



<b>COURSE GUIDE</b>
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Code	CRS820
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## Introduction

**CRS820:** Current Trends in Old Testament Scholarship is a one-semester 3- credit unit course. It will be available toward the award of the Master of Arts degree in Christian theology. The course is also suitable for anybody who is interested in the theological study of the Bible.

The course will consist of 16 units and it will investigate current Old Testament approaches in understanding and interpreting Old Testament texts. It also treats modern critical biblical scholarship with specific emphasis to the Old Testament. 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 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 the separate file, which will be sent to you later.

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

## What you will learn in this course

The overall aim of CRS820: Current Trends in Old Testament Scholarship is to expose you to current Old Testament approaches in understanding and interpreting Old Testament texts and to study the theological ideas found in the Old Testament with particular emphasis on God, humanity, sin, redemption and mission. It will also equip you with modern critical biblical scholarship with specific emphasis to the Old Testament.

Current Trends in Old Testament Scholarship is a part of Biblical theology. Therefore, our study of the theological themes of the Old Testament will include the witness of the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Your understanding of Current Trends in Old Testament Scholarship will equip you with the knowledge to explain Christian faith to other people - Christians and non-Christians.

You will find Current Trends in Old Testament Scholarship to be an enriching study as you benefit from the insights of other biblical theologians.

## Course Aims

The aim of this course (CRS820 – Current Trends in Old Testament Scholarship) is to study some of the theological themes found in the Old Testament, using exegetical methodologies in a canonical order, relating the Old Testament themes to the New Testament, and drawing implications for believing communities in contemporary Africa. This will be achieved by:

- Introducing you to the Methodologies and Currents in Old Testament Theology
- Discussing the nature and attributes of God in the Old Testament
- Exposing you to the realities of God's creations and the endowments God made for humanity.
- Analyzing the importance of covenants in humanity's relationship to the God and to one another.
- Attempting to discover the origin of sin and evil, and explores the provisions made in the Old Testament for its solution.
- Equipping you with a better understanding of the dynamics of worship, priesthood, prophecy, and sacrifices.
- Analyzing modern critical biblical scholarship with specific emphasis to the Old Testament.
- Equipping Christian leaders, teachers and scholars with necessary tools for a better interpretation and application of the Bible to Africa.

### 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 these 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 the Methodologies and Currents in Old Testament Theology
- Discuss the nature and attributes of God in the Old Testament
- Appreciate the realities of God's creations and the endowments God made for humanity.

- Analyze the importance of covenants in humanity's relationship to the God and to one another.
- Discover the Biblical view of the origin of sin and evil, and explores the provisions made in the Old Testament for its solution.
- Become equipped with a better understanding of the dynamics of worship, priesthood, prophecy, and sacrifices.
- Become conscious and work with modern critical biblical scholarship with specific emphasis to the Old Testament.
- Synchronize the different approaches to biblical criticism, namely: author-centred; text-centred; and reader-centred approaches.
- Appreciate the role of history before the text, history in the text, and history after the text in biblical interpretation.

### 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 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. Assignments File
5. Presentation Schedule

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

## Study Units

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

### *Module 1: Creator and Creation*

Unit 1: Methodologies and Currents in Old Testament Theology

Unit 2: God (Nature and Attributes)

Unit 3: Creation (Origin and Providence)

Unit 4: Humanity (Nature and Purpose)

Unit 5: Covenants

### *Module 2: Endowments, Abuse and Recovery*

Unit 1: Land as a Gift

Unit 2: Sin and Evil

Unit 3: Worship

Unit 4: Priesthood

Unit 5: Sacrifice

### *Module 3: Biblical Criticism*

Unit 1: Introduction – Definition and Need for Biblical Criticism

Unit 2: History of Biblical Criticism

Unit 3: Gains and Losses of Modern Biblical Criticism

Unit 4: Author-Centred Approaches

Unit 5: Text-Centred Approaches

Unit 6: Reader-Centred Approaches

**Please note** that Module 1 introduces you to current issues in Old Testament Scholarship and examines methodologies, the Creator and his Creations with relevant themes. The next Module 2 addresses the endowments, abuse and recovery with themes like the gift of land, sin and evil, worship and sacrifice. The last Module 3 discusses modern critical biblical scholarship with specific emphasis to the Old Testament.

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. Adamo, D T (ed). *Biblical Interpretation in African perspective*. Lanham: University of America, 2006.
3. Hayness, S R & Mckenzie, S L (eds). *An introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their application: To each its own meaning*. Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1993.
4. Soulen, R N & Soulen, R K. *Handbook of Biblical criticism*. Louisville, London: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2001.
5. Stuart, D. *Old Testament Exegesis (3<sup>rd</sup> ed)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
7. Palmer, Timothy P. (2011) *A Theology of the Old Testament*. Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks.
8. Hinson, David F. (1976) *Theology of the Old Testament*. London: SPCK.
9. House, Paul R. (1998) *Old Testament Theology*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press.
10. Rowley, H. H. (1956) *The Faith of Israel*. London: SCM Press LTD.
11. Gwamna, Je'adayibe Dogara (2008) *Perspectives in African Theology*. Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks.
12. Parrat, John (1997) *A Reader in African Theology*. London: SPCK
13. Hargreaves, John (1979) *A Guide to the Book of Genesis*. London: SPCK

## Assignments 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 a 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 tutor 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 course 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 contained 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

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

Assessment	Marks
Assignment 1-4	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)
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<b>Module 1</b>			
<b>Unit</b>			
<b>1.</b>	Methodologies and Currents in Old Testament Theology	1	Assignment 1
<b>2.</b>	God (Nature and Attributes)	2	Assignment 2
<b>3.</b>	Creation (Origin and Providence)	3	Assignment 3
<b>4</b>	Humanity (Nature and Purpose)	4	Assignment 4
<b>5</b>	Covenants	5	Assignment 5
<b>Module 2</b>			
<b>Unit</b>			
<b>1</b>	Land as a Gift	6	Assignment 6
<b>2</b>	Sin and Evil	7	Assignment 7
<b>3</b>	Worship	8	Assignment 8
<b>4</b>	Priesthood	9	Assignment 9
<b>5</b>	Sacrifice	10	Assignment 10
<b>Module 1</b>			
<b>Unit</b>			
<b>1</b>	Definition and Need for Biblical Criticism	11	Assignment 11

<b>2</b>	History of Biblical Criticism	12	Assignment 12
<b>3</b>	Gains and Losses of Modern Biblical Criticism	13	Assignment 13
<b>4</b>	Author-Centred Approaches	14	Assignment 14
<b>5</b>	Text-Centred Approaches	15	Assignment 15
<b>6</b>	Reader-Centred Approaches	16	Assignment 16
<b>7</b>	REVISION	17	
<b>8</b>	EXAMINATION	18	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17 Weeks</b>	

Table 2: Course Overview

## How to get the best from this 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 a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set 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 guides 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 own 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 introduction 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 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 questions 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 this *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 location 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 assignments, 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

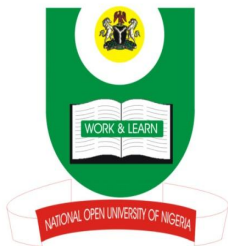
CRS820 intends to introduce you to biblical theology of the Old Testament. Upon completing this course, you will be able to answer questions such as:

- What is the meaning of Old Testament theology?
- What are the attributes of God in the Old Testament?
- What are the implications of the theologies of creation and providence for the existence of sin and evil in the world?
- What does the Old Testament teach about the nature and purpose of humanity?
- What is role of covenant in humanity's relationship with God and with one another?
- Why is worship necessary and are the roles of priesthood and sacrifice?
- Why is land ownership a major factor in many communities?
- Is there any provision for redemption and mission in the Old Testament?
- What are the modern critical biblical scholarship with specific emphasis to the Old Testament?

Of course, the questions you will be able to answer are not limited to the above list. Biblical theology of the Old Testament offers you more. I am excited to lead and guide you in this study of theological themes in the Old Testament and in the whole Bible. I hope you will enjoy the course.

## MAIN COURSE

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Course Title	<b>Current Trends in Old Testament Scholarship</b>
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## MODULE 1: CREATOR AND CREATION

Unit 1: Methodologies and Currents in Old Testament Theology

Unit 2: God (Nature and Attributes)

Unit 3: Creation (Origin and Providence)

Unit 4: Humanity (Nature and Purpose)

Unit 5: Covenants

### *Unit 1: History and Methodology of Old Testament Theology*

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3.5 Tools and Method for OT Theology

3.6 Implications for Africa

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0 References/Future Reading

#### **1.0 Introduction**

The Course CRS820 (Current Trends in Old Testament Scholarship) is structured into three modules. **Module 1** presents the Creator and Creation, discussed under five units in the following order: the History and Methodology of OT Theology; the Nature and



Attributes of God; the Origin and Providence of Creation; the Nature and Purpose of Humanity; and Covenants. **Module 2** is captioned Endowments, Abuse and Recovery, which is an offshoot of Module 1. Its five units discuss Land as a Gift; Sin and Evil; Worship; Priesthood; and Sacrifice. The last section, **Module 3** treats modern critical biblical scholarship with specific emphasis to the Old Testament.

Unit 1, which is the beginning of this study, discusses the History and Methodology of Old Testament Theology. The main body of this unit will be discussed under the following headings: Defining Old Testament Theology; Barriers to the study of OT Theology; Possible approaches to the study of OT Theology; History of OT Theology; Tools and Method for OT Theology; and Implications for Africa.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- Define Old Testament Theology
- Identify some of the barriers to the study of Old Testament Theology
- Note some of the approaches to the study of Old Testament Theology
- Have an overview of the history of Old Testament Theology
- Be acquainted with the tools and method of Old Testament Theology
- Discuss some of the implications of doing OT Theology as an African

## 3.0 MAIN BODY

### 3.1 Defining Old Testament Theology

The word “Theology” is derived from a Greek word meaning “the study or discourse of God” and implies that those who undertake to study God will learn a great deal about God’s nature, actions and attitudes. P. R. House (1998, 53) argues that from learning about God, the student would in turn discover how God relates to the created world, including the human race; that all analyses begin with God and flow to other vital subjects. So, the Old Testament Theology can be defined as “the task of presenting what the Old Testament says about God as a coherent whole.” Only by keeping God at the forefront of research can one compose a viable and balanced theological work.

How does the Old Testament present God, Humanity and the World? Scholars are not in agreement on how OT Theology should be defined or explained. According to W. C. Kaiser (1988, 477), “Old Theology is a discipline in search of a definition, a methodology, an organizing center or motif, and a permanent berth in the curriculum of divinity.” But it was M. R. Schlimm (<http://catalystresources.org/issues/373Schlimm.htm> - 12/7/11) who summarized the opinions of scholars on the best way to approach OT

Theology into three subheadings: (1) by naming a single theme as the Old Testament's unifying concept, (2) by explaining the problems with answering this question, and (3) by answering this question in a way that treats the diversity of Old Testament materials.

By the first opinion: **Naming a single theme**, the scholars sought somewhat simple explanations to how the Old Testament speaks about God, humanity, and creation. They attempted to name a singular theme as *the* rubric that brought all of the OT together into a coherent and organized whole. Examples are: Walther Eichrodt's *Theology of the Old Testament*, which argued that *covenant*, was the central unifying feature of the Old Testament; and G.E. Wright's *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, which provided both the academy and the church with a lens for viewing the Old Testament as a record of ways God had acted powerfully in Israel's history.

The second opinion: **Critique and Uncertainty** observed that attempting to fit all of the Old Testament within one rubric proved too difficult a task. Interpreters became increasingly aware of diversity among biblical texts. In 1970, B. Childs declared that biblical theology was in a state of crisis, citing not only its inability to find a central focus, but also (1) its failure to deal with both the divine and human aspects of Scripture, (2) its difficulty in articulating the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and (3) its inability to provide a foundation for theological education (cf. *Biblical Theology in Crisis* [Westminster, 1970]).

**Recognizing Diversity** was the third opinion that found expression in recent decades. According to this view OT theology is the mainstay of biblical studies; it does not emphasize one concept as the singular item that brings all of the OT together. Instead, they are quite aware of the diversity of genres, concepts, and perspectives within the canon. A key example is W. Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Fortress, 1997). Brueggemann maintains that at the core of OT faith is *testimony* to God's core character, which he describes in terms of covenant solidarity and unlimited sovereignty. Another important work aware of the OT's diversity is E. Gerstenberger's *Theologies in the Old Testament* (Fortress, 2000). The plural noun in this title is not accidental. This volume examines the different theologies present among various social institutions in the OT: families, villages, tribes, nations, and exiles.

This Course will uphold the fact that Old Testament Theology is both a complex assortment of concepts and a variety of perspectives on each of these particular concepts. We will respect the diversity of Old Testament materials, because the OT offers a variety of perspectives so that God may speak to all of humanity in all of its differences, including the African.

### 3.1 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Define Old Testament Theology, and summarize the three different opinions of scholars on how OT Theology could be explained.

### 3.2 Barriers to the study of OT Theology

There are certain difficulties confronting the study of Old Testament Theology. P. R. House (1998, 12) summarized it under five headings: (1) Historical barriers, (2) Literary barriers, (3) Theological/Hermeneutical barriers, (4) General unfamiliarity with Old Testament, and (5) Scholarly barriers.

**Historical Barriers:** The historical context of the Old Testament is different from ours. Even though one does not have to be an expert in ancient history to read the Old Testament intelligently, some historical context is necessary. Such knowledge is particularly important if for no other reason than that the books of the Old Testament are not in chronological order. Unfortunately few readers are knowledgeable in even basic background matters.

**Literary Barriers:** While most readers can easily understand narrative books like Genesis, Joshua, Esther, etc, Poetic works and Prophecies are more difficult to manage. For one to correctly interpret the OT, the person should be able to understand the different types of OT literature and how to interpret them. A wrong understanding would lead to a wrong interpretation and application.

**Theological/Hermeneutical Barriers:** Myriads of theological questions abound in the OT that requires informed answers. Most times scholars are not in agreement of which answer to accept. Examples: How does one reconcile the love of God and the wrath of God? How does the OT relate to NT? How should one relate the OT to the current readers and worshippers?

**General Unfamiliarity with OT:** The barrier of general unfamiliarity with the Old Testament hampers many readers. If there ever was a time when the Old Testament's contents and emphases were well known, then that time has passed. Most students have not read through the entire OT, hence the difficulty in grasping the comprehensive message of the OT.

**Scholarly Barriers:** OT scholars do not agree on how to approach the OT history, content, and theology. The diversity of opinions can be quite confusing.

In approaching OT studies the student is left with a dilemma: on the one hand is the opportunity to analyze and enjoy enriching, inspired, literature; yet on the other hand lie the problems of understanding, interpreting and unifying the material being studied. Any attempt to discuss OT Theology must therefore strive to bridge these gaps while remaining faithful to the OT's message.

### 3.2 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Discuss the five barriers to the study of Old Testament Theology

### 3.3 Possible approaches to the study of OT Theology

A survey of the study of OT Theology shows is quite difficult to choose a starting point for a description of the study of Old Testament theology. P. R. House (1998, 13) identified five possible approaches to the study of OT Theology:

(1) One could begin with the OT itself. How the Old Testament's theology grows and develops within its own pages must be part of a serious analysis of the subject. Attempting to chart how ideas originated and grew to maturity has the potential to leave interpreters seeking the history of theological processes rather than the conclusions of theology proper.

(2) One could also start the description with the New Testament's treatment of the Old Testament, as the New Testament writers made extensive use of the Old Testament. To start here, however, is to run ahead of one's self. The New Testament authors knew the Hebrew Scriptures thoroughly and expected their readers to possess a similar familiarity. Most current readers need to examine the whole of the Old Testament and digest its theological contents before undertaking a study of the relationship between the testaments. Some knowledge and expertise are needed to proceed further.

(3) Examining how the early church fathers, medieval interpreters and leaders of the Reformation viewed Old Testament theology is another potential entry point. John Calvin and Martin Luther are particularly notable examples of figures from church history who interpret the Old Testament as a theological document closely linked to the New Testament. The problem with this approach is that none of these individuals ever produced a single volume specifically devoted to Old Testament theology. Their ideas must be gleaned from literally dozens of sermons, commentaries and other works.

(4) Some modern writers argue that the synagogue tradition is the place to start when assessing Old Testament theology because rabbinic scholars have been commenting on the Hebrew Scriptures since the Old Testament was completed. This approach has the same constraints as trying to gather the various comments from church history. Again, Judaism and Christianity disagree over the value of a two-testament Bible and over the nature and work of Jesus Christ.

(5) The last approach is an attempt by scholars to analyze and explain what the OT itself taught; then sought to incorporate those teachings into a larger biblical or systematic theology. Furthermore, an attention is paid to historical data. Over the years, this approach is preferred.

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

- Evaluate the five possible entry points to the study of Old Testament Theology.

### **3.4 History of Old Testament Theology**

Earlier, we had discussed the five possible entry points of OT Theology, which included: Starting from Old Testament itself; New Testament; Early church fathers, medieval interpreters, and leaders of the Reformation; Rabbinic scholars; and later, the attempt to synchronize the message of the OT with biblical or systematic theology. Our focus in this section is to have an overview of the nature and practice of biblical theology by different groups and scholars over a period of time. P. R. House (1998, 15) highlighted four periods, each of which moves OT Theology studies onto new and challenging ground.

### **(A) Beginnings: From Gabler to Wellhausen (1787-1878)**

While the Bible has been read theologically since its formation, in the early, medieval and Reformation church there was no biblical theology or OT Theology as a discipline. Tertullian, Augustine and Martin Luther did not do biblical theology by itself. Instead, they did general Christian theology (Palmer 132). The origins of biblical theology as a separate discipline are commonly traced to **Johann Phillip Gabler** (c. 1753-1826), who made a distinction between biblical theology and dogmatic or systematic theology. According to Gabler, the origin of biblical theology lies in the Bible itself, while dogmatic theology stems from individual theologians with prior philosophical and ecclesiological commitments. Gabler suggested a three-stage approach to examining biblical theology. First was the gathering of historical data from OT and NT; second was a comparison of the various parts attributed to each testament; and third was to note the agreements and disagreements in order to determine what universal notions emerged. Gabler never wrote an Old Testament theology, but in his work **Georg Lorenz Bauer** (c. 1796) divided the biblical material into the study of God, humankind and Christ.

**G.P.C. Kaiser (c. 1813):** Following Gabler's and Bauer's seminal efforts, Old Testament theologians began to respond to their findings. Kaiser was the first scholar to view the study of Old Testament theology as essentially a history of religion rather than a history of God's revelation. This emphasis on OT theology as a strictly historical exploration was to become the dominant methodology in biblical studies later in the century (House 19).

Other scholars who made remarkable impact during this period were Wilhelm M.L. de Wette (c. 1813) - philosophical approach to theology; Wilhelm Vatke (c. 1806-1882) – “History of Religions” approach to theology, which had a great influence on J. Wellhausen (c.1878); etc. However, OT Theology was reduced to historical questions during this period. Matters of faith were excluded. The historical approach had triumphed on every side. The result was “the tyranny of historicism in OT studies” (Palma 132).

### **(B) The Dominance of Historicism: 1878-1920**

During this period the OT Theology was eclipsed by the History of Israelite Religion. Three factors were responsible: (1) Greater historical consciousness; (2) Archeological discoveries of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Ugarit, Greece, etc; (3) The literary critical works of Vatke, Graf, Kuenen, and above all Wellhausen (Lemke, "Theology - Old Testament," *ABD*).

In 1878, Julius Wellhausen's *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* dictated to a great extent the agenda in OT research. His contributions came from his ability to synthesize the findings of earlier scholars into a readable and unified whole. Wellhausen proposed the JEDP documentary hypothesis, which presented the Pentateuch as a composite document that was put together from different sources, and which could account for the seeming contradictions and inconsistencies found in it.

### **(C) The Re-emergence of Old Testament Theology: 1920-1960**

The dominant hold which the history-of-religions approach had exercised over the discipline of OT theology began to wane during the period between the two world wars. Several factors helped bring this change about. Among them were the general changes in theological climate following World War I, a reaction against the extremes of 19th-century historicism and evolutionary developmentalism, and new developments in the field of OT scholarship itself (Lemke, "Theology - Old Testament," *ABD*).

The year 1933 may be said to mark the beginning of a new era in OT theology with the appearance of two works, one by **E. Sellin** and the other by **W. Eichrodt**. By far the most outstanding and enduring representative of the new era in OT theology is Eichrodt's *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, (Theology of the Old Testament) originally published in three parts between 1933-39 (Eng 1961-67). He used historical-systematic method to understand the main themes of the OT. His Theology is synchronic (systematic) built around the theme of the covenant. In spite of legitimate criticisms and acknowledged shortcomings, Eichrodt's work so far remains unsurpassed in comprehensiveness, methodological thoroughness, and theological acumen (Hayes and Prussner 1985, 277).

Another remarkable contribution of this period came from **Gerhard von Rad** through his two-volume Old Testament Theology. Von Rad believed strongly that the Old Testament speaks repeatedly of God's saving acts in history. He argued that the interpreters of OT must take Israel's confession about God as preaching, not specifically as history (House 35).

### **(D) The Growth of Diversity: 1960-2000**

This period witnessed the emergence of diversity of opinions and methodologies never seen before in OT Theology. Conservative scholarship, which had not been a serious partner in the discipline's dialogue for many years, once again entered the picture. For lack of consensus in methodologies presented by both critical and conservative scholars, **Brevard Childs** (c. 1970) concluded that biblical theology was in crisis in his book. Childs proffered a canonical approach to the study of OT Theology. He separated his canonical approach from other methodologies. His approach does not utilize a single theme, nor does he choose between systematic or tradition-based categories. Instead Childs stated that a canonical approach recognizes that both types of features appear in the Old Testament, as do "innumerable other options" (House 46).

Other notable scholars of this period include: **Walter Kaiser** (c. 1978 – *Toward an Old Testament Theology*), whose work is thoroughly conservative in its opinions on revelation, history and unity of the scripture; **Claus Westermann** (c. 1982 – *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen*), the work presented the theology of OT as having the task of summarizing and viewing together what the OT as a whole, in all its sections, say about God; and **Walter Brueggemann** (c. 1992), who sought to cast OT Theology in a different mold. He maintains that at the core of OT faith is *testimony* to God’s core character, which he describes in terms of covenant solidarity and unlimited sovereignty (Schlimm, <http://catalystresources.org>). Another important work aware of the OT’s diversity is **E. Gerstenberger’s** *Theologies in the Old Testament* (Fortress, 2000). The plural noun in this title is not accidental. This volume examines the different theologies present among various social institutions in the OT: families, villages, tribes, nations, and exiles.

### 3.3 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Identify the different historical periods of OT Theology presented by P. R. House, and summarize the main contributions of scholars in each of the period.

### 3.5 Tools and Method for OT Theology

The survey of the different historical periods in OT Theology (done above) has made it clear that several methodologies for composing Old Testament theology exist. In this Course, we shall adopt a combination of methodologies that would suit our purpose. P. R. House (1998, 53) presented five factors that should guide whatever methodology one adopts in OT Theology:

- (1) It must have a historical base.
- (2) It must explain what the Old Testament itself claims, not what preconceived historical or theological systems impose upon the biblical material.
- (3) When part of Christian theology, Old Testament theology must in some way address its relationship to the New Testament.
- (4) By joining with the New Testament to form biblical theology, Old Testament theology offers material that systematic theologians can divide into categories and topics for discussion.
- (5) By stating what the Old Testament says about God’s nature and will, Old Testament theology moves beyond description of truth into prescription of action (i.e. application to one’s context).

So, our approach in this Course is to study some of the theological themes found in the Old Testament, using exegetical methodologies in a canonical order, relating the Old Testament themes to the New Testament, and drawing implications for believing

communities in contemporary Africa. The selected themes are: God (Nature and Attributes); Creation (Origin and Providence); Humanity (Nature and Purpose); Covenants; Land as a Gift; Sin and Evil; Holy Place and Worship; Priesthood and Sacrifice; Redemption, Mission; Community; and Prophecy; discussed under three modules.

### 3.5 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Can you summarize the five factors that should guide whatever methodology one adopts in OT Theology suggested P. R. House?

### 3.6 Implications for Africa

Just like the global experience, biblical theology in Africa is in search for an acceptable methodology. The advent of Christianity to black Africa coincided with the western imperialism, which impacted on the way the missionaries did biblical interpretation. According to Gwamna (2008, 200),

The resultant effects of this was the superior outlook of western missionaries on Africa and Africans as a whole, whose land, traditions, beliefs, philosophy and entire cosmologies, were branded as ‘undeveloped,’ ‘savagery,’ ‘animistic’ paganism,’ ‘native,’ ‘primitive,’ ‘superstitious,’ ‘pre-logical in mentality’ and ‘incapable of conceiving God’, among others.

In the words of Mbiti, “mission Christianity” produced a church, ‘trying to exist without a theology and without theological consciousness and concern in Africa.’ Even the theology that evolved was one sided” (Gwamna 200). So, in an attempt to extricate Africa from western imperialism in Africa’s theological thoughts, many African scholars have proffered different kinds of methodologies as an alternative in doing biblical theology in Africa. Some of the methodologies for doing biblical theology presented by African scholars include: *Contextualization, Inculturation, Indigenization, Africanization, Intercultural Hermeneutics, African Theology, Black Theology, and Savannah Theology*, etc (**Note:** these methodologies to biblical theology in Africa will be evaluated in the last unit of this Course).

Theological consciousness in Africa is evolving rapidly. The pace will accelerate if biblical scholars in Africa would engage in serious study of Biblical languages, in order to read and interpret the bible for themselves and not rely on versions. Furthermore, biblical theology in Africa should not be lured into syncretistic tendencies, and it should not be at variance from global consensus of what biblical theology stood for.

### 3.6 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Biblical theology in Africa is in search for a methodology. Discuss.



#### 4.0 Conclusion

From the foregoing, Old Testament Theology is a discipline that has a diversity of methodologies in its interpretation and application. The guideline for every methodology remains: OT Theology must have a historical base; it must explain what the Old Testament itself claims, not what preconceived historical or theological systems impose upon the biblical material; when part of Christian theology, Old Testament theology must in some way address its relationship to the New Testament; by joining with the New Testament to form biblical theology, Old Testament theology offers material that systematic theologians can divide into categories and topics for discussion; and by stating what the Old Testament says about God's nature and will, Old Testament theology moves beyond description of truth into prescription of action. This Course adopted a synthesis of theological themes with exegetical methodologies in a canonical order.

#### 5.0 Summary

This unit presented a definition for Old Testament Theology, barriers to the study of OT Theology; possible approaches to the study of OT Theology; history of OT Theology; tools and method for OT Theology; and implications for Africa.

In the next unit, we shall examine the nature and attributes of God using the methodologies we had established here.

#### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

Define the term: Old Testament Theology, and discuss some of the methodologies advocated by scholars for OT Theology.

#### 7.0 References/Future Reading

Gwamna, Je'adayibe Dogara (2008) *Perspectives in African Theology*. Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks.

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**MODULE 1: CREATOR AND CREATION*****Unit 2: God (Nature and Attributes)*****Contents**

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**1.0 Introduction**

The Old Testament opens with the declaration; “In the beginning, God Created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The idea of God is an overwhelming concept emphasized in the Old Testament. There is the belief that God exists. Yet there is no concerted effort anywhere in the Old Testament to prove the existence of God. So, the Old Testament is not a laboratory for the test of whether or not God exists. It is a testimony of the Old Testament believing community of their relationship with the One who created and sustains the universe.

This unit aims at discussing the nature, names, and Metaphors about God in the Old Testament. A hermeneutical consideration of how this Old Testament concept relates to the New Testament and its implications for believing community in Africa concludes the discussion.

## 2.0 Objectives

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

- Understand the Nature of God, Names of God, and Metaphors about God in the Old Testament.
- Discuss the hermeneutical considerations of OT concept of God to the New Testament and African context.

## 3.0 Main body

### 3.1 The Nature of God

The nature of God is discussed throughout the books of the Old Testament canon. God is described in the following terms: The God who creates; the Oneness of God; the Personal God; the Living God; etc.

**The God who creates:** The thought of God as creator is an indispensable feature of biblical theology. The Israelites believe that creation is entirely God's doing. God's uniqueness and sovereignty is manifested in Genesis 1:1, which declares: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." P. R. House (1998, 63) described how this notion ran through OT Canon: (1) In the Prophets creation serves as evidence of God's concern for Israel and the rest of the human race and as proof that the Lord has every right to judge every living creature. For example, Isaiah claims that the fact that the Lord creates the heavens and earth means that the Lord never grows weary and is ever willing to comfort a hurting people grown weary of Assyrian oppression (Is 40:12-31). (2) Several Psalms celebrate the Lord's status as Creator with the intent of stressing God's incomparability, the dignity of the human race made in the Lord's image, the redemption of Israel and the constancy of God's commitment to David and his lineage (Psalms 136 and 89). (3) Job 28 and Proverbs 8 argue that God's skills as Creator prove the Lord's unsurpassed wisdom.

**The Oneness of God:** Deuteronomy 6: 4 records, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord." This confession occupies a central place in the worship of the Jews, and influences their thoughts about religious matters. Scholars are not in agreement on how to interpret the Oneness of God in OT Theology. D. F. Hinson (1976, 19) reported that some may have interpreted it: 'The Lord is one, but there are others.' More likely, some believed: 'The Lord is the only God for Israel, but there are other gods for other peoples.' The other nations worship gods who share their power with lesser deities, but the Lord's power is supreme in Israel. Most certainly 'The Lord is One' came to mean that 'The Lord, the God of Israel, is the only God; all others are mere idols with no real existence and no power.' Other references in to God as One or supreme found in the canon include: Exodus 20:2-3; 1 Sam 5:1-5; Psalm 82:1-5; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 44:6.

**The Personal God:** The God of Israel is personal. The personal nature of God in the Old Testament is readily shown by references to nearly every portion of the Canon. God is ascribed human functions, namely: God speaks (Gen. 1:3), hears (Exd.16:12), smells (1Sam 26:19) has eyes (Amos 9:4), personal emotions (Zeph 3:17; Ezek 16:8), etc. According W. G. Baab (1934, 28),

It is clear that God is viewed as having personal and even manlike traits whereby he may communicate or otherwise relate himself to others. Yet these evidences of personal being are extremely superficial and inconclusive. They obviously fail to distinguish God from men; neither do they identify the deeper meaning of personality.

As a matter of fact, the basic ingredients of the concept are to be found in the many indications of the self-determination, the ethical freedom, and the affective characters of the divine life. There is abundant evidence on each of these points, and its accumulation readily leads to the conclusion that the God exhibited in the Old Testament is personal in the deepest and most significant sense.

The self-determination of God implies that God is able to conceive purposes and work for their realization in the processes of history as well as beyond. This assumes the power of thought and reflection as well as memory and volition. This self-determination and self-direction of God is seen in every document of the Old Testament. In Genesis 1:3, God said, 'Let there be light!' This utterance requires a preconceived purpose which receives fulfillment in the very pronouncement of the words quoted.

**The Living God:** The Old Testament presented God as a living person. Jeremiah 10:10 records, "But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King..." this signifies the God who acts in history, who performs mighty deeds of deliverance, and who manifests his power among men. He demonstrates that he is a living God by disposing of Israel's enemies. In the words of Joshua, "By this you shall know that the living God is in your midst, and that he is surely going to drive out of your way the Canaanites" (Josh.3:10). According to W. G. Baab (1931, 25), "the implication of the word "Living" shows that God is not simply an idea; he is an experiences power, acting upon and through human life and the natural order which sustains it. He delivers, redeems, saves, helps, and blesses."

### 3.1 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Identify and discuss the four main ideas of the nature of God in the Old Testament?

### 3.2 The Names of God

The belief in the existence of God is common to many religions, and each of these religions has different names for the supreme deity. In the Old Testament different names are used for the supreme deity, namely: *Elohim*, *El*, *YHWH*, *Adonai*, etc.

***Elohim*:** In Genesis 1:1, we read: “In the beginning God created...” The Hebrew word used for God is *Elohim*, a word which is plural in form, and which is sometimes used of foreign deities and translated gods. In the great majority of its occurrences, however, it is rendered God and refers to the Israelite deity. Of itself therefore its use neither demands nor excludes a monotheistic view. It is probable that the term took its rise in a polytheistic milieu, but in the most ancient texts of the Bible it is already used of a single God and is construed with a singular verb (Rowley, 51). H. H. Rowley opines that this does not prove that *Elohim* is thought of as the only existing deity, and indeed there can be little doubt that in historical times many in Israel used this term of their God without any idea of denying the reality of other gods. Another possible implication of the usage of the word *Elohim*, could be its allusion to Trinity in a Christian parlance. T. P. Palmer (2011, 17) argued that it was more likely that the plural form *Elohim* reflected a plurality of majesty or intensity.

***El*:** The word *El* sometimes stands alone or it is used as a prefix to another word to form the name of God. So, *El* is a generic word for God or god in the Old Testament. Amongst many other terms for God found in the OT, *El-Shaddai* and *El-Elyon* were used in reference to the God of Israel. It is certain, however, that there was a stage when they were thought of as separate and distinct deities. Moreover, incorporated in proper names are elements consisting of the names of other gods who are known to us from the texts which have come down from Israel’s neighbours. For Example, when Abram offered a tithe to Melchizedek, the priest of *El-Elyon*, he equated the Canaanite deity *El-Elyon* (i.e. The Most High God) with *El-Shaddai* (i.e. The All Sufficient or Almighty God), the God of the Hebrews (Ajah, 45).

***YHWH*:** The most common name used for God in the Old Testament is the *tetragrammaton* (i.e. the four letters) *YHWH*. In Exodus 6:2, Moses was told that God appeared to the Patriarchs as *El-Shaddai*, and not as *YHWH* (translated the LORD), the new identity with which he was appearing to Moses. But it is clear here that the God of the patriarchs is identified with the God in whose name Moses came, though they bear different names. According to H. H. Rowley (1954, 52), “In Israel the name *Shaddai* fell largely out of use, and was replaced by the name of Moses’ God. Where it remained, it was generally in poetry; and the same is true of *Elyon*. We never find any opposition between the God of Moses and the God of the patriarchs, or any undercurrent of feeling that the identification was not complete.”

Concerning how the actual meaning of the letter *YHWH* or how it should be pronounced; scholars are not in agreement. Some rendered it as *Yahweh*, while others call it *Jehovah*. But, in the Hebrew tradition, the word is not pointed or pronounced. In its place they

would prefer to pronounce it *Adonai* (translated as **LORD** – all the letters written in the upper case).

**Adonai:** In the Old Testament, *Adonai* could mean Lord, master, LORD depending on the context. The plural form *Adonai*, like the plural form *Elohim*, is regularly used with singular verbs and modifiers, so it is best to construe the Name as an emphatic plural or plural of majesty. When the plural is formed using a singular possessive ending (my Lords), it always refers to God, and occurs over 300 times in the *Tanakh* in this form ([http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Names\\_of\\_G-d/Adonai/adonai.html](http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Names_of_G-d/Adonai/adonai.html) -19/9/11).

The Old Testament presented the Israelite God, *YHWH* as the only LORD, and not *Baal* (the Canaanite God of Rain and Fertility). The Canaanites used the term *Baal*, or Lord, for their gods, and in the post-settlement period Israelites worshipped at Canaanite shrines according to Canaanite rites, and used this term when they would have affirmed that they were worshipping the God of Israel. There was always an undercurrent of feeling that Israel's God was not *Baal*, and in times of national tension this found open expression.

### 3.2 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Mention and discuss two names used for God in the Old Testament.

### 3.3 Attributes of God

The attributes of God refers to the way the Old Testament presented the characters of God. It is in the attributes of God that the distinctive elements of the faith of Israel lie. The characters of God listed in the OT include: Love, Justice, Holiness, and Faithfulness.

**Love:** The Old Testament presented God as the God of love. Israel was suffering in Egypt, God loved her and had pity on her and his love both expressed his own character and laid its constraint upon Israel. The Book of Hosea gave a graphic picture of how God loved his people, even though they remained unfaithful to him (Hosea 1-3). According to Rowley (62), "It is sometimes supposed that it was to Hosea that Israel owed the thought of God as gracious and merciful. Yet it clearly went back far behind Hosea to the event of the Exodus, and in a passage which is held by many critical scholars to antedate the time of Hosea" (cf. Exodus 34:6). Indeed, Hosea developed the thought of God as gracious and merciful, and with an intensity born of his own tragic experience declared the constancy of God's love, and pressed on people the demand of that love for an answering love and loyalty.

**Justice:** If God was a saving God in Exodus, he was by no means always represented as such. There were many occasions when he delivered his people, and there were other occasions when the prophets predicted woe for them. When Israel did not reflect God's character in her internal life, but by the evils that were rampant revealed her sorry state, then her way could not prosper. This was not simply God was offended with her. It was the expression of his moral character and his love. For in the teaching of the prophets the only foundation for man's well-being lies in obedience to the will of God. If God were

indifferent to their well-being he would not be God of love. Hence the discipline of events was thought of as designed to bring Israel back into the way of God's will, so that she might reap blessing, and the disasters foretold by the prophets were as much the expression of the character and will of God as the deliverance from Egypt had been. Israel's election did not mean that she was the pampered favorite of God. It brought her high privilege; but it also laid heavy responsibility on her, and was charged with constraint, which she could only disclaim to her hurt (Rowley 63).

**Holiness:** Holiness was at first thought of as a numinous quality attaching to God and to persons and things that were separated from common use. In the faith of Israel a moral content was given to the term. This is associated especially with the teaching of Isaiah, who is fond of calling God 'The Holy One of Israel', though again it was not without preparation before his time. Rowley (66) highlighted that in the call of Moses, the numinous quality of God's holiness (i.e. awe in the presence of God in terms of power and separateness from humanity) and the moral consideration (i.e. goodness and mercy in sending Moses as an agent of deliverance) came together. There is a moral quality in the holiness of God, as well as the numinous quality which communicated itself to the very ground on which Moses stood (cf. Exod. 3:1ff).

**Faithfulness:** Faithfulness of God is often insisted in the Old Testament. This term implies that God is not arbitrary in character, but self-consistent and to be relied on. He does not resort to the exercise of power to cover fickleness, which man is therefore powerless to question. In him there is no fickleness, but in all that he is and all he does he is to be trusted. Malachi 3:6 records, "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished." It is true that there are many passages where God is said to repent of having done something. This term is not used in a moral sense, however, implying that God recognized that he had been at fault. There is certainly an element of anthropomorphism in the term, and it is used at various levels of meaning in the Old Testament. In general terms it may be said to mean that God changed his mind, not because of fickleness in himself, but because of failure in men or because of man's repentance.

### 3. 3. Self-Assessment Exercise

- Summarize each of the attributes of God discussed in this section.

### 3.4 Metaphors about God in the Old Testament

The Old Testament made several metaphorical labels on God, signifying how the community of faith in the Old Testament regarded God; namely: the Lord as King; God as a Rock; Father, Brother and Kinsman; God as Judge; Shepherd; etc.

**The Lord as King:** The LORD as King is a "root metaphor." It generates such metaphors as the notion of the temple as God's royal dwelling - God's palace; the concept that God is an enthroned ruler of the Universe and presides over a heavenly court of divine armies

(Lord of Hosts); that there will be a great battle, the "Day of LORD." The OT speaks of the Lord as King a total of 85 times; representative passages include: Num 23:21; Deut 33:5; 1 Sam 12:12; Isa 6:5; 33:17, 22; Jer 8:19; 10:7, 10; Dan 4:37; Mal 1:14; Psalm 10:16; 24:7, 8, 9, 10; 29:10 (Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 116).

The root metaphor of the Lord as King utilizes two divine designation: "the King" and "LORD of Host" - the first gives us a glimpse of the LORD as the warring deity and the second as the enthroned reigning deity" (cf. Isaiah 6:1-5). In the biblical ideological complex in which the Lord as King is the very center, there are three components: chaos battle, kingship, and temple. It is logical to assume that this root metaphor was especially cultivated in the milieu of the temple, which would help to explain its occurrence in the Psalter and related literature" (Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 104).

**God as a Rock:** The Hebrew word *zur* means "rock." The word was a figure of speech drawn from Palestinian scenery to portray divine strength and permanence. No doubt these local associations favoured the continued usage of the word (cf. Isa. 32:2), but it is quite probable that the primary meaning was given in the pre-Mosaic period when the patriarchal deity, Shaddai, was invested with mountain imagery (Anderson, "Names of God," *IDB CD-Rom*). In Akkadian prayers the deity was often addressed as "great mountain," and throughout the West men worshiped the great storm-god, Hadad, usually known as Baal among the Canaanites. Thus the mountain or rock imagery suggested by *zur* has its source in the North West Mesopotamian locale with which the patriarchs are connected. Support for this view is found in some of the early personal names like Elizur - "My God is a Rock" - Num. 1:5. Another early name was Pedahzur - "May the Rock Redeem" - Num. 1:10 (Anderson).

According to OT testimony, Israel affirmed that the LORD is the Rock of Israel (Isa. 30:29; cf. Gen. 49:24). The name often appears in poetic literature (e.g., Ps. 18:2; parallel with Isa. 18:31; 18:46; 19:14; Isa. 17:10; 44:8; Hab. 1:12). An important passage in this connection is the so-called Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1), where it is affirmed that the LORD is the Rock who has given birth to his people (vs. 18) and whose stability and steadfastness are their sole refuge (vs. 4, 15, 30-31). In Isa. 26:4 the LORD is called an "everlasting rock" (Anderson).

**Father, Brother and Kinsman:** A cluster of names, such as "father"; "brother" ("kinsman") were used in antiquity to express the very close family relation between the deity and his worshipers. The conception of family kinship with the deity is reflected in personal names like *Eliab*, "My God is Father" (Num. 1:9; 1 Sam. 16:6); *Ahiezer*, "My [divine] Brother is help" (Num. 1:12); or *Ammishaddai*, "[The god of] my Kindred is Shaddai" (Num. 1:12). The ancient Semitic background of these divine names is the view that the god was actually a blood relative of the clan or family, whose members were by the same token sons, brothers, and kinsmen of the god (Anderson).



**God as Judge:** The title "Judge," like "King," refers to the function of the ruler. In a passage from the fourteenth-century Ras Shamra Tablets the two terms are used of the deity in poetic parallelism: "Our king is Triumphant Baal, our judge, above whom there is no one!" Moreover, the word "judge" was used for the early leaders of the Israelite confederacy, whose task was not just to arbitrate legal disputes (as in our restricted meaning of the term), but to get justice for Israel by acting in military crises when the confederacy was threatened (see the book of Judges). In the highest sense, the LORD is Judge (Gen. 18:25), for his actions in history set things right, by humbling the oppressor and exalting the oppressed. Other passages include Isa 33:22; Psa. 7:8, 9; 96:13).

**Shepherd:** The title "Shepherd" is also related to the office of kingship. In the ancient Orient the king was often styled as the shepherd of his people, as, e.g., in the prologue to the Code of Hammurabi, and the court language was also applied to deities whose role was to lead and protect the people. Divested of its ancient polytheistic associations, the term was applied to the LORD throughout the OT period, and was particularly appropriate for expressing the personal relation between God and his people in the covenant. Examples: Israel is the LORD's "flock" or the "sheep of his pasture" (Psa. 79:13; 95:7; 100:3); the LORD is the Shepherd (Gen. 49:24; Psa. 80:1, 2) who leads (literally "shepherds") and enfolds his people with goodness and concern, as expressed classically in the Twenty-third Psalm. Others are: Isa. 40:11; cf. Ezek. 34:1.

### 3.3 Self-Assessment Questions

- Explain what the OT means, when it refers to the LORD as King, a Rock, and a Shepherd.

### 3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations

The reality of God is the main focus of the Old Testament. 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. For example, in the Old Testament, God has various names or titles; some are generic, but one is personal (Palmer 16). Different African traditions and cultures have a common name or title for God. Nyamiti (Parrat 61) opined that Christianity could learn much from the divine names and the divine attributes stressed by Africans, such as friend, fecundity, fatherhood, life-giver, protector. But he would need to examine them in the light of the cultural elements central to African cultures: dynamism, solidarity, participation, the sacred, and anthropentrism. In particular, the symbol of the Motherhood of God found in some African cultures, could, when used correctly, complement the biblical imagery of the Fatherhood of God, and open up a deeper understanding of the nature of the Deity.

### 3.5 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Can you explain how a good knowledge of African concept of God could facilitate a good understanding of the concept of God in OT?

#### 4.0 Conclusion

From the fore-going, we have seen that in presenting the nature and attributes of God, the Old Testament affirms the existence of God, who is both personal and living amongst other attributes. As a personal God, he is able to conceive purposes and work for their realization in the processes of history as well as beyond. This assumes the power of thought and reflection as well as memory and volition. As a living person, God acts in history, who performs mighty deeds of deliverance, and who manifests his power among men. He demonstrates that he is a living God by disposing of Israel's enemies. This understanding explains why different metaphors and names were used in connection with God in the Old Testament.

#### 5.0 Summary

This unit discussed the nature of God, which includes: the God who creates, Oneness of God, the personal God and the Living God; various names for God: *Elohim, El, YHWH*, and *Adonai*; attributes of God: love, justice, holiness and faithfulness; and metaphors about God: the Lord as King, God as Rock, Father, Brother and Kinsman, God as Judge and Shepherd. The unit concluded with a hermeneutical consideration explaining how African concept of God could facilitate a better interpretation of the OT in African context.

The next unit will dwell on creation (origin and providence) as a product of God.

#### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

Outline and discuss some of the attributes of God you know. How is God described as a Judge and Shepherd in the Old Testament?

#### 7.0 References/Future Reading

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**MODULE 1: CREATOR AND CREATION*****Unit 3: Creation (Origin and Providence)*****Contents**

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**1.0 Introduction**

The OT begins with the affirmation that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1.1). Creation is the sovereign act of the Triune God who was before the foundation of the world. This unit examines the origin and providence of creation discussed under the following headings: Creation in the Pentateuch, Creation in Prophetic Literature, Creation in Wisdom Literature, Christ the Instrument of creation, and Hermeneutical Considerations.

**2.0 Objective**

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

- Understand the biblical concepts of God in the Pentateuch, Prophetic, and Wisdom literatures of the Old Testament
- See how Christ is God's instrument of creation

- Draws lessons for today through a hermeneutical consideration

### 3.0 Main Body

#### 3.1 Creation in the Pentateuch

The oldest creation narrative in the Bible is probably recorded in Genesis 1 & 2. Scholars have different opinions whether or not there are two different accounts of the same event recorded by two different traditions, namely Yahwist tradition (Gen. 2.4ff) and Priestly tradition (Gen 1). House (6) opined that the Pentateuch began the Bible's sustained interest in creation and its attendant theology. It was here that themes such as God's personal involvement with human beings, God's sovereignty, God's power, God's giving of standards, and God's willingness to forgive erring human sinners have their origins. It was also here that the fact that God is the only creator, indeed the only deity, begins its key role in Biblical theology. In some way all subsequent doctrines flow from these truths, all of which were founded on the principle that the Lord is the creator. These truths must be received and processed through human reason, but in the end they must be accepted as true by faith.

**God's Sovereignty:** Genesis 1:1 claims that the Lord is the sole source and cause of creation's existence. This verse also indicates that though the Lord is directly and personally involved in creation the Lord is separate from creation. Commentators generally agree with these initial points, but they have often debated what the opening phrase teaches about the timing of creation. William J. Dumbrell writes,

Since there is no agreed-upon translation of the two verses, interpreting them is fraught with difficulties. Verse 1 may be translated absolutely ("In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth") or dependently ("When God began to create the heavens and the earth ..."). Though both translations are syntactically and contextually possible, Genesis 1:1 is best regarded as an absolute beginning, and indication of God's control over all creation as complete (House 6).

Besides emphasizing that the world owes its existence to God, the only one able to create, Genesis 1:1 reveals that the Lord is solitary and unique. That is, there is no other god involved in the creation process and therefore there is no deity like the Lord. Genesis 1:2 indicates that the Lord personally works in creation through his spirit. Though the earth was "formless and void," the "Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." Though it is possible for "spirit" to mean either "wind" or "spirit," C.F. Keil correctly comments that here the spirit is "the creative Spirit of God, the principle of all life (Ps. 33:6; 104:30), which worked upon the formless, lifeless mass..."

**Sin and evil:** The Pentateuch marks the beginning of series of narratives which centre on the emergence and development of evil within humanity – expulsion from Eden, Cain's murder of Abel, and the marriage of the sons of God with human women and the great

flood, until the time of Abraham which marks a new beginning for the people of God (Gen.1-12). Nurnberger (2004) commented that on the one hand the narrative describes what ought to be. Where there is no evil, there is no knowledge of the difference between good and evil, thus no necessity to hide anything from God or from each other, thus no shame. Similarly, in authentic human existence, there is no conflict between humanity and nature. The creator clearly intended human existence to be without hardship.

On the other hand, the narrative depicts the discrepancy between what ought to be and what is. The commandment of God evokes human desire. While it is meant to preserve the wellbeing of humanity, it actually provides the occasion for disobedience. Where the moral norm is broken, shame emerges and with it the need to hide, to cover oneself, to find excuses and scapegoats. Adam blames his wife whom God has provided; Eve blames the snake, which God has made. Thus in the end God is to blame.

At the end of the Genesis creation accounts certain theological elements are in place. First, the Lord has been portrayed as unique, personal, sovereign, caring, and good. God's character is firmly presented as the core of all that is best in creation. Whatever is good about the heavens and earth can be traced directly back to God. Second, human beings are entrenched as the flawed stewards of creation. Third, sin must be overcome for creation to return to its intended purpose. Readers are left to cling doggedly to the belief that the personal God capable of creating the created order will also have the ability to recreate it as needed (House 9).

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

- Can you explain the Sovereignty of God and the role of sin in creation?

### **3.2 Creation in Prophetic Literature**

The Old Testament teaching on creation goes beyond the Pentateuch. House (9) argued that the Prophets handled creation themes in a manner calculated to deal with the specific problems in their eras as well as with the larger problems related to human sin left unresolved at the end of the Pentateuch. Isaiah and Amos are good representatives of how the prophetic literature uses creation themes to correct and exhort the people of their day. Both Isaiah and Amos focus on how a proper grasp of creation theology can form, or reform, God's people into a holy nation. Isaiah 40-48 addresses an audience that has been devastated by the Assyrian invasion known as the Sennacherib Crisis, which occurred about 711 or 701 B.C. This audience could easily have been tempted to serve the gods of Assyria, as king Hezekiah's father Ahaz had done (see 2 Kings 16:10-18), given the fact that Assyria had destroyed all of Judah except Jerusalem, which Isaiah 1:1-9 says was left with but a few survivors. They could also have thought it wise to turn to the Babylonian gods, for the Babylonians were constantly opposing Assyria (see Isaiah 39). They might even have considered venerating Egypt's gods, for the Egyptians had been able to withstand Assyria's attempts to overrun their territory.

**Isaiah** deals with their feelings of rejection by highlighting God's greatness, power, Sovereignty, and mercy in 40:12-31. God cannot grow weary, and God cannot forget Israel, he argues. Why? It is because the Lord is the creator, the one who stretched out the heavens and the earth (40:12). Because the Lord is the one who makes nations and decides how important or unimportant they will become (40:15-17). Because it is the Lord who sets up and takes down rulers (40:23).

**Amos** is not as interested in comforting and instructing as he is in waking up a stubborn, sinful nation. Working about 760-750 B.C., Amos seeks to warn the northern kingdom of Israel to repent before judgment comes. To achieve his purposes he calls upon creation theology at three crucial junctures to punctuate his emphasis on the day of the Lord, or the day of God's wrath. This day is coming not only for Israel, but for all surrounding nations as well (see 1:2-2:8). After declaring Israel and its neighbors guilty of a variety of heinous acts in 1:12:8, the prophet proceeds to focus on Israel's unjust and unrighteousness ways in 2:9-4:5. God brought Israel out of Egypt and called some of Israel's best to be Nazirites and prophets, only to have these messengers rejected (2:9-12). Thus, judgment must come (2:13-15). God's word for the people now is one of punishment, not of deliverance (3:1-5); their richest men and women have oppressed others and sinned in their religious observances (4:15), so God sent them smaller punishments to warn them (4:6-11), all to no avail. Why should Israel be terrified? Why should Israel repent? It is because the creator has decided to judge (4:12-13).

Amos used the fact that the Lord is the creator to warn (4:12-13), express God's wrath over injustice (5:8-9), and announce the end of God's patience with a rebellious people (9:5-6). In other words, Amos uses creation theology quite differently than Isaiah does. Amos wants his audience to sense fear at continuing to rebel against the creator. He wants his audience to take no comfort in the knowledge that there is no other god. He wants his audience to tremble at the thought of the creator and let this awe change their behavior. Isaiah and Amos used creation theology to remake God's people into a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, a goal first set forth in Exodus 19:5-6.

### 3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- Discuss the concept of creation as presented by prophets Isaiah and Amos.

### 3.3 Creation in Wisdom Literature

Psalms, Proverbs, and Job are considered as part of Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. They presuppose the existing tradition about creation, but moves in their own directions. Creation theology is strategic here in declaring God's personal wisdom and absolute sovereignty over the created order. These twin emphases are in turn vital for these books' arguments that the Lord is the source of all wisdom and that the Lord capably rules the universe in a way that demonstrates he is worth serving under all conditions.

**In Psalm 90**, God's personal majesty receives further definition through detailed creation theology. In 90:1 the Lord is depicted as protecting Israel throughout all generations. Then the psalmist claims that God has no personal end or beginning, and bases his opinion on God's role as creator. The author says to God, "Before the mountains were born, or you gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (90:2). Clearly, this text recognizes no end or beginning for the one who has created the world. It also recognizes that God's "majesty can hardly be grasped by his creatures." There has never been a time when the Lord was not God, and no such time will ever arise. Because the Lord is the creator, the psalmist goes on to argue that God has power to give and take life (90:3-6). The author also determines that one must pray to the creator for deliverance and forgiveness (90:7-17). Thus, in this psalm the creator is also the giver and taker of life, the one who forgives sin, the one who shelters Israel, and the one who has no beginning or end. Given these facts, it is appropriate for the psalmist to take all needs to the Lord. Creation theology becomes the basis, then, for intercession, for healing, and for confession of sin.

**Psalms 89 and 104-106** begin their survey of God's saving works on Israel's behalf with creation. Here creation is the beginning point of God's redemptive plan that culminates in the Davidic covenant and the need for deliverance from exile. In these psalms the people cry out for help as they recall all that God has done in the creation of the heavens and earth, the exodus, the conquest, and finally in the chastisement of the chosen people. Current forgiveness would become, then, the latest in a long line of great acts that began with Genesis 1-2. Creation theology in this passage is intended to lead to contrition, and ultimately to cleansing and wholeness (House 10).

**Job and Proverbs** have as high a view of God's person and worth as the psalms, but they use these beliefs to make different theological points. For Job the issue is whether or not the creator is faithful, trustworthy, and kind. God's power is never questioned in the book. Rather, God's use of his unlimited authority and strength is under scrutiny. Thus, it is vital that in Job chapters 38-42 emphasize the capable and kindly manner in which

God, the creator, rules creation. Nurnberger (221) commented that in Wisdom Literature we saw how a genre responded to the transcendent needs for meaning, acceptance and authority in the face of the enduring riddles of human existence. It was as if a new "Word of God" was born in their minds as they battle with the universal and never ending problems of life and death, righteousness and sin, nature and history.

### 3.3 Self-Assessment Questions

- Show how Psalms, Proverbs and Job presented the personal wisdom and absolute sovereignty of God over the created order.

### 3.4 Christ the Instrument of Creation

The prologue to John's Gospel in the New Testament proclaims Christ to be the *logos*, that is, the principle according to which the world was put together, or the wisdom with which God created the universe, as in Wisdom literature (cf. Prov. 8). Similarly Col 1:15 refers to him as the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him and through him are all things created, etc.

Referring to *ultimate power*, Christ was proclaimed to be Ruler of the universe, seated "at the right hand of God", that is, as God's prime minister or executive (Mtt 28:18; Acts 2:33, 5:31). His miracles were perceived to be the manifestations of messianic authority prophesied in the Old Testament. Furthermore, Christ occupies *ultimate space*, shown as having descended to the lowest, and ascended to the highest places imaginable (Eph 4:9f). He has been enthroned above all powers in the heavens, the realm of God (Eph 1:20). Also, Christ was presented as having *ultimate beginning*, as God's instrument of creation (Col 1:15ff; Heb 1:2f; John 1:1-5). The understanding is that Christ acts both as the channel of God's power and as the embodiment of God's redemptive love. Christ represents God's original intentions. This is where the creation narrative fits in.

### 3.4 Self-Assessment Questions

- Christ represents God's mastery over Creation. Discuss.

### 3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations

The Old Testament concept of creation is not a product of science, but a product of the community of faith. In the words of Hebrews 11:3, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible." The Old Testament believes that the LORD is the only God, so the only creator of the universe. According to Hinson (24), "several important ideas follow from the belief that God created the heavens and the earth." Such ideas include that God is Almighty (Exod 6:3); the LORD controls nature (Gen 8:22; Jer 31:35, 36; Amos 5:8; Ps 145:15, 16); God works miracles through nature (1kings 17); the LORD is God of wisdom (Ps 147:4, 5); God has a purpose for the creation (Gen 1:28; 2:15) and evil cannot stop the LORD's work (Gen 6:12; Exod 32:7).

### 3.5 Self-Assessment Question

- What are the implications that God created the universe?

### 4.0 Conclusion

The Old Testament concept of creation is multifaceted. From the fore-going, the Pentateuch teaches that God alone is the creator, the cause and source of all things that are made. It claims that the creator is personal, and as such entrusts human beings with the care of the earth and with divine laws. The Prophetic writings accepted and built upon the points made in the Pentateuch. Writing to a dispirited, wavering, people of uncertain faith, Isaiah uses creation theology to comfort, challenge, correct, embolden, and instruct. Amos



has little comfort to offer his erring, stubborn, oppressing audience. He uses creation theology to punctuate warnings about judgment for oppression and announcements that the creator's patience with sinful Israel has been exhausted. Psalms, Job, and Proverbs adapt prophetic uses of Genesis 1-2 still further. The psalmists use Genesis 1:26-31 as a reason for praise, and monotheistic passages such as Isaiah 40-48 as reasons to bow down and worship the only living God. Job stresses the notion that God is a wise, capable, and revelatory God to conclude that the Lord is worth trusting and serving when one suffers due to no fault of theirs. Proverbs invites those who need wisdom to seek it from the one who has possessed it from the very beginning. Wisdom is available to human beings because the creator wills to reveal it to them.

### 5.0 Summary

The above adopted a canonical approach in evaluating the concept of creation in the Old Testament. The Pentateuch gave the foundational understanding of creation as the product of God. This section discussed the sovereignty of God and the presence of sin in creation. Prophetic writings followed after the Pentateuch teachings. Prophetic books of Isaiah and Amos were examined. Each of the books resorted to the creation theology as a tool for demanding obedience to commands of God, who is the creator. Wisdom literature amplified the personality and wisdom of God in creation. Christ as the instrument of God's creation and a hermeneutical consideration concluded the unit.

In the next unit, we shall examine one of the products of God in creation, namely: the nature and purpose of Humanity.

### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

Critically examine the concept of Creation in the Hebrew Canon of the Scriptures.

### 7.0 References/Future Reading

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**MODULE 1: CREATOR AND CREATION*****Unit 4: Humanity (Nature and Purpose)*****Contents**

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**1.0 Introduction**

The Old Testament declares that humanity is a creature of God with a definite nature and purpose. Humanity occupies a unique place among the creatures. Our duty in this unit is to examine the distinctive features of the nature of humanity recorded in the Old Testament. They include: humanity as a creature, humanity as a thinking being, humanity as an ethical being, humanity as a free being, man a religious person, and humanity as the image of God.

**3.1 Humanity as a creature**

The graphic account of the creation of humanity by God is recorded in Genesis 2. Other references abound in the Old Testament, which attest to the creation of humanity by God. Humanity is a creature sharing the weakness and limitations of all creatures, made of flesh and so is subject to sickness and death (cf. Job 14:2; Ps. 103:15-16). The frailty of human flesh was highlighted in order to glorify the everlasting God (Isa 40:6-8). The weakness of humanity in comparison with the power of God was again brought out in the

Chronicler's history of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah. King Hezekiah reassures the people and tells them to be strong and of good courage, for they have on their side a greater power than the Assyrian. "With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." (II Chr. 32:8). Otto Baabs (62) argues, "Humanity is thus undependable, not because of sinfulness, but because in him is weakness inherent in his nature as creature participating in the frailty of all created beings."

The close connection between humanity and animals makes them both children of nature. Humanity breathes the air which surrounds him; he reproduces his kind as do the animals; he partakes of food; he sleeps for the renewal of his strength; he wears clothing—perhaps the skins of animals—to protect his body; and he lives with his own kind for survival and companionship. In none of these activities does he differ greatly from the beasts of the field. As a conscious organism struggling for existence, he should be depicted as one who makes all of the complicated adjustments demanded by his basic drives, which brought his civilization into existence.

### 3.1 Self-Assessment Questions

- Humanity is undependable, not because of sinfulness, but because in him is weakness inherent in his nature. Discuss.

### 3.2 Humanity as a Thinking Being

Perhaps, one of the most distinguishing features of humanity from other creatures is the thinking ability in the human. Old Testament presented several Hebrew words that may be helpful in understanding this aspect of humanity. The words are: *ruach* (spirit), *nephesh* (soul), *lev* or *levav* (heart, mind), and *basar* (body). When used of humanity, *ruach* has a wide range of meanings, from "breath" to "the spirit of prophecy." It may connote wind, air, gas, temper, disposition, vivacity, vigour, courage, anger, patience or impatience, spirit (bitterness of spirit), and the spirit of prophecy. It is imparted by God (Zech. 12 :1); it is the principle of life within humanity (Job. 27:3); it is preserved by God (10:12); it is the life of all human beings, which God holds in his hand (12:10); it is given by God to all people upon the earth (Isa. 42:5); God is the "God of the spirits of all mankind" (Num. 16:22; 27:16); God weighs the motives of each person (Prov. 16:2). At death the *ruach* departs from humanity (Psa. 31:5; 78:39; 146:4; Job 17:1; 34:14; EccI. 3:21; 12:7).

The second term is *nephesh*, variously translated as "soul, living being, life, self, person, desire, appetite, emotion, passion" however; it also bears the meaning of volition and judgment. It is never the symbol for rational power alone (Baabs 67). Humanity has reality in the Bible because he is, not because he is a spiritual being, a bodily organism, or a thinking-feeling centre of consciousness. Israel's thinkers did not minimize human's power to conceive ends and to will them into being; neither did they glorify the body and its natural functions as ends in themselves. They achieved a balance between body and mind in their thinking about humanity which enabled them to avoid certain intellectual

problems, and which confronted them with others just as difficult. Baabs (68) opined that the Old Testament community of faith had no problem as to the sinfulness of matter, so that asceticism never arose as an influential movement in Israel. They did create the problem as to humanity's ultimate destiny beyond history, since body and soul must share the same fate in the absence of a real dualism as to human nature.

### 3.2 Self-Assessment Questions

- How is thinking ability one of the distinguishing features in humanity as a creature of God?

### 3.3 Humanity as an Ethical Being

Humanity is an ethical person, that is, a being capable of making moral choices in the light of alternatives, and of acting thereon. It is also possible for humanity to refuse to make choices considered by the community or conscience to be desirable, or to make wrong choices. Two typically biblical limitations upon this discussion of humanity as ethical come to mind. One is the fact of humanity's existence as a collective personality, and the other is the positive theistic focus of all biblical ethics.

When humanity is observed as a corporate or collective personality, ethical consciousness and social consciousness are closely allied. Appeals to adhere to some ethical ideal are usually presented to the nation rather than to the individual, or possibly to particular groups within the nation. Amos addresses the wealthy women of Samaria, for example, and rebukes them for injustice. For him injustice and justice have real and serious social implications. A solitary good humanity is inconceivable, although Yahweh does call upon Jeremiah to look around in the streets of Jerusalem: "Search her squares, if you can find a person, one who does justice, and aims at honesty" (5:1). This language is rhetoric rather than ethical theory, however.

In the Old Testament the belief prevails that humanity is ethical. He may do justice and love mercy; he may repent and let righteousness flow, down like a mighty stream; he may wash his hands of the blood of violence and cruelty and succor the widow and orphan; and he may substitute justice for bloodshed and righteousness for the cry of the afflicted. This conduct is within his reach. The very fact that Israel's ethical leaders—the prophets, the wise men, and the lawgivers—urge upon the people the doing of good shows their belief in its possibility. The stubborn resistance of power-holding groups in the nation to the summons to live righteously should not blind us to the reality of the ethical ideal advocated by these teachers of morality with such passionate insistence and devotion. In examining the nature of this ideal, we shall come closer to the humanity of the Bible, for and by whom it was conceived.

The practice of justice in the sanctuary, the gate, and the market place is humanity's ethical obligation. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah, as well as later prophets exhort men to do justly in their social and institutional life. Their writings are full of such

exhortations. Even where denunciation takes the place of exhortation, as it often does, the same purpose of exalting the claims of justice and securing its embodiment in the national, urban, and rural community is apparent good (cf. Amos 2:6-7). Religious leaders, be they prophets or priests or teachers, will use their ecclesiastical office in an unselfish desire to advance God's good purposes in the world and will avoid maneuvering for personal advantage or gain. And laymen will not use the formulas and formal observances of religion as a substitute for ethical obedience to the moral law. All of this means that humanity, the source and center of this ethical transformation, will be true to that ethical self which is a part of his being. Further evidence of this ethical-social ideal may be found in Deut. 15:1-8; 16:18-20; 20:5-9; 24:17-22; Lev. 19:9-18.

The prophets were not content to be teachers of morals. By the nature of the case they were compelled to expound their ethical insights and ideas as the revealed will of God. These, they firmly believed, had come to them with such power and clarity from God himself that they were compelled to proclaim them, no matter what the cost. So they were prophets primarily and teachers incidentally. Convinced that their message truly corresponded with the will of God, they uttered lofty moral truths with passion and unforgettable vividness. The word of Micah, delivered by him in the latter part of the eighth century, was recalled over a century later, when the defenders of Jeremiah remembered the earlier prophet's ethical condemnation of Israel and the fulfillment of his prophecy by the fall of that country. The forcefulness of the prophets and the depth of their religious conviction made the ethical phases of their message unusually impressive.

### **3.3 Self Assessment Questions**

- Explain how humanity is regarded as an ethical being in the Old Testament

### **3.4 Humanity as a Free Being**

The freedom of humanity in the Hebrew Scriptures is a corollary of his ethical nature. Humanity marries and is given in marriage; they pioneer in new lands and adjust themselves to strange customs and peoples; they buy land, gather wealth, and lose it—all through the exercise of freedom. And in weightier matters human freedom is recognized, whether these have to do with moral conduct or obedience to God.

We are informed that God desired to test Abraham, for example, and instructed him to take his only son, whom he loved much, to the land of Moriah, where he must offer him as a burnt offering to God (Gen. 22). The narrative reveals that upon receipt of these instructions the father promptly complied – “So next morning Abraham rose early.” It is the consummate skill of the narrator rather than the insensitivity of Abraham which occasions the omission of any reference to his travail of soul as he faced the alternatives and struggled freely to make a decision. Obedience was avoidable, but nonetheless Abraham chose it. The decision of Joseph's brothers to sell the young dreamer into slavery was accompanied by a delicate balance of personal feelings and individual

desires. One brother wanted to kill him, another counseled moderation; circumstances beyond their control brought a caravan in sight; so they sold him (Gen. 37).

It is obvious that the Hebrews viewed freedom in the common-sense fashion of modern humanity. For all practical purposes humanity was free. Biblical humanity went his own way, acting as though he were free, and raising few questions about the contingencies of nature, heredity, social and cultural environment, and economic necessity, which hemmed him in and limited his action. The greatness of God's power over the life of his people and over nature would seem to shrink humanity's freedom, or even to eliminate it entirely. In holiness and majesty God ruled the life of men; how could they avoid a divine dictatorship determining their every thought and deed? This presentation of the problem would hardly be recognizable by the men of the Bible; they knew the experience of refusing the demands of God and stubbornly seeking their own ends. So they were keenly conscious of their own will, which could be exerted to oppose even the will of God. This empirical fact far outweighed any speculative considerations respecting freedom and determinism. Men knew that they were free because they actually were able to defy or to ignore the demands of God. Whether this defiance proved to be successful in the long run is another matter.

The commission of sin by Israel is a demonstration of the existence of freedom. Rebellion against God is frequent. Forceful injunctions are laid upon the nation to listen to the words of the law, to honor parents, to abstain from murder, adultery, theft, and lust, to remember past sins and past mercies, to love the Lord their God, to observe all his commandments. Before this nation is set a blessing and a curse, hinging upon obedience or disobedience (Deut. 11:26-28), "I have put life and death before you, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that you as well as your descendants may live" (30:19). The very presence of the Law presupposes lawlessness and sin – and moral freedom. Commands to comply with a particular code, such as the Decalogue, call for a redirection of the human will, whose reality and freedom are thus affirmed.

At this point the prophets may again be called in as witnesses. In the dramatic contest between Yahweh and Baal on Mount Carmel, the account of which is clearly a condensation of a long historical struggle between two opposing cultures, the prophet Elijah confronts the spectators with the necessity of making a clean-cut and unequivocal decision. They have straddled the fence long enough. "How long are you going to limp upon two diverse opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him, but if the Baal, follow him." (I Kings 18:21.) He challenges them to make up their minds and proceeds to assist them by presiding over a remarkable demonstration of the power of Yahweh. The oracles of the great literary prophets abound in imperatives summoning the nation to action based on sincerity of purpose and a new devotion to the God of justice. In Isaiah we find, "Hear the word of the Lord; . . . give ear; . . . put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil; . . . seek justice; . . . restrain; . . . uphold; come now;. . . hear now;. . . go now;.. return;..quake with fear; draw near to listen; . . behold!"

In the view of the prophets the men of Israel and Judah had the power to respond to the word of the Lord, even though that word was a radical one eliciting from human beings the most strenuous moral and spiritual effort of which a humanity is capable. That word of God is a deadly attack upon the egotism and passions of men, upon their complacency and self-will. When it is answered, it is answered by an act of faith which permits the substitution of God's will for that of men. This means nothing less than a voluntary, wholehearted committal to the demands of God, and a love for him which absorbs the heart and mind and soul. This love is freely given: man may love other gods and withhold his love from his Creator. That this possibility became an actuality may be seen in the biblical emphasis upon the sin of idolatry.

Our survey has disclosed the presence of **three principal types of freedom** in the Old Testament. There is **practical freedom**, which permits a satisfactory amount of self-expression in making life's routine decisions. This is the freedom which all men share without raising profound philosophical questions as to whether they really have it. Unperturbed by the implications for the problem of freedom of God's power over his life and thought, biblical humanity goes blithely on his way, announcing, "I will; I propose; I intend ;" as though he really were free. The second kind of freedom is **ethical freedom**, in the exercise of which humanity may eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or he may refuse to eat. As a free, moral person he may elect what is good and reject what is evil, or do just the opposite – and suffer the consequences. From his very creation he was made aware of this possibility, and in his continuing social experience this fact was driven home to him by the admonitions of his moral leaders and by the disturbance of his own conscience. Finally there is **religious freedom**. Through its possession humanity may turn to God with his whole heart; and through it he may defy his Maker and remain content with lower loyalties. These are the three freedoms of biblical men as they knew them.

### 3.4 Self-Assessment Questions

- Explain the three types of freedom connected to human nature

### 3.5 Humanity A Religious Person

Without doubt the Old Testament's description of humanity as a religious person is its most conspicuous testimony about humanity. This does not mean that humanity in the biblical record is remarkable for his piety. Even a hasty reading of the literature will correct that misapprehension. Israel's spiritual guides encountered an overwhelming weight of indifference and spiritual inertia when they tried to lead the- people in the way of faith. Complacent, content with their own resources, blind to ethical values, given to trust in physical power and military might, they constituted the immovable object against which the irresistible force of prophetic denunciation was hurled with no visible result. The testimony does mean that the attention of the Bible is focused upon humanity chiefly as a religious person, capable of entering into a relationship with God. Humanity's very spiritual blindness or indifference is of interest to biblical writers because these conditions bear upon that relationship. In fact, humanity's total activity, no matter what its nature, is

considered important for this reason. This interest ranges in the Old Testament from the meditations of the mystic to rules governing camp sanitation.

Humanity as a religious being is dependent upon God, from whom he received his life, and through whom he has hope of salvation. God is his creator and preserver, the giver and sustainer of life. The nation, which is collective humanity, was originated by God's selection of Abraham and by the divine guidance of his sons and grandsons. God brought their descendants out of Egypt; he went before them in time of danger as they entered the land of Canaan; he advised and rebuked their leaders throughout the nation's history; and he revealed a new concept of national destiny when political disaster overtook it. Religious humanity is able to feel deeply his dependence upon God. Associated with feelings of trust and gratitude, this feeling of dependence appears most prominently in Israel's book of worship, otherwise called Psalms. In the presence of foes humanity can lift up his head and trust in God (Psa: 3:3).

Afflicted by his enemies the pious humanity turns to God, who is his refuge and strength, his rock and fortress (18:1-2). The Lord answers prayer in the time of trouble when enemies are near (20:1, 7); he is humanity's unfailing friend (23), his mountain-fort (31:2), his deliverer from sickness (31:10-16; 38:5-6, 21), and a well-proved help when need is great (46:1). The heart of this religious humanity is made glad when the divine mercies are counted (Psa: 47:1)

Humanity voices are not adequate to sing God's praises (34:1-2); orchestral music is needed to supplement these. The horn, the lyre and lute, the drum and strings and cymbals are to add their swelling rhythm of sound and harmony to humanity's mighty chorus of praise to God (81 :1-2; 150). Humanity is capable of deep gratitude to his maker and redeemer, the Lord of history and of all life. He has created all things, snow and hoarfrost, wind and rain, the heavens, the earth and all creatures living thereon (104; 136; 146—148). He is the Lord of history, having through its vicissitudes delivered his people in a glorious manner (78; 81; 83; 105—106). Therefore the psalmist cries 'Let all the people say, "Amen." Hallelujah!' (106:48.)

There is no craving so absorbing and as intense as humanity's craving for God. The satisfaction of this longing by the gift of God's loving-kindness produces in the heart an immense gratitude and upon the lips continuous songs of praise and thanksgiving. Humanity's highest good is communion with God, declares the writer of Ps. 73, when the problem of the wicked perplexes him. He has no rational answer to this problem, but upon entering the sanctuary he receives the answer of faith. Humanity is made for God, and he can have no peace until he rests in him.

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

- How is humanity a religious person?

### **3.6 Humanity as the Image Of God**



Humanity's dependence upon God rests upon the fact that he is a creature; his power to worship his Creator and his deep religious craving are rooted in the fact that he was made in the divine image. From God he came, and for God he is destined. Earlier in this unit allusion was made to humanity's creaturely nature, which he shared with other creatures. Created from the dust of the ground, as were they, he shares their fate as a child of nature. He is weak and mortal, like the grass that withers in a day. From standpoint humanity as a creature is different from other creatures in that he is a special creation. To his nature was added an element found in no other created beings – godlikeness.

Five times the priestly writer uses the Hebrew word *elem* to signify “**image, likeness**” (Gen. 1:26, 27, 27; 9 :6; 5 :3). The more precise connotation of the word is not so easily determined. If we use the context in which the term occurs in connection with the creation of humanity and consider not only the particular verse but also the surrounding material, tentative results may be secured. After his creation humanity is given instructions to reproduce, to subdue the earth, and to have authority over fish, birds, tame animals, and crawling things upon the earth. As God has supreme authority over his creation, so humanity has this limited power over certain living things. “In the image of God,” then, may include this assumption of authority; certainly it is not an authority which any other creatures are said to possess and is therefore unique for humanity. However, it must be admitted that this is not certain, since direct textual evidence is lacking.

In Genesis (9:6) we read, “Whoever sheds the blood of humanity, by humanity shall his blood be shed; for God made humanity in his own image. This sentence is a part of the covenant made with Noah after the flood. Permission is vouchsafed to eat the flesh of animals, even as previously humanity had been allowed to eat green plants. While animals could be slain for food after the flood, in view of this covenant, the blood must first be properly removed. But the lives of human beings must be protected, “for God made humanity in his own image.” Thus human life is distinguished from other animal life by the fact of its special relation to God. This gives it a sacredness or inviolability which no other form of life possesses. Perhaps there is special significance in the recurrence of the command which appears in the Creation account also—that humanity is to be fruitful and multiply in the earth—although the word “subdue” is not repeated. Both sacredness and dominance are suggested by the passage here discussed, and both seem to be connected with the phrase “in his own image.”

The Yahwist's version of the events of Creation, while not containing the word *elem* includes data which might help in defining that term. In this story the serpent engages in a conversation with the woman in the garden and insinuates that God's real motive in prohibiting the eating of fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden is to prevent humanity from being like the gods. “God knows that the very day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods who know good and evil.” (Gen. 3:5.) This idea is found also in a later verse in the same chapter, where God says, “See, the humanity has become like one of us, in knowing good from evil” (3:22). The next statement in this chapter suggests that eating of the other forbidden tree will be rewarded with the gift of

everlasting life. Possibly this gift also was considered to be an exclusive possession of the gods. If humanity became immortal, he would become like one of the gods. If the serpent was right, not so much in the immediate context of the story, but in the general setting of the book of Genesis, then humanity's power to know good from evil was imparted in his creation—departing here from the serpent story—and should be incorporated in our definition of the phrase “image of God.”

In creating humanity in his own image, God, who is righteous, made humanity with the potentiality for righteousness. *Imago dei* has the further meaning of spirituality, as may be recalled from our earlier exposition of spirit in humanity. This spirit is the gift of God and is definitely a divine characteristic which would normally be shared by anyone made in his likeness. *Ruach* in humanity is his God-given capacity for communion with God and for living religiously. No biblical doctrine is clearer than this. From God, who as creative mind conceives his righteous purposes, humanity obtained his rational powers whereby he can do the divine will, carry out ethical demands for social justice, and organize his life around an ennobling faith.

Let us conclude, as a result of this investigation, that “*image of God*” means partaking of the divine nature with respect to power to rule over other living things, ethical discernment in distinguishing good from evil, and a special sacredness of personality unknown in animals. These characteristics and those whose description has been outlined in detail in this unit constitute the biblical doctrine of humanity as far as the Old Testament is concerned.

### 3.6 Self-Assessment Question

- In what sense is humanity created in the image of God?

### 4.0 Conclusion

So far, in this unit we have discussed the concept of humanity in the Old Testament. As a creature of God, humanity shares the weakness and limitations of all creatures; as a thinking being, humanity is distinguished from other creatures psychologically; the ethical nature of humanity makes him distinguish between right and wrong; as a free being, humanity is programmed to make choices, and not a robot; humanity as a religious person brings out the consciousness of worship or reverence for the Deity; and humanity made in the image of God is a demonstration of the uniqueness of the human person from every other creature of God.

### 5.0 Summary

This unit examined Humanity as a creature; Humanity as a thinking being; Humanity as an ethical being; Humanity as a free being; Humanity as a religious person; and Humanity as the image of God.

Next unit will study the concept of Covenants in the Old Testament.

**6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

- Identify and summarize the six main features of the nature of humanity in the Old Testament.

**7.0 References/Future Reading**

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**MODULE 1: CREATOR AND CREATION*****Unit 5: Covenants*****Contents**

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**1.0 Introduction**

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for covenant is always *b'rith*. In the New Testament, it is always *diatheke*. A covenant is a pact or agreement between two or more parties. God has initiated many agreements, or covenants, with different people throughout biblical history, i.e., Adam, Noah, and Abraham, and more. Covenant is an important part of biblical history and, therefore, theology. In this unit we shall discuss the concept of covenants in the Old Testament under the following sub-headings: Defining Covenants in Old Testament; Covenant with Adam; Covenant with Noah; Covenant with Abraham; Sinai (Mosaic) Covenant; Davidic Covenant; Prophets; and the New Covenant.

**2.0 Objectives**

By the end of this unit should be able to:

- Know the meaning of covenant in the Old Testament
- Discover the different features of God's covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, David and others
- Appreciate the privileges and responsibilities of God's covenant
- Understand the reason for the new covenant with God's people.

### 3.0 Main Body

#### 3.1 Defining Covenant in Old Testament

Every religion has to do with some form of union, fellowship, friendship or relationship with the Deity. "This is not peculiar to the Hebrew religion. What is peculiar to the Hebrew religion is that this union, fellowship and partnership with the Deity is based on a legal arrangement called a *covenant*. This means that God's union; fellowship and partnership with man are based on a legal contract. Further, God will have no relationship with His people outside of this legal contract. The term 'covenant' is found 286 times in the Old Testament and 33 times in the New Testament. Even when it is not explicitly used the covenant forms part of the background of each passage or book. Because it occurs so often, and in such a variety of passages, it is difficult to form a precise definition, or even description, of the essence of the covenant. However, the covenant concept provides for a very unique and distinctive kind of fellowship with God.

**It is a Lawful Fellowship.** The concept of fellowship with God based on a legal covenant meant that there was a stable and dependable element in the religion of the Old Testament. The covenant provided for a firmly regulated form of fellowship between God and man or man and God. The legal concept is introduced to show that there is an established pattern in the dealings between God and man. There is no firmer guarantee of legal security, peace or personal loyalty than the covenant. . . . It means legitimate order as opposed to caprice, uncertainty and animosity.

**It Is a Faith-Inspiring Fellowship.** The concept of a covenant fellowship with God gave the men of the Old Testament a mighty anchor to their faith. We may even say that it put them on vantage ground with God. God was obligated to them by the covenant (such is the love and condescension of God). He was their God. They were His people. He was bound to be loyal and merciful to His people. This is why we see examples of remarkable boldness to claim God's blessings. It was the covenant background which enabled Jacob to say to the Angel, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." Outside of the covenant relationship this demand would have been presumption. We must not, of course, get the idea that the covenant operated automatically or that Israel could rest on God's pledge while she herself flouted her own covenant obligations. Yet if she sincerely turned from her sins, she could always claim God's favor (1 kings 8:31-53; Ps. 106:43-47). This

reminds us of St. Paul's words: "... if we are faithless, He remains faithful — for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13, RSV).

**It Is an Exclusive Fellowship.** The covenant concept taught the Hebrews that fellowship with God was an exclusive fellowship. They alone were His chosen people. Yahweh alone must be their God. When we say that the covenant relationship with the Deity was peculiar to the Hebrews, this is not to deny that other nations may have thought of themselves as having some form of covenant with the gods. It seems, however, that "the covenantal idea was a special feature of the religion of Israel, the only one to demand exclusive loyalty and to preclude the possibility of dual or multiple loyalties such as were permitted in other religions, where the believer was bound in diverse relationships to many gods. The stipulation in political treaties demanding fealty to one king corresponds strikingly with the religious belief in one single, exclusive deity." This idea of exclusive loyalty in the relationship between God and His people is well illustrated by the marriage relationship. "The prophets, especially Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, seize on this thought and use it again and again to charge Israel with adultery. Furthermore, the formula expressing the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 29:12, [13]; etc.) is a legal formula taken from the sphere of marriage, as attested in various legal documents from the ancient Near East (cf. Hosea 2:4, [2]). The relationship of the vassal to his suzerain, and that of the wife to her husband, leaves no place for double loyalty in a monotheistic religion." This helps also to explain why prophets like Isaiah frowned upon any alliance which Israel might make with surrounding nations. Such alliances were forbidden by Israel's covenant with Yahweh.

### 3.1 Self-Assessment Question

- The term "covenant" is best understood within the context of fellowship or relationship. Discuss.

### 3.2 The Covenant with Adam

The covenant with Adam is an example of the covenant with the deity. Two kinds of covenants with Adam can be seen: the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace.

**The Covenant of works:** The agreement between God and Adam, whereby eternal life is conditioned upon obedience. Life in the Garden of Eden was a period of probation or testing and Garden of Eden was part of this world before the fall, Adam was sinless, had free will and could have obeyed God perfectly. God created Adam and Eve in His own image and likeness and made a Covenant with them (Genesis 1:27-31). It simply was that God spoke to Adam saying, "you may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall die" (Gen. 2: 16-17). This original covenant of God with man may be called the *covenant of life*. Everlasting life based upon obedience to God. The promise annexed to that covenant was life. The condition was perfect obedience. Its penalty was death.

God purposed that human beings establish a foundation for love through the family. The world without love is hell; even God's existence loses its meaning. Understand the absolute law of creation: love is human beings' God-given purpose. According to Genesis 3, the immediate consequence of Adam's disobedience was accompanied by: a) **Physiological results** - death, decay, suffering, sickness - all of this traces back to the original act of disobedience (*Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 5:12; 8:19-22*); b) **Psychological results** - shame, guilt, and fear (*Gen. 3:7*); c) **Sociological results** - blame shifting and alienation (*Gen. 3:8, 12-13*). Sin separates people. (Consider the pattern in the O.T., e.g. Cain and Abel, Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael, etc.); d) **Ecological results** - The ground is cursed - thorns, and thistles (*Gen. 3:17-19*); e) **Spiritual results** - enmity between the seed of woman and seed of Satan. Alienation from God - hiding, no desire for God's companionship - these trace back to original sin (*Gen. 3:8, 15, 4:1-15; I John 3:12*). a- Alienation from God: Our sin blots out God's face from us as effectively as the clouds do the sun. b- Bondage to self: sin brings us into captivity.

**The Covenant of Grace (Gen. 3:9, 15, 21-24):** After the fall, Adam entered into "Covenant of Grace" by which salvation is a free gift of God, by grace through faith, not based on works or merit. Thus salvation is by works, before the fall; and by grace, after the fall. God's grace and redemption was clear right in the beginning of the fall: This may be defined as that gracious agreement between the offended God and the offending but elect sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ, and the sinner accepts this believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience. This table is taken from William Payne: "Nowhere does the Bible mention explicitly the covenants of Work, Grace and Redemption. There are no such passages or texts or chapter and verse that uses the word covenant. It does not appear at all in Gen. 1-3, not even once. This theology is, at best, a hypothesis or an inference.

### 3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- How will you describe God's covenant with Adam?

### 3.3 The Covenant with Noah

Noah's son's offspring's went to build a city so they would not be scattered, to build a tower to touch heaven, and to make a name for themselves. God however confound their language that they would not understand others resulting in dispersing them over the earth. What has been implicit in creation is now found explicitly in the first mention of "covenant" in the Bible. Noah alone was found righteous (in right relationship with God) among all creation. By the time of Noah, violence had become a way of life. God decides to destroy the world with a flood, but to save Noah and make a covenant with him. The flood represented God's punishment on the world, but also His grace. Noah and his family were spared to make a new beginning. After the Flood, the blessing was renewed. God spoke to Noah and his sons: "Behold I establish my covenant with you, and your descendants after you, and with every living creature..... that never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (*Gen. 9:9-11*).

**Two covenants were contracted between God and Noah:** (1) Genesis 6:18; I will establish my covenant with you...Covenant God's salvation, protection, covenant because Noah's faith. I will save you. (2) Genesis 9:8-17; The covenants tied with the blood sacrifices. Noah's sacrifice was pleasing to God. Covenant applies to the relationship between God an individual as well as descendants and it is established by the blood. Animals for food; Sanctity of life; God will not destroy the earth by water again; & The bow in the sky is a token of this covenant. This covenant is universal "in the widest sense imaginable", encompassing all creation, for all time - making the near ubiquitous rainbow a most appropriate sign. "The covenant is unconditional; a necessity given the flood changes nothing of man's sinful nature." Gen. 8:22 and Gen. 6:5 are significant - in the first instance the evil of humanity is the justification for the flood, in the second case the same justifies never again bringing a flood. Why then a flood at all? It is because of God's desire to make explicit the purposes of the creator previously implicit in creation.

The first instance of covenant in Scripture is the covenant of God with Noah after the Flood. "It, perhaps more than any other in Scripture, assists us in discovering what the essence of covenant is. . . ." There are five features in this covenant: (1) "it is conceived, devised, determined, established, confirmed, and dispensed by God Himself;" (2) it is universal, with all flesh; (3) it is unconditional; (4) it is "intensely and pervasively monergistic;" and 5) it is everlasting. Murray concludes that "Here we have covenant in the purity of its conception, as a dispensation of grace to men, wholly divine in its origin, fulfillment, and confirmation". Yet even in this case, "where obedience to commandments is the means through which the grace of the covenant is to be realized and enjoyed, we must also take note of the fact that in other respects this covenant exhibits the features of divine initiation, determination, establishment, and confirmation which are so conspicuous in the post-diluvian Noahic covenant. The idea of compact or agreement is just as conspicuously absent as in the post-diluvian."

We may think of Noah as co-operating with God in carrying out the provisions of the covenant but the co-operation is quite foreign to that of pact or convention. It is the cooperation of response which the grace of the covenant constrains and demands. God and man do not sit down and each propose and counter-propose the various clauses of the compact or contract. The covenant relation is brought into existence by God and God alone. "Like the Adamic covenant, the Noahic covenant shows forth God's goodness and proclaims a blessing, which implies positively that physical life will continue through the ages. In that sense the covenant with Noah and all the earth is, like the covenant with Adam, a covenant of life."

### 3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- Why is covenant of God with Noah regarded as the first instance of covenant in Scripture?

### 3.4 The Covenant with Abraham



The significance of the Abrahamic Covenant is the promise in Gen. 12:3. The scriptures, foreseeing that God will justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel before hand to Abraham saying, 'In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.' "The covenant is the foundation of Israelite theology and identity, and its history is therefore of understandable significance." To develop his redemptive purpose further, God calls Abram with a promise of land and descendants (Gen. 12:1-3). This promise becomes a covenant when God formalizes the relationship with through a theophany in which the promises are restated and made binding by an oath (Gen. 15 cf. Jer. 34:18-19; Heb 6:13-18). "Against the background of complete faith that Abram showed every time God promised him something, God made His covenant with Abraham saying,," to your seed I give this land...." Previously we noted God's preface to the covenant: "walk before me and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you...." Hence, walking with God and living blamelessly is a demonstration of faith and is essential for the covenant God was about to make with Abraham.

**Promises of Abraham's Covenant** (Genesis 15, 17): Abraham would be called "father of a multitude" of many nationalities. Kings would come from him. The covenant is everlasting and for all future generations. Canaan, a foreign land, would be an everlasting possession. God will be their God. Circumcision is an everlasting sign of the covenant and applies to any nationality. All the families of the earth would be blessed because of Abraham's faithfulness. His seed would be as the stars of heaven...as the children of the Messiah, as the personification of God's chosen ones. Abraham's heirs would seize, dispossess, take possession of, inherit, disinherit, occupy, impoverish, be an heir, come to poverty, to devour, to destroy, to ruin the lands of our enemies. "The promise is eternal. It does not depend on human obedience, but on the sovereign intent of God. The disobedience of individuals cannot frustrate the purpose of God to bring salvation to the Gentiles."

**Ratification:** "God's promises are ratified in a covenant/treaty Abraham cuts the animals in half. God appears as a torch of fire. God walks between the divided animals. This covenant is un-lateral: God is responsible to keep His word. This covenant is most important. God takes an oath and swears by His life. This is the covenant which is mentioned in Exod. 6:2-4, the content of the promise to Abraham a Land, a Seed and a blessing to gentiles.

**The Land:** the boundaries (15;8) from Euphrates to the river of Egypt. The river of Egypt is not the Nile, it is el' Arish (eastern boarder of Sinai); after ca. 400 years; 430 years according to Exodus and after return from slavery.

**The seed:** A physical son, not Eliezer, a son by adoption; not a physical descendant from Hagar but a son through Sarah; Numerous descendants as the stars in heaven and as the sand on the shore. Abram's name is change to Abraham (Father of multitudes). Royalty: Kings of peoples will come from Sarah. Sarai's name is changed to Sarah (Princess). Go

will develop special relationship with them: I will be their ...(Gen.17:8). This covenant will be forever.”

**The Blessing to the Gentiles:** “This covenant, like that with Noah, has the broader purpose of blessing all humanity and is fundamentally universal in scope. It is appropriate that there is a response from Abraham.” Yet this is a response within a religious relationship; without which there can be no fellowship and hence no blessing. It is clear that God's conditional relationship with individuals must be distinguished from God's determination to work out his purposes in the theatre of redemptive history, a determination not conditional upon human response to divine initiative; So too with circumcision (Gen. 17:10-14).

Without question the blessings of the covenant and the relation which the covenant entails cannot be enjoyed or maintained apart from the fulfillment of certain conditions on the part of the beneficiaries. “We must bear in mind that ultimately what God intends in His covenant with Abraham is not material blessing but spiritual, not the land of Canaan but a spiritual realm. To inhabit this land calls for a circumcision, not of the flesh, but of the heart. Moses later said to the Israelites in the wilderness: ‘circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn’ (Deut. 10:16). Much later the prophet Jeremiah spoke similarly: ‘circumcise yourselves to the lord; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem’. (Jer.4:4)”

**The Obligation:** “The obligation of the covenant consisted of one thing: *circumcision*. (Gen. 17:9-11). God did require this one thing to keep the covenant. If there was failure in this regard, such a person had to be “cut off from his people” he had broken god’s covenant. God would not renege on His covenant, but man by disobedience could break it and forfeit his place in the land.” When we think of the promise which is the central element of the covenant, ‘I will be your God, and ye shall be my people’, there is necessarily involved, as we have seen, mutuality in the highest sense. Fellowship is always mutual and when mutuality ceases fellowship ceases. Hence the reciprocal response of faith and obedience arises from the nature of the relationship which the covenant contemplates. (cf. Gen xviii. 17-19, xxii. 16-18) (Murray 1954, 18). Our obedience is the condition upon which the fulfillment of the promise given to us is contingent. Our failure, in the face of clear commands to obey the Lord's voice, to keep the conditions of the covenant, is culpable, eternally so. Breaking the covenant earns us the wrath of the covenant.

**The Fulfillment:** Concerning both a multiplicity of descendants and the land of Canaan. Moses addressed Israel after forty years of wilderness wanderings; “*Go in and take possession of the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob...the Lord your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude*” Deut. 1:8-9. Later, after the land was occupied and Solomon was king, “*Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates...to the border of*

*Egypt” 1 Kings 4:20-21.* Thus were fulfilled both promises given to Abraham when God made a covenant with him. The gift affirmed, (Exod. 6:8) and the conquest under Joshua’s leadership. The covenant of God with Abraham extends far beyond Canaan: indeed, according to the New Testament, The promise to Abraham and his seed is that they should inherit the world. Abraham was looking for more than earthly place; rather, he was looking for a city which has foundations; whose builder and maker is God. Eternal foundation; he was seeking an enduring home land...a better country...a heavenly one.

Thus the world that Abraham and his seed were to inherit was the not the primarily a physical realm but a spiritual one. Was to happen through “Christ”, the seed of the women, the seed of Abraham (Gal.3:16); heirs according to promise. It is those in Christ to whom the promise belongs. No longer are the heirs those who descend from Abraham according to the flesh, not even from the selected line within Abraham’s seed. No longer is it physical Israel that inherit the promise, but it is those from any race and tribe, tongue, nation and people who have faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 2; 28-29).

### 3.4 Self-Assessment Question

- What were the distinctive features of the God’s promises in Abrahamic covenant?

### 3.5 Sinai (Mosaic) Covenant

The covenant was renewed by Moses forty years later upon Israel’s preparation to enter the Promised Land: *“The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb (Sinai). Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day’ (Deut. 5:2-3)* The LORD our God made (*karath* - “cut”) a covenant with us in Horeb (Deuteronomy 5:3). The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers (Deuteronomy 5:4). This didn’t exist prior to Horeb although other types of covenants did. He declared to us His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. (Deuteronomy 4:13). Moses was to teach this covenant. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess. (Deuteronomy 4:14). Moses (leads Jewish slaves to Israel) is given God's commandments to govern relationships between man and God. Man is to keep God's laws as a test, but trust in God. Mosaic Covenant, 10 Commandments; all other commandments; land with signs and tokens of continuing with circumcisions and Sabbaths.

**Obligation:** The Mosaic covenant is communal and universal. “The commandments are addressed to the individual and require individual compliance, but there is a communal aspect also; the community which is answerable to God for the actions of its members and is to ensure personal and communal compliance to God's laws.” Furthermore, Israel are not called simply to obtain the blessing, but to be a "kingdom of priests" through whom God's blessing can be poured out on all humanity. The promises of God, pledged on His

part, were to be realized through Israel's obedience. Unless Israel was obedient to God's commandments, there would be no possibility of receiving what God has promised.

In Exodus 19:4-6b, God spoke to Moses from the mountain:

*Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you and eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for the earth is mine, and you shall be my to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:3-6).*

“What is further remarkable, is that when Israel does, in fact, break the covenant (see Exodus 32), God's response is to forsake his right as suzerain lord to consider the covenant annulled and instead chooses to forgive his rebellious vassal! Admittedly, Israel does pay a terrible price for rebellion (Exodus 32:28b,34-35) but God's determination to keep the covenant indicates that whatever formal marks of conditionality the covenant contains, the tremendous grace of God gives a measure of conditionality. No wonder the Israelites, who failed time and again to keep the covenant relationship, came to know God as "the one who keeps covenant." It may help us to grasp the significance of this point if we observe that the covenant between God and His people is often likened to a marriage contract (see Ezek. 16:8, 60; Hosea 2:16; Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 31:32). In some respects Israel's solemn promise before Mount Sinai ("All that the Lord hath spoken we will do," Ex. 19:8) sounds like a bride making her wedding vow. The marriage contract, of course, is only one illustration and by no means exhausts the meaning of God's covenant with His people. But since this concept of a marriage contract is still with us moderns, it does help us to understand the biblical thought that our union with God is first of all a legal union. Just as the most sacred human relationship is based on a legal covenant, so God's union with man must be based on a legal covenant. God, being holy love, will have nothing to do with spiritual fornication.

**Ratification:** The ratification of the covenant is by blood. By sprinkling blood on the altar and the people, there was the expression of a deep covenantal relationship between God and the people of Israel. Thus there was a solemn establishment and ratification of the covenant. Thereby the covenant of God with His people was confirmed. God Himself was deeply involved; the sprinkled blood on altar and also on the people. Subsequently God established the sacrificial system with Israel (Book of Leviticus), a system that culminated in the Day of Atonement, whose purpose is purification and forgiveness. We observe that the sprinkling of blood followed upon the commitment of the people to do all the words the Lord has spoken.

**Promises:** The promises of God in the covenant are essentially twofold. “First, Israel was to be God's ‘own possession among all peoples.’ Israel was to be a special possession unto God, His own people. Second, Israel was to be to God a ‘kingdom of priests and a

holy nation.’ Israel was to have a special place before God, namely to offer sacrifices to Him, to stand in a unique relationship to God, to be set apart as a holy people.” The promise of the offspring is found in Exodus 19:5-6, “*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and holy nation*”. “This promise that Israel would become a national entity, sustaining a unique relationship to God, is not without historical antecedent. It has been observed that the Abrahamic promise envisioned a people who would become a great nation and who would have the Lord as their God.” The promise of divine blessing for Gentiles may be found in Deuteronomy 28:9-10, where Israel’s obedience will cause the nations to see that she is “called by the name of the Lord”, and the nations will fear Israel. The Book of Deuteronomy teaches that if Israel is disobedient she will become subject to these nations (28:49,65). These verses deal with Israel’s destiny among the nations as determined by her relationship to God.

**The fulfillment:** The call of Moses lays the scene for the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham (Ex. 3). To him, God reveals a new name - "Yahweh." (Ex. 3:14). “This name is found earlier in the Pentateuch (e.g. Gen. 6:1-8) thus demonstrating the writer's understanding of continuity with the patriarchal religion.” In Deuteronomy 5:1-4, The Lord made a covenant with Moses. In this text Moses reminds the people of the Law that had been given to the Israelites in Horeb (“desert” synonym for Mt. Sinai), and the covenant relationship with Him that it spelled out. Conditional fulfillment is not peculiar to the Mosaic only. The reason for the liberation of the Israelites is to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant. In both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants union and communion with the Lord is at the center of the relation (Exod 6:7 and Deut 29:13). Also, the Mosaic covenant "was made with Israel as the sequel to their deliverance from Egypt. That is, because of the Abrahamic covenant of which they are already a part the Mosaic covenant is brought to realization. It is a further working out of God's covenantal ways. It is making more patent, in a broader sociological setting, the features latent in the Abrahamic covenant. “From God’s side the covenant he made with Israel would never be broken. God is faithful to His covenant, even if Israel should prove faithless and disobedient and be punished by going into captivity again (Lev. 26:44-45). 1- Regardless of Israel’s failure, even to breaking God’s covenant, they could not annul the covenant, for it was God’s covenant, not Israel’s. Israel might, and did, violate the conditions, but the covenant remains firm. 2- Since god’s covenant remains firm and the problem rests basically in the heart, God will provide a way for the changing the heart. Much else will be needed, including a remission of sins that animal sacrifices cannot mediate and a deeper knowledge of God, but God as the Lord will surely bring it out. 3- Since Israel as a nation finally provided intractably disobedient, God did not hesitate to move beyond national Israel to claim a people out of all races and nations.”

### 3.5 Self-Assessment Questions

- Compare and contrast, Mosaic covenant with Abrahamic Covenant.

### 3.6 The Davidic Covenant

Israel is initially administrated by Judges and later by Kings (its first king was Saul). Israel and Judah are both guided by God's commandments to Moses and Abraham's faith covenant; with a moveable tabernacle including the Ark of the Covenant for the place to worship God.

**The Promise:** God anoints David king over Israel with a promise for a kingdom that would last forever through his seed that of Jesus who will reign forever. Solomon, David's first offspring, built the temple in Jerusalem for Israel to worship God with sacrifices. God spoke to David through Nathan the Prophet: *“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you...and I will established the throne of his kingdom forever....And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established forever”* 2Sam. 7:12,13. This covenant was made soon after David had become king over all Israel. Throughout the years of his kingship David had this covenant assurance from God, for among David's last words spoken were these: *“he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure”* 2Sam. 23:5

The covenant with David (2 Sam 7; 1 Chr 17, Ps 89) is preceded by two significant events, the capture of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5) and the return of the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam. 6), which prepare for the building of the temple and the kingship of Israel. Both were interrelated, for the king of a nation was considered the divine representative, and the temple was considered the earthly abode of the deity. Thus, both kingship and temple would speak to Israel of God's presence in their midst. It is not coincidental, therefore, that when David raises the issue of a "house" for God (2 Sam. 7:2), that God refuses David's offer and retorts by promising to build David a house (2 Sam. 11f.) - the divine response demonstrates that God needs no assistance from humanity, but rather is always graceful in his dealings and ready to bless. In this case, the blessing takes the form of a covenant with David, in which perpetual rule by his descendants is assured (2 Samuel 7:16).

**The Ratification and Obligation:** “The ratification is by God Himself, it could not be any higher or more certain, since it is God who swears by Himself. (Psalm 89:34-35) and (Psalm 132:11).” This covenant is unconditional (2 Sam. 7:13b; 23:5; Psalm 89:4-5; 29-30; 33-37) as David makes no oath which could be construed as making the covenant bilateral. Yet there is an element of conditionality also (Ps. 89:29-32; 32-40, 50; 132:12; 1 Ki. 2:4; 8:25; 9:4-5). If any one of David's descendants fails to properly serve Yahweh, then that particular king's rule would not be guaranteed. Ultimately, events would demonstrate that God was indeed prepared to withdraw his blessing from Israel, if Israel withdrew their loyalty from Him.

“Yet despite the virtual failure in physical terms of the Davidic line in 586 BC, the unconditionality of the covenant is demonstrated in the spiritual continuity through Messiah in the person of Jesus Christ. Yet God's intention is not to bless one individual only. The

promise of perpetual reign requires a perpetual kingdom and so the promise entails that Israel will enjoy political stability as long as God is honored. David is thus seen as the agent through whom the Exodus deliverance ("rest" in the land of promise) will be achieved."

Furthermore, when understood in its full Messianic and eschatological significance the David covenant is universal and is intended ultimately to bring God's blessing to all humanity. In the Davidic covenant several previous themes are brought together demonstrating that this is a renewal and fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs. For instance, a parallel is drawn between David and Moses by the use of "my servant". "David is a second Moses; Solomon is a second Joshua; Moses and David started their tasks but Joshua and Solomon finished them. Moses brought Israel out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai and led them in the wilderness, but it was Joshua who led them into Canaan. David captured Jerusalem, brought the ark, conquered an empire and financed the project, but it was Solomon who built the Temple. Bringing the ark to Mt. Zion is considered David's most important accomplishment. The people traveled from Egypt to Canaan, conquered the land and then settled in their homes. God also left Egypt and entered the Promised Land with them. Unlike them, He and Qiryat Ye'arim. Only when David brought the Ark to Mt. Zion could God finally finish the journey and settle in His permanent residence." The covenant has its main purpose in the promise of the Messiah. Even though David recognizes, at the end of his life, that his sons are not living according to the commands of the covenant, yet the Lord "hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for it is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he makes it not to grow" (2 Sam 23:5).

**The Fulfillment:** The Land: The empire which David conquered corresponds to the land which God promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18=1Kings 4:21=2Chr.9:26). By capturing Jerusalem and bringing the Ark to Mt. Zion, David fulfills God's promise concerning a central sanctuary, a resting place. (Deut. 12:10-14). The empire makes it possible to finance building the temple. The empire enables Solomon to be a man of peace, eligible to build the temple. The family: The population is numerous (Ex. 1:7,12; 1Kings 4:20) the name Abraham. The dynasty fulfills the promise of royalty (cf. the name Sarah). The special relationship is that of Father-son (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13). Blessing to the Gentiles: God brings blessings into Gentiles in several ways. Everyone came to hear Solomon's wisdom= God's word (1Kings 10:23-24). Bringing gifts to Solomon anticipates the gentiles bringing gifts to Jesus. The queen of Sheba praises the Lord (1Kings10:9). The temple is a house of prayer for all nations (1Kings8:41; Isa.56:7). In 2Sam. 7:19, the words torah "Adam may be a messianic promise, referring to the Son of David in the distant future who will be God's standard for judging the world. This son turns out to be Jesus.

There are, too, obvious allusions to the Abrahamic covenant; the concept of a Davidic Kingdom whose boundaries match those of the land promised to Israel (2 Sam. 7:9b-11a cf. Gen. 15:18; Deuteronomy 11:24ff), the promise of a great name (2 Sam. 7:9 cf. Gen.

12:2), and the reference to "seed" (2 Sam. 7:12 cf. Gen. 15:3-4). And not an allusion only, there is also a fulfillment as the descendants of Abraham are gathered into the land of promise under the rule of David and his heirs. "According to Samuel, David fulfilled God's promises to Abraham. According to Chronicles, when David brought the ark to Jerusalem, God finished His journey from Egypt to Mt. Zion. Now God can rest from His travels and settle in His own place, Jerusalem." God's covenant with David repeats and is based on God's promises to Abraham. 2Sam.7 Great name Gen. 12:2 2Sam. 7:9 Land/place to dwell Gen. 15:18 2Sam. 7:10; Abraham's seed Gen. 17:7-10,19 2Sam.7:12; Father-son relationship Exod. 4:22 2Sam. 7:14; Covenant relationship Exod. 6:7 2Sam.7:23-24; Adonai Yahweh Gen. 15:2,8 2Sam.7:18-19.

### 3.6 Self-Assessment Question

- What promises and obligations were associated with Davidic covenant?

### 3.7 The Prophets

The kings became corrupt; Judah & Israel worshipped false gods in false places of worship. Israel & Judah are both guided by God's commandments to Moses & Abraham's faith covenant. But because of their sins God through His prophets judged the people. The covenant theme is taken up and expounded elsewhere in Scripture. In Judges 2 and 2Kings 17 disobedience by covenant people leads to national calamity (the operation of the covenant curse). For this, repentance and faith only is the cure and will lead to God's forgiveness and restoration to covenant relationship. Such a theology of history lay behind the books of Kings and Chronicles, but it is clearly evident also in the preaching of the prophets. The pre-exilic prophets (Jeremiah and Isaiah) foresaw judgment and exile but also looked ahead to the day of restoration. Ezekiel, the prophet of the exile, saw the eternal character of God's covenant, and that this would lead to restoration and renewal of Israel's former glory.

The post-exilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi), in the context of a people whose hopes had been frustrated when the newly restored Israel did not meet expectations, preached that full covenant fellowship and its attendant blessings were delayed because of sin (Hag. 2; Zech. 2). However, through it all was the underlying assurance that God's covenant is eternal, that God is a God of promise, and that people would yet witness the breaking in of the age of that everlasting covenant of peace. Thus, the failure of Israel to live loyally as the covenant people led to the development of eschatological hopes and ultimately to an understanding that God's purpose in covenant was far greater than simply the provision of the law to Israel.

### 3.7 Self-Assessment Question

- Prophetic covenant was anchored on repentance and faith. Discuss.

### 3.8 The New Covenant



“The use of the word “new” does not indicate a totally separate covenant distinct from the previous ones, but it is an extension of them with new features and dimensions added. The new covenant in 600 B.C. occurred in Jeremiah 31:31-34. This proclamation of the new covenant is generally considered to be the foremost of the prophet’s contributions to theology”: Law written on the heart. The covenant formula, “I will be their God...” (repeated). Everyone will know God from the least to the latest by the Holy Spirit (1John 2:18-29). Forgive sin not based on ark. Worship system will change, Jesus is the high priest. New system is the work of Christ no animal sacrifices. God takes the initiative to declare that the Sinai covenant was flawed from inception (Heb. 8:7) because its legal framework could never engender the heart response which had been presupposed in its very institution. Thus, a fundamentally different covenant is proposed, to be written, not on tablets of stone, but upon the human heart (Jer. 31:31-34). Although this covenant was made necessary by the failure of the Mosaic covenant, paradoxically it will also act as its fulfillment by bringing people into right relationship with God. This covenant will initiate a new community - the people of God - it will rest upon divine forgiveness and have an eschatological focus.

The one **obligation** for the fulfillment of the new covenant is faith in Jesus Christ. This does not mean that by faith we achieve what God has promised, rather we receive the blessings He has in store.

The **promises** and their **fulfillments**: The promise of the law within the heart: (Jer. 31:33). The compulsion to do God’s command will no longer be from without but from within, it will stem from a willing heart. On a deeper level, what is really called for is a new mind, a new heart, a new spirit: and such is the promise. This promise is fulfilled through the Spirit of God, it is no longer a law that leads only to sin and death, but to eternal life in the Spirit. The promise of a unique relationship between God and a people: I will be their God and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31; 33). This relationship is no longer to the Israelite nation or race only, but to those- whoever they may be- who are called by God. The fulfillment is to be found in the New Testament. Paul sees it as the Gentiles coming to salvation.

In 1 Peter 2:9-10, once you were no people but now you are God’s people. It matters not whether they are Jew or Gentile, what counts is that through faith in Jesus Christ there is a new birth, a new relationship. The promise of the knowledge of the Lord: (Jer.31; 34). There is .....no knowledge of God in the land..... My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. (Hos.4:1, 6). The people of God will be people of knowledge, that of an immediate certainty. In such a direct and personal knowledge of God, all of life will find its profoundest meaning and fulfillment. This promise is beautifully fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ who in His own person makes God known. The promise of forgiveness of sins: (Jer. 31:34). Jeremiah does not state how this will be done. Under the old covenant, God established a pattern of animal sacrifices as a channel for the cleansing and forgiveness of sin. However, the very repetition of these sacrifices plus the fact that

animals were the offering for sin signified that there was no full cleansing and abolition of sin.

The fulfillment of this great promise is vividly declared in the new covenant in Jesus' own words: "this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins". Sins are fully forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

### **3.8 Self-Assessment Question**

- Show how the New Covenant prophesied in the Old Testament got fulfilled in the New Testament.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

The different covenants in the Old Testament surveyed in this unit point to the fact that God the creator values fellowship and relationship with God's people, and their relationships with one another. All the covenants contained rich promises for humanity, and responsibilities which were most of the time not kept. A new covenant was promised in Jeremiah, which would address most of the lapses in the other covenants. This new covenant got its fulfillment in the New Testament in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, the desired fellowship and relationship between God and humanity, and humanity with one another are fulfilled.

### **5.0 Summary**

In this unit, we surveyed the theological concept of covenants found in the Old Testament. They include: Adamic Covenant, Noahic Covenant, Abrahamic Covenant, Mosaic Covenant, Davidic Covenant, Prophetic and New Covenants. These covenants were based on fact that God values fellowship and relationship with humanity, and humanity with one another.

Next unit, which is the beginning of a new Module (Module 2: Endowments, Abuse and Recovery) will discuss the Gift of Land as an endowment from God.

### **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

- Outline the main features of Abrahamic Covenant, and compare it with Mosaic Covenant. How do they compare and contrast with the New Covenant?

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

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**MODULE 2: ENDOWMENTS, ABUSE AND RECOVERY**

Unit 1: Land as a Gift

Unit 2: Sin and Evil

Unit 3: Worship

Unit 4: Priesthood

Unit 5: Sacrifice

***Unit 1: The Gift of Land*****Contents**

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**1.0 Introduction**

This unit is the beginning of Module 2 in our study of Old Testament theology. The theme of the module is Endowments, Abuse and Recovery. This module is a follow up of Module 1 which concentrated on the Creator and his creations. Module 2 shows how the creator endowed his creatures in the creation (viz: Gift of Land), how the creatures abused the endowments (viz: Sin and Evil), and how the creators provided for their redemption (viz: Holy Place/Worship, Priesthood/Sacrifice, and Redemption/Mission). So this unit

begins with the Gift of Land as an endowment from the creator discussed under the following sub-headings: The Land as a Promise, The Land as a Gift, The Regulations about the Land, The Loss of Land, The Prophets and Promise of a Return, and Hermeneutical Considerations.

## 2.0 Objective

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

- Understand why much importance is placed on the Promised Land, Israel
- Differentiate between the promise of land and the gift of land
- understand the regulations about the land in the Old Testament
- Discover why the Promised Land was lost, and why it was recovered
- Appreciate the value of land as an endowment from God in our African context.

## 3.0 Main Body

### 3.1 The Land as a Promise

In Genesis 17:7-8 we read God's promise to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." So the promise of the land was a vital part of the covenant with Abraham. The gift of the land cannot be treated as an incidental part of the Old Testament covenant: it is part of very substance. According to Walter Brueggemann (1977: 3), "Land is a central, if not the central theme of Christian faith". Yet despite the importance of this theme, much attention has not been given to it by scholars. In particular, the land is presented to Israel's faith as a place of almost unimaginable blessing.

The Old Testament is largely a story of the people's relationship to the land. At the core is "the Promised Land," and the action of the story largely concerns a moving towards or away from this land, a land that could be called "home". The people are either wandering aliens longing for this land, or possessors of the land scheming to maintain possession either by power or purity, or exiles from the land looking once again to return. Therefore a Biblical theology which ignores this existential category not only makes the scriptures more abstract, but has less to say to a nation that is rootless and lost in anomie. If land is a central category of the Biblical story, then different relationships to the land must result in (or perhaps *from*) a different conception of faith (Médaille 2001:4).

The priority of the divine Word and divine oath as the basis for any discussion of the land is of first importance. From the inception of God's call to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees,

God had marked out a specific geographical destination for him (Gen. 12:1). This territorial bequest was immediately reaffirmed and extended to his descendants as soon as Abraham reached Shechem (Gen. 12:7). So solemn was this covenant with its gift of the land that Genesis 15:7-21 depicted God alone moving between the halves of the sacrificial animals after sunset as "a smoking furnace and a flaming torch" (v. 17). Thus He obligated Himself and only Himself to fulfill the terms of this oath. Abraham was not asked or required likewise to obligate himself. The total burden for the delivery of the gift of the land fell on the divine Provider but not on the devotion of the patriarch. As if to underscore the permanence of this arrangement, Genesis 17:7, 13, 19 stress that this was to be "an everlasting covenant."

In Leviticus 26:4-13, God's blessings for the people include the inheritance of cities, lands, olive-yards and vineyards, the bounty of which Israel will enjoy though they did not labour over them (cf. Deut. 6:10, 11; Josh 24:13). It will include rest from all enemies round about and even the healing of diseases (Exd. 23:25, 26; Deut. 7:15). Here Israel will serve the God who has brought them out of Egypt for that very purpose (Exod. 4:22-23). The fact that the promise is not unconditional in no way detracts from the reality of the promise.

The language used of God to describe the land of Canaan is sacramental in quality. That is to say that while, on the face of things, it might appear to be a straightforward description of the land; this is by no means the case. The description of the Promised Land as given in many of the records of the promise is not constrained by the realities of the land which they purport to describe. Rather, God describes the land in terms which could only fully be applied to a restore creation. It is not simply that the land fails to live up to expectation because of the sin of the heirs of the promise; there are fundamental reasons for the unfulfilment of the promise in Canaan. Canaan never was, nor could be, all that the promises declared.

This does not mean that the promise was, or is, in any sense false. It is, after all, the promise of God. This is reality and truly what God is promising to his faithful people – Paradise. Nevertheless, Canaan always falls short of the fullness of the promise and so the promise of the eternal covenant always points beyond its imperfect realization in Israel, to the new Israel, the Church.

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

- God's covenant with Abraham is anchored on the promise of a land. Discuss.

### **3.2 The Land as a Gift**

Leviticus 25:23, in a context dealing with the Year of Jubilee, declares that the owner of the land is none other than the Lord. Indeed the God of Israel is the Giver of whatever the land yields (Deut. 6:10-11). Thus one of the central theological affirmations about the land is that it is the gift of God to Israel. Eighteen times the Book of Deuteronomy refers

to the promise of the land made with the patriarchs, and all but three of these eighteen references emphasize the fact that He likewise "gave" it to them. This land was "a good land" (Deut. 1:25, 35; 3:23; 4:21-22; 6:18; 8:7, 10; 9:6; 11:17), for it was filled with brooks, springs, wheat, barley, grapes, vines, figs, pomegranates, olives, honey, iron, and copper. Yet what God gave, He then termed Israel's "inheritance" (*nahlah*). It was "the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance" (Deut. 4:21; cf. 4:38; 12:9; 15:4; 19:10; 20:16; 21:23; 24:4; 25:19; 26:1). Thus the Owner of all lands (Ps. 24:1) allotted to Israel the land of Canaan as their special "inheritance."

Whereas the land had been granted to the patriarchs by virtue of the divine Word and oath, it was still theirs in theory and not in actuality. For over half a millennium it was only the land of their sojourning; they did not as yet possess it. Then under Joshua's conquest the ancient promise was to be made a reality. Since the land was a "gift," as Deuteronomy affirmed in some twenty-five references (Deut. 1:20, 25; 2:29; 3:20; 4:40; 5:16), Israel had but to "possess" it (Deut. 3:19; 5:31; 12:1; 15:4; 19:2, 14; 25:19). This does not mean that the idea of taking the land by force or conquest was contradictory to the idea of its bestowal as a gift. As Miller correctly reconciled the situation, God's overthrow of the enemy would be the way in which He would finally allow Israel to take possession of the land. The two notions come together in the expression, "The land which Yahweh gives you to possess."

If it be objected, as it surely has, that such action on God's part is pure chauvinism and unfair partiality, it should be remembered that Deuteronomy had already spoken of the same divine replacement of former inhabitants in Transjordan. The Emim, Horites, and Zamzummim had been divinely dispossessed and destroyed (Deut. 2:9, 12, 21) and their lands had been sovereignly given to Moab, Edom, and Ammon. The comparison of their situation with Israel's had not been missed by the writer (2:12). In fact Amos 9:7 reviews several other exoduses Yahweh had conducted in the past: the Philistines from Crete and the Syrians from Kir of Mesopotamia, not to mention the Ethiopians. Accordingly, as the conquest came to an end, what the patriarchs had enjoyed solely in the form of promissory words except for a burial plot or two was now to be totally possessed. Yet this introduced another enigma, namely, the gap between the gift of the whole land and the reality of Israel's partial conquest and control of the land. On the one hand Yahweh promised to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan "little by little" (Exod. 23:30-33), and Joshua made war "a long time" (Josh. 11:18). On the other hand the Canaanites were destroyed "quickly" (Deut. 7:22; 9:3).

Furthermore not only is the speed with which the conquest was completed an issue; but also the extent of the conquest is a problem (cf. Josh. 12:10-23 with 15:63; 17:12; Judg. 1:21-22, 29). But the contrasting statements on the speed of the conquest are relative only to the magnitude of the work that was to be done. Where the conquest is presented as *fait accompli*, it is so from the standpoint of the

territory having been generally secured from the theocratic perspective (even though there were many pockets of resistance that needed to be flushed out and some sites that needed to be recaptured several times since the fortunes of warfare tended to seesaw back and forth as positions frequently changed hands). Nevertheless the inheritance remained as a gift even when the actual possession of the land lagged far behind the promise. An identical conundrum can be found by comparing the various provisions for "rest" (Exod. 33:14; Deut. 12:9) in the "place" that the Lord had chosen to "plant" His people. Whereas Israel had not yet come to the "resting place" and to the inheritance of the land (Deut. 12:9), by the time Joshua had completed his administration "The LORD had given them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers .... Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed: all came to pass" (Josh. 21:44-45).

Why then, it might be asked, was David still expecting this rest as a future hope (2 Sam. 7:10-11)? And why was Solomon, that "man of rest," expecting it (1 Kings 8:56; 1 Chron. 22:9)? The solution to this matter is that even the emphasis of Joshua in 21:44-45 was on the *promised word* which had not failed Israel, nor would it. But whether any *given* generation has remained in the land has depended on whether it has set a proper value on God's promised inheritance. Such conditionality did not "pave the way for a declension from grace into law," as von Rad suggested; neither does the conditional aspect of any single generation's participation in the blessings offered in the Davidic covenant contradict the eternity of their promises. The "if" notices in this covenant (1 Kings 2:4; 8:25; 9:4-5; Pss. 89:29-32; 132:12; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14-15) referred only to any future generation's participation in the benefits of the covenant, but they did not affect the transmission or the certainty of God's eternal oath. The ownership of the land (as a gift from God) is certain and eternal, but the occupation of it by any given generation is conditioned on obedience. Therefore neither the days of Joshua nor those of David could be used as a kind of blank check for any subsequent generation to rest on their fathers' laurels. Indeed, the word of promise could also be theirs, if they would enter not only into the material resting place, but if they too would appropriate that rest by faith as did Caleb and Joshua (Ps. 95:7-11; cf. Rom. 9-11).

### 3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- Whereas the land had been granted to the patriarchs by virtue of the divine Word and oath, it was still theirs in theory and not in actuality. Discuss

### 3.3 Regulations about the Land

**The law of NAHALAH (inheritance):** The custom of inheriting the land was prevalent among the Israelites. Hebrew words denoting this custom are the verb *NAHAL* which means "inherit" (Exod. 32:13; Num. 26:55; Jer. 12:14) and the noun *NAHALAH* which means "inheritance" (Gen. 31:14; Num. 26:55; Josh. 11:23). In their widest application these terms refer not only to an estate received by a child from his parents but also the land received by children of Israel as a gift from God. The reference to the land as an



inheritance has its beginnings in the promise that God made to Abraham when he entered the land of Canaan. In Genesis 12:7 God said: “To your descendants, I will give this land”. This promise was passed down through Abraham’s descendants and was reaffirmed to Moses: “I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord” (Exod. 6:8, cf. Exod. 3:7-8; 32:13). In Deuteronomy, Moses reminded the nation of Israel many times that the land is the Lord’s and he is the one who is giving it to them (Deut. 4:21,38; 12:9; 15:4; 19:10).

With the entrance of Israel into Canaan after the death of Moses, a new focus came into view. As the nation regarded the entire land as an inheritance, so it was then distributed among the people as an inheritance (cf. Num. 32:18-19; 34:14-18; 36:2-12). Here and at other places in the Old Testament, a clear distinction is made between the possession of land and the acquisition of other personal properties. The underlining idea being that the land is God’s property, and the people hold it as a *nahalah* = inheritance which they received through God’s grace – not by right. Therefore, even though the Israelites had settled in the land, they continued to be called “strangers and sojourners” in the land, and the portion allotted to them could not be sold into perpetuity (Lev. 25:23-28). The terms *nahal* and *nahalah* are used many times in this sense to denote the possession of a portion of the land by a tribe or family.

Joshua, the son of Nun, was a man chosen by God to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land (Josh. 1:1-2). When the people settled in the land according to God’s guidance, Joshua was commanded to divide the land proportionally among the different families (Josh. 13:7; 18:6; Num. 26:53-56; 33:54). This was done by casting lots to determine the specific piece of land to be owned by each family head. Here we see the equal distribution of land among the people who depended on land for their livelihood. In Israel only the family of priests was not given land apart from few towns (Num. 35:1-8). The reason was that their sustenance was brought to the temple in the offering by the whole nation (Ez.44:28). The children could inherit their father’s properties including his cultivated fields (Lev. 25:46; Prov. 13:22; Job 42:15). No inheritance was to be transferred. To prevent properties from going to other families, girls were prohibited from marrying outside their father’s family (Num. 36:6-9).

The New Testament also reflects the custom of inheritance as shown in the proverbs of Jesus (Matt. 21:38; Mark 12:1-8; Luk 11:13). Every member of the family or tribe had to guard that no inheritance was wasted in the form of selling it or otherwise. In 1 Kings 21:1-16 king Ahab was forcing Naboth to sell him his land, but Naboth pointed out that under the law of the Lord he was forbidden to alienate the heritage of his family. Naboth refused to sell his land, after which the king used his power and killed Naboth. King Ahab treated the land as a commodity and not as a heritage, which was against the Israelite laws of “*nahalah*”. The transgression of king Ahab of the inheritance law was later condemned by the prophet Elijah and even led Ahab’s family into a catastrophe ( 1 Kings 21:17-24).

The transgression of the “*nahalah*” law, acts of injustice and the discrimination of the poor, were some of the issues that angered the prophets in the Bible. The prophet Micah said: “Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil upon their beds; when the morning dawns, they perform it because it is in their power to do so. They covet fields and seize them; the houses, they take them away; they oppress a man and his inheritance” (Micah 2:1-2; Amos 5:11; 8:4-6; Isa. 3:13-15; 10:1-2).

In the Bible there is no one, neither a king nor a chief who had the right to take away land from anyone. “The prince shall not take any of the inheritance of the people, thrusting them out of their property. He shall give his sons their inheritance out of his own property, so that none of my people shall be dispossessed of his property” (Ez. 46:18). Again, “Do not remove an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you” (Prov. 23:10-11).

### 3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- Describe the regulations governing the use of land in the Old Testament.

### 3.4 The Loss of Land

The history and theology of the land divides right at this point. In the succinct vocabulary of Brueggemann, the Jordan is "the juncture between two histories." In the one "history is one of *landlessness on the way to the land*" and in the other it is "*landed Israel in the process of losing the land*." Thus the *sine qua non* for continued enjoyment of life in the land is obedience that springs from a genuine love and fear of God. Failure to obey could lead to war, calamity, loss of the land, or death itself (Deut. 4:26). Many of the laws were tied directly to the land and Israel's existence on it, as indicated by the motive clauses or introductory words found in many of them. In fact when evil was left unchecked and was compounded, it caused the land to be defiled and guilty before God (Deut. 21:23; 24:4). This point could not have been made more forcefully than it is in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Naturally no nation or individual has the right to interpret any single or isolated reverse or major calamity in life as an evidence of divine love which is seeking the normalization of relationships between God and man. Yet Israel's prophets were bold to declare with the aid of divine revelation that certain events, especially those in related series, were indeed from the hand of God (e.g., Amos 4:6-12 and Hag. 1:4-7).

The most painful of all the tragedies would be the loss of the land (Lev. 26:34-39). But such a separation could never be a permanent situation; how could God deny Himself and fail to fulfill His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Lev. 26:42)? As surely as the judgments might "overtake" (Deut. 28:15, 43; cf. Zech. 1:6) future generations, just as surely would every promised blessing likewise "overtake" (Deut. 28:2) them the moment "repentance" began (Deut. 30:2, 6, 8, 10; cf. Zech. 1:6). Forsaking the covenant the Lord made with the fathers would lead to an uprooted existence (Deut. 30:24-28) until God once more restored the fortunes of Israel.

### 3.5 The Prophets and Promise of a Return

The "headwaters" of the "return" promises, as Martens states in one of the first studies of land theology in the prophets, are in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Both of these men had experienced firsthand the loss of land; yet together they contain twenty-five The Promised explicit statements about return to the land and five texts with indirect announcements of return. Jeremiah's characteristic formula for the restoration of Israel to the land is "restore the fortunes (or captivity)." Twelve of its twenty-six occurrences in the Old Testament are found in Jeremiah (e.g., 29:14; 30:3; 32:44). Ezekiel on the other hand usually casts his message in a three-part formula (e.g., Ezek. 11:17; 20:41-42; 36:24; 37:21): (a) "I will bring you from the people"; (b) "I will gather you from the lands"; (c) "I will bring you into the land of Israel." In one of the most striking passages in the prophets, Yahweh pledges that His promise to restore Israel's fortunes (Jer. 33:26) will be as dependable and as certain as His covenant with day and night (33:20, 25). While the sheer multiplicity of texts from almost every one of the prophets is staggering, a few evangelicals insist that this pledge to restore Israel to her land was fulfilled when Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah led their respective returns from the Babylonian Exile. But if the postexilic returns to the land fulfilled this promised restoration predicted by the prophets, why then did Zechariah continue to announce a still future return (10:8-12) in words that were peppered with the phrases and formulas of such prophecies as Isaiah 11:11 and Jeremiah 50:19?

Such a return of the nation Israel to the land could come only from a literal worldwide assemblage of Jews from "the four corners of the earth" (Isa.11:12). The God who promised to bring spiritual and immaterial blessings will also fulfill the material, secular, and political blessings in order to demonstrate that He is indeed Lord of the whole earth and all that is in it. The question as to whether the return follows a national spiritual awakening and turning to the Lord or vice versa is difficult. Sometimes the prophets seem to favor the first, as in Deuteronomy 30, and sometimes it appears that the return precedes any general repentance, as in Ezekiel 36:1-37:14 and perhaps in Isaiah 11. But there can be no question about a future return in any of the prophets

### 3.5 Self-Assessment Question

- Discuss the steps that would lead to the recovery of the land proclaimed by the prophets.

### 3.6 Hermeneutical Considerations

For Paul, no one of the previous promises has changed—not even the promise of the land. Since the Old Testament has an authority equal to that of the New Testament, the permanency and directness of the promise of the land to Israel cannot be contravened by anything allegedly taught in the New Testament. The most significant passage on this subject in the New Testament is Romans 9-11, especially 11:11-36. For Paul, Israel's restoration to the favor and blessing of God must come in "full number" or as the RSV

puts it, "full inclusion" Rom. 11:12; Thus Israel is and remains God's link to her own future as well as the link to the future of the nations. For if her temporary loss of land and failures have fallen out to the spiritual advantage of the world and their reconciliation to God, her acceptance will signal her "life from the dead" (11:15). "And so all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26) in accordance with the predictions of Isaiah 27:9 and 59:20-21. The "and so" probably points back to verse 25 and the "mystery" of the temporary failure of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles comes in (cf. Luke 21:24). Then, in that future moment, "all Israel will be saved". This is not a matter of individual salvation or a matter of converting to a Gentile brand of Christendom, but it is a matter of God's activity in history when the nation shall once again, as in the days of blessing in the past, experience the blessing and joy of God spiritually, materially, geographically, and politically.

The main lines of Paul's argument in Romans 9-11 are clear and in complete agreement with the promise of the land to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Therefore one ought not detract from or minimize the full force of this blunt witness to God's everlasting work on behalf of Israel. For herein lies one of the greatest philosophies of history ever produced: Israel is God's watermark on secular history that simultaneously demonstrates

that He can complete in time and space what He promised to do and that He, the Owner and Ruler of all nations, geography, and magistrates, will deal severely with those nations that mock, deride, parcel up, and attack Israel (e.g., Joel 3:1-5). Those that attempt to do so either in the name of the church or the name of political and economic expediency will answer to the God of Israel.

In, Africa land ownership is very important, that is why, here and there, you see communal clashes in relation to who owns the land. Most communities rely on the land for subsistence living, hence the much attachment to it. On the other hand, some communities lose their lands to government, either because of urbanization or mineral exploration. Most times the government or its agencies do little or nothing in alleviating the problems of the affecting communities, hence the incessant militancy and unrest from the aggrieved youth of those communities. In the Old Testament, the creator endowed land to his people to benefit them; if the land in Africa is not benefiting the African people, then one should not be surprised to witness a rising incident of unrest among the African people.

### **5.6 Self-Assessment Questions**

- How would you relate place of Land in the Old Testament to the New Testament and the subsequent application to African context.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

The Old Testament is largely a story of the people's relationship to the land in relation to God's covenant with Abraham. This unit has shown that the Promised Land was first and foremost, before it became a gift. The gift of land does not imply a passive receptive but

an active possession of it to be pursued by the covenant family. Enjoyment of the Land was dependent on whether the people would abide by the regulations governing its usage. So the land was lost at a point because of abuse, and was eventually regained because of God's mercies and unfailing kindness to the people.

### **5.0 Summary**

So far, we surveyed the Gift of Land in this unit under the following sub-headings: The Land as a Promise, The Land as a Gift, The Regulations about the Land, The Loss of Land, The Prophets and Promise of a Return, and Hermeneutical Considerations.

Next unit will discuss the problem of sin and evil, which became a wrong response from humanity in the reception of God's endowments.

### **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

- Discuss the importance of Land in Old Testament Theology.

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

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**MODULE 2: ENDOWMENTS, ABUSE AND RECOVERY*****Unit 2: Sin and Evil*****Contents**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
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  - 3.2 Origin of Sin and Evil
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**1.1 Introduction**

The presence of sin and evil in God's creation has preoccupied the mind of many people on how to explain it, overcome it or at least control it. Genesis 1 records that God created everything good, and expected humanity to have a personal relationship with him, and enjoy life to the fullest. But this expectation was cut short in Genesis 3 when humanity sinned against God. The 'Fall of Humanity' is the phrase which theologians use to express the fact that most people do not reach the highest experiences of the life which God has planned for them. This unit will examine the Old Testament teachings on Sin and Evil under the following sub-headings: the Definition of Sin and Evil; Origin of Sin and Evil; Consequences of Sin and Evil; and Hermeneutical Considerations.

**2.0 Objective**

By the end of this unit you should be to:

- Discuss the role of human freedom in the presence of sin and evil
- Understand the Old Testament perspectives on the definition for sin and evil
- Understand how God views sin and evil in the Old Testament

- Describe the possible consequences of sin and evil
- Discuss the private and corporate nature of sin and evil

### 3.0 Main Body

#### 3.1 Definition of Sin and Evil

Different Hebrew words are used to express the meaning of sin in the Old Testament. This unit will concentrate on two terms, namely: “sin or **missing the mark**” and “**transgression**”. The first of these words ‘sin’ is a very general term and covers things done intentionally (Isa. 3:9; 30:1), as well as things done without intention to disobey (Lev. 4:13; Gen. 20:3-7). It may refer to something done against another man (1 Sam. 20:1), and it may also be used for something done against God himself (Exod. 32:33; cf. Hinson 78). Sin as ‘missing the mark’ or ‘missing the road’ was used, for example of an archer who failed to hit his target, or a traveler who lost his way. So, when the word is used theologically, sin carries the meaning of ‘**failure**’: something that should have been done has not been achieved. A sinner is a person who has failed to do God’s will, and has failed to live on good terms with his neighbour (Hinson 79).

The second word, ‘transgression’ is used in the RSV to translate a Hebrew word which always means an intentional act against the will of God. A ‘transgressor’ is a man who chooses to disobey God, and who goes his own way without accepting the authority of God. This same word is also translated as ‘**rebellion**’, e.g. in 1 Kings 12:19. The attitude of mind which leads a man towards acts of sin or transgression is described by the word ‘iniquity’ (Job 31:24-28; Ps. 36:1-4).

The people who are rebellious against God, and who refuse to do his will are frequently called ‘wicked’ (Ps. 10:3). Such people are often set in contrast with ‘righteous’, who do the will of the Lord (Gen. 18:23; Prov. 12:26). Job complains that both come to the same end in death (Job 9:22; cf. Eccl. 9:2). The prophet Ezekiel recognized that a man might change from being wicked, and begin to live righteously (Ezek. 33:14-16), and that the righteous also could turn aside from God, and become wicked (Ezek. 33:13).

Similarly, ‘**evil**’ is related to sin in the Old Testament. Anything which goes against the will of God and hinders his purposes is evil. Many of the writers of Old Testament describe the evil things which people do (Gen. 6:5; Isa. 13:11, etc). These things are evil because they are contrary to the will of God. But the word ‘evil’ is also frequently used in the Old Testament to describe which God has done (2 Kings 21:12; Neh. 13:17, 18; Jer. 4:6). It is not part of God’s purpose to do evil to men. He does not act to defeat his own purposes. But there are times he must punish rather than bless, in order to achieve his purposes. The suffering that is involved in punishment is what is meant when biblical writers talk about evil done by God. Its purpose is to correct sinful men. There are two kinds of evil in the Old Testament: moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil is a sinful act; natural evil is a disaster or calamity (Palmer 42)

### 3.1 Self Assessment Question

- Identify and explain some of the terms used to define sin and evil in the Old Testament.

### 3.2 Origin of Sin and Evil

Many Christians look to Genesis 3 for an answer to the origin of sin and evil. They say that the first man fell into sin, and passed on his fallen nature to all his children. There is no doubt that this story influenced the thinking of the Israelites. It comes from the earliest of the written records in Israel, and was probably among the earliest traditions. J. E. Colwell (NDT 642), argues that if the narrative of Genesis 3 was to be interpreted not only as the historical account of Adam's sin, but also as an account of the origin of sin, then the sin of Adam must be recognized as the primary biblical definition of the essence of sin – i.e. a grasping for spiritual and moral autonomy rooted in unbelief and rebellion. On the basis of Psalm 51:5, Augustine defined original sin as inherited sin; he considered that the fallen nature of Adam was transmitted biologically through sexual procreation. For Calvin and Barth, Psalm 51:5 is not to be interpreted as a reference to this inherited sin, but as recognition that from the very first the psalmist is conscious of his own sin and corruption: 'From his very conception he carries the confession of his own perversity' (NDT 642).

On the other hand, some scholars attributed the origin of sin and evil to the freedom in choice in humanity when they were created. Human beings are free to choose good and evil. Each person can respond to God either by obedience and service or turn away from him and do things contrary to his will. Thomas Aquinas had argued that for a person to be held guilty of sin it was necessary for him to be a rational being; and that therefore the fall could not have involved the loss of human reason, which Aquinas identified as the image of God in which man and woman were created, but rather must have involved the loss of that supernatural endowment which enabled a person's reason to be subject to God. According to the Reformers, however, the fall resulted in the corruption of human nature in its entirety. Reason and every aspect of his being have become totally depraved as a consequence of Adam's sin. This doctrine of total depravity is not intended to imply that fallen humanity is incapable of good works, but rather that there is no aspect of human being that is unaffected by sin: there is no 'relic or core goodness which persists in man in spite of his sin' (NDT 642).

### 3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- Write a short note on the possible origin of sin and evil from Old Testament perspective.

### 3.3 Consequences of Sin and Evil

In Genesis 3:8-24, the OT gives the interpretation of the pain and unhappiness that follow sin, or disobedience to God. These are the results of humanity's refusal to accept God as



the supreme authority. Here, Adam is a symbol of the entire humanity of every generation. The writer shows how even in the most enjoyable human activities there is often some pain or sadness. The examples which he gives are summarized by John Hargreaves (1979:24) as follows:

- (a) The attitude of people to each other (cf. Gen. 3:7, 16). God wants people to enjoy each other and to help each other, but we find that pain and shame and loneliness exist among people. Adam and Eve here stand for the whole human race, not just for males and females as they meet each other. Moreover, the writer is not saying in 3:7 that nakedness or the use of sex – by which a man and a woman are joined – are shameful or evil.
- (b) The attitude of people and animals to each other (Gen. 3:14, 15). According to this passage, God intended that people and animal should understand and respect each other, but often there is enmity between them. The writer uses the snake as an example of all living creatures which are not human.
- (c) Childbearing (3:16). The writer interprets the pain which often accompanies childbirth as another result of the sin of Adam and Eve.
- (d) Work (3:17-19). According to the writer, God wants people to see their work as a way of co-operating with him and with their fellow men (cf. 2:15). But often there is pain in it. Many people have work which is of no interest to them. Many people in the world die before their time because of the hardness of their work. One man envies another because he gets bigger wages. Employers and employed are often at enmity.
- (e) Man and God. In Genesis 3:8, we see that man and the woman in their guilt hid from God, although he was the one whom they most needed. He alone could free them from guilt. Genesis 3. 23, 24 contain another picture of this separation and misery.

So the progression of humanity's sin led to the following: **guilt, God's wrath, and judgment.** A sinful person lives in a state of guilt. He is liable to be punished for the evil he does. The prophets were deeply aware of the guilt of God's people, and continually warned them of punishment to come. They believed that the leaders of the nation were particularly guilty (Jer. 23:1-4). Among these were the kings (Hosea 5:1), prophets (Jer. 28:15, 16), priests (Isa. 28:7), and the richer and more powerful people generally. Ordinary people were not excluded from the guilt of sin.

God's response to human guilt is 'wrath'. The nature of God's wrath is well described in Genesis 6:5-7; 'The Lord saw the wickedness of man... and the Lord was sorry that he had made man on earth, it grieved him to his heart'. The prophets spoke often of the wrath of God, e.g. Hosea 5:10; 13:11; Isaiah 9:19; 10:6; Jer. 7:29; 10:10; etc. some of the Psalmists rejoiced that God's wrath would fall on evil doers (Ps. 2:5; 21:9;

59:13). Many passages in the Old Testament describe how God restrains his wrath, and holds back the punishment that sinners deserve (cf. Gen. 8:21, 22; 18:32; Exod.32:11-14; Amos 7:1-6; Ezek 33:11).

God's wrath is not a blind fury, or an uncontrolled anger. It is aroused by sin (Deut. 7:4; Isa. 5:24-25) it leads on to judgment and punishment as the reasonable consequences of sin. From the earliest time God was recognized as 'the Judge of all the earth' (Gen. 18:25), but in the Torah 'judgment' was a responsibility given to men. They were rules for fair treatment of the accused. There was to no injustice or partiality (Lev.19:15). Judgments were to be based on God's ordinances (Num.35:24). The prophets recognized that the judges of their day were not giving judgment fairly, but were helping the rich and neglecting the poor (Amos 5:7, 12). The prophets believed that they themselves were sent to declare God's righteous judgments (Hos. 6:5; Mic. 3:8), but it is the Lord who judges his people (Isa 3:14, 15; Jer. 1:16; Ezek 5:6-8).

### 3.3 Self-Assessment Questions

- Identify and discuss the five consequences of sin deduced from Genesis 3.

### 3.4 Hermeneutical Considerations.

It is vital to state here that each individual is responsible for his or her actions. Genesis 3 may have painted the picture of the serpent luring humanity into sin. But they were responsible for every action they were engaged in, since they had been warned by God earlier, and since the serpent possessed no physically coercive powers. No one is sinless; everyone is affected by living in a sinful a world. By birth, by choice or by both, the result remains that every human sins and that every human suffers for that sin spiritually, physically, emotionally, relationally, and vocationally.

According to House (1998:67), the prevalence of sin in the rest of the Old Testament cannot compare with the solutions God provided in the rest of the scripture to deal with the sin problem. Moses mediates a covenant in the Pentateuch that includes sacrifices for sins offered in faith by penitent sinners. The Former Prophets sketch how long-term, habitual sin, left unchecked, gradually pulls Israel into destruction. Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah lament being among an unclean people (Isa. 6:5) and being a person with wicked, diseased heart (Jer. 17:9), etc.

### 3.4 Self-Assessment

- . Sin never skips a generation, nor does it skip a single individual. Discuss.

## 4.0 Conclusion

This unit surveyed the Old Testament concept of Sin and Evil. Sin was defined as “missing the mark” or ‘missing the road’, a ‘transgression’, a ‘failure’ or a ‘rebellion’ against God, humanity and God’s entire creation. The Old Testament presented Genesis 3 as the introduction for human’s sin, and the foundation for evil in God’s creation. It was further expressed that the origin of sin and evil was connected to the human freedom which gave them the power of choice of either good or bad. The consequences of sin brought guilt, alienation from God, God’s wrath and judgment. But the rest of the Old Testament testified how the creator provided an escape route from the scourge of sin and evil, which most of the time were not appreciated by the covenant people of God.

### 5.0 Summary

Thus far, we have surveyed the concept of Sin and Evil in the Old Testament, discussed under the following subheadings: definition for sin and evil in the Old Testament, the origin of sin and evil, the consequences of sin, and a hermeneutical consideration.

Next unit will examine one of the places the creator provided for the Old Testament community to relate with him and deal with every problem that troubles them.

### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Write short notes on the following with Old Testament as your tool: (a) Origin of sin and evil, (b) Consequences of sin and evil, and (c) the implications of sin and evil in the world today.

### 7.0 References/Future Reading

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**MODULE 2: ENDOWMENTS, ABUSE AND RECOVERY*****Unit 3: Worship*****Contents**

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7.0 References/Future Reading

**1.0 Introduction**

Worship is an act of appreciating the deity for a favour received. In the Old Testament, worship applies to the response of the believing community to God for grace received or hopes to receive demonstrated through prayer, sacrifices, offering and praise. In this unit, we begin our examination of biblical worship by looking at the scriptural law of worship, as declared by Moses. We will then see how the precepts of the law apply within the historical narratives of the Old Testament.

**2.0 Objectives**

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

- Discuss the Old Testament precepts for acceptable worship.
- Describe the acceptable place for worshipping God

- Know the items required in an acceptable worship
- Appreciate the benefits of worship, and the dangers of not worshipping aright.

### **3.0 Main Body**

#### **3.1 The Old Testament Law and Worship – Pentateuch I**

The Decalogue, Exodus 20 gave a graphic regulation concerning what is acceptable and not acceptable in the people's relationship with God. This regulation was an attempt to put the people on the right course before they enter the Promised Land. The first commandment reminded them that the LORD is the only proper recipient of their worship. The command prohibited the worship of false gods, and enjoins them to worship only the true God, the Lord (Ex. 20:2-3). The second commandment continued the focus on worship by telling them how God should be worshipped. It does so in a negative sense, by forbidding them to worship God with human inventions. "You shall not make for yourselves any graven image"(Ex. 20:4). No physical image whatsoever was to be used to represent God (cf. Deut 4:15-16).

In this light, apostle Paul was right when he instructed the Athenians in the New Testament, "We ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device" (Acts 17:29; cf. Ps. 115:4-8). Any attempt to represent God by human devices is an insult to the Lord. His pronouncement is clear: "I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Isa. 42:8). When we consider the corrupt nature of fallen mankind, we may perceive why biblical directives in worship are so essential. The natural tendency of mankind is to pollute the worship of God, changing the truth of God into a lie, worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:25).

The Creator is the regulator of worship, and not the creature. So The Lord demands obedience from his people. He tells them how to conduct worship; and it is unlawful to worship God by means which he has not established. Any humanly-devised alterations or additions to the worship of God are a species of idolatry.

#### **3.1 Self-Assessment Questions**

- Describe the basis for worship from Exodus 20:2-3.

#### **3.2 The Precepts for Worship – Pentateuch II**

Deuteronomy 12 reviewed specifications on the ways to offer worship to God delivered by Moses to the people. The Lord forbids his people to imitate pagan ways of worship; the Israelites were commanded to eradicate the remnants of corrupt worship from their midst (Deut. 12:2-3). They were commanded to destroy "all the places" wherein the heathen served their gods. They were instructed to purge the land of all the implements associated with false worship: "You shall over throw their altars, and break their pillars,

and burn their groves with fire; and you shall hew down the graven images of their gods." Even the terminology of corrupt worship was to be erased: "Destroy the names of them out of that place." The chapter concludes with another stern warning against imitating heathen worship. There is no room for comparative religion or the assimilation of man-made devices in the worship of the true God.

Take care that you are not snared into imitating them, after they have been destroyed before you: do not inquire concerning their gods saying, "How did these nations worship their gods? I also want to do the same. You must not do the same for the Lord your God, because every abhorrent thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods. They would even born their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. You must diligently observe everything that I command you; do not add to it or take anything from it (Deut. 12:30-32).

That last statement points to doctrine highlighted earlier in the book of Deuteronomy respecting the sufficiency and authority of scripture. "You must neither not add unto the word which I command you, nor shall ye diminish anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2). The general sufficiency and authority of scripture are brought to bear upon the content of our worship. This is the meaning of the scriptural law of worship: all forms of worship must have express scriptural warrant, if they are to be admitted as legitimate means of worship. The biblical pattern of worship needs no supplements of human devising; indeed, such man-made additions are a snare "a graven image" and "the very seed of idolatry."

Apart from corporate worship, there were private worships recorded in the Pentateuch. In Genesis 12:7, Abram, at Canaan "built an altar to the LORD who appeared to him" – also at Bethel (Gen. 12:8; cf.13:4). Others include, Jacob (Gen 28:18-22; 32:22-30), and Moses (Exod. 3:5, 6; cf. Josh. 5:13-15). Through out the period of the Pentateuch, and early monarchy, worship often took place at local sanctuaries (Palmer 2011: 87).

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

- Summarize the nature of worship in the Pentateuch

### **3.3 Nature of Worship in the Historical Books - I**

The folly of Saul: The case of King Saul illustrates the folly of claiming good intentions as an excuse for worship which God has not sanctioned. Saul found himself in distressing circumstances. He was faced with a formidable number of enemy troops; and Samuel was late for their appointed meeting. Therefore, Saul decided to make a burnt offering himself, without waiting any longer for Samuel. According to the Mosaic Law, only the priests were authorized to make such offerings, but King Saul performed the priestly task on his own. No sooner had Saul committed his presumptuous deed, than Samuel arrived (1 Sam. 13:13-34). Paul R. House (1998:235) argues that since the LORD remains sovereign, and since the LORD has standards for kings, it is inevitable that the LORD will assess Saul's

effectiveness by his faithfulness to those standards. It becomes apparent that the LORD does not judge according to whether or not Saul performs as well as kings of other nations, though Israel does see (cf. 1 Sam 8:4, 5). God determines Saul's future by the king's disobedience to divine commands.

Samuel's response was blunt:

Has the LORD any great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to obey than the fat of rams; for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness, as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he too has rejected you from being king" (1Sam. 15:22-23).

The lesson of this incident is simple. No motive or action in worship is acceptable, if it runs contrary to God's revealed word. At no point had Saul professed the worship of another god; yet the king's actions toward the Lord were unacceptable, because they deviated from God's revealed word. Therefore, Saul's deeds are likened to the very opposite of true worship, to witchcraft and idolatry.

Temple Worship: As noted earlier, the 12th chapter of Deuteronomy opens and closes with general statements prohibiting the corruption of worship through imitation of heathen practices. The middle portion of the chapter is significant as regards the outward ceremonies of worship under the Levitical priesthood. Even at the time of Moses, it was understood that the portable tabernacle would eventually give way to a permanent place for the Levitical sacrifices. "There shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; there you shall bring all that I command you" (Deut. 12:11; cf. 12:5,14).

The designation of a fixed place of worship did not reach fulfillment until the Israelites conquered and settled the land of Canaan. During the reign of King David, Jerusalem was designated as the permanent location for the ark, thereby establishing Jerusalem as the center for the sacrificial ordinances associated with the Leviticus priesthood. Even so, the entire program of worship, from the tabernacle to the temple, was directed by divine revelation (McConville 1992:20).

The tabernacle worship was not the invention of Moses; it was built according to a divine blueprint. The Israelites were instructed: "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I have shown you, after the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so you shall make it" (Ex. 25:8-9; Ex. 25:40; 27:8; Num. 8:4; cf. Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5). Throughout the description of the tabernacle furnishings, it is reiterated that all things must be made according to the God-given pattern.

The Ark of the Covenant was placed within the tabernacle. It was a symbol of God's presence among them, a meeting-place between the Lord and his people. The Levitical priests performed sacrifices in the tabernacle: all according to the divine pattern given by God to Moses (Ex. 25:10-22; 29:42-46). Later, when David sought to transfer the ark to Jerusalem, the ark was moved initially in a careless manner. The law required the ark to be carried on poles by the priests (Ex. 25:14; Num. 4:1-5). Instead of following the biblical procedure, the Israelites placed the ark upon an ox cart. While this method might have seemed more convenient, it resulted in a tragedy. "And when they came unto the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God" (1 Chron. 13:9-10; cf. 2 Sam. 6:1-10).

The problem was not with the ark. The problem was the failure of the Israelites to maintain the biblical order. Therefore, David called for the priests and Levites, and he charged them, "Sanctify yourselves, you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it ..." (1 Chron. 15:12-13).

Later, David provided Solomon with a plan for building the temple: "David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof and the pattern of all that he had by the spirit also for the courses of the priests and the Levites. All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern" (1Chron. 28:11-13,19). Nothing was left for improvising; everything was ordered by the divine pattern for worship.

Solomon built the temple according to the heavenly blueprints left by David. The kingdom prospered under Solomon, and Jerusalem remained the seat of public worship for the entire kingdom of Israel. After the death of Solomon, the nation became divided and the people slid into corruption and apostasy. The northern tribes immediately embraced false worship, and never recovered from their apostasy. Within the kingdom of Judah, there were several seasons of reformation, amidst waves of idolatry. The key to understanding the history of the Israelites is to note the critical connection between the worship of the people, and God's dealings with them in relation to their worship.

### **3.3 Self-Assessment Question**

- Review the nature of worship in Israel from the time of King Saul to King Solomon.

### **3.4 Nature of Worship in the Historical Books - II**

The Apostasy of the Northern Kingdom: When the nation of Israel was divided, Jeroboam received a prophecy, that his reign in the northern tribes would be firmly established, if he would walk according to the statutes and commandments of God. Instead, the condition



of the northern kingdom was sealed negatively, because Jeroboam took a pragmatic approach to worship (1 Kings 11:37-38).

As we have seen, Jerusalem was the divinely-appointed center for the sacrificial ordinances of the Old Testament. Jeroboam reasoned that his authority would be undermined, if his subjects continued to participate in the temple worship of Jerusalem. So Jeroboam devised a "local" program of worship suited to his own purposes (1 Kings 12:28-33). Jeroboam's actions were wholly revolutionary. He established a new center for worship, new means for worship, and a new priesthood. It was not so much that Jeroboam encouraged his people to worship other deities, but that he devised new methods which displaced the biblical means of worship; Jeroboam's offense was akin to the Aaron's sin in making the original golden calf. Jeroboam was confirmed in his evil, and cursed on account of it. Similarly, the northern kingdom never recovered from this disastrous undertaking (1 Kings 13:33-34).

The kings of northern Israel are denounced for retaining the legacy of Jeroboam. Baasha exterminated the descendants of Jeroboam, but retained the corrupt religion. Therefore, the Lord sent a prophet to pronounce judgment on Baasha because he "walked in the way of Jeroboam, and has made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins" (1 Kings 16:2). This became the trend for the northern kings.

There is one especially curious episode in the latter history of the apostate northern kingdom. When Jehu took the throne, he exterminated the house of Ahab, and repudiated the Baalism of his predecessors. Jehu professed a "zeal for the Lord;" he developed a crafty plan for destroying the prophets of Baal, and he eradicated Baal worship from Israel (2 Kings 10:16; 18-28). Jehu's action brought temporal blessings for his house, but his heart was not right: "Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Beth-el, and that were in Dan. But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin" (2 Kings 10:29-31). The kings of Israel were idolaters; the apostasy of the nation was thorough; and so the Lord destroyed the northern kingdom. A chilling account is provided in 2 Kings 17:4ff, with a summary statement in verses 20-24 of that same chapter. The apostasy spelt doom to the Northern kingdom, and they were destroyed and taken captive by Assyria (2 Kings 17:32-41).

The Kingdom of Judah: After the separation of the northern kingdom, the people of Judah retained their connection with the kingly descendants of David. Sadly, not all of the kings of Judah walked in the ways of their father David, who had displayed such commendable zeal for the true worship of God. Judah became apostate during the reign of Rehoboam by resorting to unhallowed means of worship (1 Kings 14:22-24). Kings Asa and Josiah instituted reforms in their times, which their purposes at the time. But the level of apostasy in the land also attracted God's judgment on Judah. Since the people remained

corrupt, the Lord sent them the leadership they deserved. The nation fell to the Babylonians, and the people were carried away into exile.

### 3.4 Self-Assessment Question

- How will you describe the nature of worship in Israel during the divided kingdom in the North?

### 3.5 The Period of Captivity

During the captivity, it was impossible for the Jews to conduct the public ordinances related to the temple in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the Lord's people were still obligated to keep themselves free from idolatry.

Consider the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. They were told to accede to idolatry on the direct orders of king Nebuchadnezzar. (The king spoke in a tart manner; his commands sounded remarkably similar to the high-sounding rhetoric of contemporary church rulers who instruct church members to submit to unscriptural worship.) The response of the Israelites was equally direct: "Be it known unto thee, O king that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan. 3:18).

The prophet Daniel was confronted with the tyrannical decree of Darius. To comply with the decree, Daniel would be required to neglect an important element of private worship, prayer. The prophet responded with open defiance, by performing his exercises of worship openly. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (Dan. 6:10).

These short lessons from the exile are a perpetual testimony to God's people to keep themselves from idolatry. No authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical, has the right to enjoin corrupt worship upon the people; and it is unlawful to submit to usurped authority, if we are ordered to participate in idolatry. Similarly, no rulers, whether civil or ecclesiastical, have the right to discharge us from our duties of worship. If faced with such unlawful demands, our response should be plain; "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

### 3.5 Self Assessment Question

- During the captivity of Israel to Babylon, it was difficult for them to observe public worship. Why?

### 3.6 Restoration and Reform

During the reign of Cyrus the king of Persia, the Jews were permitted to return to their homeland and commence rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. They were careful to restore the temple and its services according to the scriptural pattern. "And when the builders laid

the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel." When the construction was complete, "they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses" (Ezra 3:10; 6:18).

Having reestablished the proper place and the proper priesthood for public worship, the children of Israel celebrated the Passover. "For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the Passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat, and kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel" (Ezra 6:20-22).

During the reforms of Nehemiah, the word of God was restored to a prominent position, the people confessed their sins and renewed their covenantal obligations, and provisions were made to sustain the public ordinances of worship (Neh. 8-10; Neh. 10:32-33).

### **3.6 Self-Assessment Question**

- Describe the nature of worship in Israel during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

### **3.7 Hermeneutical Consideration**

The study in this unit has shown that ignorance of the historical books of the Old Testament, especially Kings and Chronicles, is a preeminent reason why some Christians do not perceive the importance of biblical worship. The critical nature of worship, and God's dealings with his people in relation to their worship, are themes scarcely known in contemporary churches. After all, when was the last time you heard a series of sermons based upon 2 Chronicles?

The implication, whether stated or merely implied, is that the older, biblical forms of worship are simply boring, and must give way to more creative contemporary ideas. Today, many evangelicals decry the sins of abortion and homosexuality as manifestations of our nation's corruption (which they are indeed); but our contemporary moralists generally seem oblivious to the heinous sin of corrupt worship. Note well: this is precisely the kind of imitation forbidden in Deut. 12. The biblical doctrine of worship is a corollary to the biblical doctrine of salvation. As regards salvation, mankind has nothing acceptable to offer to God to procure his favour, since "all our righteousness is as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). Through Christ Jesus, God has declared the way of salvation in his word. When men go about to establish their own salvation, deviating from the way declared in God's word, they incur added guilt. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going

about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3).

Similarly, when men seek to worship God according to their own innovations, they are concurrently deviating from the biblical means of worship, and thereby adding to their own guilt. The Lord declares of such: "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). "The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy scripture" (Westminster Confession, 21:1).

### 3.7 Self-Assessment Question

- How will access our contemporary mode of worship with the practice in the Old Testament?

### 4.0 Conclusion

Based on the survey of Old Testament precepts and narratives on worship, we have discovered these general truths:

1. God is holy and jealous for his honor. He has forbidden us to worship anyone or anything beside him.
2. God has prescribed the proper way of worship; he has furnished a "divine pattern", a "due order" for worship. Since mankind has an inherent tendency to corrupt worship, we need divine instructions if our worship is to be acceptable unto God. Therefore, proper worship is restricted exclusively to the means ordained by God.
3. All elements of worship which lack divine warrant are forbidden.

To state these ideas simply: Nobody has the right to add to (or subtract from) the biblical pattern of worship; we are forbidden to alter the proper elements of worship in any way. The restriction applies to both the church collectively, and to persons individually, regardless of their station. Only the Lord has the prerogative to modify the means of worship used by his people.

### 5.0 Summary

So far, this unit adopted a canonical approach in surveying the nature of worship in the Old Testament, discussed under the following sub-headings: The Old Testament Law and Worship – Pentateuch I; The Precepts for Worship – Pentateuch II; Nature of Worship in the Historical Books – I; Nature of Worship in the Historical Books – II; The Period of Captivity; Restoration and Reform; and Hermeneutical Consideration.

Next unit will examine the role of priesthood in the Old Testament worship.

## 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Narrate in brief the nature and progression of worship from the Pentateuch to the post-exilic era of the Jews.

## 7.0 References/Future Reading

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**MODULE 2: ENDOWMENTS, ABUSE AND RECOVERY*****Unit 4: Priesthood*****Contents**

Introduction

Objective

Main body

- .1 Definition for Priesthood in the Old Testament
- 3.2 Patriarchal Priesthood
- 3.3 Aaronic Priesthood
- 3.4 The Legitimizing of priestly status and privilege
- 3.5 Hermeneutical consideration.

4 Conclusion

5 Summary

6 Tutor Marked Assignments

7 References/Future Reading

**1.0 Introduction**

A priest is one who makes the sacrifices, performs the rituals and acts as mediator between man and God. This means that he is responsible for offering the divinely appointed sacrifices to God, for executing the different procedures and ceremonies relating to the worship of God, and for being a representative between God and man. The theme of priests and priesthood is made more prominent in the Old Testament. One is first introduced to the concept of a priest in the book of Genesis, in the offering of tithes to Melchizedek by Abram (Gen 14:17-20). So, our survey of the concept of Priesthood in the Old Testament will be discussed under the following sub-headings: Definition for Priesthood in the Old Testament; Patriarchal Priesthood; Aaronic Priesthood; The Legitimizing of priestly status and privilege; Hermeneutical consideration.

**2.0 Objective**

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

- Understand the Old Testament definition of Priesthood.
- Describe the role of priests in worship.

- Realize why their ministry was legitimated in the Old Testament.
- Explain why special emoluments accrued to them.
- Be informed of the threat of corruption confronting it.
- Discuss the relevance of Priesthood in the contemporary church.

### 3.0 Main Body

#### 3.1 Definition of Priesthood in the Old Testament

According to the priestly tradition, priests were drawn from the tribe of Levi, within which was a 3-fold hierarchy: the high priest (Aaron and his successors), the priests (Aaron's sons), and the other Levitical clans (Jenson 1997:1066). The priest was a human mediator between God and the people. God was represented to the people in the splendour of his clothing, in his behaviour, and in oracles and instruction, while in sacrifice and intercession the people were represented to God (Exd 28:29-30; Lev 16). The priest or the high priest must be of the family of Aaron, unblemished in body, and character, ordained and consecrated, etc (Exd 28-29; Lev 16&21). For their emolument, priests were entitled to a share of the sacrificial meat with the exception of the burnt offering. They also benefited from other offerings like the first-fruits and tithe of tithes, etc (Lev 6:24-26; 7:28-34; Num 18; cf. Ajah 2010: 13).

Figuratively, priesthood was applied to the nation of Israel as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exd 19:5-6; Lev 20:26; Deut 14:2 cf. 1Peter 2:9-11). These priestly people were to mediate the knowledge and the blessing of the holy God to other people. The prophets frequently accused the priests of ritual and moral failure (Ezek 22:26; Hos 6:9). The people were seriously affected each time the priests failed in their role of preserving distinctive Israelite faith and practice (Amos 4:9). The introduction of monarchy also affected the appointment of priests. Example, the political choices of Abiathar and Zadok determined their respective fates (2 Sam 19:11; 1Kgs 2:21-27, 35). Eventually, “the demise of an effective royal line led to the political ascendancy of the priesthood, and the Hasmoneans combined the offices of high priest and king” in the inter-testamental period (Jenson 1997:603).

On the other hand, the Levites were regarded by some as servants of the priests and guardians of the temple. According to Jenson (1997:773), the subordination of Levites to the priests is evident at various points (Num 3:9; 8:19), although they had a privileged place in relation to other tribes. The Levites' duties in the priestly writings were to guard the sanctuary manual labour, receive tithes and offerings from the people, etc (Num 4:5-15; 8:24-26; 18:1-7, 21-24). Deuteronomy refers to both priests and Levites as Levitical priests thus grouping them together. It represents a non priestly perspective and may be using the terms more loosely. The historical books treated priests and Levites together like Deuteronomy (Josh 21). Ezekiel gave a prominent role to the Levitical priests who are to be descendants of Zadok (Ezek 44:15). The Chronicler compared the Levites

favourably to the priests (2 Chron 29:34). But in Ezra-Nehemiah the number and role of the Levites depleted considerably, and most of their duties were taken over by the priests (Ezra 2:36-42; Neh 7:39-45; cf. Ajah: 14).

### 3.1 Self-Assessment

- How would you define Priesthood in the Old Testament?

#### .2 Patriarchal Priesthood

The first occurrence of "priest" in the Old Testament is the reference to the pre-Israelite "Melchizedek king of Salem priest of God Most High" (Gen 14:18). Jethro, Moses' father-in-law and the priest of Midian, was also recognized as non-Israelite priest of the true God of Sinai by Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel (Exod 2:16 ; 3:1 ; Exodus 18:1 Exodus 18:10-12).

Priests of foreign gods in foreign lands referred to in the Old Testament are Potiphera, Joseph's father-in-law, who was a "priest of On" in Egypt (Genesis 41:45 Genesis 41:50 ; 46:20), the whole priestly organization in Egypt (Genesis 47:22 Genesis 47:26), the "priests of Dagon" in Philistia ( 1 Sam 5:5 ; 6:2 ), the "priests of Chemosh" in Moab ( Jer 48:7), and the "priests of Malcam" in Ammon (Jer 49:3). Unfortunately, there were also priests of foreign gods who practiced their priesthood within the boundaries of Israel, sometimes even under the auspices of certain unfaithful Israelite rulers (see, e.g., 2 Kings 10:11 2 Kings 10:19 2 Kings 10:23 ; 23:5).

The introduction of priests into the practice changed its meaning fundamentally. The offering of sacrifices to the deity was originally sporadic, spontaneous and personal. As the patriarchal narratives show, individuals offered sacrifices when they deemed it appropriate to do so. Sanctuaries or priests were not involved. According to the Yahwist there were no priests in the time of the patriarchs. The so called Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:23- 23:19) also does not speak of priests (Nurnberger 2004:147).

In the early times the role of the priest was the oracle. Clans, tribes or groups of tribes may have begun to acknowledge the role of a priest in sacrificial acts at traditionally holy places. The priest Eli at Shilo is a case in point (1 Sam 2ff). The Levites, a landless grouped dispersed among the different tribes, were considered to be more holy than others were preferred as priests. An example is Micah's recruitment of Levite as a priest in Judges 17. Originally, 'holy' simply meant 'dedicated to the deity'. However, there seems to be a tendency for the idea of 'sanctity' to grow on itself. In time a part of one's possession set apart for the deity (the sacrifice) led to a set-apart caste to administer this process (the priesthood), a set-apart realm (the sanctuary), and a set-apart time (the religious festival. Once you have priesthood, regular sacrifices become necessary to maintain the priesthood. The need of the priesthood for recognition, power and income led, in a subtle way, to the claim that regular sacrifices were demanded by the LORD. The empowerment of the clergy again led to the religious disempowerment of the laity.



Deuteronomy no longer recognizes the right of the laity to bring sacrifices (Nurnberger 147).

### 3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- List the Bible references of some of the priests that operated during the patriarchal era. Who were they, and what was the nature of their priesthood?

### .3 Aaronic Priesthood

Moses functioned as the original priest of Israel by initially consecrating (1) the whole kingdom of priests (Exod 24:3-8), (2) the perpetual priesthood of Aaron and his descendants, who would in turn mediate for that kingdom of priests (Exod 29 ; Lev 8), and (3) the tabernacle (Num 7:1). However, there are several passages that seem to indicate that Aaron and his sons functioned as priests in Israel even before the official consecration of the Aaronic priesthood (Exod 19:24 ; 24:1 ; 32:3-6). Of course, as brothers and sons of Amram and Jochebed (Exod 6:20) Moses and Aaron were both from the tribe of Levi through Kohath. Therefore, it was natural that the Lord should then choose the whole tribe of Levi to assist the clan of Aaron with all their priestly duties in place of the firstborn of all Israel (Num 8:14-19).

So, although the entire nation constituted "a kingdom of priests," the Lord established Aaron's descendants as the perpetual priestly clan in Israel. Together they were responsible for maintaining the proper relationship of the people to Lord in regard to the two major foci of the Mosaic covenant: (1) the administration and ministry of the sanctuary and (2) the custody and administration of the Law of Moses (Averbeck 1996).

The formal priesthood of the Mosaic dispensation was known as the Aaronic priesthood, because all the priests were required to be selected from Aaron's (Moses' brother) lineage. However, there apparently was a priesthood of some sort before that time. Moses requested permission from Pharaoh to lead his people into the wilderness so they could "sacrifice unto Jehovah" (Ex. 5:3). Furthermore, certain "priests" were required to sanctify themselves in preparation for the reception of the law on Sinai (Ex. 19:22, 24). Some surmise that these were the "elders" (Ex. 3:16), or else a select group of "young men" (Ex. 24:5). This group might have been constituted of the "first-born" who were "sanctified" unto the Lord (Ex. 13:2). Later, the Levites seem to have taken the "sanctified" place of the first-born (Num. 3:5-13). The tribe of Levi was chosen because of its fidelity when Israel worshipped the golden calf at the base of Sinai (Ex. 32:26-29).

When the law was given to the Israelites in the wilderness; Aaron and his sons were appointed to priesthood (Num. 3:10). The role of high priest was a life-long appointment, and was assumed by the oldest qualified descendant of Aaron. All other male offspring of Aaron served as priests, except in the case of the physically impaired (Lev. 21:17-23), or unless he became temporarily "unclean" (Lev. 22:3). Only the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement each year (Lev. 16:1ff).

### 3.3 Self-Assessment

- Why do scholars regard Aaronic Priesthood as the defining moment of priesthood?

#### .4 The Legitimizing of priestly status and privilege

During the rule of the high priest in Jerusalem the status of the priests rose to that of a national elite. The Levites became their servants (Num 18:2). The sacrificial rite became ever more prescriptive, complex and demanding, both in terms of the quality and the quality of the gifts – money, animals and crops.

The legitimization of the Levite role was achieved by declaring the Levites a sacrifice made by Israel to the LORD their God (Num. 8:16-19). They were substitutes for the first born sons of the other Israelites. The dedication of their lives to the LORD consisted of their service to the priesthood. According to an ancient sentiment, a sacrifice must be the best possession one has as one's disposal. So it was claimed that the Levites, previously a rather odd landless crowd, were the best part of Israel, the specially chosen part (Nurnberger 150).

Of course, the priests again were the cream of the Levites. To safeguard their special status and delineate their particular role “from now on the Israelites must not go near the Tent of Meeting, or they will bear the consequences of their sin will die” (Num 18:22). The Levites and priests were themselves charged with the responsibility of keeping the Israelites out of the sacred realm.

More down to earth, this particularly precious sacrifice to the Lord (the Levites) had to be paid for by the Israelites. They had to give sacrifices to maintain the Levites. It was claimed that the LORD had ceded his share of these sacrifices to the Aaronides for their exclusive use (Num. 18:8). The LORD's endowment to the Aaronides was declared to be an ‘everlasting covenant’ decreed by the LORD (Num. 18:19).

The Levites received the tithes (Num.18:21), but they had to pay tithes on the tithes they had received from the Israelites (and corresponding portions of sacrifices in kind). This Lord's portion was to be given to Aaron, that is, to the high priest (Num. 18:28). The Levites had to care for the sanctuary, which no other Israelite was allowed to do. The motivation given for this arrangement, the landlessness of the Levites (Num. 18:20ff), must have been a two-edged sword. Landlessness is always painful in an agricultural society. Land constituted the basis of economic independence, citizenship, status and honour in ancient Israel. With the declaration that the LORD was ‘their share and inheritance’ (Num. 18:20), their dignity was not only restored, but their status was elevated above those of ordinary Israelites.

### 3.4 Self-Assessment Question

- Why were the priests compensated with sacrifices and tithes in the Old Testament?

### .5 Hermeneutical consideration.

**(1) Priesthood is bestowed upon all those who are a member of the right family.** Just as it was only the sons of Aaron who were priests under the Law of Moses, so it is only those who are in Christ by personal faith who are priests today. Priesthood is not something which men can bestow upon other men, or even which the church can bestow; it is the result of the new birth, which constitutes one to be a child of God and thus to be in Christ. Priests are those whose sins have been atoned for, so that they are free to minister to other sinners. This atonement for the New Testament priest is that which Christ, our Great High Priest, has made through the shedding of His blood on the cross.

**(2) God's priesthood is a holy priesthood.** We are to learn from God's words, quoted by Moses, that disobedience to God dishonors Him and fails to regard Him as holy. A God who is Holy is a God who is to be honored, and we honor God by obeying Him. This same principle of showing honor by our obedience applies to others, including children, who are to honor their parents (Eph. 6:1-2), and citizens, who are to honor those in authority (cf. Rom. 13:1-7).

God takes the sin of His priests very seriously. Being in close proximity to God brings with it correspondingly high standards of conduct. This is indicated in several ways in the Book of Leviticus. God frequently indicated that disobedience to His commands would bring about the death of the violator. The expression "lest you die" is often found in this context (cf. Exod. 28:35, 43; 30:20, 21; Lev. 8:35; 10:6, 7, 9). In addition, a previous statement of God is quoted by Moses in our text as an explanation of what happened to Nadab and Abihu and its implications for the priesthood:

Priests must not let their human sympathies and family affections dim their regard for the holiness of God. Specifically, Eleazar and Ithamar were not allowed to touch the bodies of their brothers, nor were they allowed to mourn their death, as others could do (v. 6). The priests were to represent and reflect the holiness of God, and thus they could not identify with the sympathies of men. To have mourned for their brothers would have implied a sorrow for their deserved judgment, and would have implied an excessive severity on the part of God, who judged them.

**(3) Priests must not do anything which dulls their sense of judgment or their grasp of the significance of what they are doing** (vv. 8-11). I understand verses 8-10 to be directly related to the death of Nadab and Abihu. Distinct from later instructions, which are given by Moses, verses 8-10 are said to have come directly from God to Aaron (v. 8). I take it that it is possible, perhaps even likely, that Nadab and Abihu had been "tipping the bottle" before or while they were acting as priests. The consequent dullness of mind, or even downright drunkenness, could have contributed greatly to their disobedience. Today, we remind people not to mix drinking and driving. In those days God reminded

the priests not to drink and be on duty. Drinking can be deadly, to those who drive and to those who serve God.

**(4) The function of priests is to serve God and men.** Repeatedly in the 28th chapter of Exodus, the garments which are made for Aaron and for his sons are those which enable them to minister to God. So that we frequently find the expression, or one that is similar, "... that he (or they) may minister as priests to Me" (cf. Exod. 28:1, 3, 4, 41; also 29:44). The emphasis here is on serving God, more than on serving men, though I believe both elements are present.

Just what is involved in the ministry of Aaron, and of his sons? As I have pondered Exodus chapter 28 it seems to me that each of the various components of Aaron's attire relates to a particular facet of his ministry. The ephod is to contain two stones on the shoulder pieces (cf. Exod. 28:6-14). On these two stones were engraved the names of the sons of Israel. Aaron was to wear these, "as stones of memorial for the sons of Israel," to bear "their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for a memorial" (Exod. 28:12). Aaron also was to wear a "breastpiece of judgment" (vv. 15-30). On this breastpiece four rows of stones were set, with three stones in each row, each signifying one of the tribes of Israel. The purpose of these stones is given in verse 30: "... and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually" (Exod. 28:30b). On Aaron's turban was to be placed a "plate of gold" (Exod. 28:36-39). It was to be engraved with a seal, reading, "Holy to the Lord" (v. 36). This had to do with "taking away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrated," "so that they may be accepted before the LORD" (v. 38).

### 3.5 Self-Assessment Question

- Summarize the four lessons we can derive from Old Testament Priesthood for our contemporary society.

### 4.0 Conclusion

This unit has surveyed the concept of priesthood in the Old Testament. We have seen that priesthood got a legal backing as a recognized institution in the Old Testament from the time of Moses, who consecrated Aaron and his sons as priests. They had the oversight of the various offerings and sacrifices in the tabernacle, etc. (Leviticus 6:8-7:36). There were also daily, weekly, monthly, and periodic festival offerings that the priests were responsible to offer as part of the regular pattern of tabernacle worship (Num. 28-29). Also the Aaronic priests were responsible to maintain the sanctity and purity of the sanctuary (Lev 10:10). Since the Lord was physically present within the physical tabernacle structure in their midst, therefore, the physical purity of Israel was essential to the habitation of the Lord among them. The priesthood was compensated with the tithes and offerings from the sanctuary.

## 5.0 Summary

So far, this unit discussed the concept of priesthood in the Old Testament, discussed under the following subheading: definition for priesthood in the Old Testament; Patriarchal Priesthood; Aaronic Priesthood; the Legitimizing of priestly status and privilege; and hermeneutical consideration.

Next Unit will discuss the concept of Sacrifice in the worship life of Old Testament believing community.

## 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Identify and analyze the distinctive features of Aaronic Priesthood, and differentiate it from the Patriarchal priesthood.

## 7.0 References/Future Reading

Averbeck, Richard E. (1996) in Walter A. Elwel ed. *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company

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**MODULE 2: ENDOWMENTS, ABUSE AND RECOVERY*****Unit 5: Sacrifice*****Contents**

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5.0 Summary

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**1.0 Introduction**

According to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, “Sacrifice is a complex and comprehensive term. In its simplest form it may be defined as "a gift to God." It is a presentation to Deity of some material object, the possession of the offerer, as an act of worship. It may be to attain, restore, maintain or to celebrate friendly relations with the Deity.” The purpose of sacrifice could be “total self-surrender” to God, thanksgiving or a form of appeasement.

This unit examines the concept of sacrifice in the worship life of the Old Testament, discussed under the following sub-headings: History of sacrifice in the Old Testament; Types of Sacrifices; The Aims of Sacrificial Act; Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament; and Hermeneutical Considerations in the New Testament.

**2.0 Objectives**

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

- Understand the historical development of sacrifice in the Old Testament

- Describe the reasons for sacrifice in worship.
- List the types of sacrifices in the Old Testament.
- Show how the Old Testament sacrifices point ultimately to the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.
- Explain the significance of the Old Testament sacrifice to the contemporary Church in Africa.

### 3.0 Main Body

#### 3.1 History of sacrifice in the Old Testament

**The Offerings of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:4):** The account of the offerings of Cain and Abel shows that the ceremony dates from almost the beginnings of the human race. The custom of offering the firstlings and first-fruits had already begun. Arabian tribes later had a similar custom. Cain's offering was cereal and is called *minchah*, "a gift" or "presentation." The same term is applied to Abel's. There is no hint that the bloody sacrifice was in itself better than the unbloody one, but it is shown that sacrifice without a right attitude of heart is not acceptable to God. This same truth is emphasized by the prophets and others, and is needed in this day as much as then. In this case the altars would be of the common kind, and no priest was needed. The sacrifices were an act of worship, adoration, dependence, prayer, and possibly propitiation (ISBE).

**Noah (Gen 8:20):** The sacrifices of Noah followed and celebrated the epochal and awe-inspiring event of leaving the ark and beginning life anew. He offered burnt offerings of all the clean animals. On such a solemn occasion only an *'olah* would suffice. The custom of using domestic animals had arisen at this time. The sacrifices expressed adoration, recognition of God's power and sovereignty, and a gift to please Him, for it is said He smelled a sweet savor and was pleased. It was an odor of satisfaction or restfulness. Whether or not the idea of expiation was included is difficult to prove (ISBE).

**Abraham (Genesis 12:7):** Abraham lived at a time when sacrifices and religion were virtually identical. No mention is made of his offering at Ur, but on his arrival at Shechem he erected an altar. At Beth-el also (12:8) and on his return from Egypt he worshipped there (Genesis 13:4). Such sacrifices expressed adoration and prayer and probably propitiation. They constituted worship, which is a complex exercise. At Hebron he built an altar (Genesis 13:18), officiating always as his own priest. In Genesis 15:4 he offers a "covenant" sacrifice, when the animals were slain, divided, the parts set opposite each other, and prepared for the appearance of the other party to the covenant. The exact idea in the killing of these animals may be difficult to find, but the effect is to give the occasion great solemnity and the highest religious sanction.

**Job (Job 1:5):** Whatever may be the date of the writing of the Book of Job, the saint himself is represented as living in the Patriarchal age. He constantly offered sacrifices on

behalf of his children, "sanctifying" them. His purpose no doubt was to atone for possible sin. The sacrifices were mainly expiatory. This is true also of the sacrifices of his friends (42:7-9).

**Isaac (Gen. 26:25):** Isaac seems to have had a permanent altar at Beer-sheba and to have regularly offered sacrifices. Adoration, expiation and supplication would constitute his chief motives.

**Jacob (Gen. 28:18):** Jacob's first recorded sacrifice was the pouring of the oil upon the stone at Beth-el. This was consecration or dedication in recognition of the awe-inspiring presence of the Deity. After his covenant with Laban he offered sacrifices (*zebhachim*) and they ate bread (Genesis 31:54). At Shechem, Jacob erected an altar (Genesis 33:20). At Beth-el (Genesis 35:7) and at Beer-sheba he offered sacrifices to Isaac's God (Genesis 46:1).

**Israel in Egypt:** While the Israelites were in Egypt they would be accustomed to spring sacrifices and spring feasts, for these had been common among the Arabs and Syrians, etc., for centuries. Nabatean inscriptions testify to this. At these spring festivals it was probably customary to offer the firstlings of the flocks (compare Exodus 13:15). At the harvest festivals sacrificial feasts were celebrated. It was to some such feast Moses said Israel as a people wished to go in the wilderness (Exodus 3:18; 5:3; 7:16). Pharaoh understood and asked who was to go (Exodus 10:8). Moses demanded flocks and herds for the feast (Exodus 10:9). Pharaoh would keep the flocks, etc. (Exodus 10:24), but Moses said they must offer sacrifices and burnt offerings (Exodus 10:25).

**Jethro (Exod. 18:12):** As a priest of Midian, Jethro was an expert in sacrificing. On meeting Moses and the people he offered both *`olah* and *zebhachim* and made a feast.

**Moses onwards:** The Levitical Priesthood instituted from the time of David herald a new dispensation of sacrifice. At this time, sacrifice as worship requirement received a legal backing and comprehensive regulations followed. The detail description of the types of sacrifices in the Old Testament discussed below came from this period.

### 3.1 Self-Assessment Question

- Summarize the early historical development of Sacrifice in the Old Testament.

### 3.2 Types of Sacrifices

Two kinds of sacrifice are recognized and required of in the Old Testament, the bloody and the unbloody.

Four types of bloody sacrifices are described:

**(1) Holocaust or whole-burnt offering (*`Olah*):** a "burnt offering," sometimes whole burnt offering is derived from the verb *`alah*, "to go up." It may mean "that which goes up to the altar" (Knobel, Wellhausen, Nowack, etc.), or "that which goes up in smoke to the



sky" (Bahr, Delitzsch, Dillmann, etc.); sometimes used synonymously with *kalil* (which see). The term applies to beast or fowl when entirely consumed upon the altar, the hide of the beast being taken by the priest. This was perhaps the most solemn of the sacrifices, and symbolized worship in the full sense, i.e. adoration, devotion, dedication, supplication, and at times expiation (ISBE).

**(2) Sin offering (*Chota'ah, chatta'th*):** a "sin offering," a special kind, first mentioned in the Mosaic legislation. It is essentially expiatory, intended to restore covenant relations with the Deity. The special features were: (i) the blood must be sprinkled before the sanctuary, put upon the horns of the altar of incense and poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offering; (ii) the flesh was holy, not to be touched by worshipper, but eaten by the priest only. The special ritual of the Day of Atonement centers on the sin offering.

**(3) Guilt offering' (*Asham*):** "guilt offering," "trespass offering" (King James Version; in Isaiah 53:10, the King James Version and the Revised Version (British and American) "an offering for sin," the American Revised Version margin "trespass offering"). A special kind of sin offering introduced in the Mosaic Law and concerned with offenses against God and man that could be estimated by a money value and thus covered by compensation or restitution accompanying the offering. A ram of different degrees of value, and worth at least two shekels, was the usual victim, and it must be accompanied by full restitution with an additional fifth of the value of the damage. The leper and Nazirite could offer he-lambs. The guilt toward God was expiated by the blood poured out, and the guilt toward men by the restitution and fine. The calling of the Servant an '*asham* (Isaiah 53:10) shows the value attached to this offering.

**(4) Peace offering (*Shelem, shelamim*):** "peace offering," generally used the plural, *shelamim*, only once *shelem* (Amos 5:22). These were sacrifices of friendship expressing or promoting peaceful relations with the Deity, and almost invariably accompanied by a meal or feast, an occasion of great joy. They are sometimes called *zebhachim*, sometimes *zebhach shelamim*, and were of different kinds, such as *zebhach ha-todhah*, "thank offerings," which expressed the gratitude of the giver because of some blessings, *zebhach nedhabhah*, "free-will offerings," bestowed on the Deity out of a full heart, and *zebhach nedher*, "votive offerings," which were offered in fulfillment of a vow (ISBE).

Unbloody sacrifices include:

**Meal offering (*Minchah*):** "meal offering" (the Revised Version), "meat offering" (the King James Version), a gift or presentation, at first applied to both bloody and unbloody offerings (Genesis 4:5), but in Moses' time confined to cereals, whether raw or roast, ground to flour or baked and mixed with oil and frankincense. These cereals were the produce of man's labor with the soil, not fruits, etc., and thus represented the necessities and results of life, if not life itself. They were the invariable accompaniment of animal sacrifices, and in one instance could be substituted for them (see SIN OFFERING). The term *minchah* describes a gift or token of friendship (Isaiah 39:1), an act of homage (1 Samuel 10:27; 1 Kings 10:25), tribute (Judges 3:15,17), propitiation to a friend

wronged (Ge 32:13,18; Heb 14:19)), to procure favor or assistance (Genesis 43:11; Hosea 10:6).

**Wave offering (*Tenuphah*):** "wave offering," usually the breast, the priest's share of the peace offerings, which was waved before the altar by both offerer and priest together (the exact motion is not certain), symbolic of its presentation to Deity and given back by Him to the offerer to be used in the priests' service.

**(Heave offering (*Terumah*):** "heave offering," something lifted up, or, properly, separated from the rest and given to the service of the Deity. Usually the right shoulder or thigh was thus separated for the priest. The term is applied to products of the soil, or portion of land separated unto the divine service, etc.

**An Oblation (*Qorban*):** "an oblation," or "offering"; another generic term for all kinds of offerings, animal, vegetable, or even gold and silver. Derived from the verb *qarabh*, "to draw near," it signifies what is drawn or brought near and given to God.

### 3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- Explain the following types of sacrifice: Wave offering, Burnt offering, Peace offering and *Qorban*.

### 3.3 The Aims of Sacrificial Act

**Sacrifice as an expression of dependence:** dependence implies vulnerability. Survival and prosperity are precariously on the balance at all times. Sacrifice is a ritual which attempts to stabilize the situation. It consists of a symbolic act of subordination under the deity who believed to be in charge of the forces which determine life. The primary motive is not the fulfillment of a divine demand, but the acknowledgement of dependence through a sign of submission. Sacrifice assumes that the deity might be disposed favourably by human gratitude and servitude, and that the deity's wrath may flare up if human acknowledgement of dependence is not made manifest in some way.

**Sacrifice as an acknowledgement of guilt:** the awe associated with ultimate dependence translates into trepidation when guilt comes into the picture. If persons or communities have transgressed the values and norms laid down by the deity, they expect the wrath of the deity in the form of punitive or destructive events. Sacrifice now assumes the function of reconciling the deity to the transgressor. As a sign of repentance and contrition, sacrifice can take the form of self-mutilation – which does not seem to benefit the deity in any way. It is clear, therefore, that the rationale is not to pay off a debt or make amends, but, once again, to acknowledge one's dependence and abandon the usurped autonomy which the iniquity had manifested (Nurnberger 2004:144).

**Covenant relationship:** the covenant relationship with the LORD was the basis for sacrifice in Deuteronomy. The people were chosen by the LORD out of all the nations of the earth (Deut 10:15; 14:2). As a result they were expected to be a holy nation,

reverencing the LORD (14:1, 2, 23). The covenant ceremony in Deuteronomy 26:16-19, which immediately follows the tithe declaration, and ends the stipulation section of the book of Deuteronomy (12-26), makes the concept of the uniqueness of the Israelite people obvious (Ajah 2010:133).

**Fellowship:** another peculiar characteristics of the sacrificial system is the idea of fellowship with the LORD and the community at the central sanctuary: “And you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and rejoice with your household” (Deut. 14:26). Merrill (1994:241) opines that this phrase strongly suggests that the LORD was more than an interested observer in what was going on. The LORD was a participant, for such was the nature of banquets that accompanied the making and ratification of covenant relationships (Ajah 133).

### 3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- Mention and discuss at least four reasons for sacrifice.

### 3.4 Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament

Some of the references in the Old Testament that suggest human sacrifice include:

#### 1. Leviticus 27:28-29 (NASB)

Nevertheless, anything which a man sets apart to the LORD out of all that he has, of man or animal or of the fields of his own property, shall not be sold or redeemed. Anything devoted to destruction is most holy to the LORD.

No one who may have been set apart among men shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death.

#### 2. Exodus 22:29-30

You must give me the firstborn of your sons. Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but give them to me on the eighth day.

#### 3. Joshua 6:21

They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it - men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.

#### 4. Numbers 31:25-30, 40-41 (NKJV)

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Count up the plunder that was taken - of man and beast - you and Eleazar the priest and the chief fathers of the congregation; and divide the plunder into two parts, between those who took part in the war, who went out to battle, and all the congregation. And levy a tribute for the LORD on the men of war who went out to battle: one of every five hundred of the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and

the sheep; take it from their half, and give it to Eleazar the priest as a heave offering to the LORD. And from the children of Israel's half you shall take one of every fifty, drawn from the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep, from all the livestock, and give them to the Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of the LORD."

The persons were sixteen thousand, of which the LORD's tribute was thirty-two persons. So Moses gave the tribute which was the LORD's heave offering to Eleazar the priest, as the LORD commanded Moses.

#### 5. Genesis 22:2

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

#### 6. Judges 11:30-39

And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

..."You may go," he said. And he let her go for two months. She and the girls went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. After the two months, she returned to her father and he did to her as he had vowed.

**Conversely**, there are several verses that indicate that God is against child sacrifice. God expressly forbids it and its practice is described as evil:

**Deuteronomy 12:31:** You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods.

**Deuteronomy 18:9-12:** When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire...Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you.

**2 Kings 16:3:** He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.

**Psalms 106:38:** They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was desecrated by their blood.

**Jeremiah 19:4-5:** For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned sacrifices in it to gods that neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of

Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal - something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.

**We argue here:** There are numerous forms of sacrifices mentioned in the Old Testament of which human sacrifice is one. Human sacrifice in the Old Testament could mean: (a) Self-dedication; (b) Dedication of the first-born; and Child-sacrifice – holocaust. For one to ascertain whether or not it was accepted by the LORD, the context should be taken into consideration. Some have argued that if the near-sacrifice of Isaac was not actually intended by the LORD, that it would negate the understanding that Christ was actually sacrificed for the salvation of the world. But to insist that the LORD approved human sacrifice in the Old Testament in the sense of holocaust, is at best an over assumption. However, acceptance or rejection of this subject: human sacrifice (holocaust type) in the Old Testament remains controversial. More research is required to know the best way to interpret it.

### 3.4 Self-Assessment Question

- How would you interpret the concept of human sacrifice in the Old Testament?

### 3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations in the New Testament

According Nurnberger (2004:166), “Sacrifice is unavoidable.” Sacrificial acts and actions are rooted in feelings of dependence, guilt and indebtedness. The classical form is to give to the deity a part of one’s substance as a symbol for one’s life as a whole. To express one’s seriousness, this part must be one’s most treasured possession. In patriarchal cultures the most treasured possession was the first-born son. In the course of time, spontaneous and personal sacrifices were institutionalized and abused by kings and priests to gain power, prestige and income. In the New Testament the paradigm experienced a dramatic inversion: not humans sacrificed their first-born to reconcile God, but sacrificed his only-born to reconcile humanity. Humans reconciled with God are involved in the sacrifice of God on behalf of other creatures. This inversion is of great importance for ecological survival in modern times. We cannot help but live off the sacrifice of other creatures, thus of God, but we also have to take part in the sacrifice of God to give other creatures a chance.

### 4.0 Conclusion

This unit has shown that sacrifice occupies a central place in the worship life of the Old Testament. The believing community performed sacrifices as an expression of dependence on God; as an acknowledgement of guilt before God; as a covenant relationship; and as a mark of fellowship with the deity and the community. The priest plays the pivotal role in the rituals of which he is compensated with offerings and proceeds from the sacrifice. The sacrifice acceptable to God today is not the presentation of animals or agricultural produce, but a humble submission in faith and obedience to

supreme sacrifice on behalf of humanity made by our LORD Jesus Christ, which has abrogated every other form of ritual sacrifice.

### **5.0 Summary**

The concept of sacrifice was surveyed in this unit under the following subheading: History of sacrifice in the Old Testament; Types of Sacrifices; The Aims of Sacrificial Act; Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament; and Hermeneutical Considerations in the New Testament.

Next unit will survey the concept of redemption and mission in the Old Testament.

### **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

- Discuss in detail, the four major types of blood oriented sacrifice.
- How can you defend or oppose the concept of human sacrifice from the Old Testament?

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

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## **MODULE 3: MORDERN BIBLICAL CRITICISM**

Unit 1: Introduction – Definition and Need for Biblical Criticism

Unit 2: Theology and Biblical Criticism

Unit 3: Gains and Losses of Modern Biblical Criticism

Unit 4: Author-Centred Approaches

Unit 5: Text-Centred Approaches

Unit 6: Reader-Centred Approaches

### **Unit 1: Introduction – Definition and Need for Biblical Criticism**

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12.0 Summary

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#### **1.0 Introduction**

This Unit defines Biblical Criticism, and discusses the need for Biblical Criticism, and the possible implications for Africa. The student is encouraged to pay close attention to this unit because it gives the foundational basis for the study of modern biblical criticisms and previews the different approaches of biblical criticism discussed in this manual.

#### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- Define Biblical Criticism.
- Understand the need for Biblical Criticism.
- Be acquainted with the tools for doing Biblical Criticism.
- Discuss some of the implications of doing Biblical Criticism as an African
- Have an overview of the different approaches to modern Biblical Criticism

### 3.0 MAIN BODY

#### 3.1 Defining Biblical Criticism

Biblical Criticism refers to the techniques employed by biblical scholars in interpreting a given text of the Bible in order to ascertain their original wording, the nature of their composition, their sources, date, authorship and the like. Biblical criticism is neither a derogatory term nor a value judgment. It is a descriptive generally brandished proudly by those to whom it is applied. "Criticism" here refers to the exercise of an expert sense of judgment about the text and should not be confused with "criticism" in the sense of making negative statements (Wood 138). Technically, biblical criticism simply refers to the scholarly approach of studying, evaluating and critically assessing the Bible as literature in order to understand it better ([www.theopedia.com/Biblical\\_criticism](http://www.theopedia.com/Biblical_criticism) - 7/4/12).

Some critical methodologies attempt to reconstruct the ways and means by which the text came to be in its present form. These are referred to as "diachronic" for they explore the history of the text and look for meaning in previous forms and settings of portions of the text. Other methodologies recognize that there may well be a history of the text but seek meaning in the form of the text currently possesses. These approaches view the text as self-sufficient, requiring no outside information for interpretation and are referred to as "synchronic". Biblical criticism draws upon a wide range of scholarly disciplines including archaeology, anthropology, folklore, linguistics, oral tradition studies, and historical and religious studies.

Biblical Criticism, in particular **higher criticism**, deals with *why* and *how* the books of the Bible were written; **lower criticism** deals with the *actual teachings* of its authors. The word "*criticism*" must be one of the all-time least appropriate religious terms. Theologians do not engage in actual criticism - at least as the word is commonly understood. They analyze the Bible in order to understand it better. Mather (1993) defines **Higher criticism** as the study of the sources and literary methods employed by the biblical authors," while **Lower criticism** was defined as "the discipline and study of the actual wording" of the Bible; a quest for textual purity and understanding.

#### 3.1 Self-Assessment Exercise



- Define Biblical Criticism. How would you differentiate between “Higher Criticism” and “Lower Criticism”?

### **3.2 The Need for Biblical Criticism**

In order to provide reasonable answers to the questions of authorship, when, why and how individual books of the Bible were produced, biblical scholars have employed scientific and quasi-scientific methods. According to Alan C. Mitchell (2000), “Biblical criticism is as much an art as it is a science. Its objects are the interests we have in knowing as much as we can about the Bible, its world, its ideas, its teachings, indeed its very truth. The point of departure for any kind of biblical criticism, then, is the human desire to know whatever can be known about the Bible.

The desire to know the origin of biblical traditions went beyond the establishment of a reliable text and inquired into the sources of the stories and narratives included in the Bible. Often comparison of biblical texts with other ancient literatures, or with other texts in the Bible itself, was helpful in isolating subtle differences among these texts. The noted differences became important clues. They may indicate, for example, that some biblical stories did not originate only with their written transmission. It is very likely that these stories or at least some parts of them were, at first, handed on by word of mouth. Or, the observed differences of style, vocabulary, and viewpoint may show that a given biblical story was passed on in more than one form.

Other scholars were prompted by an interest to know about the kinds of materials contained in the Bible and how they may have related to the real lives of those who were responsible for producing it. In view of the realization that the transmission of biblical tradition may be quite complex, these scholars set out to catalogue the various shapes that tradition, preserved in the Bible, took. With the help of comparison with other ancient literature, contemporaneous with the Bible, they were able to isolate narrative, poetic, cultic, legal, literary and historical materials, which had their own definite shapes or forms. These, they conjectured, functioned in relation to the various circumstances of life in the ancient biblical world. Such criticism came to be known as form criticism. For example, knowing that in Philippians (2:5-11) Apostle Paul preserved a very early form of a Christian hymn; one might reasonably conclude that one way of handing on important tradition about the life, death and exaltation of Jesus was related to early Christian worship.

Biblical criticism is, also helpful in relating the meaning of the Bible to the world today. Often the methods employed to connect the Bible with our own experience are more literary and less historical in nature. Narrative, rhetorical and reader-response criticism fall under this heading. Appreciating these forms of biblical criticism helps us to understand how much biblical criticism is informed and influenced by the language and interests of the day.

Other methods that try to relate the Bible to our own experience use the feminist method and critique to produce other enriching ways to interpret the Bible meaningfully. So also does one find interest in relating the Bible to minority and non-Western cultures. Taking their lead from interpretive clues provided by these cultures, biblical scholars read the Bible in non-traditional ways, rendering its meaning in a manner that historical criticism is perhaps unable to do.

### 3.2 Self Assessment Questions

- Discuss five reasons why you think Biblical Criticism is important with reference to the above section.

### 3.3 The Place of Biblical Criticism in Theological Study

According to Gordon J. Wenham (1989:84-89), “The role we ascribe to biblical criticism depends to a large extent on our understanding of the nature of Scripture. Is it a divine book or a human one? Is the fundamentalist right to insist on the divinity of Scripture, or the biblical scholar more correct in underlining its humanity?” It is safe to argue that none of these positions should be taken in isolation. The Scripture is fully human and fully divine. Example, the OT constantly claims divine authorship. Most of the laws begin 'the LORD said to Moses', while the Ten Commandments are said to have been written by the finger of God. The prophets typically introduce their messages with 'thus says the LORD', while the narrator of the historical books adopts an omniscient perspective (Exodus 20). Within the NT the divine authorship and authority of the OT is always assumed and frequently asserted. For Jesus the OT is the word of God (Mk. 7:13; Jn. 10:35). According to St Paul it is all inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16). And the claim that the NT comes from God too is also clear in many passages (Mt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, *etc.*; 1 Cor. 14:37). This attitude towards the Bible was continued by the early church. Kelly writes, 'It goes without saying that the fathers envisaged the whole of the Bible as inspired... their general view was that Scripture was not only exempt from error but contained nothing that was superfluous.' According to Jerome, 'In the divine Scriptures every word, syllable, accent and point is packed with meaning' (Wenham 85)

Traditionally, the divine source of the scriptures has been affirmed over the years of both Judaism and Christianity. But in the last two centuries, human qualities evident in the scriptures have been spotted by careful readers. Most obviously, the fact that we have four gospels demonstrates the humanness of Scripture. Here we have four portraits of our Lord by four authors each with their own particular slant and emphasis. Then the epistles are addressed to different churches each with their own special problems, each demanding a response by the apostle to their particular needs. The variety of styles, the tendency for the writers to go off at tangents, all attest the fact that we are dealing with human compositions by human authors each with their own idiosyncrasies. Indeed the more you think about it, the more obvious it is that Scripture has to be a human book, if it is to

communicate with man. For if it had been written in God's language as opposed to Israelite Hebrew or Koine Greek, no-one could have understood it without first learning God's language. But written in Hebrew the OT was at least immediately intelligible to an ancient Israelite, while the NT was equally accessible to first-century readers of Greek (Wenham 86).

So then, Scripture is both a completely divine book and a totally human book. Neither aspect should be overlooked in the study of Scripture. We must bear both in mind as we read it and seek to apply it today. The dual nature of Scripture causes various problems, but none of the tensions are intrinsically any worse than those posed by the other doctrines like the Incarnation, Trinity, Law and Grace, etc. There is a paradox and mystery here, just as we do in understanding the incarnation and atonement. But if we acknowledge that we do not understand how the immortal could die, we will not despair when confronted by the mystery of Scripture's dual nature (Wenham 87).

### **3.3 Self Assessment Questions**

- How can you reconcile the understanding that the Scripture is both human and divine in nature?

### **3.4 The Indispensability of Biblical Criticism**

The place of biblical criticism in the study of Scripture cannot be overemphasized. Biblical criticism is essential to the understanding of Scripture as a divine work. It is so because Biblical criticism seeks to understand the situation of the original recipients of the Word, to discover exactly what the original authors of the scriptures meant by their words. Whenever documents are copied, especially when copied by hand, mistakes are liable to creep in. The branch of Biblical criticism that traces this error is Textual criticism. And even in this age of computer typesetting, very odd mistakes still from time to time. Similar things have unfortunately happened in the copying of the biblical text. We do not have the original text of Isaiah or St Paul's epistles, only copies; indeed in most cases copies of copies of copies, so that there has been plenty of chance for errors to creep in. This is particularly the case in the NT, partly because there are many more manuscripts of it and partly because Christians were less careful copiers than the Jews! However thanks to the skills of the textual critics these errors can be spotted and the text restored to very nearly its original purity. To quote F. F. Bruce, 'The various readings about which any doubt remains ... affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice' (Wenham 85). We can in other words be very confident that our restored texts are so close to the original that there is no significant difference in meaning between them and the originals.

But once we have our restored texts, as near as makes no difference to the original, how do we establish what they mean? This brings us to the science of philology and linguistics, which has been most fruitfully applied to the understanding of the Bible; in

particular James Barr has here made an immense and positive contribution to biblical interpretation. His studies have transformed our approach to determining the precise meaning of words in Scripture. So often sermons are based on sloppy etymologies or words or phrases taken out of context, but linguistics has shown that this is quite mistaken. So quite central terms in the Bible's theological vocabulary, *e.g.* faith, soul, redemption, justification, may have been misunderstood by amateurs who fail to understand how language works. Modern linguistics has taught us to examine the context in which words are used rather than their etymology to determine their meaning. It has taught us to study language synchronically before studying it diachronically. In practice this means we must examine the usage of a word in a particular book of the Bible before examining its usage and meaning elsewhere. Just because a word means one thing in one writer, it does not necessarily follow that another writer uses it in exactly the same way. And once we recognize this principle we may well be on the way to resolving the apparent contradictions between different parts of Scripture, for example between Paul and James.

The next area of biblical criticism has burgeoned in the last decade. It is the new literary criticism, especially associated in Britain with Sheffield University. It is, I believe, one of the disciplines in biblical criticism of most potential value to would-be biblical expositors in that it opens up whole new vistas in the biblical narratives so that characters in the story come alive as real people not as mere names on the page. The new literary criticism has made us much more sensitive to the inner feelings of the actors in the Bible so that we can identify with them more closely.

Let me give a short example. Literary critics insist that repetition within a story often offers very valuable clues to the attitudes of the people involved. We must examine closely who says what, and what phrases they use.

There is another area of criticism that sometimes raises problems, but again has produced many valuable insights, indeed is indispensable to a fair and accurate understanding of Scripture. It is historical criticism. It includes source criticism, issues of dating biblical books, and the writing of biblical history. To understand the message of the Bible it is absolutely essential to have some understanding of the social setting in which its books were written. Otherwise we shall import our own twentieth-century models, impose them on the text and come up with quite a misleading interpretation. According to Wenham (86), we should read in the context of OT society, rather than modern ideas. Historical criticism has a most important role to play in delineating the nature of biblical society. Without such sociological study we are liable to make terrible mistakes in interpreting and applying Scripture today.

Other disciplines of source, form, and redaction criticism can also contribute to our understanding of the Bible. Form criticism has made us aware of the conventions that guided the biblical authors. It enables us to appreciate why they arranged material in the

way they did, for example in the laws, the psalms, and the epistles. Through form criticism we can be clearer about the writers' intentions: why they included certain details and omitted others. And this knowledge should keep us from misinterpreting and misapplying biblical texts today.

### 3.4 Self Assessment Questions

- Why do you think Biblical Criticism is indispensable?

### 3.5 Some limitations of criticism

The aspect of biblical criticism that is often the most sensitive is the dating of the biblical material and the attempt to assess its historicity. Establishing the historical setting of a book is often of great value in interpreting it. For example it makes a great difference to the interpretation of the book of Revelation whether we date it before AD 70, when Jerusalem fell, or afterwards. On the former view we can read it as a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem, of the great whore Babylon. Dated later it is more natural to read it as an anticipation of the end of the Roman Empire. And there are many other books in the Bible where it makes a considerable difference to our understanding of them, when we date them (Wenham 88).

While issues of dating and authorship are very important in understanding the message of the scripture, we are encouraged not to expend all our time on them. Discussions on them should be kept in perspective for obvious reasons.

Authorship and dating are not as securely based as is sometimes claimed. The assured results of criticism are not quite as sure as they seem. Commenting on the source criticism of the Pentateuch, Professor Rendtorff of Heidelberg has written: 'We possess hardly any reliable criteria for the dating of pentateuchal literature. Every dating of the pentateuchal sources rests on purely hypothetical assumptions which only have any standing through the consensus of scholars.' And in his book *Redating the NT* J. A. T. Robinson makes much the same point. He wrote, 'Much more than is generally recognized, the chronology of the NT rests on presuppositions rather than facts. What seemed to be firm datings based on scientific evidence are revealed to rest on deductions from deductions (Wenham 88).

The second thing to bear in mind is that historicity is not everything. It of course matters whether Jesus lived, died, and rose again. But there is a Jewish scholar Pinhas Lapide who believes in these facts without being a Christian. And I suppose that if the Turin shroud had proved to be genuine, it would not have persuaded many unbelievers that Jesus was indeed resurrected. It is most heartening when archaeologists find evidence corroborating the historical record of the Bible, whether it be the names of the patriarchs, the ashes of towns sacked by Joshua, the pool of Bethesda or the house of Peter in Capernaum. All

these discoveries confirm our faith in the historical reliability of the Bible. But the Bible is more than a human history book. Throughout, it claims to be offering a divine interpretation of public historical events, an interpretation that is beyond the scope of human verification.

Finally, we should not spend too much time on the critical issues: it can easily divert us from the purpose of Scripture. Like the Jews we should be searching the Scriptures to find eternal life. Or as St Paul said, 'Whatever was written in former times was written for our instruction, that we might have hope' (Rom. 15:4). The purpose of the Scriptures is not simply to stimulate us academically, or to provide a living for professional biblical scholars. It is to lead us to God. Biblical criticism offers us indispensable aids to the interpretation and understanding of the Bible. But often instead of being the handmaid of Scripture it has become its master. When the academic study of Scripture diverts our attention from loving God with all our heart, soul and strength, we should pause and take stock. We should ask ourselves whether we are using it as it was intended. As said earlier, it is both a divine book and a human book. Because it is a human book we cannot understand it unless we employ all the types of biblical criticism to the full. But because it is also a divine book we must recognize that these tools are insufficient by themselves for us to grasp and apply its message. To do that we must have a humble mind and a heart open to the guidance of the Spirit.

### **3.5 Self Assessment Questions**

- Summarize the three reasons why biblical criticism is limited.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

Biblical criticism simply refers to the scholarly approach of studying, evaluating and critically assessing the Bible as literature in order to understand it better. It draws upon a wide range of scholarly disciplines including archaeology, anthropology, folklore, linguistics, oral tradition studies, and historical and religious studies. In order to provide reasonable answers to the questions of authorship, when, why and how individual books of the Bible were produced, biblical scholars have employed scientific and quasi-scientific methods. Biblical criticism is, also helpful in relating the meaning of the Bible to the world today. The role we ascribe to biblical criticism depends to a large extent on our understanding of the nature of Scripture, whether or not it is a divine book or a human one. While issues of dating and authorship are very important in understanding the message of the scripture, we are encouraged not to expend all our time on them. Discussions on them should be kept in perspective for obvious reasons.

### **5.0 Summary**

This unit discussed the meaning and need for biblical criticism, presented under the following subheadings: Defining Biblical Criticism; The Need for Biblical Criticism; The

Place of Biblical Criticism in Theological Study; The indispensability of biblical criticism; and some limitations of criticism. Next unit will discuss in detail one of the tools in Biblical Criticism, namely: Historical Criticism.

### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Show five reasons why biblical criticism is indispensable
- What limits do biblical criticism present?

### 7.0 References/Future Reading

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**MODULE 3: MODERN BIBLICAL CRITICISMS*****Unit 2:* Theology and Biblical Criticism****Contents**

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**1.0 Introduction**

Text-centred approaches focus on the text as it exists now, rather than on the processes whereby it has come into being. These synchronic approaches have a variety of emphases. Some, like rhetorical criticism, focus on surface features of texts, such as repetition and keywords, others deal with methods of storytelling, of writing poetry, yet others claim to elucidate underlying structures of literature. The module begins with the outcome of biblical criticism and theology, and sets forth the features of some of the text-centred criticisms like: rhetoric; new criticism and structuralism.

What is the outcome of biblical criticism for systematic theology? Scholars have been pursuing their investigations concerning text and date and authorship and historical setting until it is comparatively easy to know the status of scholarship on these points. But what does it involve for our theology? This is a practical question which has not yet

received its final answer. This Unit appraises the impact of biblical criticism with systematic theology

## 2.0 Objectives

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

- Appreciate the contribution of biblical criticism to systematic theology.
- Discover that theology and scientific inquiry are not hostile to each other
- Confirm that Theology and Scientific Inquiry are not hostile to each other
- Examine the Fundamental Nature of Biblical Criticism

## 3.0 Main Body

### 3.1 What Difference does Biblical Criticism Make?

Indeed, there exists a remarkable lack of agreement on this point. Some men are growing impatient of the leisurely way in which important questions are being discussed, and are vigorously demanding that criticism shall announce its "assured results" so that a new dogmatics may be established which shall not need to be revised. Others, observing the wide variety of opinions among the critics, insist that the whole critical movement is so pervaded with subjective vagaries that it cannot be trusted to yield any definite results. A few scholars who employ the critical method feel that no important changes in theology are necessary. Others insist that when the full implications of criticism are understood, far-reaching alterations will take place. Some men fear that if modern biblical scholarship is allowed to go its way unhampered by doctrinal restrictions, it will prove subversive of Christianity.

Others believe that we have never yet known the real essence of Christianity, and that critical scholarship will purify and enrich our faith. In view of these conflicting opinions, it is not superfluous to ask just what the outcome of biblical criticism is in so far as it affects the task of the theologian.

It is the purpose of this article and of those which follow to inquire whither we are bound if we make positive use of the principles of critical scholarship. Just what difference does it make in the theologian's work if he recognizes the legitimacy of modern methods of biblical interpretation? What ought to be the conception of the field and the task of systematic theology on the part of the one who welcomes criticism as a right and fruitful means of discovering the truth? Does it alter in any significant way the conception of the task which has hitherto prevailed? If so, what are the positive principles of constructive thinking which emerge?

### 3.2 Theology and Scientific Inquiry, Not Hostile to Each Other

At the outset of our inquiry, let us get rid of the feeling which is all too prevalent, that theology and scientific inquiry are necessarily hostile to each other. The past generation

has, indeed, been so unfortunate as to witness a species of warfare which was largely due to the fact that neither science nor theology had quite "found itself" in our modern world. But the attitude of hostility which was so prominent in the last generation is not characteristic of all ages.

The history of religious thinking reveals the fact that a theologian must use the scientific tools of his age for the organization of his thought. The man who translates the Bible from Hebrew and Greek must possess and use precisely the same linguistic skill and must adopt precisely the same critical processes as a translator of Homer or of Plato. The scholar who attempts to tell us what the apostle Paul meant in his arguments must use methods of interpretation which would also serve the expounder of Aristotle's philosophy.

The systematic theologian who attempts to put in convincing form the religious convictions of Christian believers must employ the canons of logic demanded by the secular philosopher in expounding his system. If the theologian is to make himself intelligible at all, he must use the thought-processes with which his age is familiar. It is thus inevitable that he shall make positive use of the science of his day.

### **3.3 Examples from Christian History**

A single example taken from Christian history will illustrate this fact. It is customary today to poke fun at those theologians of the late Middle Ages whom we call "schoolmen" or "scholastics." It seems to us (in our ignorance of what they actually did) that they often were spending their time on barren questions of no importance to anyone. But they were really trying to set forth religious doctrines in terms of the science of the day, which they had learned from Aristotle's writings. We think the scholastic method uninteresting because we have abandoned the formal logical science which scholasticism embodied. When pupils in our schools no longer memorize the Barbara celarent we can scarcely expect that a theology which proceeds by formal syllogisms will seem to them convincing. But this should not blind us to the fact that the schoolmen were genuinely scientific theologians in their day.

Now biblical criticism is simply the study of the Bible by the methods approved by modern science. How the word "criticism" is misunderstood! It is often assumed that a critical student of the Bible will proceed to find all the fault possible with the venerable book. "Higher critics" are thus sometimes portrayed as a class of disgruntled pessimists whose sole remaining pleasure in life is to destroy whatever last vestiges of authenticity have been left in the Bible. In their supposed superior wisdom they are imagined to be adequately described by the word "hyper-critic." The portrait thus drawn is anything but a lovely one; and a movement which can outlive the ridicule which has for a half-century been lavished upon biblical criticism has at least an amazing vitality.

But what is criticism? We feel no resentment at the art critic. On the contrary many of us pay for the privilege of attending his lectures. We feel that the Shakesperian critic merits the honorary degree which is perhaps conferred upon him for his researches. When by critical examination the atomic theory which we learned in our textbooks on chemistry is

modified, we have only praise for the scientists who thus revise our doctrines. It belongs to the very nature of any scientific procedure to be "critical." One who adopts the methods of science in any realm must become a critic. That is, he must use his powers of discernment. He must not be satisfied with reading another man's statement. He must investigate and verify for himself, if he is to have any standing among modern scholars.

Now an axiom of this critical spirit of modern scholarship is that there can be no theories which are immune from re-examination. In the realm of natural science the doctrine of gravitation is, I believe, popularly thought to be absolutely established. But there are not wanting scientists who question the correctness of Newton's conclusions in certain particulars. In the field of biology Darwin's name is universally honored today. But no aspect of the science of biology is more perplexing to the layman than the wide differences of opinion among specialists concerning some of Darwin's conclusions. The critical spirit means that every man has a perfect right to discredit traditional conclusions if he can do it by scientific methods. And there is nothing to prevent one from putting forth the most preposterous theories if he chooses. But whoever does so must remember that his new theory will have to run the gauntlet of critical scholarship. If it does not endure this test, the author of the theory loses the respect of his scientific colleagues.

### **3.4 The Importance of Diversity**

In the world of science a man is judged not so much by his conformity or nonconformity to established conclusions as by his fidelity to scientific method. Scientists who disagree can meet and argue with each other, all the time preserving the inquiring spirit which prevents denunciation. The fact of diversity in opinion is thus welcomed in the scientific world as a source of fruitful investigation. It is then hardly creditable to one's intelligence if questioning in science is looked upon as honorable and desirable while questioning in theology is identified with disloyalty to truth. Yet the art critic or the literary critic or the critic of Darwinism is treated with respect, while the biblical critic is too often misunderstood and caricatured. The questioning of the scientist has been recognized as the preliminary essential to a surer understanding of the truth. The questioning of the biblical critic has been treated as if it were final, involving a denial of everything which is questioned. But the biblical critic, like the art critic, is simply attempting to investigate things carefully, in order to put human knowledge on a firmer basis. The simple recognition of this fact would prevent much confusion. It is true that just as vagaries in the field of art criticism are accepted as an inevitable accompaniment of freedom of research, so vagaries in biblical criticism must be expected as a by-product of the serious work of that science. But the scientific spirit holds that eventually the truth will be better established by letting every man have a free opportunity to question the theory of any other man. The dread of the disapproval of one's fellow investigators can be relied upon to keep most scholars from rash excursions into absurd realms of theory. Biblical criticism, then, means that the same methods of investigation which in other realms are believed to lead to the truth shall be applied in the study of the Bible.

It would seem that nothing but good could come of the application of such sober methods of inquiry to the Bible. Those who believe in the critical method of Bible-study are firmly convinced that only good does result. But the applications of modern biblical scholarship have brought about certain modifications in theological attitude which have been a source of real perplexity to many earnest and honest men. The reason for this perplexity, resulting, as it sometimes does, in distrust or denunciation of the entire process of criticism, we must understand, if we are to see rightly into the relation of theology to biblical criticism. The older theologies were constructed by what is known as the "proof-text" method. It is true that this method has been employed by men who first made a careful study of the Bible, collecting the evidence in an inductive manner and building upon this induction their doctrinal conclusions. But there are not wanting examples of a more superficial use of biblical texts. If a man believed strongly a certain doctrine, he felt that it must be scriptural; consequently he was under the temptation of trying to make as good a showing as possible from the Scriptures. Such a theologian was likely to overlook and neglect those passages which made against his theory. The prevalence of this method of proof has led to the skeptical remark so often heard that "one can prove anything he chooses out of the Bible." When both total abstinence and moderate drinking, both emancipation and slavery, both Trinitarian and anti-Trinitarian appeal to the Bible, the layman may be forgiven for feeling that the ways of the theologian are past finding out. It is manifestly impossible to retain the confidence of men in theology if it comes to such varied conclusions without giving to those who are perplexed any clue as to the method by which the conclusions are reached. Biblical criticism undertakes to establish a method by which investigations may be made with the same expectation of reaching stable conclusions in biblical interpretation as in any other realm where scientific method has taken the place of unscientific assertion.

### **3.5 The Primary Question**

Now the primary question which the critical Bible student asks is very different from the primary question which was asked by theologians in the past. The older theologian assumed that the purpose of Bible study was to ascertain directly what one ought to believe. But a very short examination reveals the fact that, whatever our method, it is not so easy to determine what biblical "truth" is. The suggestions of the tempter in the early chapters of Genesis can scarcely be said to embody "truth." The speeches of the friends of Job are pronounced untrue by the book itself. Paul's injunction to women to keep silence in the churches is not generally regarded as binding today. No one holds that one should literally cut off his hand when it does wrong, or pluck out the right eye. How many of us always give to any man that asks, and turn not away from him who would borrow? The matter of finding what we ought to believe by a mere reading of the Bible is not so simple as it seems. Consequently, theologians have always been obliged to make discriminations within the Bible.

One means of discriminating was in ancient times formulated in what was then regarded as scientific method. This was the doctrine of a double or a triple or even a quadruple

sense of Scripture. Early in the history of Christianity it was laid down as a rule that nothing discreditable to God could be in the Bible. Any statement, therefore, which seemed to be unworthy of God was not to be taken literally. It must be figuratively interpreted. But how may we know whether to take a given passage of Scripture literally or figuratively? Unless we can discern some test of this, we are left to the vagaries of individual opinion. It is the recognition of the uncontrolled subjectivism of this allegorical method that has led modern scholars, following the spirit of Luther and Calvin, to discard the doctrine of a threefold or a fourfold sense of Scripture. So long as two scholars may take the same text and one may declare that it means one thing, while the other asserts that it means something entirely different, it is evident that no really scientific method of discovering the meaning of the Bible has been established. Modern biblical criticism holds that it ought to be just as possible for men to agree as to the meaning of the Bible as it is possible for them to agree concerning the motions of the stars or the constitution of a chemical substance. And the method by which this desired certainty is to be attained is called biblical criticism.

The general principles of biblical criticism are too familiar to readers of the *Biblical World* to need extended explanation. There are two main tasks, one exactly technical, the other more vital and general. The technical task is undertaken by textual criticism, which seeks to ascertain so far as possible the exact text of the books of the Bible. During the long centuries when copies of the biblical books were made by hand, many variations in the text appeared. This task of textual criticism is so complicated that it requires a special training in order to be able to estimate the relative value of different readings.

So far as systematic theology is concerned the consequences of textual criticism are comparatively slight. The theologian cannot, indeed, maintain the absolute correctness of any specific reading of a doubtful passage. In most cases, however, the variation is of minor importance so far as doctrine is concerned. Yet the question whether Paul ever called Jesus God is made doubtful by uncertainty as to punctuation in one crucial text. The famous saying in II Timothy concerning the inspiration of Scripture is translated in three different ways by scholars, on account of doubt as to grammatical construction. A Syriac text of Matthew declares Joseph to be the father of Jesus. Is this reading more authentic than the Greek text underlying our accepted versions? Just what words did Jesus speak in establishing the Lord's Supper? These are some of the questions upon which a defensible conclusion is bound up with the problem of knowing what the authentic text is. Still, as has been said, the variations are not usually of sufficient importance to demand serious changes in our interpretation of biblical doctrine.

The other branch of criticism-the so-called "Higher Criticism" -is less exactly technical, but is quite as difficult. It is concerned to discover the literary and historical genesis of the books of the Bible, in order that we may better comprehend what they mean. For example, it is almost impossible adequately to understand the content of the books of the prophets unless one is able to interpret them in their historical setting. Then we can see what allusions mean, and can appreciate the message of the prophets. When we read the contents of the priestly ritual without reference to the circumstances which produced the

law, we have merely a mass of statistics. But when we see the way in which that law served to hold the nation fast to the religious ideal of holiness which the prophets had proclaimed, we appreciate the spiritual significance of this attempt to make all the life of the Jew consecrated to Jehovah. When we read the Epistle to the Hebrews without regard to the circumstances which brought it into existence, we are likely to be puzzled by the elaborate argument drawn from priests and sacrifices. But when we picture a group of Christians, discouraged by persecution and weary of waiting for the triumph of the kingdom which was so long delayed, thinking perhaps that after all they had been mistaken in adopting Christianity, the elaborate arguments to show how much better Christ is than the best that Hebrew religion had produced gain new meaning. When we try to derive from the Book of Revelation specific predictions of history in our day so that we may ascertain the exact date of the end of the world, we are likely to become confused by the visions and beasts and symbols. But when we know something of the apocalyptic hopes of the Jews and early Christians, we can see how this book of splendid visions would serve to encourage those who were disheartened by persecution. It thus is of great importance for the right understanding of the books of the Bible to know the dates and circumstances of their composition.

### **3.6 Consequences for the Theologian**

These critical attempts to estimate the significance of a book of Scripture by appreciating the religious problems which called it forth have certain important consequences for the theologian. The item which has attracted most public attention-viz., change of theory as to authorship-is really of little significance, so far as the theologian is concerned. The contents of the Twenty-third Psalm remain the same whether David wrote it or whether, as seems to be implied in the words, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever," the author lived after the temple existed. The Book of Leviticus, with its elaborate descriptions of tabernacle and priestly service, is just as foreign to our way of regarding religion if Moses wrote it, as it is if it comes from post-exilic times. In fact, those questions which are of primary interest to the critical student are often of little or no consequence to the systematic theologian. Thus much of the controversy which rages between conservative and radical scholars in the realm of biblical criticism may be ignored by the systematic theologian. His business is to set forth Christian convictions; and conclusions as to the date or authorship of a book can hardly be classified as either Christian or non-Christian.

So far as theology is concerned the real significance of biblical criticism, then, is not to be found so much in its technical conclusion as in a change of view as to the way in which any biblical message is to be interpreted. Instead of seeking to derive directly from a scriptural utterance a decisive answer to our modern theological problems, the critical scholar attempts rather to discover what problems were present in the mind of the biblical writer, and what answers to the questionings of his heart he discovered. The determination of date and authorship is only preliminary to an understanding of the historical significance of the book in question.

If, for example, the last chapters of Isaiah were written by the prophet who wrote the first portion, we must interpret the passages concerning Cyrus and events in his time as the result of miraculous foresight on the part of a prophet who lived two centuries before the events which he prophesied took place. The statements which he makes must have come in some mysterious way out of an unknown realm. But if, as is now generally believed among scholars, the book was written by a contemporary of Cyrus, or even at a later date, it becomes possible to interpret it as an expression of religious aspiration and insight growing directly out of the bitter experiences of Israel. So, too, the Book of Daniel, if dated in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, must be viewed as an essentially magical prevision. If it came from the Maccabean period, its message is seen to be vitally related to the religious problems of the time.

In short, the modern biblical student is not satisfied with biblical statistics. He is not content to know what doctrines are in the Bible. He desires to feel also something of the glow of religious conviction which gave to the doctrine its power. He wishes to share in imagination the indignation of Amos at the corruption of his day, to have his soul thrilled with the Isaiah of the Exile at the vision of a people so purified through suffering and discipline that God calls them his elect to bring the gentiles unto him. He attempts to reproduce sympathetically that intense longing for holiness on the part of the later Israelites which led to the elaboration of the Levitical cultus. And if he succeeds, if he can feel himself one in spirit with the biblical interpreter of some crisis of history, he gains a sense of reality which arouses a new wonder at the majesty of the biblical messages. The Bible has become a new and living book to thousands in our day just by this process of historical interpretation. But this very sense of reality means that the utterances of a given author gain their religious power from their connection with specific historical conditions. And historical conditions change. The religious interpretation of history at one time may not suit another time. We may follow Isaiah with the keenest sympathy as he strives to reassure Israel by asserting the inviolability of the Temple at Jerusalem. Then, a century later, when Jeremiah denounces as false prophets those who repeat this earlier message of Isaiah, we may with equal zeal do homage to the courageous soul of the man who dared to face the changes which a hundred years had brought and in the light of these to reverse the judgment of an earlier prophet. We may find ourselves with hearts beating higher as we live over in imagination the scenes of primitive Christianity when religious fervor and courage were kept up by the apocalyptic expectation of the miraculous consummation, and yet may realize that history did not fulfil the hopes of those early followers of Christ. In other words, the modern Bible student has learned to think of the biblical utterances, not as timeless truths, but as living convictions of men who lived under definite historical circumstances. The theology of the Bible is a theology framed to meet definite problems called forth by the exigencies of specific historical conditions.

The theology is addressed to that particular situation, and gains its vitality from its ability to lift men's hearts to new courage as they face their peculiar problems. But if the situation changes, the message also must change. If new problems arise in the experience of men new solutions become imperative. Thus we find in the Bible a changing theology



as the needs of men change. It is this discovery of a changing theology in the course of the biblical history which makes impossible the retention of the older theological practice of treating scriptural statements as if they were timeless and absolute expressions of truth. Moreover, the perception of an evolution in the biblical literature is only a specific application of the larger recognition of the fact that human history is continually in the process of change and adjustment. The ideas which seem absolutely true to one age appear inadequate to a later time. The doctrines which in one century are potent means of arousing high aspirations may in a later century have lost their power. If it was impossible for Jeremiah to approve the reiteration of Isaiah's message in his day, we see that even the word of an inspired prophet is subject to temporal limitations. Thus the outcome of higher criticism is something more important than a revision of traditional opinions about dates and authorship. It leads us straight into the realm of historical interpretation as contrasted with dogmatic interpretation. One who has accepted the principles of higher criticism finds that the very process of discovering the literary genesis of the books of the Bible makes him aware that the literature which he is studying is a record of genuinely human experience, and that the convictions contained in it were wrought out by actual wrestling with fundamental problems of life. As one traces the history of the experience portrayed in the biblical books, one becomes aware that a virile theology was never produced merely by the repetition of an authorized message, but that, on the contrary, the greatest books of the Bible owe their origin to a determined attempt to find an adequate expression for a living faith in opposition to a dead formalism.

### **3.7 Fundamental Nature of Biblical Criticism**

The great prophets of Israel and the apostle Paul were violent nonconformists. The message of the Bible therefore appears in a fundamentally altered perspective because of the processes of historical interpretation. The utterances of prophet and apostle are no longer viewed as finished doctrines which may be appropriated by us just as they stand. The Scriptures rather reveal to us the mighty upheavals and the determined struggles of a living faith. One who has come to realize the significance of this point of view will inevitably seek to ascertain the problems which confront men of a given age before attempting to give an accurate account of the theology of that age. Thus the center of gravity is shifted from the outer aspects of doctrine to the inner aspects of religious experience. The key to the understanding of the biblical theology lies less in a theory of inspiration than in an adequate understanding of the thoughts and fears and hopes of men who faced the crises portrayed in the books of the Bible. The critical scholar must be constantly on his guard against assuming that a writer in biblical times will have had the same religious ideas as men in the twentieth century. He must gain as accurate a picture as possible of the actual problems with which the ancient writer was grappling.

Only thus can he do justice to the messages of the Bible. But this means that when the message of a biblical writer has been discovered, it will not necessarily be a universally valid doctrine. It will portray convictions which grew out of a very definite historical situation. For example, the prophets of Israel lived at a time when history was apparently

disproving the national belief that Israel should be the supreme nation of the world. The discovery that mighty Assyria on the one hand and ancient and formidable Egypt on the other were counting for vastly more in contemporary history than was the little people sandwiched in helplessly between these two world-powers-this fact must be constantly put in the background of the messages of the earlier prophets. The theology of the prophets, therefore, is primarily and directly a message to a people whose political future is doomed. Can a nation's God permit his nation to perish? If so, what does it mean? This is the problem which the prophets of Israel attempt to answer in their theology. Now to transfer that theology bodily to another age with its different national problems is manifestly impossible. Another instance of this difference between biblical problems and modern problems is to be found in the eschatological hopes of the early Christians. In order to understand the references to the second coming of Christ, one must appreciate how the often disappointed expectations of the Hebrew people that they would become politically supreme in the world had led to the belief that humanly speaking such triumph was impossible. But their indomitable belief in the fidelity of God to his promises had taken expression in the belief that God in a miraculous way would put an end to this evil age in which his people were oppressed, and would establish on earth a kingdom from heaven under the sway of his chosen Messiah. It was the persistence of this Jewish belief in the minds of followers of Christ that led to the emphasis in the New Testament on the second coming of Christ. When we read the eschatological passages of the apostolic writings against this background, we can see the tremendous influence which these visions would possess in fortifying them against persecution and discouragement.

To be able to feel that the Lord would soon come to put down the powers of evil meant that the hardships of the day could be endured with fortitude. But to transfer bodily to our own day these millennial hopes means to encourage such movements as that of the Millerites in the past century, who prepared their ascension robes so as to be ready on the given day. It means that the numbers in the Book of Revelation will be made the basis of elaborate computations so that one may have the certainty that the end of the world will come on a given date. The biblical student must read these passages with a sympathetic understanding of the hopes and beliefs of the first century. The systematic theologian must do his work in a century to which the eschatological visions are foreign. Here, again, a simple transfer of doctrine from ancient times to modern is out of the question. It is therefore evident that one who adopts the critical method of studying the Bible will find himself led to the conclusion that theological doctrines cannot be treated as "truths" existing independently of religious experience. Religious convictions are answers to the questions which earnest men ask when confronted with serious issues. To learn the answer to a question without knowing the exact nature of the question itself is a proceeding as formal as it is superfluous.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The attempt of expositors to relate biblical doctrines to the questions which men were asking in biblical times inevitably affects the work of the systematic theologian. He, too,

must accurately define the questions which men are asking in his day if his answers are to be pertinent. To preserve a vital relation between theology and life is the plain duty of the theologian who really understands the nature of the biblical utterances. Now it requires only a little reflection to see that the problems which confront men of the twentieth century are likely to be quite different from those which men of the first century were compelled to meet. Indeed, one of the conspicuous features of present-day theological activity is the attempt to adjust theology to the vital experiences of men today. To write theology for the "modern mind" is a favorite enterprise. It is seen that only as doctrines shall actually help men to answer the questions in which they are interested can they preserve the function which biblical utterances fulfilled. The most important outcome of biblical criticism is the recognition of the supreme importance of this fundamental aspect of theology. But when this conception of the task of theology is clearly apprehended, it will inevitably lead to a method of theological study which shall seek to do complete justice' to present-day religious conditions. Some aspects of this new task will be considered in subsequent articles.

### 5.0 Summary

This Unit discussed the following subtopics: What Difference does Biblical Criticism Make?; Theology and Scientific Inquiry, Not Hostile to Each Other; Examples from Christian History; The Importance of Diversity; The Primary Question; Consequences for the Theologian; and Fundamental Nature of Biblical Criticism.

### 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Theology and Scientific Inquiry are not hostile to each other. Discuss.
- Describe the fundamental nature of Biblical Criticism.

### 7.0 References/Future Reading

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**MODULE 3: MODERN BIBLICAL CRITICISMS*****Unit 3:* Gains and Losses of Modern Biblical Criticism****Contents**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main body
  - 3.1 What Gains Can Be Mentioned?
  - 3.2 What Losses Can Be Mentioned?
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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**1.0 Introduction**

There is a distinction to be made between biblical criticism unmodified, and modern biblical criticism. We cannot conceive of their being anything lost through biblical criticism when by it we mean a devout and prayerful seeking of God's will concerning man in the Bible, and the gracious salvation through Jesus Christ which is its grand purpose to reveal. It is true, when we take biblical criticism in this sense, that "there is everything to hope and nothing to fear from its progress." But modern biblical criticism cannot be taken exclusively in this sense. It is not bringing a false accusation against it, in view of the destructive criticism of the Tuebingen school, and such wild, irreverent if that word is too strong then let us say presumptuous study of the Word of God, as shown by Kuenen, Wellhausen, Robertson Smith and others, to say that there are dangers and evils connected with it which make the question whether there is gain or loss to be derived from it; a pertinent one, and one which it is well earnestly to consider. It probably is too early in the day to hope to get a satisfactory or a just estimate of the gains and losses of modern biblical criticism. We have not yet reached final results in this. Its modern phase is only in its beginning, and there is still much to be done by it; yet it will not be out of place to stop a moment and see where we have arrived, and what ground we have covered. And this unit aims not at a final summing up of gains and losses, but will call attention only to a few of these.

**2.0 Objectives**

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

- Outline and discuss some of the gains and losses of Modern Biblical criticism.

### **3.0 Main Body**

#### **3.1 What Gains Can Be Mentioned?**

First, the fact that attention is called by it to a direct study of the Bible. That is, the destructive attacks upon the Bible by some who claim to be "of the household of faith;" their apparently reckless treatment has directed to the Bible the attention of many who were occupied with discussions of things suggested by it, who were speculating about it, but were not engaged in its direct study. Now, undoubtedly, greater gain is to be derived from a direct study of the Bible than from the study of speculations about it, or of inferences drawn from it. If we can turn men's attention from a discussion -or study of non-essentials in religion, to a direct study of the Bible, with its "plain fact of a personal Creator, a God in history, a revelation of divine love and duty in his Son," we have gained much; and not the least gain is the fact that when this has been done, "we need not fear the atheism of to-day." There is nothing so refreshing to the thirsty soul, as to go directly to the fountain of truth, and drink deep draughts of divine, loving, inspiring truth. If it is served at second hand, be it brought in ever such beautiful and attractive cups, it loses its sparkle and its full power to assuage the thirst. Whatever, therefore, tends to turn men's attention to a direct study of the Bible, is a great gain to true religion. And certainly modern biblical criticism has done this.

A second gain is that through it the Bible has become a more real book to us. It has not always been such to men. They looked upon its history, poetry, song and story, as something which had nothing in common with other history, poetry, song and story. The Bible is indeed, a sui generis book: a book, which, in its application, construction and teaching, has for its object something distinct from any other book on earth; it has its peculiar characteristics. This is true because of its inspiration, and because of the fact that it is "our supreme and sole authority in matters of faith, and 'contains all truth necessary for salvation.'"

That it has so distinct an object, and characteristics of so unique a nature, has led men to look upon it as if it were not a real book—a book which all should read, ponder and study. This being the case, it was laid aside for only special use, and was not also used for the good a study of its history, its language, and its literature would do the world. A procedure which is fatal in many respects, since in accordance with it:

(I) The Bible was not man's constant companion, to help him, to cheer him, to instruct him, to encourage him, to warn him.

(2) Much valuable knowledge which the Bible alone contains, besides a knowledge of God and salvation, was kept hid from men's view. Sir Walter Scott said, "There is only one book-the Bible. The other books are mere leaves, fragments." And our own Whittier has well written, " We search the world for truth; we call The good, the pure, the beautiful From graven stone and written scroll, From all old-flower-fields of the soul; And, weary seekers of the best, We come back laden from our quest, To find that all the sages said, Is in the Book our mothers read."

(3) People dared not approach the Bible with that holy boldness which makes it an arbitrator in all disputes with conscience in the various departments of life, outside of the salvation of the soul. Now, biblical criticism, and especially biblical criticism of our day, has assisted in making the Bible a real book. And this, Robertson Smith rightly calls its "great value." It is, however, true, that the Higher Criticism goes too far in this direction. It looks upon the Bible too much as it does upon a book of merely human origin, and hence has a tendency to destroy the reverence and holiness with which it should be approached, no matter how real it becomes to them or may be to them. The true course lies between the two extremes, and if the Higher Criticism will have ultimately as its end a following of this middle course, great gain will come from it. This seems to be the hope and promise of it. And, therefore, Professor Green rightly says, "Every encouragement should be given to the freest possible discussion.

The attempt to stifle discussion in the present posture of affairs would be in every way damaging to the truth."

A third gain, in brief, is found in the fact that the more the Bible is directly studied the more the divine truth is learned and discovered. Daniel Webster said, "There is more of valuable truth yet to be gleaned from the sacred writings that have thus far escaped the attention of commentators than from all other sources of human knowledge combined."

Biblical criticism which has for its object a direct study of the Bible helps in discovering, either intentionally, or accidentally, new truths which would never be discovered but for it.

The fourth gain: again, in so far as the modern biblical criticism has led to a rejection of the two extreme phases of biblical interpretation-the allegorical and the dogmatic-so as to rest the defence of revelation upon a ground which commends itself to reason and common sense, and upon facts, there is a great gain. The arbitrary fancies and the mystical principles of the allegorists cannot satisfy this age of critical knowledge of history and language. "The truth of Christ and his spiritual Gospel, which only could give the key to the Old Testament, was indeed a profound one. But instead of studying it in the clear method of history, the Bible was made a sacred anagram; the most natural facts of Jewish worship or chronicle became arbitrary figures of the new dispensation. Type and allegory were the master-key that unlocked all the dark chambers, from the early chapters of the Genesis to the poetry of David or the grand utterances of Isaiah. Wherever we turn

to the fathers, to the Epistle of Clement, or the sober Irenaeus, to Tertullian, who finds the type of baptism in the Spirit brooding on the waters and in the passage through the sea; or to Augustine, who explains the six creative days as symbols of the ages/of divine history, we have the numberless cases of this style of exposition.

We prize the early Christian writers for their intellectual and spiritual power in the great conflict of the faith with a Pagan wisdom; nay, we can often admire, with Coleridge, the rich, devout fancy glowing through the homilies of Augustine; but as biblical scholars all were simply of a time when true criticism was hardly known. Nor will the dogmatic principle of the Latin Church satisfy men of to-day; a principle which found in the Bible, by proof-texts, wrested from their real meaning often, support for any metaphysical or religious dogma which they might hold. Luther called such a procedure "a rover and a chamois-hunter." It was rightly done by Luther when he rejected the *analogia fidei*, and claimed the *analogia Scripturae sacrae* (Washburn). And in so far as modern biblical criticism has corrected such arbitrary rules, and has taught men "the study of Scriptures in their own meaning" it has led to great gain.

### 3.2 What Losses Can Be Mentioned?

We turn now to a few of the losses of biblical criticism.

- i) And there may be named the danger of its causing men to read the Bible with a too critical eye. When they do this, they lose the spirituality of heart and the inspiration to personal piety, which come from reading it in loving trust, and with a devotional heart. There is a great difference in reading the Bible with an eye to find in it literary beauty, or merely history, or reading it in a devotional frame of mind, for growth in spirituality of heart, and personal piety. The purpose for which the Bible was written was not its literary and historical value; on the contrary, it was given to us for our growth in Christian spirit, and as a revelation of God's will to and concerning man, and a revelation of salvation full and complete in Christ. Dr. Washburn has well said, "This word may speak to the mind and heart of a Christian reader, although he knows nothing of the methods of exact learning; and if the keenest criticism do not approach it with special reverence for a book, which has fed the spiritual life of men, as no other has done, it will be barren indeed even for the scholar."

Anything, therefore, which tends to cause men to look upon the Bible in any other than a devout, spiritual frame of mind is baneful. And who doubts that this has been the case, to some extent at least, with the Higher Criticism of our day? Having raised its many doubts --many uncalled for and unfounded doubts, we may add-it has led men to take up their Bible with an eye too exclusively critical, and to study the Bible with a mind too full of doubts.

- ii) This leads us to mention a second evil resulting from our Higher Criticism, viz.: That it has a tendency to cause men to lose their confidence in certain portions of the Bible. This tendency may not be seen or felt so much among specialists in biblical study, or among ministers, who have time and inclination and whose business it is, to study the Bible critically, as among the people in general, who have no time to follow out the discussions, and only know that doubts exist in the minds of men who make biblical study a specialty. Learning that these are unsettled on many points, the natural consequence is that doubts are awakened in their minds and they lose their trust in the Bible. Could the work of biblical criticism go on quietly among specialists, and the rest not know of it, until results definite and satisfactory have been reached, the evil would not be so great. But as the discussions are now carried on, in every religious paper, and even in secular papers, there is no doubt that the result is to unsettle many in the faith of the Bible as the word of God. Let us devoutly hope and pray that this all-important department of sacred learning may be directed by the Spirit of God, to the end that the Word of God may not be made void, but may be glorified as a power of good and righteousness in the world.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The whole aim of biblical criticism is not find faults with scriptures, and overthrow people's faith in it. Biblical criticism has as its object a direct study of the Bible, which helps in discovering, either intentionally, or accidentally, new truths which would never be discovered but for it.

#### **5.0 Summary**

This unit highlighted some of the gains and losses associated with modern biblical criticism.

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

- Outline and discuss three gains of modern biblical criticism
- Why do you think modern biblical criticism pose some problems to the believer in the bible?

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

Soulen, R N & Soulen, R K. *Handbook of Biblical criticism*. Louisville, London: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2001.

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## MODULE 3: MODERN BIBLICAL CRITICISMS

Unit 4: *Author-Centred Criticism*

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### 1.0 Introduction

Historical criticism is a branch of literary criticism that investigates the origins of ancient text in order to understand "the world behind the text"; it is also known as the historical-critical method or higher criticism. The primary goal of historical criticism is to ascertain the text's primitive or original meaning in its original historical context and its literal sense, including authorship and dating. The secondary goal seeks to establish a reconstruction of the historical situation of the author and recipients of the text (Levenson). This Unit discusses: Definitions for Historical Criticism, History of HC, Interpretation of HC, and Views on higher criticism/historical Methods.

## **2.0 Objective**

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

- Define Historical Criticism
- Narrate the History of Historical Criticism
- Discuss various Interpretations of Historical Criticism, and
- Identify different views on higher criticism or historical Methods.

## **3.0 Main Body**

- **Defining Historical Criticism**

The approach of Historical-critical methods typifies the following: (1) that reality is uniform and universal, (2) that reality is accessible to human reason and investigation (3) that all events historical and natural are interconnected and comparable to analogy, (4) that humanity's contemporary experience of reality can provide objective criteria to what could or could not have happened in past events. Application of the historical critical method, in biblical studies, investigates the books of the Hebrew Bible as well as the New Testament.

When applied to the Bible, the historical-critical method is distinct from the traditional, devotional approach. In particular, while devotional readers concern themselves with the overall message of the Bible, historians examine the distinct messages of each book in the Bible. Guided by the devotional approach, for example, Christians often combine accounts from different gospels into single accounts, whereas historians attempt to discern what is unique about each gospel, including how they are different.

The perspective of the early historical critic was rooted in Protestant reformation ideology, inasmuch as their approach to biblical studies was free from the influence of traditional interpretation. Where historical investigation was unavailable, historical criticism rested on philosophical and theological interpretation. With each passing century, historical criticism became refined into various methodologies used today: source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, tradition criticism, canonical

criticism, and related methodologies (Levenson). The rise of historical consciousness brought a flood of philosophical, historical, and literary questions regarding the origin of the biblical texts: date, place, authorship, sources, and intention (Soulen).

### 3.1 Self Assessment Questions

- Discuss the four perspectives historical criticism typifies.
- **History of Historical Criticism**

Historical criticism began in the 17th century and gained popular recognition in the 19th and 20th centuries. Earlier, the Dutch scholars like Desiderius Erasmus (1466 – 1536) and Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) are usually credited as the first to study the Bible in this way. The phrase "higher criticism" became popular in Europe from the mid-18th century to the early 20th century, to describe the work of such scholars as Jean Astruc (mid-18th century), Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91), Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), and Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918). In academic circles today, this is the body of work properly considered "higher criticism", though the phrase is sometimes applied to earlier or later work using similar methods.

Higher criticism originally referred to the work of German biblical scholars of the Tübingen School. After the path-breaking work on the New Testament by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the next generation – which included scholars such as David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72) – in the mid-19th century, analyzed the historical records of the Middle East from Christian and Old Testament times in search of independent confirmation of events related in the Bible. These latter scholars built on the tradition of Enlightenment and Rationalist thinkers such as John Locke, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Gotthold Lessing, Gottlieb Fichte, G. W. F. Hegel and the French rationalists.

These ideas were imported to England by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and, in particular, by George Eliot's translations of Strauss's *The Life of Jesus* (1846) and Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1854). In 1860 seven liberal Anglican theologians began the process of incorporating this historical criticism into Christian doctrine in *Essays and Reviews*, causing a five-year storm of controversy which completely overshadowed the arguments over Darwin's newly published *On the Origin of Species*. Two of the authors were indicted for heresy and lost their jobs by 1862, but in 1864 had the judgment overturned on appeal. *La Vie de Jésus* (1863), the seminal work by a Frenchman, Ernest Renan (1823–92), continued in the same tradition as Strauss and Feuerbach. In Catholicism, *L'Evangile et l'Eglise* (1902), the magnum opus by Alfred Loisy against the *Essence of Christianity* of Adolf von Harnack and *La Vie de Jesus* of Renan, gave

birth to the modernist crisis (1902–61). Some scholars, such as Rudolf Bultmann have used higher criticism of the Bible to "demythologize" it.

### 3.2 Self Assessment Questions

- Show how historical criticism was referred to higher criticism. Who were the main players?
  - **Interpretations of Historical Criticism**

Scholars of higher criticism have sometimes upheld and sometimes challenged the traditional authorship of various books of the Bible. A group of German biblical scholars at Tübingen University formed the Tübingen School of theology under the leadership of Ferdinand Christian Baur, with important works being produced by Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach and David Strauss. In the early 19th century they sought independent confirmation of the events related in the Bible through Hegelian analysis of the historical records of the Middle East from Christian and Old Testament times.

Their ideas were brought to England by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, then in 1846 Mary Ann Evans translated David Strauss's sensational *Leben Jesu* as the *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, a quest for the historical Jesus. In 1854 she followed this with a translation of Feuerbach's even more radical *Essence of Christianity* which held that the idea of God was created by man to express the divine within himself, though Strauss attracted most of the controversy. The loose grouping of Broad Churchmen in the Church of England was influenced by the German higher critics. In particular, Benjamin Jowett visited Germany and studied the work of Baur in the 1840s, then in 1866 published his book on *The Epistles of St Paul*, arousing theological opposition. He then collaborated with six other theologians to publish their *Essays and Reviews* in 1860. The central essay was Jowett's *On the Interpretation of Scripture* which argued that the Bible should be studied to find the authors' original meaning in their own context rather than expecting it to provide a modern scientific text.

### 3.3 Self Assessment Questions

- Demonstrate how the Tübingen School sought to interpret Historical Criticism.
  - **Views on higher criticism or historical Methods**

The historical-critical method of Biblical scholarship is taught widely in Western nations, including in many seminaries. According to Ehrman, most lay Christians are unaware of how different this particular academic view of the Bible is from their own. Conservative evangelical schools, however, often reject this approach, teaching instead that the Bible is completely inerrant in all matters (in contrast to the less conservative Protestant view that it is infallible only in matters relating to personal

salvation, a doctrine called biblical infallibility) and that it reflects explicit divine inspiration. However, the Catholic Church, while teaching inerrancy, also allows for more nuance in interpretation than would conservative Evangelical schools, because of its historical understanding of the "four senses of Scripture". In the Pontifical Biblical Commission's "Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," the need for historical criticism is clearly expressed and affirmed.

With Protestant historical-criticism, the movement of rationalism as promoted by Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), held that reason is the determiner of truth. Spinoza did not regard the Bible as divinely inspired; instead it was to be evaluated like any other book. Later rationalists also have rejected the authority of Scripture

### **3.4 Self Assessment Questions**

- Compare and contrast the different views on Historical Criticism by Conservative Evangelical schools and Catholic Church.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

The emergence of Historical Criticism, evidently, raised questions concerning the origins of biblical books. Prior to this time, many people looked to the church for their interpretation and for guidance in their understanding of the Scriptures. By Reformation period, new era of biblical interpretation evolved, which challenged the authority of Rome as the sole interpreter of the Scriptures. On the one hand, this meant that people recognized the fact that Scripture itself is its own interpreter. On the other hand, this also meant that, in the eyes of some, people had license to develop their own ideas on the meaning and origin of Scriptural books apart from an external authority. The whole aim of Historical Criticism is not to seek out faults from the scriptures, but to develop a systematic way of its interpretation through verifiable data.

### **5.0 Summary**

This Unit has shown that Historical Criticism or Higher Criticism is an attempt to investigate the origins of ancient text in order to understand "the world behind the text", including the dating, authorship and place. It discussed the different definitions, history, interpretation and views about Historical Criticism. Next Unit will concentrate on one of the tools of Historical Criticisms, namely: Source Criticism.

### **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

- Discuss the history of Historical Criticisms, comparing and contrasting the Catholic and Evangelical views.

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

Mather, G. A. & Nichols, L. A. *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult*. Zondervan, 1993.

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## MODULE 3: MODERN BIBLICAL CRITICISMS

### *Unit 5: Text-Centred Criticism - Rhetorical Criticism*

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#### **1.0 Introduction**

Text-centred approaches focus on the text as it exists now, rather than on the processes whereby it has come into being. These synchronic approaches have a variety of emphases.

Some, like rhetorical criticism, focus on surface features of texts, such as repetition and keywords, others deal with methods of storytelling, of writing poetry, yet others claim to elucidate underlying structures of literature. The unit focuses on Rhetorical criticism which is not just about persuasive techniques, but all approaches which are concerned with the surface features of the text. We now realize that Hebrew writers had a range of tricks or devices that they used, maybe unconsciously, in composing poems or stories. Parallelism is the best known poetic device. In prose, repetition of phrases or keywords is very important. The beginning and end of sections may be marked by inclusion (repetition of the opening). Writing in panels (ABCDABCD), or chiasmically (ABBA), or in longer palistrophes (mirror-image patterns ABCDED CBA, etc) are some of the devices that have been noted in both OT and NT. This unit studies definition of rhetoric criticism, history of the discipline,

## 2.0 Objectives

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

- Define rhetoric criticism
- Understand the history of rhetoric criticism
- Apply rhetorical criticism to both OT and NT

## 3.0 Main Body

### 3.1 Defining Rhetoric Criticism

One branch of literary critics compared the biblical materials to the Greco-Roman orators. They observed the writers of the Bible had similar interests, similar goals of persuasion, and similar techniques. They began to look for specific literary devices that gave clues to the composition of the passage. If these devices could be found, they would unlock the interpretation of the text.

Rhetorical criticism functioned in two dimensions. (1) Its proponent claimed it helped focus on the writing as a whole, rather than on its individual parts. Such knowledge emphasized the progress (movement) of the text, so the reader knew exactly "where" a particular passage occurred: the logical flow of the book. This location helped identify how that section functioned in relation to the whole text. (2) Rhetorical critics claim proper analysis of the text provided better knowledge of the provenance of a writing. With proper classification of literature came proper understanding of the circumstances that promoted it. Particularly, they believed the discipline reveals the emotional attitude of the writer, as well as what he hoped to achieve through the material. Thus, rhetorical criticism flourished. The founding of the movement is credited to James Muilenburg perhaps the most influential early scholar was George Kennedy. The approach better suits the Epistles than the Gospels and Acts. Consistent with that, it was applied to Epistles like

Galatians, Philemon, Philippians, and Thessalonians. It has application, however, to the Gospel and some have begun to apply it there.

### **3.2 History of the Discipline**

Scholars agree that the modern emphasis on rhetorical criticism began in 1968. In a presidential address before the Society of Biblical Literature Muilenburg called for scholars of the Bible to "go beyond form criticism,,," Specifically, he was interested in the OT and Hebrew literary composition. He wanted to find "the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose," and to discern "the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole." He described this "as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism, of course, throughout history scholars had interacted with rhetorical approaches, but the modern revival came because of the bankruptcy of form critical approaches. In actuality, rhetorical critics do not necessarily oppose other critical approaches. Some claim to see values in other methods. They objected to the fact that a piecemeal dissecting of the text failed to take account of the "wholeness" of the document. Critical methods employed until that time traced the prehistory of the text. They had little value in explaining the impact the whole text had on its readers. Kennedy stated the role of the discipline as follows: Rhetorical criticism takes the text as we have it, whether the work of a single author or the product of editing, and looks at it from the point of view of the author's or editor's intent, the unified results, and how it would be perceived by an audience of near contemporaries. Most scholars see the discipline as complementary. It is "a valuable additional methodology, largely untapped, for understanding biblical material."

### **3.3 The Purpose of Rhetorical Criticism**

Rhetorical criticism attempts to understand the text as a whole. It focuses on the point the author made and the response of the reader. Specifically, the goal is to understand two important aspects of biblical study: Why did the author write this text, and how did he put it together? Obviously this relates to issues of biblical introduction. It assumes that the literature has a purpose and that the document itself (and sometimes by itself) reveals that purpose. It further assumes a given author had access to rhetorical devices that enabled him to address a situation powerfully. In other words, the author arranged his material as he did to make the best impact on his readers.

Some assumptions underlie this approach. (1) A rhetorical study assumes the author consciously employed literary devices, Since orators were common in the Greco-Roman world, it seems likely the writer employed such an honored form of persuasion. On the other hand, one might ask: Is this too much to expect of the writers of Scripture who, in some cases, appear to be untrained in classical disciplines? Further, is this consistent with a concept of the inspiration of the Scriptures which the church has affirmed throughout the centuries? (2) Rhetorical criticism assumes the writings were basically formal. If the writers utilized common rhetorical devices, they obviously thought about what they



wanted to write and how they wanted to express it.<sup>17</sup> It is indicative of the discipline that Episodes which have been understood traditionally as informal were among the earliest objects of rhetorical criticism. These included Philippians, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. (3) The discipline assumes the readers were comfortable with a more formal address from the writer. According to this approach, a friendly letter from and to friends seems impossible. The critic assumes the writer employed various persuasive techniques. Ultimately, rhetorical criticism hopes to reveal the historical situation.

The style and tone of written persuasion reveals the atmosphere that existed between the writer and his readers. It also clarifies the seriousness of the situation and the response the writer desired. Other aspects of biblical study contribute to this understanding, but rhetorical critics believe that the flavor of the writing helps most.

### **3.4 The Process of Rhetorical Criticism**

Doing rhetorical criticism involves two major investigations. First, the interpreter must identify the rhetorical unit. Following that, the interpreter must determine the structure of the text and what type of rhetoric it is. Both of these require quite complex forms of analysis. Discovering the Rhetorical Unit: this task includes both the larger unit; the entire piece of literature-and the smaller units which comprise it.

Every complete literary unit has an introduction, body, and conclusion. These may occur on a broad, comprehensive scale, or they may occur in isolated portions of writing. If the unit is a piece of larger work, clear reasons are needed to identify the particular smaller units. Generally, rhetorical units have clear literary boundaries. Most of these involve word repetition. The most common "boundary marker" is inclusion, called "inclusion" in English. Inclusion is a literary device by which a writer reveals the limits of his discussion of a particular subject. Most often, inclusion occurs with a word or phrase. When the writer first employs the phrase, the discussion begins. At the conclusion of the discussion, the writer uses the phrase again, thus indicating in a summary fashion the discussion has ended. Of course, the word or phrase may be essential to the content of the unit and therefore may be repeated many times within the inclusion.

Sometimes grammatical markers form the inclusion. For example, probably the most common form of inclusion is the chiasm. A chiasm is a discussion of two parts of a subject arranged in an A B B A order. That means the first part of the subject occurs in the first and fourth positions, normally designated as A and N.. The second portion of the discussion occurs in the second and third positions, normally designated as Band B'. The inclusion occurs with the more significant material, the first and fourth positions. When the chiasm concludes, the reader understands that the particular literary unit also concludes. For example, Moises Silva employed this technique in his commentary on Philippians. He used it to demonstrate the unity of 1:27--4:3.<sup>22</sup> Vernon Robbins used it to mark off the introduction of Mark's Gospel.

Other common lexical devices help the reader isolate literary units. Another common device is the repetition of words in an anaphoric manner. This means the author repeats a word or phrase frequently enough that a pattern occurs. The Beatitudes of Matthew 5

repeat the word "blessed." Hebrews 11 repeats the word "by faith" (one word in Greek) to form a pattern. Sound devices also form inclusions and mark literary divisions. Sometimes a writer employs words or phrases that sounded "poetical" for purposes of memory recall. This may well occur in Mark 2:1-12.25. A final example of these devices is rhetorical questions. Frequently in the NT the writer asks such questions. They introduce a subject to be addressed, and when the address concludes, the writer asks another question. This device occurs in Romans 5-8 in particular. Not everyone agrees on the specific rhetorical devices a writer might employ. Sometimes almost diametrically opposite conclusions occur. Perhaps this happens because the science is in its infancy. Perhaps there will never be a consensus. Nevertheless, these methods help in text analysis, particularly in isolating a rhetorical unit.

Analyzing the Kind of Literature. The second step involves analysis of the rhetorical unit. Here the interpreter considers three major categories of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, and style. Invention refers to the "proofs" and "refutations" of a speech or writing. When a writer addressed a reading audience, he first considered the kinds of proofs he would use. The selecting process came to be known as "inventions. "

"Arrangement" (Lat. *dispositio*; Gr. *taxis*) concerns the organization of the material. The Greek orators divided their speeches into four main parts. The exordium occurred first. It consisted of an introduction to the entire writing. The exordium set the direction of the relationships and prepared for the main elements of the literature. The rhetoricians then moved to the narratio. This was the statement of the case. It set the direction for the literary proofs that would follow. Third came the probatio, which included the body of the speech or writing. Finally, each speech ended with the peroratio. This was the conclusion. These occurred regularly, so any literary piece could be analyzed this way. If the documents parallel the Greek orations, the rhetorical critic will find these elements in each NT book. As will be noted later, the forms may vary, but the structural elements remain. In addition to invention and arrangement, each orator considered style. This meant he would consciously determine the type of approach to an audience. Many ancient Greeks, such as Aristotle, pointed to two different kinds of persuasive techniques. Some persuasions were "artless"; that is, they occurred "outside" rhetoric. They included such things as laws, witnesses, contracts, and oaths. On the other hand, a rhetorician had at his disposal many "artful" ways of persuasion. These were appeals to action which demonstrated the orator's ability. It made rhetoric powerful. These "artful" devices corresponded to different aspects of persons. Some arguments appealed to the rational faculties. These sometimes related to logos, the "reasoning" capability of the human mind. Other arguments appealed to the emotions. These were known as pathos arguments. They intended to move someone by touching the feelings.

Finally, the ethos involved morality. They called people to action based on ethical or moral principles. The type of argumentation-style helps to determine the nature of the discussion. It further anticipates the type of response desired by the speaker or writer. Ancient orators learned various devices they could use in each of these areas to persuade

their hearers of appropriate action. All of this analysis provides the interpreter with the data to determine the rhetorical situation. The discourse is like an answer to a question; the rhetorical situation is the question. Applying that analogy to the NT, the piece of literature is the answer to a question that surfaces only by considering the rhetorical context. At this point, it is helpful to note the kinds of rhetoric used by the Greeks. First, they had deliberative oratory. In general use, this was what an orator used to persuade someone of his or her opinion or way of going about something. It occurred commonly, because most of the "everyday" debates involved such decisions. For example, political discussions were deliberative, as were things that had to do with public affairs. In addition to deliberative orations, the ancient Greeks had judicial oratory.

This was the language of the courtroom. Particularly suited to defending or condemning specific actions, it could be used for anyone wishing to accuse or justify himself or someone else. Because of the highly developed legal system of the Greco-Roman world, this style developed into a fine art. Finally, there were epideictic orations. This was the language of praise and honor, as well as blame and dishonor. Orators used these techniques when they wanted to inspire an audience. It was the oratory of festivals as well. NT scholars debate which NT writings contain these various types of rhetoric. Their assumption is if a writing fits into one of these styles, it helps the interpreter understand the situation of the readers and the intent of the writer. Of course, there is a circular element here, since the style depends on the literary characteristics, and the literary characteristics are derived from the style of writing.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

Rhetorical criticism has occupied the minds and energies of an increasing number of scholars in the last twenty-five years. No doubt it will remain for years to come. It brings the promise of helpful analytical insights. It particularly helps the interpreter see the whole of a discourse, and it provides the tools for analysis of the structure of the parts. Nevertheless, interpreters should move slowly into this study, particularly if it is the only perspective taken of the text. As with other approaches, there is need for the wisdom of the community of scholars.

#### **5.0 Summary**

This unit discussed: Defining Rhetorical Criticism; History of Rhetorical Criticism; the Purpose of Rhetorical Criticism; the Process Of Rhetorical Criticism. Next Unit will continue with part two of rhetorical criticism.

#### **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment**

- Narrate the history of Rhetorical Criticism
- Outline the Process of Rhetorical Criticism

**7.0 References/Further reading**

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**MODULE 3: MODERN BIBLICAL CRITICISMS*****Unit 6: Reader-Response Criticism*****Contents**

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6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

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## 1.0 Introduction

Whereas traditional criticism focuses behind the text and composition criticism and structuralism in the text, reader-response criticism may be said to discover meaning in front of the text. For the reader-response critic, reading the Bible "as literature is to retrieve it from the museum, to relate it to the life of contemporary readers. The actualization of literature is dictated by the interaction between the text and reader. All other readings, such as historical or theological ones, are valid but not complete. Full(er) meaning is possible only when the Bible is read as literature, where the Bible is reimaged by the reader in the sense of the reader's own world. This is the focus of this module.

## 2.0 Objectives

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

- Have an overview of reader-response criticism
- Discuss Deconstructionism and Canon Criticism

## 3.0 Main Body

### 3.1 Reader-Response Criticism: What is it?

Reader-response criticism assumes that knowledge is grounded in life. Meaningful knowledge is discovered when the reader's social experience impacts the text so as to make it meaningful to that person. As McKnight contends, "readers make sense" of texts, the world, and themselves. Since the interpretive process includes the reader's own worldview as well as that presupposed by the text, the text becomes infinite in its potentialities for meaning. Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of symbolism and phenomenology acknowledges that the text had a meaning for the author and original audience, but once that was experienced, the sense of the text lies beyond it and resides in us as readers "in front of" the text.

All other aspects of literary analysis, such as historical and text-centered readings, are incomplete and subject to the reader-significance reading. McKnight, however, cautions not every reading is valid. There are controls of interpretation in the process, "for systems of interpretation involve components that must be correlated with each other and with the reader-components that are dynamic in themselves as well as parts of a dynamic system. These include an interpretation that is possible, consistent, and satisfying to the reader and his worldview, Radical reader-response criticism, whose heart is the reader's eyes, invites readers to bring to the text their own ideological nuances. Marxist, feminist, materialist, and liberation readings are among these sociological approaches to the Bible.<sup>46</sup> Exemplary of ideological readings is feminist criticism which reads a biblical account through the lens of gender. E. Schussler Fiorenza explains the shift from androcentric readings to a feminist hermeneutic: "A feminist critical interpretation of the Bible cannot

take as its point of departure the normative authority of the biblical archetype, but must begin with women's experience in their struggle for liberation. The means, then, is to deconstruct the male voice that dominates the story and its chauvinist ideology and construct the feminist voice by a retelling of the story.

P. Tribble combines her feminist readings with structural exegesis to critique the role of women and men in the Bible. In the account of Ruth, for instance, Naomi and Ruth are engaged in the on-going struggle of women to obtain security in a male-dominated society. Tribble concludes, "Ruth and the females of Bethlehem work as paradigms for radicality. All together they are women in culture, women against culture, and women transforming culture, what they reflect, they challenge. And that challenge is a legacy of faith to this day for all who have ears to hear the stories of women in a man's world.

### **3.2 Deconstructionism**

Also known as "poststructuralism," this literary analysis has its roots in the philosophy of Jacques Derrida whose theory has resulted in extreme skepticism about the possibility of meaning. The publication of Derrida's *De la grammatologie* in 1967 inaugurated the movement. It has become an important force in literary criticism since the 1980s, but it has had little impact on biblical studies. To understand Derrida's theory, we must recall the long-held opinions of Western society concerning how meaning is achieved in communication.

First, it has been assumed that meaning is grounded in an objective reality which can serve as a basis for communication. This reality is referred to as the "metaphysics of presence." Derrida terms this assumption "logocentric": Original truth is attributed to the logos, that is, a word, reason or the Word of God. In logocentrism, being is always determined in terms of an entity's presence. It is this ontological presence (being) or center that gives the elements of a system its balance and coherence.

Second, Western civilization has accepted that speech (word) is more reliable for discovering and relating meaning than writing since the speaker can exercise greater control. There is created an opposition between the origin (speech) and the manifestation (writing). Logocentrism assumes that these oppositions occur between an origin and its fall, with the first having priority; for example: presence/absence, voice/writing, sound/silence, being/nonbeing, conscious/unconscious, truth/lie, transcendental/empirical, meaning/form, literal/metaphorical, signifier/signified, and so forth.

All literary-critical methods assume this logocentrism, but Derrida challenges the tradition. He argues there is no absolute ground or origin. Every term is itself a product. Derrida exposes the weakness of Saussure's proposition of a gap between the signifier and what is signified in a language system (see structuralism above). Derrida contends that the gap is far less stable than Saussure's system permits. Derrida holds that meaning is not an original presence, rather an absence which distinguishes a word.

Moreover, a sign always has a dependence on a prior context or differentiation in a speech act. Writing, Derrida argues, is prior to speech. Thus, there is no original logos, and there is left a perpetual instability or distancing between the signifier and the signified. The oppositions created in this system are inverted, e.g., absence/presence, non being/being, signified/signifier, metaphor/literal.

Derrida invents the term *différance* as a concept to reveal the slippage between signifier and the signified. *Différance* has three significations: (1) to differ (to be unlike, dissimilar); (2) *differre* from Latin (to scatter, disperse) and (3) to defer (delay, postpone). In French the *a* in *différance* (to defer) is silent; the word sounds like *différence* (to differ). This distinction is perceived only in writing. "Differ" is spatial distinction and indicates the sign arises in terms of its differences or spaces (absence!) within the system. The "defer" is a temporal distinction, and the sign perpetually postpones presence. *Différance* for Derrida is not just a word or concept, a force or event; it can be conceptualized as "the structured and differing 'origin' of difference."<sup>53</sup> An example is the sign "chair" which brings to mind (consciousness) the idea of a chair (signified), but the real chair is not actually present. The sign is employed, but we delay or postpone producing the actual referent. In other words, the sign "chair" marks an "absent present." Both *différance* (delay) and difference between sign and referent disrupt logocentrism's center of presence. It is not actual presence but metaphor or delusion.

When applied to literary analysis, deconstructionists explain how the text subverts or deconstructs itself. J. Culler comments, to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or promise."

The text does not have a meaning as a reference to something that is signified; the text is an infinite "play of signifiers" that is brought about by the contingencies of language. For the deconstructionist, meaning is not in the author, the textual artifact, the deep structure, or the reader. There can be no determinative judge or arbiter of meaning, for that, too, is subject to deconstruction; the text is metaphor or pun. The critic "plays with the text" as an exercise of criticism for its own aesthetic sake. This kind of radical skepticism has hindered deconstructionism's influence among biblical scholars. P. D. Miscall is an Old Testament scholar who has read Genesis 12 and 1 Samuel 16-22 from a deconstructionist perspective. His "close reading" of the text exposes what he believes are the ambiguities, ambivalences, and gaps of the narrative. He concludes that no consistent reading is possible for the characters Abraham or David. He reads the text as "decidedly undecidable," which means there is no determinative meaning, whether it be authorial, phenomenological, structuralist, or existentialist. The indeterminateness of the text prevents a definitive reading and a coherent one; there can be no historical or theological or ideological meaning.

### 3.3 Canon Criticism

We turn now to a criticism which is better known among biblical scholars because it was introduced by one of its own members and is uniquely suited to biblical studies. Canon criticism can be better apprehended by the student in light of what we have discovered up to this point since it shares features of the literary approaches. The seminal work of canon criticism is B. S. Childs' *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, which outlined a new direction in biblical interpretation. His contention was that the development of historical-critical methods had created a crisis in the possibility of doing biblical theology. He set forth a new agenda to save the discipline of biblical theology by giving it a new basis. This new beginning point is the extant canon which functions as the normative expression of religious faith by the believing communities of Judaism and Christianity. The proper stance of the critic toward the Bible, contends Childs, is a person of faith within the community who views the text as "Scripture." Thus, Childs' Introduction focuses on the text in its final form as a fixed religious canon. For "religious" texts they are only properly interpreted when related to the fuller affirmations espoused by synagogue and church. In other words, the present canonical shape provides the interpretive framework for the expositor's reading.

Childs acknowledges his criticism shares with the synchronic literary approaches whose emphasis is the integrity of the text. Yet he insists canon criticism differs from such studies by its relating the text to a community of faith. Canon criticism is driven by theology, he says, not literary categories for their own sake. Approaching the text as "Scripture" gives the text its referential orientation in the roots of historic Israel whereas synchronic studies view the Bible as non-referential. Nevertheless, Childs speaks of canonical context in the sense of its literary context, not its historical. Childs distances his analysis from historical-critical methods by insisting that only the canon, that is, the final form and arrangement of the biblical texts, can serve functionally as a hermeneutical norm. He opposes the fragmentation of the text as typically achieved by historical criticism.

Childs does not deny the efficacy of historical-critical methods when it comes to answering historical questions, but he believes such methods cannot provide an adequate basis for doing theology. In his opinion, the failure of historical criticism is its restriction of textual meaning to the past. A rival voice within this movement is J. A. Sanders whose work has much in common with Childs but which differs at significant points. Sanders agrees that historical criticism effectively cut the Bible off from the very communities that revered it. He comments, "For some the Bible has become a sort of archaeological tell which only experts can dig. He adds that the old criticism assumed that the original meaning of the text alone had a valid meaning worthy of "scientific" study. Consequently, such interpreters gave the original context, as reconstructed by form criticism, the only authoritative meaning. This false notion of authority encouraged a deconstruction of the canon where the layers of canonical shaping given by the faith communities were systematically stripped away. Sanders also agrees with Childs that an adequate hermeneutic requires relating the literature to the historic communities of faith. Thus, they



concur that the concept of canon is not merely the closure of a sacred list but how the canon functioned within community.

Sanders, unlike Childs, sees canon criticism as a natural extension of the historical-critical methods. Canon as a process for Childs is limited to the period once the text was stabilized. Sanders believes that the proper canonical context is not solely the final form of the text but also includes the prior successive stages of the canonical process in its historical development. Sanders disagrees with Childs that there is one canon, but rather he contends for many canons. Historical tools, therefore, are needed to isolate the various stages of canonical development, tracing the function of those traditions that finally reside in the extant canon. For this reason Sanders insists on the terminology "canonical" criticism, as opposed to canon criticism, because he believes that the canonical process is a continuum operating along the same dynamics whether in the past (intrabiblical) or among the Jewish and Christian community life settings today. He sees canonical shaping reaching beyond the stabilization of the text, for he believes that the on-going history of hermeneutics continues along the same basic tenets as the canonical processes in antiquity.

Both Childs and Sanders make it clear their call for canon or canonical criticism is not a return to pre-critical traditionalism. Their work presupposes the advances of historical-critical studies, particularly the work of Sanders. Canon criticism does not provide solace for "fundamentalism." Childs does not encourage the pre-critical practices of allegory or harmonization practiced by the church fathers and reformers. Unlike evangelical scholarship, he admits the canon possesses theological and historical disagreements, but unlike historical critics he seeks to discover a coherent meaning within the parameters of the community's vision of the whole. He shows how the church successfully read the Bible despite its incongruities.

Evangelical scholars can applaud some consequences of Childs' and Sanders' efforts. (1) The correction of historical criticism, that is, its "decanonizing" of the text, is long overdue. (2) Childs' affirmation that the text is Scripture which can be and should be read as a cohesive whole is refreshing among critical scholars. (3) Childs acknowledges that the extant text provides the normative reading for understanding the text as opposed to the historical critic's specious "original" meaning. (4) The canonical method encourages evangelical scholars to look at passages in their whole biblical context, permitting them to impact and be impacted by the whole. The evangelical approach to canon understands the Hebrew Bible as "Old Testament," which affirms the genetic relationship between the Old and New.

"Where canon criticism fails is its continued dependence on historical-critical conclusions, though it curbs its excesses. Also, the opinion that the original meaning of a passage has been significantly altered in the development of the canon is unfounded. Rather, the canonical shaping of a passage unveils the already-present meaning (latent) which is clarified and deepened by the intra-biblical commentary."

### **3.4. Audience Criticism**

When prophets preached, or apostles wrote epistles, they were addressing real people with particular outlooks and problems which the writer tried to address. Sometimes these beliefs were explicitly referred to, as Paul does in writing to the Corinthians: he seems to have received a letter to which 1 Cor. is a reply. In the case of Amos, there are few allusions to what his hearers were thinking, but if we are to make sense of the book's message, we must read it as a kind of dialogue between and his listeners. Though the term 'audience criticism' is new, scholars have long been aware of the importance of establishing the original situation a text envisages if it is to be correctly understood.

### **3.5 Indeterminacy**

It is one thing to envisage the situation of the original readers: they knew the writer, his language, and the situation he was addressing. But the situation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reader is different. There are many 'gaps' in the text, that is, things left unsaid, which a modern reader must supply. And different readers will fill these gaps in different ways. Can we be sure who is right on how these gaps should be filled? The world of ideas we inhabit is quite different from the biblical, and our knowledge of the original setting of the texts is so patchy that we may completely misconstrue them. Furthermore, according to deconstructionists, there are contradictions within texts, which make establishing a determinate meaning impossible.

### **3.6 Ideological criticism**

Not only is it very difficult for moderns to understand the biblical world, but it must be recognized that our preconceptions affect our reading of the text. Rather than pretend that we have no pre-understanding that we bring to the text, ideological critics believe that they should be openly acknowledged and that their effect on our readings be explored. One may approach the text as a materialist or a vegetarian. What would materialists make of the frequent references to the supernatural in the Bible? How would a vegetarian react to the concept of animal sacrifice? Criticism of biblical texts from these perspectives is rare, but liberationist/Marxist and Feminist criticism is much more popular. Liberationists insists that texts be read from the standpoint of the poor and oppressed in the Third World, not, as is often done, from the standpoint of the comfort of the Western middle classes. What do the texts have to say about poverty and oppression? Feminist critics urge that texts be read from a woman's standpoint. Some insist that texts should be evaluated against the principles of modern feminism and the patriarchy of many biblical passages exposed. Others merely highlight those passages that acknowledge the equality of the sexes or laud women's achievements.

## **4 Conclusion**

Reader-oriented approaches have drawn proper attention to the subjective input of the reader to all criticism. All readers come with their own agenda and preconceptions, which will inevitably colour their reading of a text. But this does not mean all readings are equally valid, or that texts are of indeterminate meaning. If that happened in everyday life, we should cease to communicate. Obviously, it is easier to understand friends than those we meet for the first time, or those who speak a foreign language. But that does not mean we cannot understand someone or text better if we work at it.

Reader-oriented critics are right to draw attention to the ideology of the reader. What we bring to a text in the way of assumptions and questions will influence what we find in them. It is the postmodern world, where all truth is held to be relative, this does mean that any ideology may be brought to a text. But from a Christian perspective, there is only one God and therefore truth must be one, too. So it is essential for Christian critics to approach the text with a Christian ideology, not a secular one, or we will read against the grain of the text, imposing our own ideas on the bible instead of letting it address us with God's message for us. Its agenda is to show us how to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and our neighbour as ourselves. Unless we readers make that our priority, we are likely to distort its meaning at many points.

## 5 Summary

This unit studied: Reader-Response Criticism: What is it?; Deconstructionism; and Canon Criticisms. Audience Criticism; Indeterminacy; and Ideological Criticisms.

## 6 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Give a brief description of Deconstructionism as a form of biblical criticism
- Canon Criticism is the brain child of B. S. Childs. Discuss
- Write short notes on:
  - Audience Criticism;
  - Indeterminacy; and
  - Ideological Criticisms

## 7 References/Future Reading

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