

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY I (OTS 101)

Introduction to the Old Testament and the Pentateuch

LESSON 1 – STUDENT GUIDE



RD. RUCKER

Course Objectives

- Demonstrate the ability to identify the purpose and themes of the books of the OT
- Articulate the basic content of the OT as well as its message, theology, and teaching
- Be familiar with the broad outline of the historical and geographical context in which the OT was written (able to recognize/identify key people, places, events, and dates, as well as key worldview differences between ancient times and today)
- Understand the message, structure, and content of each OT book.

Textbook

- A Survey of the Old Testament: The Bible Jesus Used
- Encountering the Old Testament
- A Survey of the Old Testament

Grade Scale

Attendance	20%
Quizzes	30%
Final Exam	50%
Extra Credit	10%

What Is The Bible

Sixty-Six (66) Books

Old Testament: Thirty-Nine (39)

New Testament: Twenty-Seven (27)

How do we know the right books are in the Bible?

Apocrypha: Term relating to the extra books, in addition to the sixty-six books of the traditional canon, that are included in Roman Catholic Bibles
Means: "Hidden" or "Concealed" and refers to extracanonical scripture

(Other books which had their origin in the period beginning after the time of Malachi – They are called the apocrypha)

What is “Canon”

Hebrew – *qaneh*

Greek – *kanon*

Standard to which biblical writings must conform

Canonicity

As God revealed his word through people, it became important to know which books came from him and which books reflected only human opinion. A consensus emerged as to what constituted proper test for canonicity. The test focused on three factors:

Author	Audience	Teaching
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Test 1: (Author) Written By A Prophet or other Spirit-led person

A book that was part of the canon had to be written by a prophet or another Spirit-guided person. Human authors would not know God’s will apart from God’s Spirit assisting their understanding. The Spirit of God had to guide the writing process. The Spirit’s presence ensured that the finished product was God’s truth and accurately communicated God’s message.

Test 2: (Audience) Written to All Generations

A book that was part of the canon had to impact all generations. God’s message could not be confined to one audience. If a book was God’s word, it had to be relevant to all people of all times. The author might have written the work for a particular audience, but if it truly was God’s Word, all who read it could profitably apply its teachings to their lives.

Test 3: (Teaching) Written in accord with previous revelation

A book that was part of the canon could not contradict the message of earlier canonical books. Example: If a new writing claimed to be from God but contradicted the teachings of Genesis, it could not be God’s Word. God’s truth remained the same and would not contradict itself.

Josephus

Jewish General turned scholar wrote a rebuttal to anti-Jewish propaganda in the latter part of the first century. In his writings, Josephus describes the

Hebrew canon of scriptures that was recognized by the Jewish people of his day.

It follows, I say, that we do not possess myriads of inconsistent books, conflicting with each other. *Our books, those which are justly accredited, are but two and twenty, and contain the record of all time.*

(Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.37-43)

His words are important because they give us a point of view that is unbiased by Christianity. According to Josephus, the test of authority for the Scriptures was that they were written by a prophet.

“It is true, our history has been written since Artaxerxes, very peculiarity, but has not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time.” (Contra Apion 1:8)

Hebrew and English Book Order

Contains the same material (Books In different Order)

Hebrew Bible

Law Torah	Prophets (Former/Latter	Writings
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English Old Testament

Pentateuch	Historical Books	Poetic Books	Prophetic Books
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Hebrew Bible	
Torah	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Prophets <i>(Nabi'im)</i>	Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)
Writings <i>(Kethuvim)</i>	Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra - Nehemiah, Chronicles,

English Old Testament	
Pentateuch	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Historical Books	Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 -2 Samuel, 1 -2 Kings, 1 -2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
Poetic Books	Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
Prophetic Books	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Inspiration

God – Ultimate author of all Scripture

The Bible affirms its inspiration in many places:

2 Timothy 3:16 – *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”* (NKJV)

The apostle Peter, writing about the same time as Paul described:

2 Peter 1:20-21 – *“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”*

God, Scripture’s ultimate author, thus did allow human writers the freedom to express their own personalities as they wrote. But the Holy Spirit guided the process in such a way that the ideas and words the writers chose accurately conveyed the meaning God intended. Over the centuries, many authors wrote what we now call the sixty-six books of the Bible. Nonetheless, the finished product represents God’s voice, faithfully reflecting the message he intended for us to receive (2 Pet. 1:3).

The conviction that the Bible is divinely inspired has important implications for Christians today. First, it means that the Bible is trustworthy. We can trust it to provide reliable information in all it affirms. It provides many insights into the history of God’s people and also describes God’s plan for the world and for our lives. It reveals life’s highest meaning and purpose and tells us how to become all we were created to be.

Second, divine inspiration means that the Bible is authoritative. Because it is God’s Word, it speaks with divine authority. It calls us to read it, to understand the implications of its message, and to submit to it. And it remains God’s truth whether or not we choose to submit to it. The Bible boldly sets before its readers two choices: to obey God’s will or to oppose it. God’s servant Moses even called God’s word life itself (Deuteronomy 32:47).

We can read the Bible today because of the faithful work of many individuals over several generations. These individuals, called **scribes**, copied God’s Word by hand,

taking great care to maintain its accuracy. Scribes played a crucial role in the ancient world. Faithful transmission of accurate information was an important aspect of society. Kings counted on scribes to record royal edicts. Administrative officials needed scribes to record significant business transactions. Mistakes could have serious implications—political, economic, or otherwise. The scribes who copied the biblical texts believed they were copying the very words of God. Consequently, they took great care to preserve the copies they had received. One of the most important groups of scribes was the **Masoretes**.

The Masoretes

The Masoretes (AD 500–1000) worked to preserve the Old Testament text they had received. They wanted to ensure an accurate understanding of the text and its faithful transmission to subsequent generations. They received their name from the masora, a complex system of markings they developed to achieve their purpose. The Masoretes took three significant steps to ensure textual accuracy.

First, they developed a system for writing vowels. Until this time, written Hebrew contained only consonants, though by this time a few consonants were sometimes used to indicate certain vowels. The Masoretes developed this vowel system to preserve in written form the oral tradition they had received from earlier generations.

Second, the Masoretes developed a system of accents for the Hebrew text. These accents assisted the reader in pronouncing the text but also showed the relationship of various words and phrases in a sentence to one another. Thus, they helped to clarify many difficult passages.

Third, the Masoretes developed a system of detailed notes on the text. These notes provided a means to check the accuracy of a copied text. Today, we can produce identical manuscripts on a computer or copier, but the Masoretes had to produce them by hand.

The Hebrew word for “scribe” means “counter,” and the Masoretes counted every thing in the text. They knew, for example, that the **Torah**—the first five books of the Old Testament—contained 400,945 letters! They knew that the Torah’s middle word was the Hebrew word translated “in-quired” in Leviticus 10:16. They knew the Torah’s middle letter was in the Hebrew word translated “belly” in Leviticus 11:42. While such knowledge may seem trivial to us, the Masoretes knew such information was vital to their careful preservation of the biblical

text. We benefit greatly from their diligent work.

Transmission in the Original Languages

The vast majority of the Old Testament text was originally written in Hebrew, though a few portions (Gen. 31:47b; Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; Jer. 10:11b; Dan. 2:4b–7:28) were written in **Aramaic**. Both Hebrew and Aramaic are Semitic languages, in the same language family as **Akkadian** (the language of the Assyrians and the Babylonians), **Amorite**, **Phoenician**, **Ugaritic**, **Ammonite**, **Moabite**, and **Arabic**.

Three are most important to our study—the **Masoretic Text**, the **Samaritan Pentateuch**, and the **Dead Sea Scrolls**.

Masoretic Text

The Masoretic Text comes from the Masoretes. The oldest copies of this text date to somewhat earlier than AD 1000; however, most scholars believe these copies reflect a text from about AD 100. The Masoretic Text is the most reliable Hebrew text we have.

Samaritan Pentateuch

The Samaritan Pentateuch, as the name implies, contains only Genesis through Deuteronomy, and originated with the Samaritans. The Samaritans came from the intermarriage of Jews and foreigners in the territory of the northern kingdom after it fell to Assyria in 722 BC. The Samaritan Pentateuch's oldest manuscript dates to about AD 1100, though many scholars believe it is based on a text from 200 to 100 BC.

The Jews saw the Samaritans as compromisers who had denied their faith by inter-marrying with foreigners and by adopting other teachings. The Samaritans, however, felt they preserved a more ancient and pure form of the faith. Like the Jews, they believed in one God, but they embraced only the Pentateuch as their authority and believed God had chosen Mount Gerizim—not Mount Zion—as the place for his people to worship him. Sharp theological differences were thus inevitable. The Samaritan Pentateuch is slanted in such a way as to reflect these differences. Thus, the text provides an early witness to the way the Samaritans interpreted the Pentateuch. For this and other reasons, it is not as reliable for determining the text's original reading.

Dead Sea Scrolls

A shepherd boy accidentally discovered the first of the Dead Sea Scrolls in a cave in 1947. Archaeologists subsequently explored nearby caves and found more scrolls. These scrolls date to about 200–100 BC and contain at least parts of every Old Testament book. They also provide much information about the community at Qumran, the site where the scrolls were discovered. Most important for us, they confirm the reliability of the Masoretic Text. One of the most spectacular finds was a virtually intact scroll of the entire book of Isaiah.

Transmission

The **Septuagint**, a translation of the Old Testament into Greek, dates to about 300–200 BC and comes from the Egyptian city of Alexandria.¹⁰ Its name and abbreviation (LXX) come from the fact that a team of seventy-two scholars did the translation work. The Septuagint provides an important early testimony to the Old Testament text. Sometimes scholars have been able to resolve difficult readings in the Masoretic Text by comparing it to the Septuagint. But some parts of the Septuagint are more reliable than others. For example, the **Pentateuch** is more carefully translated than the rest of the Old Testament, and the Septuagint form of the book of Jeremiah is quite different from the Masoretic Text version. The reason for these early differences remains a mystery.

The Aramaic Targums are collections of writings based on the Old Testament text. These Aramaic writings date from the early Christian era, though parts are from earlier. The Targums arose during a time when many Jewish people understood Aramaic better than they understood Hebrew, and they often provided common interpretations to the Hebrew text. In places, the Targums reflect a fairly literal translation of the Hebrew. Elsewhere, they add commentary and stories as they elaborate on the text's meaning. Some Targums (e.g., the Targum to Song of Songs) wander quite far from a text's clear basic meaning. Because of this, the Targums generally do not provide a reliable witness to the Old Testament text, though they do help us understand early Jewish interpretations.

Hermeneutics: How Do We Interpret the Bible

So far in this chapter we have discussed canon, inspiration, and textual transmission. We have examined which books make up the Old Testament, how the Spirit of God worked with the human authors to produce the Old Testament, and how the books of the Old Testament were handed down to us. But important questions remain: How do we interpret the Old Testament? Will we always understand the text if we simply start reading? Or must we follow

Certain rules of hermeneutics, or interpretation?

Grammatical-Historical Method

The grammatical-historical method seeks to find the basic “plain sense” meaning of a Bible passage by applying standard rules of grammar and syntax. It seeks to determine what the text says grammatically and what it meant historically. It tries to discover the author’s original intention by consistent application of the principles that follow.

Understand the Context

The term “context” refers to the words and sentences surrounding a word or statement that help us understand the meaning of that word or statement. Suppose I said to you, “Today, I saw the biggest trunk I have ever seen in my life.” What does *trunk* mean in that statement? Was I watching an elephant at the zoo? Did I see a giant redwood tree? Or was I inspecting the back end of a large car? Without a context, you cannot tell what I mean. Context is also important for properly interpreting a Bible passage. Bible students should study three kinds of context: immediate con- text, remote context, and historical context.

Immediate Context

Immediate context denotes the words or phrases in the verses closest to the word or statement one is trying to understand. The immediate context usually influences the meaning the most. For example, my ambiguous sentence becomes more clear if I add, “When I was looking at the zoo elephants today, I saw the biggest trunk I have ever seen in my life.” Of course, the word “trunk” still might denote a large box on the elephant’s back, but the reference to zoo elephants does suggest to its hearers that probably I am speaking of an elephant’s trunk. Context at least narrows the meaning of the term in question.

Remote Context

Remote context describes the biblical material in the surrounding chapters and beyond. It also may influence the meaning of the passage in question, though usually not as directly as the immediate context does. Sometimes readers will consult other biblical material by the same author to see how he uses a particular word or phrase elsewhere. They may even trace an idea through the Old Testament or the entire Bible.

Historical Context

Historical context refers to the setting in history in which the writer wrote the

Bible passage. For example, we understand the book of Lamentations better when we realize that the author was describing Jerusalem's plight after the city's destruction in 586 BC. We appreciate the meaning of a psalm of David better if we know the occasion on which he wrote it. The historical context thus forms the backdrop against which the biblical writer composed his text.

Determine the Type of Literature

The Bible contains many different types (or **genres**) of literature, and the interpreter must apply somewhat different principles in each case. For example, historical narrative tells a story; it is quite different from prophecy, which calls the people to trust in God or describes God's future plans for the world. Poetry and parables also require special consideration. Each genre thus has its own principles of interpretation; some of those principles may overlap with the guiding principles for other genres, while others will not. Failure to take the type of literature into account may lead to a skewed interpretation of the biblical passage.

Interpret Figurative Language

In our daily speech, we often use figurative language. We speak of the sun rising, of being so hungry we could eat a horse, or of going the extra mile for someone. We do not mean any of these things literally; rather, these "figures of speech" communicate truth in a symbolic way. The Bible also contains figurative language. The prophet Isaiah used it when he wrote, "The trees of the field will clap their hands" (55:12). He really meant nature would flourish on the day of salvation. The psalmist (1:1) used figurative language when he wrote, "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked." To walk in step with the wicked means to take the advice of wicked people. We likely will arrive at strange interpretations if we fail to recognize the Bible's use of figurative language.

Let Scripture Interpret Scripture

Sometimes we find a Bible passage that remains difficult to understand even after we apply the principles of hermeneutics. Perhaps the passage has two possible meanings or seems to contradict another Bible passage.

For example, how should we understand James 2:24? The verse says, "So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone" (NLT). But Romans 3:28 says, "So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law" (NLT). Do the two verses contradict each other, or is there another explanation?

In such cases, we should let Scripture interpret Scripture. That is, we should find another biblical text that presents clear teaching on the topic and interpret the difficult passage in light of the clear one. We can do this because the Bible does not contradict itself. By applying this principle, we find other biblical passages that clearly teach that salvation comes by grace through faith alone (Gal. 3:1–6; Eph. 2:8–9). Consequently, we should reexamine James’s words in their context to discover if James meant something else when he used the expression “shown to be right by what we do.” Indeed, a careful reading shows that James meant Abraham and Rahab proved their faith was genuine by doing good works, a concept that does not contradict Paul’s teaching.

Discover the Application to Modern Life

Earlier in the chapter, we explained how one of the tests of canonicity was that a biblical book had to be written to all generations. The author originally wrote for a particular audience, but if the message was truly from God, it would apply to all generations. What is the Bible interpreter’s final task, after applying the proper hermeneutical principles...? To determine what the text meant to its original audience, is to determine what the text means for today. This step is sometimes the most difficult, but also the most crucial. To do this, we must understand what issues in our modern culture parallel in some way the issues in the Bible passage we are studying. Then, to the extent they are parallel, we may apply the Bible’s teaching on those ancient issues to our modern situation. When done correctly, this process can provide appropriate guidance for life issues today.

The Bible is not merely an ancient book with a message for an ancient people. It is the Word of God. It spoke to Israel, and it speaks to us today. Our task as Christians is to study it, to apply it to our lives, and to share it with a world that needs to hear it.

Summary

Tests for the canonicity of an Old Testament book must focus on the author, the timelessness of its message, and the consistency of its teaching with earlier canonical books.

Scribes who copied the biblical texts took great care in their work because they believed they were copying the very words of God.

The Masoretes did three things to preserve the text they received: (1) they developed a system for writing vowels; (2) they developed a system of accents for the Hebrew text; and (3) they developed a system of detailed notes on the text.

The vast majority of the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the rest in Aramaic.

The most important Hebrew copies of the Old Testament are the Masoretic Text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament.

To interpret the Old Testament, it is important to follow the rules of hermeneutics: use the grammatical-historical method; understand the context; determine the type of literature; interpret figurative language; and let Scripture interpret Scripture.

To understand the context of an Old Testament passage, we must consider the immediate context, the remote context, and the historical context.

The Old Testament is more than an ancient book. Its principles apply to our lives today.

LESSON ONE QUIZ

1. What does the word "Canon" mean?

2. How did people know or decide which books belonged in the Bible?

3. Identify the division of the Hebrew and English Old Testaments (Book Order)

4. Describe the process of biblical inspiration in your own words as you understand it?

5. What are the implications of biblical inspiration?

6. What is a scribe? One of the most important groups of scribes was identified as?

7. Identify the three (3) significant steps the Masoretes took to ensure textual accuracy.

8. Name and briefly describe the significance of the major manuscripts we have

9. What do Bible interpreters mean by the expression "grammatical-historical interpretation"?

10. Why is it important to use good guidelines for interpretation?
How many of those guidelines can you name?