanded through successful military conquest against foreign foes, commercial enterprise and agricultural production flourished. The earliest prophets from Israel and Judah looked beyond the façade of the so-called golden age to the dry rot of social and moral decay in both Israel and Judah. Amos and Isaiah paint similar pictures of “real life” in the divided kingdoms. Contrary to all external appearances, these seers charged that the two kingdoms were “loaded with guilt” (Isa. 1:4) and “ripe” for the judgment of God (Amos 8:1-2; cf. 3:9-15; Isa. 3:13-15; 5:8-30).

Outline of Amos

- |    |  |          |
|----|--|----------|
| 1. | War Oracles against the Nations        | 1:1-2:16 |
|    | a. Oracles against six foreign nations | 1:3-2:3  |
|    | b. Oracles against Judah and Israel    | 2:4-16   |

- |    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 2. | Confirmation of God's judgment on Israel    | 3:1-6:14 |
|    | a. Reasons for God's judgment               | 3:1-4:13 |
|    | b. Laments because of Israel's false hopes  | 5:1-6:14 |
| 3. | Visions and exhortations about Israel's end | 7:1-9:15 |
|    | a. Five visions of God's destruction        | 7:1-9:10 |
|    | b. God's restoration after judgment         | 9:11-15  |

### The Message of Amos

Given the background above and the outline, the prophet's message to Jeroboam II and Israel was that "the end has come for my people" (8:2). The pronouncement of Amos against the false priest Amaziah: "Therefore this is what the LORD says:

Your wife will become a prostitute in the city,  
and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword.  
Your land will be measured and divided up,  
and you yourself will die in a pagan <sup>a</sup> country.

And Israel will certainly go into exile,  
away from their native land'" (7:17) represents a condensed version of the prophet's word of judgment to the whole nation (cf. 7:10-17). This has led many biblical scholars since the early part of the twentieth century to regard the prophet Amos as the messenger of an inescapable and all-inclusive divine punishment. This position is not without criticism as others have rejected what has been described as the construal of the prophet as the messenger of a nation-murdering God, maintaining that Amos's proclamation aimed at repentance rather than the announcement of doom. More recently, the application of sociolinguistic approaches such as rhetorical criticism and speech-act theory has gone some way toward overcoming the aforementioned dichotomy by demonstrating that prophetic judgment oracles, by their very nature, evoke the possibilities of inevitable doom and of mercy invoked by repentance. Amos demonstrates that God hates violence and oppression of the weak, hence all people, Jews and Gentiles will be held accountable for their sins.

### Major Theme

The major theme of Amos is social justice. The prophet condemned Israel for her inability "to do right" (3:10). The book of Amos describes "pure religion" as discipline in speech, aiding orphans and widows in distress, and avoiding "pollution" from the world (1 :26-27).

### 3.2.2. Hosea

#### Background

The book of Hosea is the first of the collection of briefer prophetic writings known as "The Twelve" in Hebrew Bible and "the Minor Prophets" though Amos is believed to have predated Hosea. These books are not called "Minor" because they are less important than the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel) but because their books are much shorter.



Hosea the prophet was the son of Beerī who lived in Israel during the kingdom's "golden age" under Jeroboam II. His name is derived from the Hebrew word meaning "salvation." He was an eighth century B.C. prophet; with the possible exception of Jonah, he was the only writing prophet to live in the northern kingdom.

The superscription provides a clue to the background of Hosea's prophetic ministry. His ministry (755-25 B.C.) began shortly after the time of Amos and continued almost until Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians in 722/21 B.C. Prophet Hosea was born in Israel and married Gomer before the end of the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (1:1-4) – an era commonly referred to as Israel's golden age. The ground for the nation's political and economic expansion had been laid by Jeroboam's father, Jehoash (2 Kings 13:10-13, 25). Although the ministry of Hosea ended before the fall of Israel, his prophecies warned of the approaching destruction of the nation.

The forty-year reign of Jeroboam II as king of Israel was followed by great political and social instability. Hosea lived in the troubled and chaotic times of several coups and counter-coups within a very short time (2 Kings 14-15). Hosea 4:1-3 gives a sense of the deterioration of social, political and community life. The religious situation was equally bad. From the very start of the book, the prophet accuses Israel of turning away from the Lord and going after false gods (1:2). He found the entire leadership of Israel and the people guilty of this apostasy and spiritual degeneration. There was a syncretic religious experience with the elements of worship of Yahweh mixed with elements of worship of Baal. The priests had failed to teach the law (4:6). The kings did not trust the Lord to protect Israel but looked to Assyria and Egypt for help (7:8).

### Outline

I.	Superscription	1:1
II.	Adultery in Israel and Hosea's family	1:2-3:5
	Children of Harlotry	1:2-2:1
	Gomer's Unfaithfulness	2:2-23
	Hosea's Faithfulness	3:1-5
III.	Covenant Lawsuit and Judgment against Israel	4:1-14:9
	Israel's Ignorance and Unfaithfulness	4:1-6:3
	Israel's Judgment	6:4-10:15
	Yahweh's Faithfulness and Love for Israel	11-14

### The Message of Hosea

Hosea's message revolves around Israel's past in which Yahweh had expressed His loving kindness (*hesed*) for Israel by calling them out of Egypt (11:1). The primary imagery of the

book is Hosea's marriage, which symbolized the covenant (marriage) between Yahweh and Israel (2:16). Hosea's ill-fated marriage explains God's agony over Israel's unfaithfulness to their covenant relationship. After describing the tragedy of his own marriage (1-3), Hosea reports on God's divorce case against Israel. His covenant lawsuit contains a series of: a) accusations, b) announcements of punishment, and c) offers of hope. The first two are expected parts of a divorce lawsuit, but God's consistent offer of hope at the end of each section demonstrates His covenant loyalty (*Hesed*) for His sinful people. Hosea identifies Israel's basic problem as its sin in turning away from the Lord. The two most frequently used words in the book are 'return' and 'know'. These words summarize Hosea's message: 'return to the Lord' and 'know the Lord'. This return must be genuine, for God is not interested in superficial, ceremonial repentance (6:1-6). He desires repentance that leads to a life characterized by integrity of heart, mind and action. Unlike Amos, Hosea criticized the idolatrous Baalism of the eighth century (8:4-6). Prostitution was the symbol of that idolatry.

## Major Themes

### a. Hosea's Marriage

Hosea's marriage to Gomer – the prostitute at the command of God has prompted a variety of interpretive opinions among biblical scholars. These views have been summarized under the following headings:

#### 1. Symbolic Marriage

This approach understands the marriage hypothetically as an allegory or prophetic vision, not as a real event in Hebrew history.

#### 2. One literal marriage: Sequential narrative

This approach affirms the historicity of Hosea's marriage to Gomer and views chapters 1 and 3 as two separate events in the prophet's life.

#### 3. One literal marriage: Parallel narrative

This interpretation affirms the historicity of the prophet's marriage but understands 1 and 3 as parallel accounts of the same even or two versions of the same even written at different times in the prophet's ministry.

#### 4. Two literal marriages

According to this view, chapter 1 describes Hosea's first marriage to chaste Gomer and chapter 3 recounts a second marriage to a "prostituting" woman of unknown identity.

The most acceptable interpretation is the prophet's one literal marriage to a "prostituting" woman named Gomer (with chapter 1 and 3 treating two separate events in the prophet's life).

### b. Baalism

God's controversy with Israel was rooted in the syncretic religious ideologies of Canaanite Baalism and Hebrew Yahwism (Hosea 4:4). The god Baal was one of a pantheon of deities worshiped by the Canaanites. Baal – the son of El and Asherah was known as the rain and storm god whose chief concerns were agricultural fertility and sexual reproduction among animals and human beings. Mot another Canaanite deity for sterility and death was Baal's eternal rival. According to Canaanite mythology, the seasons of rain and plenty and drought and famine were the consequence of the perpetual conflict between Baal and Mot. Hosea's experience with his faithless wife Gomer, directly paralleled Yahweh's relationship with a people who left their God to play the "harlot" with Baal (4:10, 12, 15, 17; 15:3-4; among others). This figurative use of the terms 'harlotry' and 'prostitution' for religious apostasy is common in both the Pentateuch and the Prophets (e.g. Exo. 34:14-16; Num. 25:1; Jer. 3:2; Ezek. 16).

### 3.2. Self-Assessment Questions

1. What kinds of social and religious conditions in Israel prompted Amos' prophetic ministry?
2. Discuss the main themes of Hosea.

### 3.3. Isaiah

Little is known about the prophet Isaiah, except that he lived during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, who were the kings of Judah between roughly 767 B.C. and 687 B.C. (1:1). His writing ability (8:1), his knowledge of other books of the OT, his interest in the politics of his country (30-31) and his access to the monarchs (7:3; 38:5) suggest that he was a well-educated and influential person living in Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. Isaiah's earliest prophecies are believed to have been given near the end of the reign of Uzziah (ca. 750 B.C.) and stretches to the beginning of Manasseh's kingship with that of Hezekiah (ca. 690 B.C.), paralleling most of Micah's ministry. Many scholars view Isaiah as the prophet par excellence of the classical era of prophecy. Along with Amos, Hosea and Micah, he was a bright star in the prophetic constellation of the eighth century B.C. who soared like an eagle in his literary and theological distinction. More than other his contemporaries, he fully comprehended the gravity of the Assyrian threat and its implications for the immediate present and remote future.

There are controversies surrounding the date, unity and authorship of the book of Isaiah. While some have maintained the traditional single authorship, others have insisted on at least two different authors of the book, separated from one another by at least 150 years. Typically, reference is made to a hypothetical "deuteron-Isaiah" and often an additional "trito-Isaiah" as the unidentified individuals credited with writing chapters 40-66 in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. Scholars who support of multiple authorship base their argument on the shift occurring at chapter 40 - the style becomes more poetic and theoretical, the tone becomes conciliatory rather than condemning and an exilic audience rather than the Judah of eighth century B.C.

Nevertheless, for those who do not view the statements of Jesus Christ as literary references, but as affirmations of authorship, the New Testament would require that Isaiah be considered the prophet who delivered these oracles to Israel, for his identified at least as their source. That does not necessarily mean that he wrote them down, but it does register that what was written represents faithfully what Isaiah said. If the book of 2 Kings used the book of Isaiah as a source, it means that the book must have been written down fairly soon after Isaiah died. Thus, some scholars remain unconvinced that the book of Isaiah must be divided among several authors.

## Background

The book of Isaiah took its setting in the background of the second half of the eighth century B.C. It should be recalled that this is during the resurgence of the Assyrian as the first world power known in history. Assyria had imposed a ruinous tribute on the northern and southern Israel. The two nations were tempted to revolt and form coalitions with Syria or Egypt. During Hezekiah's reign, the northern kingdom was completely destroyed by the Assyrians, who then invaded Judah and Jerusalem narrowly escaped capture (2 Kgs. 18-19). The religious situation was equally confused. The fear and political uncertainty from the Assyrian influence made the nation to turn to the gods of surrounding nations (2 Chr. 28:22-24). Yahweh was often thought of as just one god among many. It was in this context that Isaiah denounced the moral and religious corruption of the people and announced God's judgment on the nations. But he also announced salvation for those who remained faithful to the Lord and for those who repented, as well as the future restoration of Jerusalem.

## Outline

1. Introduction	1-6
i. Overture	1-5
ii. Commissioning	6
2. The Assyrian Context	7-39
i. Oracles at the Time of Syro-Ephraimite Coalition	7-12
ii. Oracles Against Nations	13-23
iii. Apocalyptic Conclusion to Oracles Against the Nations	24-27
iv. "Woe" Oracles at the Time of the Siege of Jerusalem	28-33
v. Apocalyptic Conclusion of "Woe" Oracles	34-35
vi. Resolution of the Assyrian Crisis	38-37
vii. Transition to Babylonian Crisis	38-39
3. Projected Oracles Addressing Exiles	40-55
i. The incomparable God will bring salvation	40-48
ii. The suffering Servant will bring deliverance	49-55
4. Oracles of restoration and judgment	56-66

## Message

The material of the book of Isaiah is arranged to emphasize the faithfulness of Yahweh, the covenant God. This is clearly expressed in the contrast between the actions of the two kings Ahaz and Hezekiah. The former did not trust Yahweh, but sent for the Assyrians to aid him in time of political crisis (against the advice of Isaiah). This move only resulted in replacing crisis with another. For the latter, though Hezekiah initially counted on Egypt's help, depended on Yahweh and was delivered in a mighty way. This way, Hezekiah became a convincing example of how God in his sovereignty can bring deliverance – an important lesson for the exiles who were encouraged to respond to their crisis with trust.

## Major Themes

### a. Names as Signs

Chapters 7-9 present four sons whose names were given to highlight God's short-term and long-range agendas for Israel. The names are:

- i. Shear-Jashub ("a remnant will return" 7:3) and Maher-shalal-Hash-Baz ("quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil" 8:1-3) – Isaiah's children.
- ii. Immanuel ("God with us" 7:14; 8:8.10).
- iii. The child identified in 9:6.

### b. The Servant

Four sections in the book speak of a Servant who would be instrumental in fulfilling God's plans for Israel and are designated as "Servant Songs." The sections include: 42:1-7; 49:1-9; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12; in addition, 61:1-3 shows some similarity to the Servant songs, although the designation "servant" is not used. Israel is at times referred to as God's servant in the book (e.g. 41:8; 44:1) and Cyrus plays an instrumental role in God's program of deliverance; nevertheless, the description of the Servant in the songs goes far beyond what could be said of either of them. The function described for the Servant is strikingly parallel to the function ascribed to the future, ideal Davidic king elsewhere in the book (cf. chap. 11 and 55:3-5). This is further confirmed by the New Testament uses and common interpretation of these passages. The Servant no doubt, is not called "Messiah" by Isaiah, the function and accomplishments attached to him lead many to that conclusion.

### c. The Holy One of Israel

"The Holy One of Israel" is a title used almost exclusively for God by prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament. In addition to Isaiah's emphasis on the holiness of God, this title also reflects the book's concern over the seriousness of Israel's sins against that God.

### d. Redeemer

Redeemer is another attribute of God emphasized in the book of Isaiah. This title for Yahweh is used only four times elsewhere but more than a dozen times in Isaiah (see 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16). The verb is used another nine times as an action carried out by Yahweh (see 43:1; 44:22-23; 48:20; 51:10; 52:3, 9; 62: 12; 63:9). Again the focus is the sovereign grace of God.

### e. Eschatology

Eschatology – the study of the last things is said to be one of the themes of Isaiah because of the book’s emphasis on the future kingdom of Israel. It is depicted as a kingdom centred in Jerusalem. Peace and prosperity will abound, and the entire world will come to Jerusalem and marvel and be taught. Proper worship and the centrality of the law are significant characteristics of this kingdom.

### 3.3. Self-Assessment Question

i. From the major themes of Isaiah, discuss the relevance of Isaiah’s message to his primary and contemporary audience.

### 3.4. Micah

Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah and the last of the four famous prophets from the eighth century B.C. He was from Moresheth-gath, a Judean city near the old Philistine stronghold of Lachish. He proclaimed most of his prophetic messages in the capital city of Jerusalem. His ministry began before the fall of Samaria in 722/21 B.C. and received new messages from God until the early years of Manasseh. Micah is one of the few prophets who are referred to specifically in another prophetic book. For instance, when Jeremiah was threatened with death for his prophecies of doom against Jerusalem, he was spared by elders who reminded the people that Micah had prophesied the same more than one hundred years earlier (Jer. 26:18-19). This gives a clue to Micah’s popularity as a prophet of God.

### Background

Micah preached during the crisis period of the Assyrian empire; In fact, Assyrian’s rise to power is described in chapter 3. He witnessed the events that brought about the destruction and deportation of the northern kingdom of Israel. There are various dating given to the prophetic activities of Micah this is due to the difficulty associated with assigning them precisely to one incident of another. There were several major invasions of Judah by the Assyrians during Micah’s lifetime, and any of them could have served as the backdrop for some of his prophetic proclamations. The most threatening of these was the campaign of Sennacherib that culminated in a siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. and is viewed as providing the historical setting for many of Micah’s prophecies. In the Sennacherib’s campaign, many cities of Judah were besieged and destroyed – mostly notably, Lachish (see 1:13). Recall from above that the great military success of King Uzziah (or Azariah) in the first half of the eighth century had blossomed into a period of economic boom – for some. The economic prosperity brought with it the development of a merchant class in Israel and divisions in society that had not previously existed. The poor class of the society often found itself at the mercy of the merchants who seemed to enjoy the support of the monarchy. Equity in the market-place became an exception instead of a rule. Against this social backdrop, God sent Micah with a message of denouncement of injustice and false religiosity.

## Outline

The message of Micah can be divided into three major sections. Each section begins with warnings of judgment and ends with a message of salvation and hope.

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| 1. God will come with great power        | 1:1-2:13 |
| i. He will judge Israel and Judah        | 1:1-16   |
| ii. Reasons for God's judgment           | 2:1-11   |
| iii. God will gather a remnant           | 2:12-13  |
| 2. New leadership will come to Jerusalem | 3:1-5:15 |
| i. God will remove evil leaders          | 3:1-12   |
| ii. Zion will have a new leader          | 4:1-5:15 |
| 3. The people must come to God           | 6:1-7:20 |
| i. Covenant lawsuit against Judah        | 6:1-16   |
| ii. Hope for the nation                  | 7:1-20   |

## Message

Prophet Micah is one of the few prophets who explicitly stated their purpose: "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin" (3:8). This purpose is well reflected in the large proportion of indictment and judgment oracles in the book. He focused his message on the leadership level of the society. They were responsible for injustice and had an invented sense of good and evil (2:1-2; 3:1-3, 9-11; 6:10-11). The result was that they would suffer destruction and exile. Observe, the five judgment oracles took five different directions:

1. Destruction of cult places and objects, using cosmic terms (1:3-7; 3:12)
2. Political devastation, including overthrow of cities and sending their inhabitants into exile (1:10-16).
3. Personal judgment against specific offenders (2:3-5).
4. Spiritual judgment, depriving the prophets of revelation (3:6-7).
5. Socioeconomic judgment, affecting the fertility of the land (6:13-16).

There are also a number of sections offering hope and deliverance to at least a remnant of the people. These appear to project both short-term deliverance from the Assyrians (2:12-13; 5:2-9) and restoration for the nation in the indefinite future (4:1-5; 7:8-20), although time designations, as has been noted, are not clear.

## Major Themes

### a. The Deliverer

Micah refers to royal deliverers in two places who will serve as the Lord's instruments that will save Israel from her enemies. The king is depicted in 2:13 as leading the people as they "break out of" the enclosure. In spite of the severe judgment, God would not reject the righteous remnant of Judah. One day he would gather them together; their king would lead them to freedom (2:12, 13).

In 5:2-9, a new and powerful ruler would be born in Bethlehem. Notice that the pre-exilic prophets did not use the term *Messiah* to refer to the future, ideal Davidic king, so such a person must be recognized by function rather than title. His message about a deliverer was clear. The Lord intended to provide one after the necessary judgment was complete. Observe the obscurity of the deliverer's identity and the timing of his appearance in the text. As history progressed, the New Testament authors offered new insight into the significance of Micah's prophecy. They did not hesitate to see Jesus, born in Bethlehem, as "the new David" who was anticipated by Micah and the other prophets. This insight offered fresh understanding of the Lord as a God of deliverance.

b. What Does The Lord Require?

This question is drawn from perhaps the best-known verse in the book of Micah – 6:8

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.

Reading the text within its context, Israelites were questioning how the Lord could be appeased from the anger aroused by their offenses (6:6-7). The text indicates what Micah's audience needed to do to get back on the right track in their relationship to the Lord. The message is clear – obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22).

### 3.4. Self-Assessment Question

Discuss the major contribution of Micah to the pre-exilic prophetic ministry.

## 4. Conclusion

From the discussion so far, it is clear that the eighth century B.C. was indeed a turbulent period of Israel's history. This was a time of Assyrian resurgence following almost half a century of weakness in her politics. It has been observed that Assyrian weakness had led the two kingdoms of Israel to a period of economic boom. However, the century-long Jehu dynasty in Israel ended within a year of the death of Jeroboam II and a time of insecurity set in. In Judah the long-term reign of Uzziah terminated a decade after Jeroboam's passing, and although the Davidic dynasty in the south gave a greater sense of stability to Judah than Israel enjoyed, the spiritual and social problems in Judah were similar to Israel's. The prophecies of Isaiah in particular and that of Hosea and Micah more generally reflect the five Assyrian invasions of Syria-Palestine. The third invasions saw the fall of Samaria in about 722 B.C. while Judah survived the last



campaign of Sennacherib against Hezekiah in 701 (Isa. 36-37; 2 Kgs. 18:13-19:37; Mic 4:6-13) because of his trust in God. Yet, the Assyrian's influence was sustained for almost a century longer.

## 5. Summary

This unit has been focused on the earliest prophets (eighth century B.C.) of the pre-exilic period of Israel's history. Five prophets belong to this period namely: Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah; though Jonah is not viewed by some scholars to be among them. The next unit will be focused on the prophets of the late pre-exilic period – the seventh century B.C.

## 6.0. Tutor Marked Assignments

1. Discuss the major contribution of Micah to the pre-exilic prophetic ministry.
2. From the major themes of Isaiah, discuss the relevance of Isaiah's message to his primary and contemporary audience.
3. What kinds of social and religious conditions in Israel prompted Amos' prophetic ministry?
4. Discuss the main themes of Hosea.
5. Justify the inclusion of the Book of Jonah among the eighth century B.C. prophetic books.

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**MODULE 2: THE LITERARY/CLASSICAL PROPHETS****Unit 2: Late Pre-Exilic/Seventh-Century Prophets****Contents****1.0 Introduction****2.0 Objective****3.0 Main Body**

## 3.1 Nahum

## 3.2 Habakkuk

## 3.3 Jeremiah

## 3.4 Zephaniah

## 3.5 Joel

**4.0 Conclusion****5.0 Summary****6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments****7.0 References / Future Reading****1. Introduction**

More “writing” prophets arose during the seventh century B.C. in the history of Israel: Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Jeremiah and Zephaniah. The 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was a period of storm and stress when the doom of entire nations – including Judah itself – was being sealed. Assyria had already destroyed Samaria (722-721 B.C.), resulting in the exile of the northern kingdom of Israel and posed a current threat to Judah. It should be recalled that Assyria was brutally cruel, her kings often being depicted as gloating over the gruesome punishments inflicted on conquered peoples. One of their strategies of domination was uprooting whole populations as and deporting them to other parts of their empire. The leaders of conquered cities were tortured and horribly mutilated before being executed (see Nahum 3:3). Generally, the smaller states of western Asia were often pawns in the power plays of such imperial giants as Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. Ashurbanipal, last of the great Assyrian rulers, died in 627. His successors were no match for Nabopolassar, the founder of the Neo-Babylonian Empire,

who began his rule in 626. Soon after Assyria's capital city fell under the onslaught of a coalition of Babylonians and Medes in 612, Egypt marched northward in an attempt to rescue Assyria, which was near destruction. King Josiah of Judah made a fatal decision to stop Egyptian advance and met his death at near Megiddo in 609 at the hands of Pharaoh Neco II (2 Chron. 35:20-24). Josiah's son Jehoahaz (also known as Shallum, 22:10b-12) ruled briefly and was imprisoned by Neco who replaced him by Eliakim (another Josiah's son) and renamed him Jehoiakim. Jehoahaz's who ruled for scanty three months was remarkable for a turning point in the royal court's attitude toward Jeremiah (36:1ff). This section is concerned with the ministry of these prophets to their primary audience and their relevance to contemporary readers.

## 2. Objective

**At the end of this unit, you should be able to:**

- Mention the seventh century prophets.
- Explain the historical background of the seventh century prophets
- Appreciate the writings of the seventh century prophets
- Discuss the message of the seventh century prophets
- Assess the relevance of the seventh century prophets to contemporary readers

## 3. Main Body

### 3.1. Nahum

The author of the book is introduced in the first verse and describes the content as a vision. The vision Nahum saw concerned the judgment of the great city of Nineveh. The superscription does not contain any chronological information hence the dating is based on internal evidences. The strongest internal evidence is the fall of Nineveh which is believed to have taken place around 612 B.C, makes it logical to place the dating of the book of Nahum at a time before it.

It should be recalled that Prophet Jonah went to the city of Nineveh - the capital of Assyria to proclaim a judgment oracle against her around the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The people of Nineveh responded with repentance and God spared them; but before long they went back to their old ways. Later, the Assyrians oppressed Judah and many other countries. Many righteous people began to wonder if God would ever destroy the Assyrians as Isaiah prophesied (Isa. 10:5-34). By this vision, God revealed to Nahum that He still was an all-powerful God who executes judgment against evil and is good to those who trust in Him. It is believed that these prophecies encouraged Josiah not to submit to the Assyrian but to move forward with his political and religious reforms.

**Outline**

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| a. Introductory Psalm (God's wrath and goodness)       | 1:1-8   |
| b. God's wrath on Nineveh and the deliverance of Judah | 1:9-2:2 |
| c. The siege of Nineveh                                | 2:3-13  |
| d. Reasons for Nineveh's inevitable doom               | 3:1-19  |

**The Message**

Nahum proclaims the impending judgment of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria – an empire that was renowned for the ruthlessness and cruelty of its conquests. The prophet began his prophecy with a poem that reminded his audience of God's wrath, His power and His goodness (1:1-8). They had repented at the preaching of Jonah and God restrained His wrath. Soon they resumed their evil and arrogant ways. Nahum's prophecy concerning Nineveh shows God's anger at those great powers that oppress the weak. This message brought comfort to Judah, who had seen her sister nation – Israel deported by the Assyrians (2 Kgs 17:3-6) and had herself been attacked by them (2 Kgs 17:14-19).

**3.1. Self-Assessment Question**

Discuss the impact of Nahum's message on the people of Judah

**3.2. Habakkuk****Authorship and Date**

Not much is known about Habakkuk except the he was a contemporary of Jeremiah and a man of vigorous faith rooted deeply in the religious traditions of Israel. His prediction of the coming Babylonian invasion (1:6) suggests that Habakkuk lived in Judah toward the close of Josiah's reign (640-609 B.C.) or at the beginning of Jehoiakim's (609-598). Biblical scholarship generally dates Habakkuk's prophecy a little before or after the battle of Carchemish (605), when Egypt was defeated by the Babylonians (Jer. 46). It is highly probable that Habakkuk, like Jeremiah, lived to see the initial fulfilment of his prophecy when Jerusalem was attacked by the Babylonians in 597 B.C.

**Outline**

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| i. Title  | 1:1      |
| ii. Habakkuk's First Complaint:<br>Why does the evil in Judah go unpunished?  | 1:2-4    |
| iii. God's Answer: The Babylonians will punish Judah  | 1:5-11   |
| iv. Habakkuk's Second Complaint:<br>How can a just God use wicked Babylon to punish a people<br>more righteous than themselves? | 1:12-2:1 |

- |     |   |                       |
|-----|---|-----------------------|
| v.  | God's Answer: Babylon will be punished, and faith will be rewarded                                      | 2:2-20                |
| vi. | Habakkuk's Prayer:<br>Manifestations of God's wrath and mercy<br><br>Confession of Trust and joy in God | 3:1-16<br><br>3:17-19 |

### Message

Habakkuk contains a dialogue between the prophet and God as seen above and that marks it out among other prophetic writings. In the first two chapters the prophet argues with God over His ways that appear to him irrational, if not unjust. Being satisfied with God's replies, he responded with a beautiful confession of faith in the last chapter.

This account of wrestling with God shows that Habakkuk was perplexed at the prevalence of wickedness, strife and oppression in Judah but God seemingly did nothing. Habakkuk's perplexity increased when he learnt that God was preparing to do something about it through the "ruthless" Babylonians (1:6): How could God, who is "too pure to look on evil" (1:13), appoint such a nation "to execute judgment" (1:12) on a people more righteous than themselves (1:13)? However, the Lord makes clear that eventually the corrupt destroyer will itself be destroyed. At the end, the prophet learns to rest in God's appointments and await his working in a spirit of worship.

### Major Theme

#### **The Righteous (Just) will live by his faith (2:1-4)**

Until the day God avenges the Babylonians and restores Jerusalem, the righteous live by faith, waiting with confidence for the fulfilment of God's unfailing promise the wicked will be punished (2:5-19) and His legitimate claim to the whole world will be universally acknowledged (3:1-16). This is no doubt the message of Habakkuk – and in that perspective on history, the righteous rejoice in the Lord (3:17-19).

#### **3.2. Self-Assessment Question**

Discuss the relevance of Habakkuk's major theme to contemporary believers in God

#### **3.3. Jeremiah**

The book preserves an account of the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah, whose personal life and struggles are known in greater depth and detail than those of any other Old Testament prophet. His prophetic ministry is believed to have spanned between 626 and 586 B.C. Jeremiah was a priest, a member of the household of Hilkiyah. His hometown was Anathoth (1:1), so he may have been a descendant of Abiatha (1 kgs 2:26) who was a priest during the days of King Solomon. God instructed Jeremiah not to marry and raise children because the imminent divine judgment on Judah would sweep away the next generation (16:1-4). He is commonly known as a prophet of doom, as such, he attracted only a few friends, among who

were Ahikam (26:24), Gedaliah (Ahikam's son, 39:14) and Ebed-Melech (38:7-13; 39:15-18). Baruch was the closest companion and loyal secretary, who wrote down Jeremiah's word (36:4-32). The prophet advised Baruch not to succumb to the temptations of ambition but to be content with his lot. He equally received from a deed of purchase from Jeremiah and deposited same for safe keeping (32:11-16) and accompanied him on exile in Egypt (43:6-7). Some biblical scholars are of the opinion that Baruch was also responsible for the final compilation of the book of Jeremiah because no event captured in chs 1 – 51 occurred after 580 B.C. (note that ch. 52 is generally viewed as an appendix added by a later redactor).

### Outline

i.	Call of the Prophet	1.
ii.	Warnings and Exhortations to Judah	2-35
	a. Earliest Discourses	2-6
	b. Temple Message	7-10
	c. Covenant and Conspiracy	11-13
	d. Messages concerning the Drought	14-15
	e. Disaster and Comfort	16:1-17:18
	f. Command to Keep the Sabbath Holy	17:19-27
	g. Lessons from the Potter	18-20
	h. Condemnation of Kings, Prophets and People	21-24
	i. Foretelling the Babylonian Exile	25-29
	j. Promises of Restoration	30-33
	k. Historical Appendix	34-35
iii.	Sufferings and Persecutions of the Prophet	36-38
	a. Burning Jeremiah's Scroll	36
	b. Imprisoning Jeremiah	37-38
iv.	The Fall of Jerusalem and Its Aftermath	39-45
	a. The Fall of Judah	39
	b. Accession and Assassination of Gedaliah	40:1-41:15
	c. Migration to Egypt	41:16-43:13
	d. Prophecy against the People in Egypt	44
	e. Historical Appendix: Promise to Baruch	45
v.	Judgment against the Nations	46-51
	a. Against Egypt	46
	b. Against Philistia	47
	c. Against Moab	48
	d. Against Ammon	49:1-6
	e. Against Edom	49:7-22
	f. Against Damascus	49:23-27
	g. Against Kedar and Hazor (Arabia)	49:28-33
	h. Against Elam	49:34-39
	i. Against Babylon	50-51

## Message

The outline of the book of Jeremiah shows that judgment, especially the final curse of exile, is the dominant theme of the Prophet. Jeremiah condemns the nation's worship of idol (11:13; 19:13), pride (13:9) and failure to keep the Sabbath (17:19-27); but his major complaint is against Jerusalem's unjust social, political and economic system. Above all, judgement is one of the all-pervasive themes in Jeremiah's writings, though he was careful to point out that repentance, if sincere, would postpone the inevitable.

The prophet pictures Yahweh fighting against the city in a great battle in which the enemy invades from the north, the weakest point in Jerusalem's defences (4:5-7). As a symbol of Jerusalem's imminent subjugation to the Babylonians, Jeremiah binds himself in the wooden yoke bars of an ox (28). Prophet Hananiah, however, convinced of the sacredness of Israel's covenants, takes the yoke bars from Jeremiah's neck, breaks them into pieces and declares that Yahweh will break the yoke of Babylon within two years. Jeremiah leaves, but later confronts Hananiah and denounces him, for being a faker but for being a lying prophet that God has sent to seduce the rebellious people into a false confidence. He later responds that the Babylonian yoke will not be of wood but of iron (28).

The prophet's theology conceived of God as the Creator of all that exists (10:12-16; 51:15-19), as all-powerful (32:27; 48:15; 51:57), as everywhere present (23:24). Jeremiah ascribes the most elevated attributes to Yahweh whom he serves (32:17-25), presenting Him as the Lord not only of Judah but also of the nations (5:15; 18:7-10; 25:17-28; 46-51). While God's judgment of Judah and the nations would be terrible, His mercy and covenant faithfulness would triumph over wrath. Beyond the judgment would come restoration and renewal.

### 3.3. Self-Assessment Question

Describe Jeremiah's idea of God

## 3.4. Zephaniah

### Authorship and Date

The superscription announces the prophet's ancestry which is traced through several generations back to "Hezekiah" (1:1); suggesting that Zephaniah was probably related to the royal line. His utterances show a much greater familiarity with court circles and current political issues unlike prophet Micah who dealt carefully and sympathetically with the problems of the common people of Judah. The prophet may have been familiar with the writings of such prominent eighth-century prophets like Isaiah and Amos, whose utterances he reflects, and he may also have been aware of the ministry of prophet Jeremiah (see Isa. 2:11, 17, 20; Joel 1:15; 2:2; Amos 5:18; 8:9). Having prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.) qualifies him as a contemporary of Jeremiah, Nahum and perhaps Habakkuk. Zephaniah's prophecy is situated at early date in Josiah's reign.

## Outline

i.	Introduction	1:1-3
a.	Title: The Prophet's Identity	1:1
b.	Prologue: Double Announcement of Total Judgment	1:2-3
ii.	The Day of the Lord Coming on Judah and the Nations	1:4-18
a.	Judgment on the Idolaters in Judah	1:4-9
b.	Wailing throughout Jerusalem	1:10-13
c.	The Inescapable Day of the Lord's Wrath	1:14-18
iii.	God's Judgment on the Nations	2:1-3:8
a.	Call to Repentance	2:1-3
b.	Judgment on Philistia	2:4-7
c.	Judgment on Moab and Ammon	2:8-11
d.	Judgment on Cush	2:12
e.	Judgment on Assyria	2:13-15
f.	Judgment on Jerusalem	3:1-5
g.	Jerusalem's Refusal to Repent	3:3:6-8
iv.	Redemption of the Remnant	3:9-20
a.	The Nations Purified, the Remnant Restored, Jerusalem Purged	3:9-13
b.	Rejoicing in the City	3:14-17
c.	The Nation Restored	3:18-20

### Message

The message of the prophet revolves around God's approaching judgment on Judah and the nations. In his judgment against Jerusalem (3:1-7) Zephaniah mentions four groups: princes, judges, prophets and priests. All of these have forsaken their intended function of preserving the society. Instead, they are destroying the society (3:3). They are no longer just, but God is just and will punish them. His last word is restoration for the remnant (3:8-20). The book concludes with a song celebrating God's faithfulness for restoring Israel (3:14-20).

#### 3.4. Self-Assessment Question

Enumerate the four groups mentioned in Zephaniah's prophecy and explain why God's punishment will befall them

#### 3.5 Joel

The only personal information about the prophet Joel is that his father's name is Pethuel; others are inferred. For instance, it can be deduced from his numerous references to Zion (2:1, 15, 23; 3:17) and to Judah and Jerusalem (2:32; 3:1, 6, 8, 17-20) that he came from Judah. It is possible that he was not a priest because he sets himself apart from them (1:13; 2:17). He may not have also been an elder of Israel for he addresses them as a group and calls for their assemblage to avert the terrible Day of the Lord (2:16).

The book of Joel is devoid of allusions to Israelite, Judean, Mesopotamian and/or Egyptian figures that might be used to determine an approximate date for the prophet. The situation is worsened by the fact that the superscription (1:1) contains no chronological data. Theories using some internal evidences have therefore placed it from the ninth to the second centuries



B.C. and many dates in between (see Hill and Walton, 200:473-474). Support for a post-exilic period includes Joel 3:1-2, in which the scattering of the Israelites is treated as an event in the past.

## Background

The historical background of the book of Joel is even more difficult to fix because of the uncertainties surrounding the date of authorship. Going by the post-exilic dating, scholars believe that Joel prophesied shortly before the fall of Jerusalem around 587/86 B.C. People from Judah had been taken into captivity in Babylon in 605 and 597 B.C. (3:1-3), but the temple in Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed (2:16-17). Around 590 B.C., Joel taught that the severe grasshopper plague was a warning from God that the day of the Lord, the final day of Judah, was at hand.

## Outline

- 4. The Current Crisis**
  - a. Description of Current Locust Plague 1:1-12
  - b. Call to Lament the Lost Sacrifices 1:13-14
  - c. “The Day of the Lord” Is Near: Plague as Judgment 1:15-20
- 5. The Coming Escalation of Locust Plague**
  - l.** Description of Escalation of Locust Plague 2:1-11
  - m.** Call to Repentance to Avert Escalation 2:12-17
  - n.** The Day of the Lord Postponed: Renewed Prosperity 2:18-27
- 6. The Future Day of the Lord**
  - a. Description of the Day of the Lord 2:28-32
  - b. Judgment on Nations 3:1-17
  - c. Prosperity of Israel 3:18-20

## Message

Prophet Joel was greatly concerned about “the day of the Lord.” He began by correlating the current locust plague with the inception of the day of the Lord in anticipation that the judgment would get worse. Consequently he called on the people to repent – though indictment is mentioned. The people’s positive response ushered in predictions of the Lord’s favour (2:18-19a). In his treatment of the future day of the Lord, the nations were to be the focus of the Lord’s judgment. For Israel, both judgment and restoration were socioeconomic in nature.

## Major Theme

### The Locust Plague

- v. The belief that the gods showed their anger by bringing a about natural disaster was common in the region of ancient Near East but the issue borders on the need to resolve which deity had sent it, what he/she was anger about, and how

appeasement could be done. In Joel's context, the first question was easy for Israel, but the other two were rarely self-evident. Joel did not a particular offense of the people to the Locust plague instead he viewed it as a warning from God concerning the day of the Lord when, in general, the just will be vindicated and wicked will be punished. He pictured this day of the Lord as a great military invasion, similar to an invasion of grasshoppers (2:1-17). The only hope was for the people to throw themselves on the mercy of the Lord: return to God, weep and fast. God may be patient a little longer and gracious even though the people did not deserve it (2:12-13).

### 3.5. Self-Assessment Question

Assess Joel's view of "the Day of the Lord."

## 4.0. Conclusion

Thus far, it is obvious that the turbulent state in the international politics of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. extended to the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Samaria had already fallen to the Assyrian Empire (722-721 B.C.) and Judah was threatened. It was against this background, Jeremiah who was one of the leading prophets of the era ministered. The lesser known prophecies of Zephaniah and Nahum concentrate respectively upon Jerusalem and Nineveh. Little is known about Habakkuk apart from his personal problem as he considered the development of world events, and his experience of God during that time led to the message that became a means of universal comfort: "... the righteous will live by his faith" (2:4).

## 5.0. Summary

This unit has discussed the late prophets (seventh century B.C.) of the pre-exilic period of Israel's history. Five prophets belong to this period namely: Nahum, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Joel though Joel is not viewed by some scholars to be among them. The next unit will be focused on the prophets of the exilic period – the sixth century B.C.

## 6.0. Tutor Marked Assignments

- a. Discuss the impact of Nahum's message on the people of Judah
- b. Explain the relevance of Habakkuk's major theme to contemporary Christianity.
- c. Describe Jeremiah's idea of God
- d. Enumerate the four groups mentioned in Zephaniah's prophecy and explain why God's punishment will befall them
- e. Assess Joel's view of "the Day of the Lord."

## 7.0. References / Future Reading

Ahiamadu, A.E. *Biblical Hermeneutics – Methods and Tools of Interpreting and Applying the Bible in African – A postcolonial maximalist analysis*. Enugu: SIVC, 2012

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## **MODULE 2: THE LITERARY/CLASSICAL PROPHETS**

### **Unit 3: Exilic/Six-Century Prophets**

#### **Contents**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

#### **2.0 Objective**

#### **3.0 Main Body**

##### 3.1 Ezekiel

##### 3.2 Obadiah

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

#### **5.0 Summary**

#### **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

#### **7.0 References / Future Reading**

### **1.0. Introduction**

These are the prophets of the period of the Babylonian Empire also known as the Exilic prophets whose ministries span between 597-539 B.C. The prophets include Ezekiel (592-572) and Obadiah (585) who served after the deportation of Jehoiachin to Babylon. Ezekiel and Obadiah lived in a time of international turmoil. Assyrian Empire had begun to crumble under the blows of a resurgent Babylon. Recall that in 612 B.C. the great Assyrian city of Nineveh fell to a combined force of Babylonians and Medes. Three years later, Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt marched north to assist the Assyrians and to try to reassert Egypt's influence over Palestine and Syria. At Megiddo, King Josiah of Judah, who attempted to intercept the Egyptians forces, was crushed, losing his life in the battle (2 Kgs. 23:29-30; 2 Chron. 35:20-24). Jehoahaz one of the sons of Josiah succeeded the father and ruled for three months after which Neco installed Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, as his vassal in Jerusalem. In 605 the Babylonians overwhelmed the Egyptian army at Carchemish (see Jer. 46:2), pressed south as far as the Philistine plain. With the elevation of Nebuchadnezzar to the throne of Babylon in the same year, Jehoiakim shifted allegiance to him though he later rebelled.

In response to Jehoiakim's rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar sent a force against Jerusalem, subduing it in 597 B.C., Jehoiachin - of Jehoiakim along with about 10,000 Jews (including Ezekiel) were exiled to Babylon to join those who were deported during Jehoiakim third reign (see 2 Kgs. 24:14; Dan. 1:1). Nebuchadnezzar placed Zedekiah -Jehoiachin's uncle on the throne in Jerusalem, but he too rebelled within five or six years. Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem in 588 and in 586 B.C., the walls were broken and the city plundered. Their oracles are also in the form of judgment (Ezek. 24), repentance and restoration (Ezek. 37).

## 1.2. Objective

**At the end of this unit, you should be able to:**

- Mention the sixth century prophets.
- Explain the historical background of the sixth century prophets
- Appreciate the writings of the sixth century prophets
- Discuss the message of the sixth century prophets
- Assess the relevance of the sixth century prophets to contemporary readers

## 1.3. Main Body

### 3.1 Ezekiel

#### Authorship/Date

The book of Ezekiel reveals that the prophet was among the Jews exiled to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. and there among the exiles he received his call to become a prophet (1:1-3). He was married (24:15-18), lived in a house of his own (3:24; 8:1) and, along with his fellow exiles, had a relatively free existence. He was of the priestly family (1:3) and

therefore was fit to serve as priest; hence he ministered as a priest-prophet to the exiles with his messages having much to do with the Temple (chaps. 8-11; 40-48) and its ceremonies. It is believed that if the writing occurred during the events described, Ezekiel's prophecies were likely recorded between 597 and 570.

### Outline

1. Oracles of Judgment against Israel	1-24
a. Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision	1-3
b. Symbolic Acts Portraying the Siege of Jerusalem	4-5
c. Oracles Explaining Divine Judgment	6-7
d. Vision of the Corrupted Temple	8-11
e. Symbolic Acts Portraying Jerusalem's Exile	12
f. Oracles Explaining Divine Judgment	13-24
2. Oracles of Judgment against the Nations	25-32
a. Against Ammon	25:1-7
b. Against Moab	25:8-11
c. Against Edom	25:12-14
d. Against Philistia	25:15-17
e. Against Tyre	26:1-28:19
f. Against Sidon	28:20-24
g. A Note of Promise for Israel	28:25-16
h. Against Egypt	29-32
3. Oracles of consolation for Israel	33-48
a. The Watchman	33:1-20
b. Jerusalem's Fall Reported and Explained	33:21-33
c. The Lord as the Good Shepherd	34
d. Oracles against Edom	35
e. Consolations for the Mountains of Israel	36:1-15

f. Summary of Ezekiel's Theology	36:16-38
g. Vision of National Restoration	37:
h. The Final Battle	38-39
i. Vision of Renewed Worship	40-48

### Message

Ezekiel's call to prophetic office (1-3) is accompanied by an impressive vision of God and the command to warn his people of impending peril. He employs many symbols, including the performance of dramatic acts, perhaps to seize catch the attention of his audience and also to memorably convey his message. His theme revolves around God's sovereignty. It has been remarked that nowhere in the Bible are God's initiative and control expressed more clearly and pervasively than in the book of Ezekiel. For instance, from the first chapter, which graphically describes the overwhelming invasion of the divine presence into Ezekiel's world, to the last phrase of Ezekiel's vision ("THE LORD IS THERE") the book sounds and echoes God's sovereignty. The resolve of this sovereign God is that He would be known and acknowledged. This is implied by the use of the clause "Then they will know that I am the LORD" about 65 times.

Moreover, God's sovereignty is evident in His mobility. He is not limited to the Temple in Jerusalem. He can respond to the sin of His people by leaving His sanctuary in Israel and graciously condescend to visit His exiled children in Babylon. He does as he pleases either to judge or to be gracious. He allows the total dismemberment of Israel's political and religious life so that her renewed life and his presence with her will be clearly seen as a gift from the Lord of the universe.

### 3.1. Self-Assessment Question

Assess the relevance of Ezekiel's message to ancient Israel

### 3.2 Obadiah

#### Authorship/Date

Obadiah is the shortest book of the Old Testament. Nothing is known about the Prophet apart from the vision he recorded. Scholars differ on the date of his writing due to some uncertainties as to which invasion of Jerusalem is in view since there were several invasions. Nevertheless, considering the Babylonian attacks on Jerusalem (605-586), Obadiah would be a contemporary of Jeremiah.

#### Outline

1. Title and Introduction	1
2. Judgment on Edom	2-14

a. Edom's Destruction Announced	2-7
b. Edom's Destruction Reaffirmed	8-14
3. The Day of the Lord	15-21
a. Judgment on the Nations but Deliverance for Zion	15-18
b. The Lord's Kingdom Established	19-21

### Message

As Nahum prophesied against Assyria in the pre-exilic context, Obadiah prophesied against Edom in the exilic context (v. 1). God's program of salvation seems to go down the drain when Edom prospers and gloats over Jerusalem's defeat. However, Edom's participation in that disaster will bring on God's wrath. She herself will be destroyed, but Mount Zion and Israel will be delivered, and God's kingdom will triumph.

### 3.2. Self-Assessment Question

Discuss the message of Obadiah to his primary audience.

### 4.0. Conclusion

Ezekiel (592-572) and Obadiah (585) both belong to the exilic prophetic ministry. This was the period of Babylonian rule that conquered the Assyrian empire. Babylon eventually subdued Judah leading to her exile in Babylon.

### 5.0. Summary

This unit has discussed the exilic/sixth century prophets of Israel's history. Two prophets – Ezekiel and Obadiah belong to this period. The next unit will be focused on the post-exilic prophets

### 6.0. Tutor Marked Assignments

- List the sixth century prophets.
- How is the theme of sovereignty expressed in Ezekiel.
- Explain the historical background of the sixth century prophets
- Assess the relevance of Obadiah's message to his primary audience

### 7.0. References / Future Reading

Ahiamadu, A.E. *Biblical Hermeneutics – Methods and Tools of Interpreting and Applying the Bible in African – A postcolonial maximalist analysis*. Enugu: SIVC, 2012

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## MODULE 2: THE LITERARY/CLASSICAL PROPHETS

### Unit 4: Post Exilic Prophets

#### Contents

#### 1.0 Introduction

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#### 3.0 Main Body

##### 3.1 Haggai

##### 3.2 Zechariah

##### 3.3 Malachi

#### 4.0 Conclusion

#### 5.0 Summary

#### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

#### 7.0 References / Future Reading

### 1.0. Introduction

After the defeat of the great Babylon, the conqueror - Cyrus king of Persia issued a decree in 538 B.C. allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5).



Following the edict, about 50,000 Jews who were led by Zerubbabel journeyed home and began work on the temple. Two years later (536) they completed the foundation amid great rejoicing (Ezra 3:8-10). The Samaritans and other neighbours became threatened by their success for fear of the political and religious implications of a rebuilt temple in a thriving Jewish state. They started to oppose the project vigorously and managed to halt work until Darius the Great became king of Persia in 522 B.C. (Ezra 5:3-6; 6:6-12). This section will examine the impact of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi - the prophets of this period to the life of Israel.

### 1. Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Enumerate the post-exilic prophets.
- Trace the historical background of the post-exilic prophets
- Explain the writings of the post-exilic prophets
- Assess the message of the post-exilic prophets
- Discuss the relevance of the post-exilic prophets to contemporary readers

### 3. Main Body

#### 3.1. Haggai

##### Authorship and Date

King Cyrus of Persia died in battle in 530 B.C. and succeeded by his dictatorial son Cambyses who also died in 522 B.C. Darius who though ambitious was nobler and was interested in the religions of the empire became king of Persia in 522 B.C. It was in his second year as king of Persia that Haggai and Zechariah began to encourage the returned exiles to rebuild the temple (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14). The messages of Haggai were given during a four-month period in 520 B.C., the second year of king Darius. The first message was delivered on the first day of the sixth month (Aug. 29), the last on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month (Dec. 18). The dates of Haggai's recorded messages are best correlated with those of Zechariah and with other historical event (see Introduction to Zechariah in NIV Study Bible).

##### Outline

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| 1. First Message: The Call to Rebuild the Temple      | 1:1-11  |
| 2. The Response of Zerubbabel and the People          | 1:12-15 |
| 3. Second Message: The Temple to Be Filled with Glory | 2:1-9   |

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| 4. Third Message: A Defiled People Purified and Blessed | 2:10-19 |
| 4. Fourth Message: The Promise to Zerubbabel            | 2:20-23 |

### Message

While it has been remarked that Haggai is the second next shortest book of the Old Testament, its teachings are none the less significant. Prophet Haggai clearly shows the consequences of disobedience (1:6, 11; 2:16-17) and obedience (2:7-9, 19). The people are blessed rather than curse with they give priority to God and His house. Thus, obedience brings the encouragement and strength of the Spirit of God (2:4-5). There is also the presence of Messianic significance as revealed in 2:7 the “desired of all nations.” The coming of the Messiah would fill the rebuilt temple with glory (2:9). Yahweh made Zerubbabel His “signet ring” as a guarantee that the Messiah would come (2:23).

### 3.1. Self-Assessment Question

How is the Messianic motif expressed in the prophecy of Haggai?

### 3.2. Zechariah

#### Authorship and Date

In 520 B.C. two months after the beginning of Haggai’s prophecy, Zechariah’s prophetic ministry began. This was during the postexilic period of Israel’s history and a time of the Jewish restoration from Babylonian captivity. Prophet Zechariah was from a priestly family that returned from Babylon in 538 B.C. (Neh. 12:16). The first eight chapters are believed to have been written between 520 and 518 B.C.; chapters 9-14 may have been written later.

#### Outline

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| Part 1   | 1-8     |
| a. Introduction  | 1:1-6   |
| b. A Series of Eight Night Visions   | 1:7-6:8 |
| c. The Symbolic Crowning of Joshua the High Priest   | 6:9-15  |
| d. The Problem of Fasting and the Promise of the Future  | 7-8     |
| Part 2: Two Prophetic Oracles: The Great Messianic Future and the Full<br>Realization of God’s kingdom | 9-14    |
| a. The first Oracle: The Advent and Rejection of the Messiah   | 9-11    |
| b. The Second Oracle: The Advent and Reception of the Messiah  | 12-14   |

## Message

The message of Zechariah is related to its Messianic as well as its apocalyptic and eschatological motifs. With respect to the Messianic emphasis, the prophet foretold the coming of Christ in lowliness (6:12), his humanity (6:12; 13:7), his rejection and betrayal for 30 pieces of silver (11:12-13), his crucifixion (struck by the sword of the Lord; 13:7), his priesthood (6:13), his kingship (6:13; 9:9; 14:9,16), his coming in glory (14:4), his building of the Lord's temple (6:12-13), his reign (9:10; 14) and his establishment of enduring peace and prosperity (3:10; 9:9-10). Regarding Zechariah's apocalyptic and eschatological emphasis, he foretold the siege of Jerusalem (12:1-3; 14:1-2), the initial victory of the enemies of Judah (14:2), God protection of Jerusalem (14:3-4), the judgment of the nations (12:9; 14:3), the topographical changes in Judah (14:4-5), the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in the Messianic Kingdom age (14:16-19) and the ultimate holiness of Jerusalem and her people (14:20-21).

### 3.2. Self-Assessment Question

Discuss the relevance of the message of Zechariah to the New Testament believers

### 3.3. Malachi

#### Authorship and Date

The authorship is ascribed to Malachi – a name that means “my messenger.” Based on the Hebrew term *mal'aki* which occurs in 3:1 is normally used of a priest or prophet (2:7; Hag. 1:13), some have thought that “Malachi” is only a title which tradition has given the author. The view has been supported by appeal to the Septuagint that translates the term in 1:1 “his messenger” rather than as a proper noun. It should be noted that the issue of name remains uncertain; it is still very likely that Malachi was in fact the author's name.

The similarity between the sins denounced in Nehemiah and those denounced in Malachi suggest that the two leaders were contemporaries. Malachi may have been written after Nehemiah returned to Persia in 433 B.C and was most likely the last prophet of the Old Testament era.

#### Outline

1. Title	1:1
2. Introduction: God's Covenant Love for Israel Affirmed	1:2-5
3. Israel's unfaithfulness Rebuked	1:6-2:16
a. The Unfaithfulness of the Priests	1:6-2:9
b. The Unfaithfulness of the People	2:10-16
4. The Lord's Coming Announced	2:17-4:6

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| a. The Lord will come to Purify the Priests and Judge the<br>People | 2:17-3:5 |
| b. A call to Repentance in View of the Lord's Coming                | 3:6-18   |
| c. The Day of the Lord Announced                                    | 4        |

### Message

By the time of Malachi's prophecy, the Jews who have been allowed to return from exile and have rebuilt the temple; but they were still faced with several discouraging factors. The factors include the following:

- a. Israel's land remained a small province in the backwaters of the Persian empire
- b. The glorious future announced by the prophets was yet to be realized
- c. God was yet to come to the temple (3:1) with majesty and power to exalt his kingdom in the sight of the nations

With these, the Jews of the restored community began to lose hope; doubting the covenant love of God (1:2) and longer trusting his justice (2:17; 3:14).

Therefore, Malachi rebukes their doubt of God's love (1:2-5) and the faithlessness of both the people and their priest (1:6-2:16). He reassures and warns his readers that "the day ('that great and dreadful day of the LORD,' (4:5) is coming" and that "it will burn like a furnace" (4:1). The righteous will rejoice on that day and "... will trample down the wicked" (4:1-3). Hence, "remember the law of my servant Moses" (4:4). Above all, the Lord will send "the prophet Elijah" to call them back to the godly ways of their forefathers (4:5-6).

### 3.3. Self-Assessment Question

- a. Explain the challenges faced by Israel after the rebuilding of the temple.
- b. How are these challenges captured in Malachi's message?

### 4.0. Conclusion

Haggai (520), Zechariah and Malachi belong to the post-exilic prophetic era in Israel's history. This was the period of Persian rule that conquered Babylon the great. It is notable for the challenges associated with the return from the Babylonian exile and the restoration of Israel as predicted by the earlier prophets. These prophets were used by God to bring messages of reassurance to Israelite community.

### 5.0. Summary

This unit has discussed the post-exilic prophets of Israel's history. Three prophets – Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi belong to this period. The discussion will be on module 3 – Old Testament Theology and Wisdom Literature.

### 6.0. Tutor Marked Assignments

- e. List the post-exilic prophets.
- f. How is the theme of Zechariah relevant to New Testament believers?
- g. Explain the historical background of the post-exilic prophets

### 7.0. References / Future Reading

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## MODULE 3: WISDOM LITERATURE AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES

### Unit 1: Issues in Wisdom Literature

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#### **4.0 Conclusion**

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#### **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

#### **7.0 References and Future Readings**

##### **1.0 Introduction**

The Old Testament is a multifaceted and multilayered book and a greater part of it is what is commonly known as Wisdom Literature. The book of Job through to the book of Songs of Solomon are primarily classified under this heading, not as though there are no wisdom in the other parts of the Old Testament. The fact is that the aforementioned section of the Biblical canon illustrates the personal experiences of sages presented in form of songs, dirges, laments, and poems couched in wisdom or pedagogic language.

This unit aims at discussing the concept of Wisdom, the source(s) of Wisdom Literature and the Theology of Wisdom Literature. A hermeneutical consideration of how Wisdom Literature impacts on the Old Testament piety and morality is given with a view to assessing its implications for the believing community in Africa.

##### **2.0 Objectives**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the concept and source(s) of Wisdom Literature, and its relevance in the general understanding of Old Testament theology.
- Discuss the hermeneutical considerations of Wisdom Literature especially in the light of a general understanding of wisdom in African context.

##### **3.0 Main Body**

###### **3.1 The Concept of Wisdom**

Wisdom is generally understood as the right application of knowledge. Moreover, it is regarded as basic to a theological understanding of the twin concepts of Creation and Redemption, and this extends its relevance to both a discussion of the Old and New

Testaments. In specific terms Wisdom is associated with Creation and with Redemption in both Testaments as an illustration of its importance in overall Salvation History. We begin with the place of wisdom in several of the leading presentations of Old Testament theology since the second world war; the different approaches to understanding the theology of the sages by contemporary wisdom scholars, including Biblical Scholars of African descent; etc.

### **The Place of Wisdom in Old Testament Theology:**

While the dominant trend in Old Testament theology has been either to neglect wisdom literature or to consider it to be outside the mainstream of Israelite faith, some scholars have offered important insights into both the theology of the sages and how it relates to the larger biblical theology. We begin with the place of wisdom in several of the leading presentations of Old Testament Theology since the second world war, and then move on to the different approaches to understanding the theology of the sages by contemporary wisdom scholars.

### **The Place of Wisdom in the Theology of the Sages**

According to an Old Testament scholar, Wright the locus of Old Testament Wisdom Literature is Creation, and not history *per se*. He struggled to answer the fundamental question of how to reconcile Wisdom Literature's emphasis on a right relationship to God and to fellow humans with the Old Testament concept of retributive judgment so clearly imbued in both historical and prophetic literature of the Bible.

He traces the Wisdom of the sages so copiously embodied in Wisdom literature to international origin and character. Although this was a constant source of intellectual agitation for Wright, the problem is solved when one understood that Wisdom in the ancient Israelite folklores, legends and literature were never unique. In other words, the distinctive

character of Israelite faith and Wisdom literature is more the result of her predilection for historical preservation of her oracles, but more the result of the preserved oracles of sages in their respective personal encounters with the Highest Deity!

Interestingly, Wright understood creation as both the prologue to history and its eschatological climax in the new heaven and new earth. Creation stands as both the beginning and the end of the divine-human drama, but it has very limited importance for what occurs in between (Gen.3-Rev.20). Wisdom could provide guidance for the moral life, but it did not articulate a distinctive faith centred in the salvific actions of God. In postcolonial critical hermeneutic, we infer that wisdom is at the heart of both creation and redemption, although it is unravelled by a faith that is not based on a moral, but on a spiritual rebirth.

For his part, Gerhard von Rad gives a more important role to creation and wisdom in general Old Testament Theology, but his emphasis continued to be laid on the category of the salvation event. The Old Testament is a book of extensive historical narratives, but only as one comes to the section on Wisdom Literature do one encounter the personal experiences of ancient sages in circumstances and situations in which they by the outworking of divine

wisdom experienced transcendental victory. To von Rad Wisdom in ancient Israelite religion and culture were the products of creeds, chants and songs some of which were extant in the neighbouring ancient Near Eastern communities.

Wisdom is therefore Israel's response to the proclamation of the great acts of Yahweh, embodied in the traditions of faith found in the Hexateuch, Genesis through Joshua. Every reader of von Rad would consider this a very curious remark since he makes no reference to the great events of redemptive history in his writings, but only to creation. Von Rad pursues his analysis of the book of Job in association with the laments of the Psalms as Israel's trials and consolation of individual Israelites. He understands Job in terms of the character's being torn between the caring, righteous, saving God of tradition and the God he experiences as a venomous enemy. The conflicts in Job, as in most of Wisdom Literature is however resolved in theophany in which God turns a "smiling face to his creation". Accordingly, the purpose of the divine answer in the book of Job in particular is to glorify God's justice towards his creatures, and the fact that he is turned towards them to do them good and bless them. In other words theodicy – the justice of God – cannot be understood by humans, it can only be adored!

Finally, in the African context wisdom consists in a careful consideration of what proceeds from one's mouth – words! Thus the birth of a new child or at the demise of a loved one, people gather to make incantations suggesting either negatively what should be avoided in the future world, or positively what the affected soul should embrace in the life to come. The book of Psalms, if it is read and recited at the right time, in the right place and a certain number of times releases a secret power that enables one to deal with adverse situations or to

affirm admirable conditions as the case might be. The imprecatory psalms 5, 6, 28, 35, 37, 54, 55, 89, 109 etc were embraced by indigenous African adherents of the Christian faith as portent tools for dealing with witches and other subterranean forces of evil, and in promoting the good life. According to David T. Adamo:

“The fact is that African Christians, like the Yoruba, do not face the same problems as Western Christians. They need a different hermeneutic that takes into cognizance their cultural traditions and the place of the Bible in the solving of their problems. African Indigenous Christians are not passive receivers of Christianity. They make use of whatever they find useful from Western missionaries and adapt it to suit their world view and needs and in so doing they have made a substantial contribution to the interpretation *and use of wisdom literature*” (italics mine).

### 3.1 Self-Assessment Exercise

Identify and discuss the concept of Wisdom, and the place of Wisdom Literature in the thinking of Sages?

### 3.2 The Source(s) of Wisdom Literature



Wisdom Literature is the genre of literature common in the Ancient Near East. This genre is characterized by sayings of wisdom intended to teach about divinity and about virtue. The key principle of wisdom literature is the techniques of traditional story-telling used. These books also presume to offer insight and wisdom about nature and reality. The genre of mirror-of-princes writings, which has a long history in Islamic and Western renaissance literature, represents a secular cognate to wisdom literature. Within classical antiquity the poetry of the advice of Hesiod, particularly His works and days have been seen as a like genre to ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature.

Moreover, several biblical scholars have noted that some sections of Wisdom literature especially the 30 sayings of the wise in Proverbs 22:17-24:22 contain similarities to the 30 sections of the Egyptian “Wisdom of *Amenemope*” – an instructional piece that is roughly contemporary with the time of Solomon. Similarly, the personification of Wisdom so prominent in Proverbs 1 – 9 (3:15-18; 8:1-36) can be compared with the personification of abstract ideas in both Mesopotamian and Egyptian writings of the second millennium B.C.E. The role of Hezekiah’s men (see Pr 25:1ff) indicates that important sections of Wisdom literature were compiled and edited from 715 to 686 B.C.E. This was a time of spiritual renewal led by the king, who also showed great interest in the writings of David and Asaph (see 2 Chro. 29-30). Perhaps it was also at this time that the sayings of Agur (Pr. 30) and Lemuel (Pr. 30 1-9) and other “sayings of the wise” (Pr. 22:17-24:22; 24:23-34) were added to the Solomonic collections, though it is possible that the task of compilation was not completed until after the reign of Hezekiah.

The Jews sometimes speak of the Old Testament as the Law, Prophets and the Writings. Included within the third division are Psalms, and wisdom materials such as Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. These wisdom books are associated with a class of people called “wise men” or “sages” who are listed with priests and prophets as an important force in Israelite society (cf. Jer. 18:18). Wise men were called on to give advice to kings and to instruct the young. Whereas the priests and prophets dealt more with the religious side of life, wise men were concerned about practical and philosophical matters. Some of their writings, like Proverbs, were optimistic, as they showed the young how to behave in order to live prosperous and happy lives. Other materials such as Job and Ecclesiastes, were more pessimistic as they wrestled with difficult philosophical and theological questions such as the problem of evil and the prosperity of the wicked (see also Ps. 37; 73). Both viewpoints – the optimistic and the pessimistic – are also found in the literature of other nations in the ancient Near East.

It is instructive to note that Proverbs could not be interpreted as prophecy or, its statements about certain effects and results, as promises. For instance, Pr. 10:27 says that the years of the wicked are cut short while the righteous live long and prosperous lives (see Pr. 3:2 etc.) The righteous have abundant food (Pr. 10:3), but the wicked will go hungry (Pr. 13:25). While such verses are generally true, there are enough exceptions to indicate that sometimes, the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. Normally, the righteous and wicked “receive their due on earth”

(Pr.11:31), but at other times reward and punishment lie beyond the grave. Such is the nature of Proverbs that interpreting them as promises or as prophecy misses a vital point!

Hebraic wisdom literature contrasts with the social philosophies developed in Greece that encourage good behaviour for the health of the state, families, or from fear of reprisal. While the wisdom books, particularly Ecclesiastes, note that punishment may follow from poor choices, it is because the laws of goodness and rightness are God's and are ordained by God that they should be followed. While wisdom is represented as the result of human reflection, and thus as the guide in all the affairs of life but predetermination of good remains God's prerogative (in Wisdom of Solomon and in parts of Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus, but not Ecclesiastes)

The wisdom texts emphasize human powers as bestowed directly by God; it is identified with the fear of God (Job 28:28; Pr.1:7; Ecclus 15: 1ff), an extension of which is obedience to the Jewish law (Ecclus 24:23).

In the broad sense, there are seven (7) books in Biblical Wisdom literature: Job (42 chapters), Proverbs (31 chapters); Ecclesiastes or Qoheleth (12 chapters), Sirach or Ecclesiasticus (51 Chapters); Book of Wisdom or Wisdom of Solomon (19 chapters), Psalms (150 chapters), and Song of Songs ( 8 chapters). Five of them, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Psalms and Song of Songs were composed in Hebrew. They can be found in the Hebrew Bible, and in both the Protestant and Catholic Bibles. Sirach and Wisdom were composed in Greek and are found in the Septuagint and Catholic Bibles only. They are generally called the deuterocanonical books of the Catholic canon.

In addition, biblical Wisdom literature are *a-historical and timeless*. In other words, they have little or no concern with history. They are concerned with questions about the role of God in everyday life. This is based on the fact that the Jewish people came to realize that they can only experience God through the daily events of their lives. As a corollary to this point, wisdom literature or tradition can be found in nearly all cultures. Similar materials are found in the literature of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations and in African oral traditions or oral literature (orature). Significantly, they are expressed in aetiologies, proverbs, riddles, songs and wise sayings. Wisdom traditions in all cultures help to keep alive customs and manners of the people and as such they are only transmitted from one generation to the next, firstly orally and later on in written form. They assist the young to imbibe the wisdom of their elders. Wisdom literatures are generally timeless, in the sense that they do not go out of date.

### 3.2 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Mention and discuss the source(s) of Wisdom Literature.

### 3.3 Articulations of the theology of Wisdom literature

Theology here is used to highlight the radical change which wisdom underwent during the post-exilic period. By this time wisdom literature moved from the court to the school. Prov. 1 – 9 is an example of this process. By this time there was no opposition between wisdom and the

fear of the Lord. What this means is that wisdom was compared to the fear of the Lord. Derived from this, fear of the Lord meant obedience to the will of God. By this time also as exemplified in the Book of Proverbs wisdom was identified with the Lord. This notion is conspicuous in most of Wisdom literature.

The distinguishing mark of the theology of wisdom is its expression under the authority of God's will, the experience and advice of sages. Once acquired wisdom is capable of exhibiting a life of its own, such that it replaces the sage as a theological resource. Wisdom also assumed Messianic qualities as we find in sapiential passages such as Isaiah 11:2. It is also seen as a gift of God, eternal and co-existent with God as both Creator (Pr. 8: 14-18; 8:35-36) and as King (Pr.4:7; 8:14-16).

In other words, wisdom is associated with royalty and priesthood at the same time. Wisdom is also embodied in justice and virtue as opposed to injustice and vice. Each of the books of Wisdom literature portrays an aspect of theology that impacts on the study of Biblical Studies generally. Those who do not keep the law lack wisdom and run the risk of divine punishment. On the other hand those who keep the law must desire wisdom and ask for it before they can obtain it. Wisdom is like a very shy maiden who must be cajoled and

cowed into submission through aggressive and persistent quest. Wisdom is also like a Saviour who rescues the young from the snares of loose women, and from death in its various forms. Those who embrace wisdom obtain divine protection, preservation, promotion and prosperity.

Another theological feature of Proverbs is its personification. In this way wisdom is seen as a preacher, as a guide and as a sister, as a hostess at a banquet, as a firstborn of God, his craftsman, playing before him. She existed before creation, and originates from God. At the same time wisdom is represented as a spouse and consort of those who seek her, and is capable of attracting those who love her. Yahweh – the Source of Wisdom – always makes Himself available to all those who daily watch at His gates (Pr. 8:35; 4:22). In the final analysis God rewards the good and punishes the evil. Yahweh is recognized as the First Cause, governing the universe with an outstretched hand and scrupulous eyes. His sanctions on bad conduct is near and telling, as well as his recompense of reward to the good and godly.

### 3.3 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Summarize the various theological components of Wisdom Literature

### 3.4 Dominant Paradigms of Wisdom Literatures

The Jewish community of faith saw Wisdom literature as sacred writings which is also described as “the book of Truth”. Although there are elements of epic, dramatic and lyrical poetry in these five or more compositions, in which profound spiritual truths are enshrined for the edification of humanity. This constitutes a decided development in thought from that which obtained in connection with some of the very early fragments of Hebrew poetry, such as occurred in the Pentateuch. There are several areas in which Hebrew poetry can be compared

or contrasted with African poetry and only a few of such points will suffice for our purpose at this stage.

First of all, ancient Hebrew poetry have a long standing literary history, whereas the writing of African poetry can be said to be a post-colonial experience dating from only the recent past. Secondly, Hebrew poetry have a re-occurring theological theme, whereas African poetry are mainly anthropomorphic at best and at worst animalistic. Third, Hebrew poetry is couched in specific cultic terms and are specially directed to boost the cult of Yahweh, whereas African poetry are couched mostly in domestic terms and expressed in polytheistic language. Finally, where Hebrew poetry are lyrical and rhythmic, African poetry are satirical and insinuating.

Moreover, Hebrew wisdom literature is characterized by certain literary and paradigmatic features including the parallelisms, strophic arrangement and metrical forms as follows:

### **Parallelisms**

Lowth distinguished between three varieties of parallelism as follows:

- (a) Synonymous, in which the second line of a poetic verse repeated the thought expressed in the first line (e.g. Ps.83:14; Isa. 1:3).
- (b) Antithetic, in which two portions of the verse were involved in contrast (e.g. Prov. 1:29); the same idea was sometimes expressed positively first, then negatively (Ps. 90:60).
- (c) Synthetic, in which the sense carried on continuously (e.g. Ps. 1:1f., 2:3). This form is hardly parallelism in the strictest sense, as subsequent critics came to recognize.

Starting from this discovery other later writers began to apply the rhythmic or metrical principles of different varieties of Semitic poetry to Hebrew, but this procedure involved a consideration of syllabics rather than accentuation. Some scholars, following Anton, Meier and Ley made the accent the determining principle of poetic measurement in Hebrew, and this approach gained increasing approval among English-speaking scholars, although there were some who disapproved of the textual emendations in which most German scholars indulged.

The strophic arrangement of Hebrew poetry was emphasized by Koster who built upon the foundations established by Lowth to distinguish different varieties of strophes. Although a number of commentaries were published in which the poetical material of the Hagiographa was dealt with in various ways, the gains were comparatively modest. Briggs cited three additional varieties of parallelism that scholars had come to recognize as a result of studying Hebrew wisdom literature.

### **Metrical Division**

Regarding metrical division, it should be remarked immediately that there is no tradition of meter in the classical Hebrew compositions, and even the Talmud had nothing to say about this particular topic. While Josephus applied the occidental concepts of Classical poetic meter to the writings of the Hebrew in stating that the songs of Moses (Ex. 15:1ff; Deut. 32:1ff) were written in hexameters, he did this only to show his Gentile readers that a specific poetic form underlay certain portions of the Hebrew Scriptures. However, Classical analogies are unfortunately misleading here, since any discernible meter in

Hebrew poetry can only be determined by relationship to the forms of other ancient poetry in which the essential basis of the structure was a balance of thought, and by implication from the parallel lines themselves.

Two reasons may be adduced for the contention that some of the Hebrew poetic compositions exhibited concepts of meter. In the first place, several of the psalms were apparently meant to be sung to the accompaniment of a variety of musical instruments. Furthermore, the fact that the poetry of the ancient Near East and of Egypt pointed to the presence of meter might also support this idea.

### **Strophic Arrangement**

Within the last century a good deal of discussion has centred upon the question as to whether the lines of Hebrew poetry could be grouped in order to form stanzas or strophes. In general it can be said that the majority of the older critics held to the view that the psalms were arranged in regular strophic organization, the nature of which had been obscured to some extent by later liturgical glosses. More recent studies have shown that while such an arrangement is possible, as indicated by the presence of acrostic poetry in the Old Testament, the grouping of distiches or tristichs into larger formal units cannot be demonstrated.

The fact that strophic arrangement in Hebrew wisdom literature was never allowed to interfere with the sequence of thought would imply that the stanza was never basic to the structure of such compositions. This is in contradistinction to modern poetic usage, in which the stanza comprises a group consisting of a specific number of lines marked by a particular rhyming pattern. Even where there might appear to be some kind of strophic division in Hebrew poetic literature, it seems clear that the stanzas followed the logical divisions associated with the thought forms rather than the rhyming-patterns of modern poetic usage. There would thus seem to be no evidence for the kind of rigid, metrically constructed strophes entertained by earlier Old Testament scholars.

We can conclude this section on strophic arrangements in Hebrew wisdom literature by saying that should a strophe be defined in a more fluid fashion as an informal arrangement of lines characterised by certain external indications, it may be possible to speak of strophes. This implies literally that the close of a stanza may be indicated by the presence of a recurring refrain (cf. Psa. 45:5-11; 43:5; 46:7-11), and as Koster pointed out, by the inclusion of *selah* at the end of a line. There has been some doubt expressed as to the validity of *selah* as a criterion for strophic delineation, since the meaning of the term itself is obscure. Generally the word

stands outside the balanced arrangement of the thought-form, and its association with many psalms headed by a supposed musical title has led some scholars to the conclusion that it called for the raising of the voice in praise.

### 3.4 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Explain what Wisdom Literature means, when its various paradigms are brought into consideration

### 3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations

Providing answers to life's most difficult questions – why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer sometimes? are the main focus of Wisdom Literature. This consciousness is not alien to the traditional African. Just as the African has much to learn from the Old Testament and Christianity, it is also true that some insights from the African traditional religion could facilitate a better interpretation of the scriptures in African context. In other words, there are, in Biblical hermeneutics, some theoretical components which enhance the elucidation of the text in a dynamic way. These can be subsumed under three main headings, namely, world-views, context and textual evidence. When the African context is brought into dialogue with the context of ancient Near East in the task of understanding, interpreting and applying wisdom literature through the prism of African cultural or postcolonial hermeneutics, that indeed is wisdom *par excellence*. For example, in Wisdom Literature the concept and sources of wisdom literature, including its theological articulation and the dominant paradigms are all illustrated in the oral traditions of African cultures, but this shall be discussed later.

### 3.6 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Can you explain how a good knowledge of African oral traditions and poetry – both written and oral – could facilitate a good understanding of Wisdom Literature?

## 4.0 Conclusion

The Old Testament is a multifaceted and multi-layered book and a greater part of it is what is commonly known as Wisdom Literature. In specific terms Wisdom is associated with creation and with redemption in both Testaments as an illustration of its importance in overall salvation history. As a corollary to this point, wisdom literature or tradition can be found in nearly all cultures. Similar materials are found in the literature of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations and in African oral traditions. Each of the books of Wisdom literature portrays an aspect of theology that impacts on Biblical Studies generally. Hebrew wisdom literature is characterized by certain literary and paradigmatic features including the parallelisms, strophic arrangement and metrical forms. When the African context is brought into dialogue with the context of ancient Near East in the task of understanding, interpreting and applying wisdom literature through the prism of African cultural or postcolonial hermeneutics, that indeed is wisdom *par excellence*.

### 5.0 Summary

From the fore-going, we have seen that in discussing the components of Wisdom literature insights from our understanding of African cultural or post-colonial hermeneutics goes a long way to facilitating our appreciation of the depths or rigours of Hebrew wisdom literature. As a field of study in which attempts are made to deal with some of life's most difficult questions, it is important to bring the ancient Near Eastern cultures into dialogue with what is known of Wisdom in Africa. This unit having disclosed the nature, components, theology and paradigms of wisdom literature concluded on the note that African concepts of wisdom literature could not be divorced from the wisdom discussed in both the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern world in general.

The next unit will dwell on the Place of Wisdom in Old Testament Theology

### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

Outline and discuss the major components of Wisdom Literature and show the features of Hebrew poetry that distinguishes it from African oral and written poetic literature. How does an understanding of African cultural hermeneutics facilitate our appreciation of wisdom literature in the ancient Near East particularly Israel?

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**MODULE 3: WISDOM LITERATURE AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY:  
ISSUES AND APPROACHES**

**Unit 2: The Place Of Wisdom In Old Testament Theology**

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3.2 The Dialectic of History and Creation

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### 3.4 Hermeneutical Consideration

## 4.0 Conclusion

## 5.0 Summary

## 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

## 7.0 References / Future Reading

## 3.0 Introduction

Wisdom Literature is the personal, experiential, and poetic representation of Old Testament piety, and it has often attempted to answer the age-old question of the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. Putting it mildly, wisdom is a timeless, inherent quality of both Divinity and humanity, putting it at its best; yet it is found only in a few who dares to solicit the personal support of Deity in their daily dealings. This unit examines the relationship of Wisdom to the issue of timelessness and eternity of wisdom discussed under the following headings: Wisdom and the paradigm of history, the dialectic of history and creation, wisdom and canonical theology, and hermeneutical considerations.

## 4.0 Objective

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Understand the biblical concepts of wisdom in the books of Wisdom Literature enunciated in Unit 1.
- See how Christ is both the Wisdom and the Power of God.
- Draws lessons for today through a hermeneutical consideration.

## 5.0 Main Body

### 5.1 Wisdom and the paradigm of History

It is instructive to note that Biblical faith was communicated through the forms of history, and so one has to take history seriously even in consideration of Wisdom and the morals of society as they evolved over a long period of time. In other words, biblical faith affirms in a very triumphant manner the meaning of history. Wisdom demands the main hermeneutical requirement of proclamation and response. The faith community in demonstration of the wisdom and power of God proclaimed and then confessed the acts of God in creation, redemption, salvation especially through an encounter with the Word.

The locus of wisdom literature is however in creation, not history. Creation may have occurred in time with all the wisdom associated with it, but it is primeval and non-datable time. Therefore, as Wright puts it, in any attempt to “outline a discussion of Biblical faith it is the wisdom literature which offers the chief difficulty because it does not fit into any type of faith

exhibited in the historical and prophetic literatures. In it there is no explicit reference to or development of the doctrine of history, election or covenant”.

Biblical scholars are excited by wisdom’s international origin and character, but to some scholars like Wright it is a mind-boggling phenomena. For instance, how could someone searching for the distinctive character of Israelite faith find it in religious and moral views that are common to many ancient Near Eastern cultures? Israel’s distinctiveness was undoubtedly marked by her predilection for history, and this contrasts with the beliefs and values common to the ancient Near Eastern communities that their gods wielded cosmic powers that could astound even the incredulous. Furthermore, wisdom’s epistemological approach to revelation and moral instruction combined the powers of observation of nature and social life with critical reflection on human experience. Yet this approach was not an exclusive Israelite heritage, but one that could also be found in the neighbouring ancient Near Eastern cultures. Apparently, there was no place in wisdom literature for special revelation through either history or law. According to Wright, wisdom articulates a clear view of natural revelation, but it does not set forth a theology of the Word that proclaims and interprets the meaning of history.

However, it is to Gerhard von Rad that we turn when we explore the relevance of wisdom to history in Old Testament theology. He underscored the centrality of an ancient Israelite creed often embedded within a larger narrative context. Again, Israel confessed this “little creed” within a liturgical context of festival. The confession contained the following list of redemptive acts of God: the promise to the fathers, the exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the wilderness, and the gift of the promised land. In fact some of the psalms are devoted entirely to the historical experience of Israel, while no other mention of this is mentioned in the other Wisdom books.

The interesting this is that each interpretive insight into these historical events results in newer interpretations and reformulation of the creed to emphasize rising hopes and promising occurrences in both the individual and national life. It is easy to mix creation with the redemptive acts of God in history. Only when one is able to draw a line between the creative ordinances and the validity and authority of the commandments surrounding the created order, can one be able to distil both the sapiential heritage of the Jew and the innate ability to relate to both mundane or to divine things. Wisdom is a divine gift from God to humans and revealed to them the will and nature of God, though considering God to be mysterious and beyond the limits of human comprehension. While the sages in this first stage recognized that there were imponderables, the spirit exuded in their teachings was one of optimism, untouched by a deep sense of the tragic.

### **3.1 Self-Assessment Question**

- Can you give three reasons why wisdom is described as transcendental to history?

### **3.2 The Dialectic of History and Creation**

In his theological writings, Claus Westermann has given a more significant and constructive place to creation and wisdom than have either Wright or von Rad. Westermann's theological construction consists of two interactive poles; soteriology (salvation) and blessing (creation). His presentation of history follows essentially von Rad in setting forth an ancient historical credo that becomes the basis for the themes or traditions developed in the Exodus-Sinai complex that later join with the covenant of Deuteronomy. Westermann sees the Old Testament as eschatological in its basic movement: The goal of history is the salvation of the world. Within this driving thrust of history, Yahweh saves his chosen people through means of great acts of redemption.

The second pole, blessing, incorporates the divine power that preserves and enhances life and undergirds the continuing order of creation. Divine blessing includes the gift and continuation of the power of procreation, the provision of sustenance, and support for the structures of life. According to Westermann's view of the Old Testament, creation is beyond history, meaning that it does not exist within a temporal movement. While creation is the presupposition of faith, it is not a historical saving act and thus not the object of confession. Creation was not a part of the ancient credo, for the Old Testament could not conceive of an alternative to God's creation of the world. Furthermore, in Westermann's view, creation is not associated with revelation, it does not testify to God.

However, creation theology does seek to secure the present by linking the order of reality to the wellsprings of primal origins. Creation theology embraces universalism; Israel points to God as the creator of humankind and the world. Westermann argued that Israel inherited its understanding of divine creation from the ancient Near East, and, like its sources, developed two separate traditions: the creation of humanity, the older of the two and the creation of the world.

Subsumed under the pole of blessing (creation), Wisdom is given an important place in Westermann's Old Testament theology. Wisdom's gift are maturity, longevity, reproduction, and the general enhancement of life; but these come as a result of divine blessing. God's power of blessing is encapsulated within Wisdom sayings. Like the larger theme of creation, Wisdom is not specifically limited to the chosen people; rather, it is universal in scope. Wisdom and creation share this universalism, for God creates, sustains, and blesses all of life. Wisdom is the power, design, and life-enhancing gift of God that shapes and undergirds reality.

Westermann used this bipartite division of the two traditions of creation (anthropology and cosmology) to speak of the development of Wisdom theology. The early sayings in Proverbs understand humans to be creatures made by God with possibilities and limits that are indigenous to their creatureliness. Humanity is a creature of the earth, gifted with organs of sense to know and perceive. The place of the human creatures is among other creatures, a part of a whole, bound to creation, and blessed by the Creator of the land with nourishment, sustenance, and well-being. This is the older creation. Later wisdom takes up the tradition of the creation of the world with Yahweh through wisdom's establishing, designing, and ordering the cosmos.

### 3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- Discuss the concept of wisdom and creation? What role do humans occupy in the Divine-nature partnership with particular reference to wisdom?

### 3.3 Wisdom and Canon Theology

The following features of the canonical approach to Wisdom theology is extant: First, the primary task of interpretation is to understand the shape and function of canonical books. This means that the task is not to uncover the various layers of tradition that comprise a book, but rather to concentrate on the final form of the book that entered into the canon. Second, the canonical approach takes seriously the community of faith that not only shaped the canonical books, but also was shaped by them. Third by means of “inter-textuality” the interpreter used scripture to interpret scripture, for texts in the canon are meant to be read and understood in reference to each other. And fourth, the canonical shape of Wisdom books, particularly in their poetic rendition actualizes their meaning – a meaning that transcends the limitations of historical time and space to address a Word of God to future generations.

Growing out of these literary features of the canon has been the larger issue of the purpose or meaning of an entire book, like for instance the book of Job. Is the book designed to present Job as a paradigm of the suffering of a righteous man? Or is the book written to undermine the traditional theory of retribution? Is the answer to the problem of suffering found in Job’s religious experience of encounter with Yahweh in the whirlwind speeches, or does it reside in the content of the book? These questions are complicated by the issue of literary integrity.

Taking the book of Proverbs, its long standing interpretive problems can be outlined in a similar way. It includes its literary composition, the question of form and redaction, historical background, and the theology of wisdom. The major theological questions have to do with the extent that divine order serves as a constitutive element in older wisdom, the issue of retribution, the understanding of wisdom in the wisdom poems (Job 28; Pro. 8 and Sirach 24), and, perhaps most problematic, the relation of Israel’s wisdom literature to the rest of the Old Testament theology. What this approach does provide, is perhaps, a clear description of the canonical function of Proverbs for the piety of an ongoing community of faith.

It is in Ecclesiastes that we find, as Brevard Childs have stated, a superscription which identifies the book with the “son of David” (obviously Solomon, reputed as the wisest of the Hebrew monarchs). More than that the book seeks to undergird the assault on wisdom with its most authoritative voice. Moreover, the book carries with it an epilogue which seeks to legitimate the book as authoritative, divine wisdom and not as private fancy, while indicating in the final analysis that all human wisdom and behaviour will come under divine judgment. The epilogue indicates that the book, then, is to serve as a guide for the community’s critical reflection on wisdom. At the same time the epilogue warns that the message of the book, limited to human wisdom and behaviour in the present, is relativized ultimately by the eschatological judgment of God.

Yet in the theology of Wisdom literature, wisdom is indeed the active voice of God, which calls people to true life, established thrones and kingdoms, speaks through the decisions and actions of leaders to rule justly, and witnesses to the Creator. This revelatory voice of God also assumes the providential role of directing human life in the areas of moral behaviour and discourse. “As an essential witness to God’s purpose in his creation, wisdom is built into the very structure of reality, and in this role seeks to guide humanity to the way of truth”. This wisdom is found, not through reason, but through “the fear of God.”

Again, the response of human wisdom to God’s address is not limited to ethics, though certainly this is an important dimension to the divine imperatives. Wisdom’s response is larger, for it encompasses the totality of human experience. Like the Torah, wisdom requires a faithful response in commitment to God and the divine order, to engage in acts of justice, to care for the poor and needy and to regard life as a good gift from God.

### 3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- Describe the major theological questions served by the Divine order. What are the constitutive elements in older wisdom particularly in its impact on the issue of retribution?

### 3.4 Hermeneutical Considerations

Wisdom literature inadvertently personifies the Deity of the Christ, and as part of the experiential, if not the exponential features of the community of faith, it shaped that community and in turn was shaped by that community. In Proverbs, wisdom is an ally of God the Creator (Pr.8:22) and empowers those individuals who possess her (Pr.4, 8). This idea is carried into the New Testament community of faith as the Apostle Paul equates Christ with both Divine wisdom and power (1 Cor. 1:22-25). For instance, although Job is seen as a historical person, his sufferings have semblance to the sufferings of the Christ on the cross, and raises the question of theodicy. Why do the righteous occasionally suffer and the wicked sometimes prosper? Why is it not the other way round as most of Wisdom literature (e.g. Psalms, Proverbs) infers? The answer lies in the fact that a Sovereign God knows what is best for his creatures and the safest way to confer His benefits on them is through their love of Wisdom. Most African readers of the Psalms would wonder why the judgment of God is delayed on the wicked, but find in the other parts of Wisdom literature that the delay is sometimes due to God having appointed a day of destruction for those who persist in wickedness. God’s sovereign power is circumscribed by His Wisdom and Love altogether!

### 3.4 Self Assessment Question

What implication does the sovereignty of God have on wisdom generally?

### 4.0 Conclusion

It has been said that the locus of wisdom literature is in creation, not history. Creation may have occurred in time with all the wisdom associated with it, but it is primeval and non-datable time. Therefore the sapiential heritage of the Jew and the innate ability to relate to both mundane or to divine things inheres in the creative ordinances and the validity and authority of

the commandments surrounding the created order. Wisdom is a divine gift from God to humans and revealed to them the will and nature of God, though considering God to be mysterious and beyond the limits of human comprehension. Wisdom's gift are maturity, longevity, reproduction, and the general enhancement of life; but these come as a result of divine blessing. God's power to bless or curse is encapsulated within His inscrutable wisdom and ineffable love for His creation. Like the larger theme of creation, wisdom is not specifically limited to the chosen people; rather, it is universal in scope. The response of human wisdom to God's address is not limited to ethics, though certainly this is an important dimension to the divine imperatives. Wisdom's response is larger, for it encompasses the totality of human experience. In Proverbs, wisdom is an ally of the God the Creator and empowers her possessors. This idea is carried into the New Testament community of faith as the Apostle Paul equates Christ with both divine Wisdom and Power.

### 5.0 Summary

The above adopted a canonical approach in analysing wisdom and the paradigm of history, in evaluating the dialectic of history and creation, and in assessing the relationship of Wisdom literature to a canonical theology along with a critical identification of the hermeneutical import of the conclusions that scholars may draw from the entire discourse. Wisdom literature amplified the personality and wisdom of God in creation, in history and in redemption. The unit concluded on the crucial note of the typical case of the Christ as a fulfilment of the types of suffering of the righteous that is still a source of bewilderment to analysts of the Divine oracles today, particular on the issue of theodicy.

In the next unit, we shall examine the various approaches to Wisdom Literature within the broader context of Biblical theology, as a further step towards resolving the knotty issue of theodicy.

### 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

Critically examine the issue of the universality of in the ancient Near East and Israel, particularly in its relevance to New Testament times.

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## **MODULE 3: WISDOM LITERATURE AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES**

### **Unit 3: Cosmology and Anthropology in the Testament of Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes).**

#### **Contents**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

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3.1 The Quest for the Good in the Cosmology of Qoheleth.

3.2 Cosmology and the Ethical Order.

3.3 Anthropology and the Ethical Order.

3.4 The Testament of Qoheleth and the Moral Order.

3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

## 5.0 Summary

## 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

## 7.0 References / Future Reading

### 1.0 Introduction

Cosmology refers to the ways a people perceive the world around them, which in turn shapes the way they respond to the demands of the environment around them. In Wisdom Literature cosmology reflects in the unending activities observable in every facet of natural life on sky, land and sea. Qoheleth considers all human activities as utterly meaningless because it all ends in futility with no real satisfaction, as will be found in the “fear God and keep his commandments” theme. Perhaps, the same emptiness could be seen in plants and animals as they blossom and flourish “as leaves on the tree” and then soon “wither and perish”.

On the other hand, anthropology refers to the *modus vivendi* of *homo sapiens*

In Qoheleth, it is rightly observed that even the human mind does not escape the vanity show. Life generally is meaningless and the day of death is better than the day of birth. There is a similarity of lifestyles and life experiences across human communities and the same events take place in all of them. Wisdom and learning makes for healthy outlook on life, but it does not strengthen human resolves any more than wealth and wellbeing increase longevity. The best approach to life is therefore the unrelenting effort to “fear God and keep his commandments” which is the whole duty of humans. Besides God who alone is constant, immutable and immovable, every other object of creation is liable to transient life. Life at its best is very brief and its glories a fading beauty.

### 2.0 Objective

**At the end of this unit, you should be able to:**

- Discuss Cosmology and Anthropology from the perspective of Wisdom Literature.
- Describe the good life and the most congenial ethical order.
- Know what is meant by testament in *Qoheleth* and its moral order
- Appreciate the benefits of knowledge as it relates to both cosmology and anthropology

### 3.0 Main Body

#### 3.1 The Quest for the Good in the Cosmology of *Qoheleth*.

Life under the sun is full of challenges. Consequently, wisdom is an important attribute of those who aspire to the good life. It means that the wise would work at their jobs and relate with their peers in a purposeful and goal-oriented manner. Work has no inherent value unless it gives us enjoyment and the fulfilment we need. There is a cosmology of traditional wisdom



in *Qoheleth*, but it does not provide suitable answers to the questions raised about the good life in human existence. The sage who authored this book could not move from perceptions of the world and extension of what is perceived with creation to shape vital images into compelling articulations of faith and the temporal life. Tradition no longer provided a reservoir for cosmological images of faith, due to both the failure of collective memory and the inability of sapiential teachings, especially those concerning retribution, to withstand the practical engagement of Qoheleth's experience and observation. Further *Qoheleth* could not envision a world of sacred dwelling in which justice and well-being prevailed.

The crisis for *Qoheleth* was both an ethical and a theological one, since he came to assert, because of his own critical reflection on and experience of present existence, that the observable connection between the moral life and cosmology had broken down. Order for this sage assumes the dimensions of rigidity and tyranny, because of the rule and character of a hidden God. The ethical life was no longer one of living in conformity with cosmic order and seeking to establish a sphere of beneficence in which well-being would result. The cosmological rendering of a world of goodness in which moral action led to desirable consequences could no longer sustain itself in an enigmatic and frightening reality unresponsive to human behaviour. When the prevailing cosmology lost its power to convict, the moral system dependent on that world view was replaced by one no longer upheld by divine sanctions and a pervasive justice present in the world, society and human nature. Thus a very different way of looking at human existence in the world needed to emerge. What was called for was a new world view shaped by Qoheleth's own imagination. To find the resources for this human-oriented reality, Qoheleth turns to the anthropological tradition. This tradition is reconceived in this sage's imagination, and central to this preconception is his metaphor of *hebel*, "breath", which literally means meaninglessness in this book.

### 3.1 Self Assessment Question

- Describe the basis for meaninglessness of life in *Qoheleth* (Ecclesiastes). What dimension of wisdom is the author's focus?

### 3.2 Cosmology and the Ethical Order

*Qoheleth* reflects a cosmology or world view that is essentially theocentric and monotheistic. In the first major section of the book (Ecc. 1:12-5:19) king Solomon speaks about human view of life on earth, and with an allusion to the endlessness of human labour, he lists his own accomplishments and the building of great and magnificent structures. He also included the accumulation of wealth, physical pleasures, royal rule, legal decisions, the typical human activities that have their opposites, the success story of coming to the throne, and cultic activities. In every case the king of Israel concludes that each human activity is based on a particular view of the world and that such activities contribute to maintaining a social and economic, even political order but with results that are at best transient and at worst ephemeral. Every action is grounded in the desire to master and perpetuate life, but this

desire cannot be fulfilled. Actions guided by wisdom cannot guarantee success, and success without joy lacks value.

Life is a riddle for which *Qoheleth* attempts to find the key. It is remarkable to note that even Solomon who reigned as Israel's wise monarch could not fully grasp life's meaning, neither could he experience satisfaction in his labours, and could not expect to his remembrances to outlive him. The meaning of life is not to be found in the acquisition of knowledge, money, sensual pleasures, oppression, religious profession, or folly. No human accomplishments guarantees a future remembrance of the dead by the living, Solomon for instance could not be remembered beyond his immediate succeeding generation before it faded into the oblivion of human forgetfulness, a fate to which every mortal are eventually consigned. The desire for the life-giving spirit, residing at the basis of all human life and activity remains unfulfilled in most occasions, and what humans are left with at the end of their days on the earth is no more than "*hebel*" "breath" "a chasing after the wind" or meaninglessness.

The structure of human life is such that humans are perpetually engaged in the struggle to make sense of life "under the sun". However, even this attempt is also futile because God has made it that humans will find nothing even if they engage in the greatest quest for meaning.

The only way to maintain the social order is to realize the centrality of God as the source and end of all values as the one who indeed is both Creator and Sustainers of the earth and its world system. Therefore a life lived under God will seek to use and enjoy the manifold aspects of human existence to the greater glory of God. In this cosmology lies the orderliness needed for life to be lived and enjoyed by all who belong to the family of God.

The only meaning that exists is to rest every human case with God and to "fear God" and to keep his commandments. In addition humans are to depend on God for daily needs and requirements, and so enjoy each day's provisions as being specially from him. *Qoheleth* constitutes an exhortation to live a God-fearing and perhaps a God-honouring life, realizing that one day an account would have to be given to Him. *Qoheleth* apparently relied upon traditional religious beliefs in making the affirmation that God made humans to be mentally upright, but that the intervention of devices of human fashioning had led to the declension of humankind from prevenient grace. The book's basic presupposition is that life in all its manifold aspects is entirely devoid of meaning without God.

Apparently, there is a wisdom that is earthly and is summed up in the words of *Qoheleth*, but the heart and essence of true wisdom is to know God from whom all blessings flow. The author claims to have tested every facet of life based on a cosmology of Epicureanism, but it all worked out in the knowledge that all of life is futility. Even eating and drinking serves to give one temporary satisfaction except that whatever gain one has made is obscured by the knowledge that "time changes all things", including those coming after one. In view of the fact that the world system lacks any reliable or dependable justice system, it is clear that the attempt to do the right thing is often countered by the presence of wrong that goes on in the

heart of humans. Evil doing never gets its full expression without the controlling influence of the opposite yearning to do the right.

### 3.2 Self Assessment Question

- Summarise the main features of life under the sun as expounded by *hebel* or “breath.” Analyse the relationship between world views and ethical order.

### 3.3 Anthropology and the Ethical Order

Lots of paradoxes exist in the realm of anthropology and threaten the very fabric of societal order if not handled with the wisdom and understanding prescribed in *Qoheleth*. Some enjoy longevity, but end up worse than a still-born child. In other words, longevity must be qualified with certain attainments before it can be meaningful: children, grand and great-grand children and a settled home are the distinctive of a responsible longevity worthy of proper veneration. Humans who are wise, but poor get no recognition among their peers; neither do those who are fools, even though enjoying abundant wealth. They all end up like the beast doomed to death, destruction and their memory consigned to oblivion. It is like the sordid case of princes who walk the streets on foot, while beggars ride on horses. Such contradictions of life baffle the author of *Qoheleth* as it would baffle students of Wisdom today. Yet such are the paradoxes of life that humanity without divinity ends up not better than the animals around their houses – all go to the same place, not above, but beneath.

These paradoxes seem resolved in the understanding that “a bird in hand is worth two in the bush”, or as the African proverb would put it, “we do not pour away the remaining drinking water in the water pot, just because the clouds are gathering and rain is being expected.” Our ethical order must be built on reality not on speculation. In *Qoheleth* it is made clear that each human received his / her proper gift from God, even though at death humans do not take anything away with them from the earth. Human ethical order is built on relationships that are faith based, not destiny based. The wealthy person who became rich through ill-gotten gain and who eventually did not live to enjoy this wealth, is worse in reputation than a still-born child..

Even the king’s word is esteemed as of high importance because the king is full of traditional wisdom but even the best intentions of the king is only negated by human activities which often are paradoxical and contradictory. *Qoheleth* examines individual actions, including that of the king and sage within the larger structure of time. The *anthropos* is a product of aesthetic appeal and moral standards which must be maintained through “fear of God and the keeping of his commandments”. Moreover, the *anthropos* must work at achieving her goals within the time allotted them on earth as there is no labour no inventions on the other side of eternity. Already they are denied the comprehensive knowledge of the cosmic and historical components of time and the course of divine events – in the past, present and future – and are trapped in a present that is obtuse, mysterious, and ambiguous, completely unaware of what may or may not happen.

It means that human control over events and their outcome passes from human hands either to God or to mere chance. One may only rejoice in the "day of adversity" and learn from the "day of adversity" that God is the one who structures time and determines the course of significant events. Thus all human actions are accompanied by risk.

Consequently, human inability to discern divine activity undercuts both the theologies of salvation history and cultic ritual, which represented and re-actualized in sacred drama deeds of divine redemption. Moreover, the failure to perceive a coherent pattern for historical time, so evident in prophetic and historical texts in Israel, results in the fragmentation of experience and the loss of collective and individual identity. The human quest for identity and self-understanding within a common tradition requires the integration of temporal phases (past, present and future) as a unity. Collective memory enables both the community and the individual to recall and rearrange significant events from the past in order to be able to explain the present. Human memory allows for individuals to tap into the reservoirs of tradition so as to find root metaphors to convey meaning.

Similarly, the anticipation of history allows both the individual and the community to give informed direction to their actions. Memory and anticipation are creative acts of the imagination that organize and interpret experience. The individual and the community come to self-understanding through the narratives they construct. The incorporation of individual life within the larger tradition provides a meaning structure in which self-understanding reaches a culmination and produces coherence in life. Thus in the views of Jesus Ben Sira, individual life becomes part of the community's past experience, present existence, and anticipated future. The basis for *Qoheleth* is the inevitable loss of collective and individual memory (Ecc.1:8-11; 5:20). With the loss of memory, experience does not achieve unity through time. Rather, experience fragments into disconnected pieces of isolated perceptions. All that remains is the immediacy of the present moment.

### 3.3 Self Assessment Question

- Review the nature of humans in *Qoheleth*, and show how individual or collective memory can enhance identity and self-understanding.

### 3.4 The Testament of *Qoheleth* and the Moral Order

When we examine *Qoheleth*'s poem on anthropology, we see a disclosure of the royal testament, balancing the anthropology and cosmology of the two strophes of the introductory poem. The two themes of the poem are joy (*smh*) in two different strophes. First, Ecc.11:9-10 there is the occurrence of *carpe diem* which while exploiting the creation of light and darkness, admonishes the audience of students to rejoice in the sweetness of youth, for "childhood and youth are *hebel*." The young are therefore warned against consummating their joy in unlicensed frivolity. His counsel remains clear: Enjoy life while the physical capacities for celebration are at its height.

As one approaches the concluding sections of *Qoheleth*, one is astounded by the intelligent use of metaphors in describing the declining days of the aged sage. Leo Perdue describes it as “an allegory of old age and increasing decrepitude, or the metaphorical description of physical decline and death in terms of a large estate or city”. The allegorical interpretation is often strained, leaving much to the imagination, The interpretation of the decline of a large estate or city follows a more literal and obvious translation. This decline becomes a metaphor for the decline and death of human beings. Leo Perdue proposes a variation on the second interpretation by suggesting that this description represents the end of the world of human dwelling and nature, occasioned by the death of the human creature. Death returns history and the cosmos (civilization and nature) to chaos in a depiction that is quite similar to that found in Jeremiah 4:23-26.

A look at the second strophe (Ecc. 12:1-7) begins with a continuation of the *carpe diem*, but quickly changes in mood and substance. “Remember your creator (or is it your “tomb”?) in the days of your youth,” the sage instructs, adding the sombre note: “before the evil days come, and the years draw near in which you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” The opening line contains a crux interpretatum (*bore eka* cp. *Bara*’), most normally translated as “your creator.” However, this translation is questionable due to the plural now (“creators”). In the oldest surviving interpretation of this text, preserved in the tractate Abot 3:1 in the Mishnah and attributed to Rabbi Akabia ben Mahalalel, one reads:

Reflect upon three things and thou wilt not come within the power of transgression: know whence thou art come, whither thou art going, and before Whom thou wilt in future render account and reckoning. “When thou art come”- from a fetid drop; “and whither thou art going” – to a place of dust, worms and maggots; “and before Whom thou wilt in future render account and reckoning” – before the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He.”

The author of *Qoheleth* has carefully chosen a term that, through similarity in sound and spelling, would stimulate the imagination to think of all three. This is the understanding of the Mishnaic and Talmudic interpretations and is not uncommon procedure in Hebrew rhetoric. If so, the resultant meaning for the poem would be as that God is the giver of and nourishes all life. Nevertheless, he does not shunt his offspring out of all troubles, but gently rescues them from all their foes. *Qoheleth* (11:5) takes creation for granted, as he depicts the process of conception in the embryo as the commencement of the life of all humans. Thus human mortality lies in their origin at conception.

Still on the process of divine origin of all things, *Qoheleth* urges the congregation to “remember your creator” – a reminder that brings to the fore the divine and natural response to suffering. The congregation is to recall the mighty deeds and salvific acts of God, including the slaying of the chaos monster and the creation of the world, in order to establish the basis for hope in present redemption and to remind God to act to redeem his people (cf. Ps. 74,77). For God to remember his people means to deliver them (Ps.74:3). For *Qoheleth*, God is indeed the powerful tyrant whose power directs the world and determines the fates of human beings, neither is he the redeemer who enters into life to save the human creature. Thus, while the

students are instructed to remember God, they should not expect that God will remember them otherwise.

In Wisdom Literature the question is often asked “What are humans that God is often mindful of them” (cf. Ps 8). On the terrestrial plane, the question asked by Qoheleth is, why would humans engage in a titanic struggle to master life and be in control of their own destiny when the life they live eventually ends in futility? The students are therefore instructed to remember God in the prime times of their youth, when bad habits have not yet gotten hold of them. Life progresses to the point when the physical senses are dulled, and humans make speeches even when they are not talking, and they hear sounds even when they are not listening. During this paradoxical stage of life, the parts of the physical body begins to deteriorate in structure and function. All the wisdom and all the learning gradually wear out in significance, and all that matters is “reverential attitude towards God the maker of all, and a keeping of his laws”.

### 3.4 Self Assessment Question

- How would you describe the use of metaphors in depicting the days of old age. What other ways can metaphors be interpreted in Wisdom Literature?

### 3.5 Hermeneutical Consideration

The study in this unit has shown that *Qoheleth* is a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary book from the fourth and third century BCE, perhaps composed from the various collegial collections from the previous Priestly and Monarchic era in ancient Israel. Fear of the unknown should never be allowed to displace the healthy fear of God. In order to overcome the fear of the unknown, humans should think of God in thankful terms and have pleasure in being alive. There are countless opportunities of doing the right waiting at the door-steps of all those who are reverential in their attitude towards God. In the same way, there are oddities hanging around in every human environment awaiting to be ignited by inhuman conduct and bad behaviours.

It is important that rulers should liaise with wise men in the making and shaping of policies, because excluding them could prove fatal. Wisdom, not wine should come first in the reckoning of princes in order for just and righteous policies to emerge from their seats of power. Life is so full of uncertainties even for those already occupying positions of influence and power. Consider the dilemma confronting the human being who comes face to face with wonderful opportunities of service and great rewards, but which leave in their trail sorrow and travail. The assurance given in *Qoheleth* in the face of dilemma is that nothing escapes the knowledge and sovereignty of God. Reality is found only in God from whom all natural phenomenon emanate and to whom all life returns. No one can stand before the judgment seat of God boldly who has not learned to take God’s commandments serious in this present times.

### 3.5 Self Assessment Question

- You have heard the conclusion of the whole matter in *Qoheleth*. Now tell us the conclusion of the whole matter according to the lessons you have learned so far.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

Whenever we speak of a stable social, moral and ethical order, we should not forget to align our speech with an understanding that is informed by our world view and human craving for innovations. A stable moral and ethical life has to be lived in conformity with the cosmic order with a view to an established sphere of beneficent influence leading to the well-being of both humans and other creatures. It is not like the sordid example of princes who walk the streets on foot, while beggars ride on horses. Such are the contradictions of life that baffle the author of *Qoheleth* as it would baffle students of Wisdom today. Moreover, the paradoxes of life that humanity without divinity ends up with are not better than that of the animals around their houses – all go to the same place, not above, but beneath. Lots of paradoxes exist in the realm of anthropology and threatens the very fabric of societal order if not handled with the wisdom and understanding prescribed in *Qoheleth*. Some enjoy longevity, but end up worse than a still born child. The allegorical interpretation is often strained, leaving much to the imagination, The interpretation of the decline of a large estate or city follows a more literal and obvious translation. This decline becomes a metaphor for the decline and death of human beings. Leo Perdue proposes a variation on the second interpretation by suggesting that this description represents the end of the world of human dwelling and nature, occasioned by the death of the human creature. It is important that humans make the “fear of God” and the “keeping of his commandments” a priority so that they are able to stand boldly before him on the day of accounting and reckoning.

#### 5.0 Summary

So far this unit adopted a postcolonial critical approach in assessing the various interpretations to which *Qoheleth* is susceptible, including the following sub-headings: The Quest for the Good in the Cosmology of *Qoheleth*; Cosmology and the Ethical Order; Anthropology and the Ethical Order; The Testament of *Qoheleth* and the Moral Order; as well as Hermeneutical Considerations.

Next unit will examine the Theology and Salvation History in the book of Psalm.

#### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Narrate in brief the nature and development of testament in Qoheleth, based on her cosmology and anthropology. Illustrate your answers with useful references.

#### 7.0References / Future Reading

Ahiamadu, A.E. *Biblical Hermeneutics – Methods and Tools of Interpreting and Applying the Bible in African – A postcolonial maximalist analysis*. Enugu: SIVC, 2012

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## **MODULE 3: WISDOM LITERATURE AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES**

### **Unit 4: Theology of Praise and Prayers in the book of Psalms.**

#### **Content**

#### **Introduction**

#### **Objective**

#### **Main Body**

- 3.1 Hebraic traditions of Praise and Prayer
- 3.2 The Liturgical Approach to the Psalter.
- 3.3 Metrical Divisions in the Psalter.
- 3.4 The Strophic arrangement of the Psalter



3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

#### 5.0 Summary

#### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

#### 7.0 References / Future Reading

### 1.0 Hebraic traditions of Praise and Prayer

The names “Psalms” and “Psalter” come from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) where they originally referred to stringed instruments (such as harp, lyre and lute), then to songs sung with their accompaniment. The traditional Hebrew title is “*tehillim*” meaning “praise”, even though many of the psalms are *tehillot* meaning “prayers”. In fact, one of the first collections included in the book was titled “the prayers of David son of Jesse” (Ps.72:20). As John H. Stek has pointed out, “The Psalter is a collection of collections and represents the final stage in a process that spanned centuries.” It was put into its final form presumably by the post-exilic temple personnel, who completed it probably in the third century B.C.E. As such it served as the book of common prayer, as well as the song book and of religious instruction for the second Temple (Zerubbabel’s and Herod’s) temple and for use in the synagogues. By the time of the first century C.E. it was generally known as “the book of Psalms (Luk.10:42; Acts 1:20). At that time also Psalms was used as a title for the entire section of the Hebrew OT canon known as the “Writings” (see Luk. 24:44). So our survey of the theology of praise and prayers in the Psalms as a leading book in Wisdom Literature will be discussed under the following sub-headings: Hebraic traditions of Praise; Parallelisms as didactic forms of Praise; The theology of the Psalms reflected in metrical divisions; Strophic arrangement and lyrical impact of the Psalms; and Hermeneutical Considerations.

### 2.0 Objective

**At the end of this unit, you should be able to:**

- Understand the significance of Praise in Wisdom Literature
- Describe the Hebraic traditions of Praise
- Realize why Parallelism and metrical Divisions is crucial to Wisdom Literature
- Be informed of the strophic arrangements, and
- Discuss the relevance of the Psalms in the worship of God by the contemporary church.

### 3.0 Main Body

#### 3.1 Hebraic Traditions of Praise and Prayer

It is interesting to note that the book of Psalms features primarily the praises and prayers of a faith community composed primarily of Hebrew adherents of Yahweh. Yet the heart and essence of the Psalmody is moral. Occasionally, the Psalter drew attention to the beauties of nature in praise of the Creator, and an ongoing concern with the world around them in their prayers, but all these were primarily within the sphere of moral activity. Since the ancient Hebrews of Old Testament times enjoyed no assurance of a future life, the question of retribution for wickedness was entertained in terms of the contemporary or immediate future situation, and undergirded by the traditional Hebrew belief in the Divine moral governance of the world.

As far as the Psalter is concerned God's people in general and Israel in particular would be dominant on all the face of the earth wherever they are found (Ps. 2:8; 18:43; 45:5). Similarly, the God whom they served rules the universe (Ps. 47:8) and deserves the praise of all the earth (Ps.2:11; 22:27; 68:32 etc). Moreover, such offer of praises has both a temporal and an eschatological implication (Ps.9:8; 67:4). Eschatology in the Psalms is more of a pious hope that disease, evil, and misfortune would be banished from the earth (Ps.27:13) instead of the more drawn out eschatology of the New Testament that the earth would be made anew in a creative sense. In the views of R.K. Harrison there is not as much eschatological hope in the Psalter as there is of praise of God and prayers to him on issues that border on terrestrial circumstances and situations.

Perhaps the Messianic hope is embedded in every expression of praise and prayers in the Psalter, but it is of the sort that precluded any thought of an existence other than what obtained in the physical world. The ancient Hebrews believed that the death of the body meant the individual was virtually isolated from God in *Sheol*. This depicts the Psalmists as being predominantly concerned with the more immediate problems of life, with a possible exception of Psalm 49:15 and 73:24. Nevertheless, some Psalms expected to encounter the divine presence even in the shadowy realms of *Sheol* (Ps. 138:9). If we look for a theology of a future life we cannot find it in the Psalms. However, there was certainly a distinct feeling that all individual spiritual values were by no means obliterated in the decease of the body. Indeed, the very fact that certain authors (of the Psalms) entertained the concept of some kind of vague existence in *Sheol* at least suggested the possibility of a future re-awakening, and that alone was a constant source of praises and prayers.

As Harrison puts it, those who seek to do God's will and so exercise their highest mental faculties in exercise of their duties, find that they gain an inner peace that approximates the Psalmist's model for spiritual and material beneficence. Therefore, in the opinion of Biblical scholars the book of Psalms is the pilgrim's map to a fulfilling spiritual life. The book is a single entity of praise, prayers, and spiritual instructions – a total of 150 psalms in our modern Bible versions. A further division into five books each ending with a doxology marks out the Psalms as a book of books. The opening Psalm serves as an introduction to the rest of the Psalms while the 150<sup>th</sup> Psalm serves as the final doxology.

### 1.1 Self Assessment Question

- How would you describe the use of prayer and praise in the Psalms?

## 1.2 The Liturgical Approach to the Psalter

It was the passion of Herman Gunkel to give the Psalms a literary face, aside of its renowned spiritual value as Israel's hymn of praise, litany of prayers, and a code of instructions. Herman Gunkel whose work on the Psalms began in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, considered the structure of the Psalms as important to an understanding of the worship situations from which they emerged. He was also interested in the thoughts and moods which different psalms were found to have in common. A third feature of Gunkel's study was the recurrent features of style, form and imagery which served these various ends. He found the following main types: Hymns of praise, personal thanksgiving, communal laments and personal laments. In addition there were smaller categories such as marching liturgies, blessings and cursing, wisdom psalms, royal psalms and a variety of other mixed types.

While Gunkel regarded most of the canonical psalms as literary descendants of Israel's original psalmody, S. Mowinckel saw them as products of a living cultus. He reconstructed the rites and festivals of Israel from the clues which he detected, independently of any confirmation from the Pentateuch. His early psalm studies, in the 1920s, made much of a postulated festival of Yahweh's accession as King, supposedly celebrated at the New Year somewhat after the fashion of the Babylonian *akitu* festival, leaving its traces in about 40 of the psalms and in the development of OT eschatology. This lead was quickly followed sometimes to excess, by other scholars, notably the so-called Myth and Ritual School of British and Scandinavian scholars in the 1930s, who drew heavily upon comparative religion to construct in detail a cultic drama of divine combat and nuptials and the fixing of destinies, which accounted for many of the cries of anguish or triumph in the Psalter and most of its allusions to seas and springs, enemies and monsters, defeat and victory, and the attributes and activities of the king.

Not all scholars, however, who acknowledge a debt to Mowinckel have agreed in detail with him or (still less) with those who carried his methods to extremes. Mowinckel himself makes less of the Accession motif in his later writings than in his early studies, and other scholars who emphasize the influence of the new year festival on the Psalter would see its main aspect as covenant-renewal (e.g. A. Weiser) or the reaffirming of God's choice of Zion and the house of David (e.g. H.J. Kraus). But the legacy of Gunkel and Mowinckel remains, in the preoccupation of most commentators with the task of assigning each psalm to its proper class, and in the viewing of almost all the material as ecclesiastical.

This is distinct from the view, with which there can be no quarrel, that the psalms were collected and used for worship, and in many cases written expressly for such use. Instead, it assumes that even those psalms which profess to have sprung from episodes in the life of David (i.e. the bulk of Psalms 51-60), or which are attested as his writings by the NT (eg. Psalm 16, 69, 109-110), arose on the contrary out of the cult-drama or were anonymously composed as set pieces for worship situations that might arise for the individual, the Davidic king or the congregation. Thus Psalm 51 despite the introductory statement which is part of the Hebrew

text, is allegedly not David's prayer after his sin with Bathsheba, and Psa. 110, despite our Lord's account of it, is not allowed to be the work of (as he himself put in Mk. 12:36) 'David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit.' Within this dominant school of thought, however, there are varieties of opinion as to the right classification of individual psalms, and there is more confidence in saying who did not write the psalms than in deciding who did.

Consequently, J. D. Douglas suggested that the attempt to place the psalms within their setting should be governed by the evidence in each separate case. This will include the internal characteristics to which Gunkel and his successors have drawn attention, but it will be controlled by the statements, where there are such, in the titles and other scriptures. It will also bear in mind the fact that a psalmist could speak (as Peter pointed out in Acts 2:30ff.) as 'a prophet' aware of God's promises and foreseeing what was far beyond his own horizon.

In all of this, the content of praise includes singing God's goodness, extolling his works on a personal, communal, national and inter-communal levels. Individual praises occur in acknowledgement of his mercies, while national praises are sung in remembrance of great acts of grace. In all, the great acts of God exhibited in the course of the gruesome national experience known, first as the cruel Egyptian bondage and later as the exile, is aptly depicted.

### 3.2 Self Assessment Questions

Why do scholars regard the Psalms as the defining literary masterpiece of praise and prayer.

### 3.3 Metrical division in the Psalter

Regarding metrical division, it should be noted that classical Hebrew poetry has little or no room for metrical division. Not even in the Talmud did meter occupy any significant place. What Josephus did was to apply the occidental concept of classical poets to the writing of Hebrew poetry in his literary analysis of the songs of Moses in both Exod. 15:1ff and Deut. 32:1ff. In his opinion this classical Hebrew poetic lines were written in hexameters, and shows that a specific poetic form underlay certain portions of the Hebrew scriptures. In the opinion of R.K. Harrison there is hardly any justification for this attempt to fit a Semitic literature into an occidental mould. Literature like culture should be allowed to be understood and used within the confines of its own context, particularly when the concept of comparative literature is not in view. Any discernible meter in Hebrew poetry can only be determined by relationship to the forms of other ancient poetry in which the essential basis of the structure was the balance of thought and by implication from the parallel lines themselves.

Furthermore, the fact that the poetry of the ancient Near East and of Egypt pointed to the presence of meter might also support this idea. On the basis of a comparative study of the Syriac language, Bickell repudiated the idea that Classical Greek and Latin concepts of poetry could be related to an oriental language, and sought to transpose the poems of the Old Testament into metrical forms similar to those employed by Ephraem and other Syriac poets. Several grounds may be adduced for the contention that some of the Hebrew poetic

compositions exhibited concepts of meter. In the first place, several of the psalms were apparently meant to be sung to the accompaniment of a variety of musical instruments.

Perhaps one essential element of Hebrew poetry, if metrical divisions can be accorded a place in it, is its nature of fluidity. Consequently, while in Babylonian poetry the commonest line comprised two parallel *stichos* containing two stresses each, it frequently happened that in one or other of the *stichos* a third stress was inserted 2:3 or 3:2). On such a basis the comparative simplicity of the Hebrew diction might suggest a 2:2 line as the primary form, and although this structure occurs quite frequently in Hebrew poems, 3:2 “pentameter” is far more common. By far the most widely used scheme in Hebrew poetry, however, is the 3:3, occurring in the poetic sections of Job, in many prophetic oracles, in Proverbs, and in the bulk of the Psalms. While Babylonian poetry often has a predominantly 2:2 meter, individual compositions are generally interspersed with lines that can only be read in terms of a seven-fold *ictus*, making for a 2:2:3 compilation. A six-stress line often seems to require a scanning in terms of 2:2:2.

### 3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- Of what use was the meter (or metrical forms) in the psalms for the ancient Hebrew faith communities?

### 3.2 The Strophic arrangement of the Psalter

A strophe can be defined as an informal arrangement of lines characterised by certain external indications. Within the last century a good deal of discussion has centred upon the question as to whether the lines of Hebrew poetry could be grouped in order to form stanzas or strophes. In general it can be said that majority of the older critics held to the view that the psalms were arranged in regular strophic organization, the nature of which had been obscured to some extent by later liturgical glosses. More recent studies have shown that while such an arrangement is possible, as indicated by the presence of acrostic poetry in the Old Testament, the grouping of distichs and tristichs into larger formal units cannot be demonstrated. The fact that strophic arrangement in Hebrew poetry was never allowed to interfere with the real sequence of thought would imply that the stanza was never basic to the structure of such compositions.

This is in contradistinction to modern poetic songs, in which the stanzas comprises a group consisting of a specific number of lines marked by a particular rhyming pattern. Even where there might appear to be some kind of strophic divisions associated with the thought-forms rather than the rhyming patterns of modern poetic usage. There would thus seem to be no evidence for the kind of rigid metrically constructed strophes entertained by earlier Old Testament scholars.

The Septuagint (LXX) appears to have had some sort of liturgical usage in view when the term was rendered by *diapsalma*, with the implication being that stringed instruments were used to accompany the rendering of the psalm concerned. The Hebrew verb could thus mean either the “lifting up” of voices and the crescendo of musical instruments. That the latter seems very probable is indicated by the fact that *selah* normally occurred at the end of a division of

thought, where the voice would presumably pause in any event. In the absence of the foregoing, the only other reasonable indication of some form of strophic arrangement may be seen in the symmetrical organization of the thought-forms.

The discovery of Ugaritic materials was preceded by the frequent assumption by Biblical scholars that the regular strophic order that they had postulated had been disturbed by glosses or dislocations of the text. This furnished a warrant for wholesome rearrangement of lines, textual emendations, and the like, sometimes being undertaken with reference to the Septuagint (LXX) and later versions, but on other occasions being indulged in on a basis of purely subjective speculations. Aside from any other considerations that might preclude such activity, it should now be fairly apparent to all scholars as a result of the discoveries at *Ras Shamra* that the text of the Hebrew Psalter is by no means as faulty or corrupt as was supposed by a great many nineteenth-century critics. Furthermore, the wide degree of freedom that the literary compositions of Ugarit enjoyed with respect to form and fluidity of meter indicates that considerations of meter *per se* are not by any means adequate as criteria for textual criticism, and that in fact wholesale reorganization of the text of the kind indulged in by Duhm and others is specifically contradicted by the epic texts from *Ras Shamra*.

### 3.4 Self Assessment Question

- What is a strophe and how does it facilitate the use of the psalms in prayers and private meditations?

### 3.3 Hermeneutical Considerations

It is interesting to note that some of the Psalms “have a more didactic character than others (e.g. Psalm 1, 112, 127), while a further type, which may have been related to community usage independently of Temple worship (Ps. 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 131) is in harmony with some of the great poetical expressions of faith and trust found elsewhere in the Old Testament narratives (Gen. 49:2ff; Exo.15:1ff; Dt. 32:1ff; 1 Sam.2:1ff; Jere. 11:18ff; 12:1ff; Hab.3:1ff). This observation was first mooted by R.K. Harrison.

Some have concluded that the first Psalm is an introductory note to the rest of the psalms. It demonstrates the benediction of those who live good lives separated from sin and from worldliness. How could it be said that someone who exclusively was devoted exclusively to the study of the Torah would be comparable to a tree planted by the sides of the waters? It is because of the creative result of such a commitment which includes privileged insight into the practical realities of life as well as the power of application of same to the issues of each day. If the first Psalm is an introductory note to the rest of the psalms, then the second Psalm is an introductory note to the body of Messianic psalms. Some theologians insist that all of the Psalms have Christ as theme, and that the words of the Psalms foreshadowed the depths, heights and breadths of the thoughts of the incarnate Messiah so envisaged.

On the other hand, there are those who stress the need to limit the Messianic connotation to those Psalms referred to in the New Testament as explicitly Messianic such as Psalms 2, 22 and

110 to mention a few. In this latter view therefore the second Psalm is clearly Messianic while other general Psalms could not be said to envision a Messiah – whether in his first or second advent. Yet the Psalmist did not mince words as to the extent of mutual love and care that existed between God and Christ on the one hand and between God and his people on the other. Consequently, those who fail to pledge their loyalty to the King of kings would face the wrath and the disgust of the Father of all spirits and Lord of all flesh.

Interestingly, Jehovah tackles his adversaries in the same way they tackle those who keep his commandments on earth. This tackling is hinted in the third Psalm which incidentally is the first of the psalms with an imprecatory perspective to it. Humans are quick to multiply their hatred of the good, and do intensify the troubles of the just, but they are unable to hinder them just because of Jehovah's special interest and love for the just and upright. He gives sleep to his beloved ones, so that they know that God is in perfect control of all situations and circumstances that might confront his people. He cannot and does not ignore the appeals of his own people as they are set apart for the purpose of being in constant communion with their Maker. There would be abundant joy and gladness in the heart of the upright as a result of God's sovereign intervention in their situation and his divine "padding" of their plans and purposes. In the morning God would oversee their trials and triumphs, and at night speak to them as a King of kings and God of gods as they arise in the morning with hearts that are turned towards the very temple and city of his presence. Thus shall Jehovah bless the upright and cause the godly to walk in his ways.

However, whenever they ere as they very often do then instead of hearing his words of comfort (Isa. 40:1), they would be rebuked by Jehovah in hot displeasure. A situation arises when the Almighty would use his prophets to send timely warnings to his errant people so as to avert an outpouring of his anger against them. The dead do not praise God, and Jehovah gains nothing when the wicked are flushed out and they drag the just along with them into graves of silence. Consequently, those who maintain a life of uprightness are shown divine favour and given the power to escape all forms of trials or tribulation. Jehovah is the greatest teacher and he teaches the just and upright in the ways they should go, so that though weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

The message of the Psalms generally appeal to the pious, the religious and faithful of all times and clime. The church in Nigeria make use of the psalms so much that it nearly always obscures the clear teachings of Jesus Christ on forgiveness. Adherents of the Christian faith inadvertently employ the use of the psalms in their prayers and most at times end up venting their spleen of vengeance and hate upon their perceived adversaries, rather than simply asking that the God of all mercies should pour out his mercies upon them and show them kindness as those who act before they realize what they are doing.

### 3.4 Self Assessment Question

- Summarize the main thrust of piety in the Psalms and show how they have been applied in our contemporary society.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

This unit has surveyed the Psalter with a view to highlighting its special interest in the personal piety and experiences of adherents of the God of the Hebrews, and by extension the God of the universe. The traditional Hebrew title is “*tehillim*” meaning “praise”, even though many of the psalms are *tehillot* meaning “prayers”. In fact, one of the first collections included in the book was titled “the prayers of David son of Jesse” (Ps.72:20). The Psalms have both a literal face and spiritual worth. It serves as Israel’s hymn of praise, litany of prayers, and a code of instructions. Herman Gunkel whose work on the Psalms began in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, considered the structure of the Psalms as important to an understanding of the worship situations from which they emerged. The Psalms are both metrical and strophic to put it simply.

Any discernible meter in Hebrew poetry can only be determined by relationship to the forms of other ancient poetry in which the essential basis of the structure was the balance of thought and by implication from the parallel lines themselves. Similarly, the strophic arrangement in Hebrew poetry was never allowed to interfere with the real sequence of thought. In other words, the stanza was never basic to the structure of such compositions. Generally, some of the Psalms “have a more didactic character than others (e.g. Psalm 1, 112, 127), while a further type, which may have been related to community usage independently of Temple worship (Ps. 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 131) is in harmony with some of the great poetical expressions of faith and trust found elsewhere in the Old Testament narratives.

#### 5.0 Summary

So far, this unit discussed the theology and praise of the Psalter with a particular emphasis on their liturgical and ecclesiastical worth in the life and worship of the ancient Israelite faith communities. This has been done using the following sub-headings: Hebraic traditions of Praise and Prayer; the Liturgical Approach to the Psalter; Metrical Divisions in the Psalter; the Strophic arrangement of the Psalter, and Hermeneutical Considerations.

The next unit will discuss the Theology of Relationship and Redemption in the Songs of Solomon.

#### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Identify and analyse the distinctive features of the Psalms in the worship life of Old Testament believing or faith community.

#### 7.0 References / Future Reading

Ahiamadu, A.E. *Redefining Stewardship of Land and Oil Mineral Resources in Nigeria: a theological and ethical response..* Saarbrücken: Lambert 2011

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## **MODULE 3: WISDOM LITERATURE AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES**

### **Unit 5: Relationship and Redemption in Canticles (Songs of Solomon).**

#### **Contents**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

#### **2.0 Objective**

#### **3.0 Main Body**

3.1 Allegorical and Erotic View of Canticles

3.2 Literal and Dramatic View of Canticles

3.3 Liturgical and Didactic-moral View of Canticles

3.4 Hermeneutical Considerations

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

#### **5.0 Summary**

#### **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

#### **7.0 References / Future Reading**

## 1.0 Introduction

In the Canticles (Songs of Solomon) we are presented with Wisdom Literature as it relates to the love life. It features a scenario in which the intertwining of religion and cultural life has been beautifully illustrated. To the Jews Canticles is a source of pure and exquisite delight that must be read and meditated upon during any of the three major national festivals – Passover, feast of Weeks and Tabernacles. However, pure aesthetics would forbid any literal acquaintance or even interpretation of Canticles because it speaks of base and vile desires and ambitions. Yet it is a book so mysterious and incomprehensible to the unspiritual mind, even though the book is an expression of pure marital or erotic love as ordained by God in creation. That pure love is vindicated in Canticles as against the asceticism and lust of the literal interpreters – which are the two profanations of holy matrimony. There are over 15 geographical references, about twenty-one varieties of plants and fifteen species of animals mentioned in the book, with the name of King Solomon mentioned in seven occasions. Biblical scholars describe the author of Canticles (Songs of Solomon) as well versed in country lore: This points to the fact that true love is holistic, involving humans, animals, plants, flora and fauna.

## 2.0 Objectives

**By the end of this unit, you should be able to:**

- Understand the liturgical significance of Canticles as Wisdom Literature
- Describe the allegorical and symbolic interpretation of Canticles
- Show how the erotic language of Canticles impacts on a literal interpretation of relationships and redemption.
- Explain the significance of the flora and fauna of Bible lands as depicted in Canticles for a holistic view of relationships and redemption.

## 3.0 Main Body

### 3.1 Allegorical and Erotic View of Canticles

In the opinion of rabbinical scholars the Song of Solomon (or Canticles ) is fondly referred to as one of the best gifts ever given to Israel from God: “The whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; all the Writings are holy, and the Song of Songs is the holy of holies.” That is the way Rabbi Akbar affirms the canonicity of the Songs. There had been considerable literal opposition to the canonicity of the Canticles which undoubtedly stemmed from its overtly erotic nature and language. Historically, this objection

was outweighed by the traditional Solomonic authorship and by the rabbinic and Christian allegorical interpretations which lifted the poems above a sensual level.

The traditional attribution to Solomon is based on the references to him (Songs 1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11) especially the title verse (Songs 1:1). Solomon's skill at song writing was alluded to in 1 Kings 4:32. However, the final redaction of the book might have taken place centuries after the historical Solomon, perhaps earlier than the Greek period – (circa 300 B.C.E.) in view of the intercourse between Canaan and Ionia from the Solomonic period onwards. The linguistic evidences notwithstanding as well as the use of Aramaisms, the Northern origin of the book seems clearly evident, especially when the geographical allusions are taken into careful consideration – Sharon (2:1), Lebanon (3:9; 4:8, 11, 15 etc), Amana, Senir, Hermon (4:8), Tirzah (6:4), Damascus (7:4), Carmel (7:5). Nevertheless, there is no provincialism in the book. The author simply displays a perfect knowledge of Palestine and Syria – from Engedi by the Dead Sea (1:14) to the mountains of Lebanon.

Like other Wisdom Literature the book is personal, experiential and poetic. The power of poetry lies in the intensity of love and devotion expressed and especially in the rich imagery which permeates the descriptions of the lovers and their love. To look at this descriptions with the mindset of African love songs should not detract from their essentially Semitic origin and application. Some of the similes might look derogatory to the African love singer (e.g. teeth like ewes, neck like the tower of David 4:2ff), but again that does not diminish the depth of the passion expressed from the loved one to his beloved. According to A. Bentzen, Orientals fix their eyes on one single striking point, though they use several parallelisms to express it: the single striking point in these love songs is the beauty and finesse of the human frame – be it the female or the male. Be that as it may, the wide allusion to pastoral qualities in the imageries of the book have caught the attention of form critics. The poems abound in references to animals and especially plants and some scholars find this as depicting a source for the Songs located in the Canannite fertility cults.

The allegorical method of interpretation of Canticles have therefore been found a useful tool in the hands of rabbis and Church fathers who struggled with the idea of accepting Hebrew love songs into the canon of Scripture. This allegorical interpretation have highlighted the love of God towards his people as manifested in Hebrew history. In Christian circles, contemporary interpreters have equated the beloved to the Church, and the lover to God or Christ. Origen is the great allegorical interpreter of Canticles, followed by Jerome, Athanasius, Augustine and others. One of the greatest setbacks of the allegorical school is the problem of subjectivism – each one interprets according to the individual preferences. In the opinion of R.K. Harrison “the most acceptable would be the view that the book entertains a double *entendre*, in which the theme of human love is interpenetrated with a mystical concept of a far deeper order.

### 3.1 Self Assessment Question

- Summarize the importance of an allegorical interpretation of Canticles in Wisdom Literature.

### 3.2 Literal and Dramatic View of Canticles

Biblical Scholars see in Canticles (the Songs of Solomon) a substantial amount of ancient materials that might have originated principally from Israel, in a Northern Kingdom perspective. As we have seen it has often challenged both secular and ecclesiastical interpreters. The overtly secular and the natural, frank treatment of it, the unique allusions to exotic things in nature, the frequent interweaving of nature and dramatic imagery, sharply distinguish the Canticles from nearly all extant pre-Christian Hebrew literature. Furthermore, as V. Nyoyoko has observed “the book hangs together rather loosely, deriving a semblance of unity mainly from the unusual theme and from the roughly similar style of the separate poems and fragments.” No other force, such a single author’s viewpoint or an easily recognizable unified structure, can be found to lend credence to the whole, or to guide readers to the meaning and purpose of the book.

Speaking of dramatic imagery, Delitzsch suggested two major characters of Canticles, namely Solomon and the Shulamite shepherdess in the drama. Falling in love with her, the king took her from her homeland to marry her in Zion, and as a result was lifted from the levels of physical attraction to pure love. This theory was criticized rightly or wrongly on the ground of the dignity of the king. It would be out of character for a king of Solomon’s standing and calibre to condescend to the love of a shepherdess (Songs 1:7). Neither would it have been realistic for the closing scene of the love drama to take place in the home village of the bride. Furthermore, in Songs 6:8ff, the bridegroom appeared to set the bride in favourable contrast to the royal harem, which ill accords with the traditions associated with Solomon.

The book combines a mastery of flora and fauna of Bible lands with sentiments of a cultural and commercial intercourse between the lover and his beloved. A number of lyrics contained in the book reflect both a Hamitic and Semitic source, though scholars are critical of any possible connection with the former. In rabbinic circles, Canticles is read exclusively in allegorical terms as has been mentioned earlier, though a literal interpretation is widely accepted among contemporary Biblical scholars and exegetes.

It is remarkable to note the extensive use of metaphors in Canticles: “tents of Kedar”, “tent curtains of Solomon”, “tents of the shepherds” – all of which describe a woman with a beautiful and pleasant physique as a masterpiece of creation. On the other hand, the “chariots of Pharaoh”, “strings of jewels”, “earrings of gold”, describe the exquisite delight of noble men who occupy the royal estate. Other individual clauses include “sachets of myrrh”, “a cluster of henna blossoms”, “vineyards of Engeddi”, “rose of Sharon”, “lily of the valleys”, and others like “lilies among thorns” which collectively refer to a heart that is purified with love and filled with thoughts that are true, just, lovely, honest, pure, noble, kind, virtuous and praise-worthy. On a more literal and dramatic note, they would refer to the heart of Jesus Christ the redeemer of his church, his bride. The heart of the lover became so captivated by the beauty of the

beloved that it forgets all physical limitations of space and time in the expression of the heart of love. Even the tone of the voice become infected with the “love virus” because the heart is filling and swelling with love. Love is compared to a garden where all kinds of good fruits could be found.

The wonder and amazement in Canticles is in the fact that the beloved thirsts for love while the lover throttles the globe for adventure. Even when the beloved stuck to appointments given by the lover, circumstances perhaps beyond her control led to an adjustment which resulted in a strong feeling of frustration, distress and despair in the bowels of both. In the attempt to catch up with the lover so as to regain lost ground the beloved stumbles into night marauders who apparently show no regard for anyone – prince, princess, ranks or file. The radiance and ruddiness of love increases from both their heads to their toes only when they show the right attitude in the midst of pleasant as well as distasteful circumstances until their love dreams are achieved, and they find themselves in each others’ warm embrace.

Only then does the important body parts become the mutual possession of each other – hair, eyes, cheeks, lips, arms, body, legs, mouth. At the peak of its expression, love causes the lovers to become oblivious of the huddles which they have scaled, while they are busily engaged with a mutual romance that amplifies the wonderful features of their individual bodies. They exchange these distinctive features and blend them into one conjugal union, such that sooner or later they become one body, one soul, one spirit in both a mystical and literal sense.

Painful though it seems, but separation either due to profession, occupation, ill-disposition, or even death becomes inevitable at some point in the relationship. Therefore, love must be experienced and expressed at the right time. Moreover, as long as life lasts, distance cannot obliterate the feeling of love. Though separated by thousands of kilometres, a lover’s heart is kept warm in the hope of a possible reunion with the one loved. As the Church song goes it is a day when true lovers “meet to part no more” (Songs 1-6).

### 3.2 Self Assessment Question

- Explain the following metaphors of love emotions in Canticles: ““tents of Kedar”, “tent curtains of Solomon”, “tents of the shepherds” the “chariots of Pharaoh”, “strings of jewels”, “earrings of gold”, “sachets of myrrh”, “a cluster of henna blossoms”, “vineyards of Engeddi”, “rose of Sharon”, “lily of the valleys”, and others like “lilies among thorns”.

### 3.3 Liturgical and Didactic-moral View of Love

The liturgical interpretation of Canticles was first published in 1922 by T.J. Meek. His findings show that Canticles had been derived from sources external to Hebrew customs and manners. His view was countered by N.H. Snaith who claimed to have detected the presence of two alternating cycles in the book relating to specific aspects of Hebrew history. Later biblical scholars like Harrison would prefer sources of Canticles closer to the Phoenician, rather than Egyptian or Babylonian ritual practices. In its present form, Canticles might not have any

connection to any pagan liturgy of a generally immoral character as it is difficult for such to be incorporated into the canon of the Hebrew Scripture without a radical revision of its theological presuppositions, and there are no indications that such a redaction took place at any time.

The didactic-moral as well as the liturgical value of Canticles is captured in all of its eight chapters, but especially in the second chapter. It presents the purity and wonder of true love. Exponents of this position have generally regarded the work as historical and as far as some Christian interpreters are concerned it is alleged that the love portrayed therein directs the reader to the greater love of Christ. Basically, however, the composition teaches the beauty and holiness of the marriage-love relationship that God has ordained for humanity, and it is on such basis that Rowley would support the inclusion of Canticles in the Hebrew canon. Let us take a cursory look at the way the liturgical and didactic-moral experience is worked out in the book:

Love is a vision shared by the opposite sex in a union that is comparable to the blossoming of a rose or lily (Songs 2:1-2). In the same vein, it is also compared to uniqueness of a tree among the trees of the forest. Apparently, every love relationship is unique (2:3) both in aroma it sends out and in the fruit it bears. Love also is a didactic emotion both in its power of covering the nakedness of the beloved and as consolation to the isolated. It is both a banner unfurled to draw the attention of all to the intimacy shared by the lovers, as well as a table which provides enriching delicacies for the enjoyments of the lovers.

From the dining hall to the bedroom of delights, the parts of the body come into amorous intercourse. At this juncture, no interference could be condoned, and so intercourse had to be in absolute privacy (2:3-7).

Apparently, and in very deep amorous language, the intimacy of the lovers – particularly the sex experience is described as a “leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills – standing behind our walls..” The completion of the action opens the way into another realm of love, first, a rising from the love bed (2:8-10; 7:11-13), and second a refreshing showers from the dews outside the court-yard. Among the figurative expressions of both physical and biological communication brought into play in the act of love-making include “the winter is past, the rains are over; flowers appear, singing, cooing of doves.. arise” are heard all around the palace (2:11-13; 6:11; 7:12).

Primitive love such as is depicted in Canticles is full of natural and exquisite delight, but its limitless affection exposes it to rivalry and competition from other equally suitable lovers. Night time is lover’s time. One lover alone does not keep the warmth of love, especially at night (Ecc. 4:9-12). Yet when one lover like Solomon can boast of several wives and concubines, definitely he could not be at off their beds at the same time. Neither was it possible for everyone of those women to share in his love for more than a couple of times in the year.

When love is confronted by such a huge competitiveness, then only a restive lover can be sure of sharing in the romance of the lover even in the quietness of the night. Perhaps, the watchmen were positioned to patrol the city to ensure that everyone stayed in the places of their individual love experiences (3:1-5; Neh.3:29; 11:19; 13:22). There could be several other

reasons why the duty of the watchmen are required within both the kingdom and palace, but they could do nothing without the support of Yahweh – who appointed the king in the first place.

It is evident in Canticles that love is an exalted emotion, with a fragrance that is totally alluring, and with companions that are both valiant and noble. Love rides on a chariot that is upholstered and beautifully adorned, and its crown is both maternal and glorious (3:6-11). Love is attractive and charismatic: it often draws out a huge company of admirers, helpers and providers such that in the place of love, nothing practically is lacking!

### 3.3 Self Assessment Question

- **Mention and discuss at least four of the various interpretations of Canticles.**

### 3.4 Hermeneutical Considerations

In Canticles it is generally believed that a collection of individual love poems within the Hebrew faith communities have been brought together for both didactic and liturgical reasons. The eroticism apparent in them, according to this view, is to be taken literally for what it is. No attempt can succeed in finding structural coherence in the whole or can uncover an underlying moral. Perhaps some of the lyrics may have been sung at weddings, but the hypothesis advanced at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which regards all the lyrics in the book as part of one cycle of poems similar to those sung at modern Syrian folk weddings, is no longer believed plausible. Thus all four interpretations including the allegorical and erotic, the literal and dramatic, and the liturgical and didactic-moral view of Canticles still have their active proponents.

According to Apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians, love is both explorative and protective (cp. 1 Cor. 13:4-8; Songs 2:14-15). Everything about love is beautiful and sweet. Moreover, love like a sweet fragrance sends out sweet aromas that attract “foxes” figurative of persecutions. Love never fails – yes never falters even in the face of troubles. It is instructive to note that love is an affair for the night, not broad daylight, that is, speaking of the amorous component of true love (2:16-17; cp. 2 Pet. 2:13-15 etc.). Those who carouse or make love during the day time are inexorably described as “blots and blemishes” in a canonical text ascribed to no less an apostle than Peter.

In the opinion of E.J. Young, with regards to the teaching of the book:

The Songs of Solomon (or Canticles) does celebrate the dignity and purity of human love. This is a fact which has not always been sufficiently stressed. The Song, therefore, is didactic and moral in its purpose. It comes to us in this world of sin, where lust and passion are on every hand, where fierce temptations assail us and try to turn us aside from the God-given standard of marriage. And it reminds us, in particularly beautiful fashion, how pure and noble true love is. This, however, does not exhaust the

purpose of the book. Not only does it speak of the purity of human love, but by its very inclusion in the Canon, it reminds us all of a love that is purer than our own.

### 3.4 Self Assessment Questions

- Canticles does celebrate the dignity and purity of human love. What would you compare the “foxes that spoil the new vine” to in the new dispensation of interpretation today?

### 4.0 Conclusion

To the Jews Canticles is a source of pure and exquisite delight that must be read and meditated upon during any of the three major national festivals – Passover, feast of Weeks and Tabernacles. Like other Wisdom Literature the book is personal, experiential and poetic. The power of poetry lies in the intensity of love and devotion expressed and especially in the rich imagery which permeates the descriptions of the lovers and their love. The overtly secular and the natural, frank treatment of it, the unique allusions to exotic things in nature, the frequent interweaving of nature and dramatic imagery, sharply distinguish the Canticles from nearly all extant pre-Christian Hebrew literature. Basically, however, the composition teaches the beauty and holiness of the marriage-love relationship that God has ordained for humanity, and it is on such basis that Rowley would support the inclusion of Canticles in the Hebrew canon. We also took a cursory look at the way the liturgical and didactic-moral experience is worked out in the book. We also noted that all four interpretations including the allegorical and erotic, the literal and dramatic, and the liturgical and didactic-moral view of Canticles still have their active proponents. There are several parallels in African oral literature to the tenets of Canticles.

### 5.0 Summary

The essential nature of relationship in Canticles with implication for the redemptive love of the lover for the beloved was surveyed in this unit under the following sub-headings: the Allegorical and Erotic View of Canticles; the Literal and Dramatic View of Canticles; the Liturgical and Didactic-moral View of Canticles, and Hermeneutical Considerations.

The next unit will survey the concept of Wisdom and Old Testament Theology.

### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Discuss in detail the parallelism between erotic and agape love in Canticles
- How can you defend or oppose the explicit language of love used in Canticles?

### 7.0 References / Future Reading

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