

Overview of the Old Testament

The goal of this training is to review (in a very broad way) the scope of the Old Testament. In addition to personal notes a couple of favorite texts were important in creating this, including Celia Brewer Marshall's *A guide through the Old Testament* (1989: Westminster/John Knox Press, KY); and Alice L. Laffey's *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (1988: Fortress Press, PA.)

Session 1: Primeval history

- Genesis 1-11 stories don't give us facts – give us vehicles by which the Hebrews explained life
 - Explained understanding of world, themselves, God
 - Stories originated long before invention of writing = oral form
 - Circulated independently
 - Editors codified the stories, viewed thru different lenses
 - Important words
 - Elohim = God(1:1-2:4); YaHWeH = Lord (2:4b-25)
 - Ruah (breath/wind/spirit)
 - Adam (mankind/humanity) / adamah
 - Creation (Gen. 1:2-2:4a)
 - Questions: who is God & who are God's creatures meant to be?
 - Genesis 1
 - cosmology: from watery chaos to dry land
 - style is grand & powerful
 - *task: define how God's omnipotence is expressed*
 - Genesis 2
 - cosmology: from parched earth to fertile land
 - is a plot with characters
 - *task: define anthropomorphic qualities of the Lord*
 - *task: taken together, what do Genesis 1 & 2 tell us @Creator? Creator's intent for humanity?*
 - Creation and the fall (2:4b-3:24)
 - Focus on relationships between the characters & how change
 - *Task: what do you think is the cause of the fall? Nature of sin? The relationship between sin and human freedom?*
 - Cain and Abel (4)
 - Look for theological understanding vs. historical data
 - Sin has come into world & is more disturbing w/each generation
 - The flood (6-9)
 - Accounts of a great flood were common in ancient Near East
 - Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh

- Sumerian tale of flood sent by gods
 - *Task: Flood hasn't removed evil thoughts of our hearts; how could God solve this problem?*
- The tower of Babel (11)
 - Ch 10 = table of Nations = attempt to account for variety of lands/languages/nations in ancient Near East
 - With chapter 11 try to explain diversity of humanity
 - Task: what does this say @ desires of humans & God?

Patriarchal history (Gen 12-50) concerned with Abraham + descendants

- ~4000BC Sumerians began settling in Mesopotamia near mouth of Tigris & Euphrates rivers (modern Iraq)
- By 3300 BC were writing on clay tablets using letter based on sounds (vs. hieroglyphs), had running water, irrigated fields, temples (ziggurats)
- Culture existed as collection of city-states vs. unified nation
 - Each little republic was often hostile toward neighbors
 - Land eventually divided into 2 great empires: Babylonia & Persia
- Each Sumerian city-state as considered estate of one of gods
- Abram (Abraham later) was from Ur – moon god Sin
- Abraham-Isaac-Jacob-12 sons = heirs to God's promises & beginning of genealogy of people specifically chosen by God
- There's humor: Abraham haggling with God on behalf of Lot's family in Sodom @ number of righteous people needed to spare entire city
- Focus on very real persons who were chosen despite who they were
- God chose a people & led them – constantly on the move
 - Life moved toward an end that God promised
 - Linear development → progressive development & revelation
- God makes himself known in personal way
 - Appearances of God (theophanies) take forms of fire or dreams
 - Sometimes simply as a man

Session 2

Exodus (begins about 400 yrs. after end of Genesis)

- Three important sections
 - Story of deliverance from Egypt & beginning of journey toward Canaan
 - A body of law, including the 10 Commandments
 - Description of the Tent of Meeting & its furnishings
 - Includes the tabernacle description in last few chap of Exodus
- Background @ how Egypt was a welcoming place to Joseph & brothers
 - Middle Kingdom had rulers (Hyksos) who were Semitic peoples themselves
 - Had migrated from region east of Black Sea

- Hyksos (name: “foreign chiefs”) had overthrown native Egyptian rulers ~1700 BC
- Ruled for over 100 yrs
- Welcomed needy neighbors from east through famine because had Nile as independent source of water
- During famine Joseph (in Egypt) sent for his brothers & set them up in Goshen
- Exodus 1:8 – *Now there arose a new king over Egypt that didn’t know Joseph*
 - “period of oppression” began when native Egyptians overthrew foreign Hyksos rulers ~ 1500 BC
 - Semitic people either expelled or enslaved
 - Ambitious building program using “wanderers” and “outsiders”
- *Exodus 12 – read*
 - *How is Passover night celebrated*
 - *What is purpose of blood of lamb?*
 - *What does the Lord want the Egyptians to know?*
- Covenant Treaties
 - Hittites (Semitic people) set the bar for how to treat those conquered
 - Extended offers of peace & mutual benefit
 - Join with us and we will protect you
 - Called suzerainty (Suzerain) covenant
 - OT covenants: Yahweh is suzerain & Hebrews are vassals
 - YHWH freely enters into covenant relationship
 - YHWH sets forth terms of covenant
 - Compare Abrahamic Covenant + Mosaic Covenant w/Suzerainty Covenant

Suzerainty Cov	Abrahamic Cov	Mosaic Cov
Author identified	Genesis 17:1	Ex. 3:13-15; 6:2-3
Suz past deeds for vassal	-	Exodus 19:4
Obligations binding vassal	Gen. 12:1; 15:6; 17:9	Exodus 19:5a, 7, 8
Blessings/Curses identified	Gen 12:2-3; 15:5, 12-21; 17:2-8	Ex 6:7-8; 19:5b, 6 God literally took up residence w/them
Witnesses & sign of the Cov	Genesis 15:17; 17:11-14	Exodus 24:3-8

How is the Mosaic Covenant a continuation of the Abrahamic covenant? How different? How compare them using words like conditional/unconditional, unilateral/bilateral? What metaphors express the relationships best?

LAW & SACRIFICE

- Law (Torah) is understood as a gift to God’s People, not a list of restrictions
- All laws attributed to Moses even though came into being from Exodus ~1290-538 BC
- 3 major bodies of law in Exodus:

- Ten Commandments (20:1-17) – first 4 preserve community = relationship of people to God ; last 6 @ individuals & our relationship with others
- Book of the Covenant (20:18-23:33)
- Ritual Decalogue (34:11-26)
- *Possible focus: different kinds/presentations of law; what they are designed to accomplish; if you think they could be more appropriate to our society now if rewritten or nuanced*
- Leviticus = “of the priesthood”
 - Aaron(Moses’ brother)=first high priest of Hebrews; of tribe of Levi
 - Talks @ being holy = being set apart from rest of world by God vs. being perfect
 - For service to/of God
 - Holiness in Israel called for sacrifices:
 - Burnt offering: a sacrifice of praise & thanksgiving to God
 - Peace offering: covenantal meal between worshiper, fellow Israelites & God
 - Sin offering: sacrifice that makes atonement for sins committed inadvertently & is preceded by confession
 - Atonement is unique to Hebrew worship
 - Reconciliation of two parties to become “at one” again
 - Restoration of covenant relationship when been broken by sin
 - Symbolic power of blood in sin offering = putting a cover over the sin
 - Putting cover over sin makes atonement possible
 - no longer has power to put a rift in the covenant relationship because is blotted out by the blood of the sacrifice
 - When Jerusalem temple destroyed by Roman in AD70→end sacrifices
 - Prayer then took the place of sacrifices
 - Law tells Israelites that proper approach to God is thru sacrifice
 - Therefore, place of priest offering sacrifice on behalf of the people so Israelites might approach God = important
- Deuteronomy
 - Scroll found in 621 BC when King Josiah repairing temple in Jerusalem
 - Contained this oldest form of our present book of Deuteronomy
 - Greek word meaning “second law”
 - Actually a repetition of the law for new generation of Hebrew who have never lived in Egypt nor experienced the Exodus
 - Takes form of 3 sermons delivered by Moses to Hebrews 40 years after left Egypt
 - *hesed* = one of great teachings of Deuteronomy = steadfast love; shown by God moving Hebrews thru time & space

FROM THE WILDERNESS TO THE CONQUEST

- Journey from the wilderness to the conquest told in historical narrative found in books of Numbers, Joshua, and Judges
 - Happening at beginning of Iron Age
- Numbers = “*Bannidbar*” in Hebrew, meaning “in the wilderness” = setting of whole book
 - has many lists (tribes, leaders, offerings, march formations) & account of march from Mt. Sinai to Moab
 - 2 major themes:
 - Leadership & greatness of Moses, who intercedes on behalf of Hebrews
 - Contentiousness of Hebrews who constantly murmur/rebel against Moses & God
 - 40 years of wandering in the desert
 - From people were born into slavery died and a new generation took place
 - New generation not disheartened by slavery & inherit Promised Land
- Joshua
 - Conquest of Canaan by Israelites staging a series of holy wars that ended as a sweeping conquest of all the land
- Judges
 - Conquest of Canaan portrayed as thru bitter struggles against foreign oppressors over almost 200 years
 - After Joshua died, old patriarchal system broke down with no new form of centralized authority to take its place
 - Judges fills in the gap created between Joshua & Saul, the 1st king of Israel
 - Describes the Hebrew tribes settled in Canaan as a confederacy tenuously held together by religious bonds
 - Judges were the chieftains of the various tribes; not always moral leaders like Moses & Joshua
 - Canaanites were organized in city-states that had walled cities & were well armed
 - Philistines on the coast had well-trained armies & iron weapons

The early monarchy

- Nomadic Hebrews had settled in Canaan ~1200 BC as now an agrarian society under local chieftains/Judges, held together by faith in Yahweh
- Samuel marks the transition from the era of the Judges to the monarchy
- First & Second Samuel originally one long scroll
 - Anointed Saul (~1020) and then David (1000 – 961 BC) as kings over Israel
 - Saul was unfit to be king – Spirit of Lord descended on him briefly; then departed
 - David was shepherd boy who grew to be beloved hero of Israel
 - Political unity evolved under king David who controlled threat from Philistines
 - 2nd Samuel ends w/ David’s empire stretching from Egypt to Euphrates

- Jerusalem as new capital was center of government & worship

Session 3

The divided kingdom & the rise of prophecy

- Reign of Solomon considered magnificent (1Kings 1-10)
 - Difficulties: Solomon did away w/eldest brother (Adonijah) who claimed throne & generals who supported Adonijah
 - Focus on power & outward splendor – required wealth
 - David had acquired wealth by conquering peoples @him → pillage + tribute
 - Solomon wasn't a warrior - actually lost some of his father's acquisitions
 - Solomon called on Phoenecians who knew @ grand architecture for help
 - Had vast harem, army, roads, & slaves – even used his own people, Hebrews, as serfs (drafting them for work 1month of every 3)
 - Began trading to finance his empire
 - Foreign princesses in his harem brought foreign gods & priests
 - Israelites ceased to worship God with perfect hearts
 - Rebellion grew in the masses as the union of all the tribes became tenuous
 - When Solomon died most of David's kingdom was in disarray
- *Nabi* meaning:
 - Spokesman (e.g. Aaron for Moses)
 - Member of holy men; displayed ecstatic behavior; possessed by Spirit of YHWH
- Samuel was the last of the Judges – also called “*nabi*” – told words of Lord to the people
 - Stood over & against king (Saul): called people & king to account
- Prophets appear in threatening times – sees trouble ahead (present & immediate future) & warns audience
 - Compelled to speak what hear from Lord
 - Task is to confront (vs console)
- Royal prophets attached to courts of Near Eastern monarchs worked for hire (often supporting will of king)

9th century prophets

- 1Kings 17-19, 21
 - Elijah appears w/out warning to confront Israelite king, Ahab
 - 1Kings 19:9-18
 - Elijah accomplishes 3rd task; Elisha accomplishes first two
- 1Kings 19: 19-21 = call of Elisha
- Elisha's death marks end of 9th century prophets

8th century prophets

- Major vs. Minor prophets
 - Refers to length of book (scroll), not importance

- 1 scroll each: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
- 12 minor prophets all on 1 scroll: Amos, Hosea, Micah, Joel, Johah, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- Dominant concern: relationship of people to their God
- Prophets had supernatural experiences yet lived in the world (vs. mystics living apart)
- Prophets recognized no real hope in immortality
 - Concerned about spending this life in companionship with God
- Prophets were interested in the future = about relationship with Yahweh
 - Divination, soothsaying, clairvoyance were not involved
- Favorite tense of prophets = the present
 - Current spiritual condition determines destiny
 - Future not set in stone but conditioned upon the present

Each prophet had a particular message that can be understood by reading book

- Historical context (only question not found in each of the books)
 - Who was the audience?
 - What was the political situation?
- What do we know about the prophet as a person?
 - What is his background and how does that affect message?
 - Was there a particular call by God?
- Forthtelling (laying bare the present; uncovering status of nation & people) @ *the now*
 - Prophet criticizes what he sees going on about him
 - Religious, ethical, political corruption
- Prophetic use of simile, metaphor, other poetic devices
- Foretelling (concern is about the future)
 - What will happen if the people don't change?
 - What judgement does the prophet deliver?
 - What is the hope?
- Overall key message of the prophet
 - Amos: God is angry & demands justice
 - Historical context: preached to Northern Kingdom ~750 BC
 - Time of peace and prosperity; all was quiet with luxury & security
 - 5:24 (justice rolling on like a river); 7:7-8 (plumb line)
 - Hosea (740-700 BC): God aches and desires love
 - Historical context: preached to Northern Kingdom just after Amos
 - Time of political anarchy
 - Assyria conquered them in 721 BC
 - Deported inhabitants who became the Lost Tribes →obscurity
 - 6:6 (I desire mercy, not sacrifice & acknowledgement of God vs burnt offering)
 - Isaiah

- Historical context: preached to Southern Kingdom of Judah bet 740-687 BC
 - Judah became a vassal state to Assyria paying them tribute; plague sent Assyrians home, so Jerusalem was left intact from devastation
- Isaiah 2:4 (they will beat their swords into plowshares & their spears into pruning hooks)
- Isaiah 30:15 (in repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength)
- Isaiah 58:6-7 = true fasting promises in vv8-10
- Isaiah 60:18-19 No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light and your God will be your glory.
- Micah
 - Historical Context: contemporary of Isaiah in Southern Kingdom
 - Saw Northern Kingdom fall to Assyria & then revolt against them (A)
 - Micah 6:8 – what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with your God

Session 4

Prophets of the fall of Judah and the exile

- *Prophecy vs. philosophy*
 - *Prophets didn't consciously form a system of thinking*
 - *Prophecy is insightful; insightful vs. argumentative*
 - *Prophets grounded themselves in word of God (vs. either abstract reasoning or empirical observations)*
 - *Prophets addressed covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh vs. intellect*
- Jeremiah (630-580 BC)
 - Historical Context: great prophet of doom before fall of Judah & then hope to exiles in Babylon after the fall)
 - Not recorded in chronological sequence so straight reading is confusing
 - Jeremiah 31:31 – the time is coming declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant though I was a husband to them....
 - Jeremiah 31:33 - This is the covenant I will make with them: I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor.....
- The new Covenant is hopeful to exiles; like old Mosaic covenant:
 - Both covenants rest on the initiative and authority of Yahweh

- Goal of both covenants is the same: I will be their God, and they will be my people.
- Ezekiel
 - Historical context: Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Jerusalem and forced young king Jehoiachin to surrender in 597 BC
 - King + 10,000 Jews carried off into exile
 - Prophesied against the sinfulness of Jerusalem and foretold its fall
 - Ezekiel 18:20 The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him
 - Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh

Postexilic literature

- Ezra – Nehemiah doesn't read chronologically; about the events of the Restoration
 - Renewal of the covenant in Nehemiah 8:1-12
 - Ezra sometimes called father of Judaism
- Postexilic prophets are Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi
 - Interested in building the second temple and the role of the priesthood
 - Note increased emphasis on proper forms of worship – Jews to be clean and exclusive
 - Prophets look forward to the new age when Jews will become the teachers and missionaries of God to the whole world
 - There is a tension between exclusivism and universalism
- Short stories: Ruth, Jonah, and Esther
 - Possess unity in plot, theme, character, tone and are very readable

Wisdom literature and the Psalms

- Wisdom literature prob came into Israel during the reigns of David and Solomon
 - "Golden age" brought nobles and wise men to court in Jerusalem
- Proverbs represents collected wisdom of Israelite sages
 - 2 types of people in Proverbs: wise and foolish
 - Ascribed to Solomon because his wisdom was to have been great
 - Compiled during Restoration yet rests on traditions of early pre-exilic times
- Ecclesiastes = "the preacher"
 - Hebrew name for book = Qoheleth (ko-HELL-et) meaning one who conducts and assembly or school – so probably more a philosopher than preacher
- Job (~4th century BC) includes the doctrine of exact retribution (suffering = sin)
 - Job's friends turn against him with harsh indictments, upholding wisdom formulas and religious doctrines vs. sympathizing with him

- God gives Job what he wanted and needed: vision of God who speaks to Job personally
- Psalms- e.g. Psalm 23 (God is shepherd; we are sheep)

Daniel & Apocalyptic literature

- Daniel has 2 units:
 - Six stories about Daniel and his friends, faithful Jews living in Babylonian exile (ch 1-6)
 - Daniel's four visions concerning the course of history and the end times (ch 7-12) = example of apocalyptic literature (=revelation)
 - Apocalyptic literature usually addressed to people who are suffering & persecuted
 - Jews could decode the puzzle in the writing and find the real message that God would soon act on their behalf
 - Dreams, visions, animal symbols, numerical puzzles are regular features of this genre
 - Emphasis: God's power and God's goal
 - Hope rests not in this world but beyond