

LESSON 4 The Books of the Old Testament

“Reading the Old Testament is like reading any other ancient history book,” commented a young man who had just joined our Bible study group. After he had read and studied some of the Old Testament, however, he changed his mind.

Although the Old Testament contains some history, such as Creation and stories of the Jewish nation, there is much more. Sometimes a story is repeated or told from another viewpoint. Prophecies have been carefully recorded, some with their fulfillment and others yet to take place. The books also contain love stories, poems, songs, and proverbs in rich variety.

We can count on history books to tell us about their heroes, but the Old Testament includes the common folk of their day. These stories are no less important, for they give us a clear picture of God’s dealings with His people.

The books of the Old Testament can be divided into five major themes. In Lesson 3, we learned about the smaller divisions of the books—the chapters and verses. Now we will look at the major divisions or classifications.

The Plan

- A. Organizing the Classifications
- B. Explaining the Classifications

The Goals

1. Identify the major classifications of the Old Testament.
2. Name and identify the five books of the Law.
3. State general facts about the content of each of the historical books.
4. Give a distinguishing characteristic of each poetical book.
5. State the general theme of each of the Major Prophets.
6. Name one distinguishing characteristic of each Minor Prophet.

A. ORGANIZING THE CLASSIFICATIONS

Goal 1. Identify the major classifications of the Old Testament.

The following simple sketch of a hand helps us remember the major classifications of the Old Testament.



The thirty-nine books of the Old testament are grouped as follows:

Law	5 books
History	12 books
Poetry	5 books
Major Prophets	5 books
Minor Prophets	12 books

The table of contents in the front of your Bible lists the books of the Old Testament. They may be classified as follows, but if not, the following chart will be a helpful guide.

LAW	HISTORY	POETRY	MAJOR PROPHETS	MINOR PROPHETS
Genesis	Joshua	Job	Isaiah	Hosea
Exodus	Judges	Psalms	Jeremiah	Joel
Leviticus	Ruth	Proverbs	Lamentations	Amos
Numbers	1 and 2 Samuel	Ecclesiastes	Ezekiel	Obadiah
Deuteronomy	1 and 2 Kings	Song of Solomon	Daniel	Jonah
	1 and 2 Chronicles			Micah
	Ezra			Nahum
	Nehemiah			Habakkuk
	Esther			Zephaniah
				Haggai
				Zechariah
				Malachi

Perhaps you have wondered why the prophets are designated as being either major or minor. The classification has little to do with content, as all the books are important. The

major prophetic books (with the exception of Lamentations) are longer; the minor books are shorter.

Application

1 Organize the following classification titles into their proper order. Put the number *1* in front of the title that belongs to the first classification, *2* in front of the second, and so forth.

- ... **a)** Major Prophets
- ... **b)** Law
- ... **c)** Poetry
- ... **d)** Minor Prophets
- ... **e)** History

2 How many books are in each of the following classifications?

- Law
- Minor Prophets



B. EXPLAINING THE CLASSIFICATIONS

The Law

Goal 2. Name and identify the five books of the Law.

The first five books of the Bible are known as the books of the Law or the Books of Moses. They are also called the Pentateuch, which means “five books.” The Pentateuch was written by Moses, the great leader and liberator of the Jewish people.

Genesis means “beginning” or “origin.” The book of *Genesis* tells of the Creation, the origin of humankind, the Flood, and the call of Abraham.

Exodus means “going out.” This book tells how God led His people out of slavery, opening the Red Sea before them and providing for their needs. The book of Exodus contains the Ten Commandments and laws for the nation.

Leviticus takes its name from Levi, the priestly tribe. This book gives instruction for the priests and the offering of sacrifices—looking forward to Christ who would become the sin offering for the whole world.

Numbers records the numbering of the people. Recording the census was important to the young nation about to possess the land that was promised to their father Abraham.

Deuteronomy means “second law.” The book contains further instructions for God’s people, Moses’ farewell address, and his commission to Joshua who would assume leadership after Moses’ death.

The Pentateuch highlights God’s dealings with humanity for an estimated period of twenty-five hundred years. It lays the foundation for the story of redemption.

Application

3 Memorize the names of the five books of the Law. Then, without looking at the list, write the names of these books.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

4 Read the description on the left, and write in front of each the number of the book title it matches.

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| ... a) Freedom from slavery | 1) Genesis |
| ... b) Rules for Jewish priests | 2) Exodus |
| ... c) Creation of humankind | 3) Leviticus |
| ... d) Census recorded | 4) Numbers |
| ... e) Moses' farewell | 5) Deuteronomy |

5 (Circle the letter of each correct completion to the following sentence.) The first five books of the Bible include

- a)** rules for God's people.
- b)** 2,500 years of Greek history.
- c)** the Ten Commandments.
- d)** instructions for the Levites.

History

Goal 3. State general facts about the content of each of the historical books.

The twelve books of History give the history of the Jewish nation. They tell of God's dealings with individuals and with the nation as a whole.

Joshua, the general who led the Hebrew people after the death of Moses, went on to conquer the land of Canaan. The book of Joshua is about that conquest.

There were, however, a number of small kingdoms and cities that tried to fight back. *Judges* covers four hundred years of defeats and victories in Canaan: defeat when the people forgot God, victory when they repented and God raised up judges as deliverers.

The book of *Ruth* tells of a dedicated girl from the land of Moab who lived in the time of the judges. She became the great-grandmother of David and one of the ancestors of Jesus.

First and Second Samuel take their names from Samuel, the last of the judges. He was also a priest, prophet, educator, and statesman who played an important role in his nation becoming an established kingdom.

First and Second Kings and First and Second Chronicles continue the nation's history and tell how it became divided into the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. The Chronicles also contain genealogies important to the Hebrew people.

God used *Ezra*, a priest, and *Nehemiah*, a cupbearer, to lead the Hebrews back home after their captivity in Babylon. These two men helped rebuild the nation. God also inspired Ezra to write and to gather the sacred books that made up the Old Testament. He had copies made of the Scriptures so the people could read them.

The book of *Esther* tells how God used a beautiful Jewish girl to save her people from being massacred during the captivity.

The historical books add up to about a third of the Old Testament. Put a slip of paper before the book of Joshua and another one after the book of Esther. Practice finding each book as quickly as you can. Perhaps a friend will select names at random for you and time you.

Application

6 Read the description on the left, and write in front of each the number of the book title it matches.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ... a) Saved the Hebrews from being killed | 1) Joshua |
| | 2) Judges |
| ... b) King David's ancestor | 3) Ruth |
| | 4) 1 and 2 Samuel |
| ... c) 400 years of defeats and victories | 5) 1 and 2 Kings,
1 and 2 Chronicles |
| ... d) The priest who had copies made of Scripture | 6) Ezra |
| | 7) Nehemiah |
| ... e) The prince who led the Hebrews out of Babylon | 8) Esther |
| ... f) The general who conquered Canaan | |
| ... g) The beginning of the kingdom of Israel | |
| ... h) The history of Judah and Israel | |

7 The second classification of Old Testament books is called "Historical Books" because it tells the history of

- a)** Moab and Babylon.
- b)** Canaan and Egypt.
- c)** Judah and Israel.

8 The last three historical books that tell of God's protection over the Hebrews during their captivity and return from Babylon are

- a)** Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.
- b)** 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings.
- c)** Joshua, Judges, Ruth.

- 9** We remember Ezra for his important role in
- a)** getting together the books of the Old Testament that existed then.
 - b)** writing the Pentateuch or the five books of the Law.
 - c)** preventing Nehemiah from working.
- 10** Compare the first five chapters of 1 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles. Which book gives more genealogies or records of families with their ancestors?
- a)** 1 Kings
 - b)** 1 Chronicles
 - c)** 2 Chronicles
-

Poetry

Goal 4. Give a distinguishing characteristic of each poetical book.

Many of the books of the Bible contain poetical passages. Five books, however, are grouped under the books of Poetry.

Job is a dramatic poem about the sufferings and eventual reward of a righteous man. This book is believed to be the oldest in the Bible.

Psalms is the hymnbook and prayer book of the Bible. These poems were collected and used by the people of Israel in their worship. Though David and other leaders wrote many of the Psalms, a number of them are of unknown origin.

Solomon, a son of David and the third king of Israel, was the wisest man who ever lived. He wrote and compiled *Proverbs* to teach young people how to live successfully. *Proverbs* is one of the “books of wisdom.”

Ecclesiastes is Solomon’s testimony of how empty life is without God. Pleasures, riches, accomplishments, and power cannot satisfy. Humanity was created to serve God.

Song of Solomon is like an opera, a dramatic song. It tells of the love between bride and groom and symbolizes God's love for His people.

Hebrew poetry often differs from other poetry in both style and structure. Through this poetry we see God's heart toward His people and their response to Him.

Application

11 Write in front of each description, the number of the book title that it matches.

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| ... a) God loving His people like a groom
loves his bride | 1) Job
2) Psalms
3) Proverbs |
| ... b) Hebrew hymn book | 4) Ecclesiastes |
| ... c) Teaching young people how to live | 5) Song of
Solomon |
| ... d) Why the righteous suffer | |
| ... e) Life's emptiness without God | |
-

Major Prophets

Goal 5. State the general theme of each of the Major Prophets.

When God wanted to communicate directly with His people, He often used chosen men known as prophets. These prophets proclaimed God's message either by the spoken or written word.

The books in this classification are called Major Prophets because of the length of the books, the long ministry, and great influence of these prophets.

Isaiah was both a prince in Israel and a great prophet who lived during the time that Babylon was establishing its empire. He foretold the captivity of the Hebrew nation, but also brought a message of hope. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born,

Isaiah foretold Jesus' virgin birth, His death for our sins, and His resurrection.

Jeremiah also wrote about the Babylonian captivity and told that the Jews would return to their homeland after seventy years. Cyrus' decree allowing the Jews to go back to Palestine came just as Jeremiah had predicted (see Jeremiah 25:11).

Jeremiah saw many prophecies fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. He describes this in five mournful poems called *Lamentations*.

Ezekiel was one of the major prophets of the exile. He prophesied to the Hebrews during their seventy years of captivity in Babylon.

Daniel, a captive Hebrew prince, became the prime minister of the Babylonian empire. His accurate predictions of the rise and fall of empires are amazing. Many of them have already been fulfilled, and some are being fulfilled in our lifetime.

Application

12 Which major prophet lived seven hundred years before Christ and predicted many details that were fulfilled in the life of Jesus?

- a) Isaiah
- b) Jeremiah
- c) Daniel

13 Although poetical, a book telling about the destruction of Jerusalem is not grouped with the other books of poetry. Which book is it?

- a) Proverbs
- b) Ecclesiastes
- c) Lamentations

14 The prophets who were captives in Babylon and preached to the Hebrews in exile were

- a) Isaiah and Jeremiah.
- b) Ezekiel and Daniel.
- c) Jeremiah and Lamentations.

15 The name of the captive prince who became prime minister was

- a) Isaiah.
- b) Jeremiah.
- c) Daniel.

16 Match the prophecy on the left to the prophet who gave it.

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| ... a) The virgin birth of Christ | 1) Jeremiah |
| ... b) Rise and fall of empires | 2) Isaiah |
| ... c) Seventy years of Babylonian captivity | 3) Daniel |

Minor Prophets

Goal 6. Name one distinguishing characteristic of each Minor Prophet.

The twelve books of the Minor Prophets together do not equal in length the book of Isaiah. But these men loved God and valiantly proclaimed His message to people who were often indifferent or rebellious toward God. The first nine of these prophets lived before the captivity; the others lived after the Jews' return to their homeland. Each book bears its author's name.

Hosea preached of God's love for His people as that of a husband for an unfaithful wife. Hosea illustrated it by forgiving his own unfaithful wife.

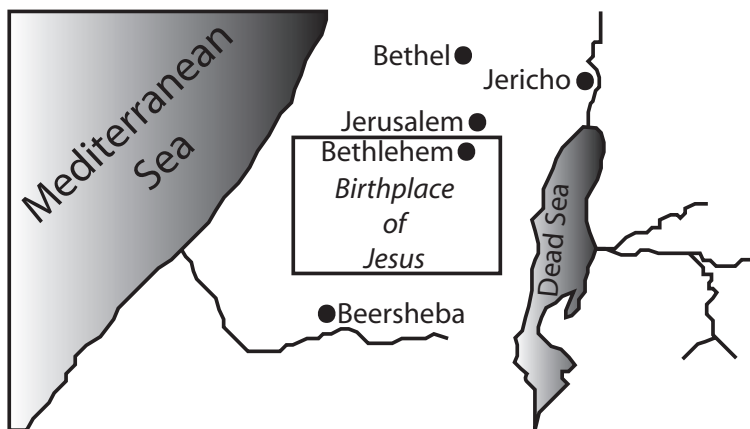
Joel prophesied the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost and in the charismatic revival of these last days.

Amos was a shepherd whom God sent to the capital of Israel to preach against social injustice. He warned the people of coming judgment against sin.

Obadiah prophesied of judgment against the country of Edom. Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. We know very little about the prophet himself.

God sent *Jonah* as a missionary to Nineveh, but Jonah tried to run away by sailing to another city. After being swallowed by a big fish, he repented, was delivered, and then obeyed God.

Micah lived at the same time as Isaiah and Hosea. He prophesied destruction of the Hebrew nation, but also gave hope for their future. He spoke of the Savior and even mentioned the town where Jesus would be born (see Micah 5:2).



Nahum prophesied the destruction of Nineveh, the great city that had repented under Jonah's preaching. But when the people turned again to their wickedness, God said He would destroy the city.

Habakkuk and *Zephaniah* warned of national defeat and captivity if the people did not repent. The people clung to their sins and entered Babylon as captives.

After the return from Babylon to Palestine, God used *Haggai* and *Zechariah* to encourage the rebuilding of the temple.

Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, lived four hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ. Read in Malachi 3:8–12 his message on tithing.

So ends the record of God's dealing with His people under the old covenant while they waited for the coming of Christ and His new pact.

Application

17 Read the characteristic on the left, and write in front of each the number of the prophet it matches.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| ... a) Judgment on Edom | 1) Hosea |
| ... b) Preached to Nineveh | 2) Joel |
| ... c) Love of God | 3) Amos |
| ... d) Social injustice | 4) Obadiah |
| ... e) The Holy Spirit | 5) Jonah and Nahum |
| ... f) Christ's birthplace | 6) Micah |
| ... g) Message on tithing | 7) Habakkuk and Zephaniah |
| ... h) National defeat and captivity | 8) Haggai and Zechariah |
| ... i) Rebuilding of temple | 9) Malachi |

Now that you have completed the first unit, you are ready to answer the Unit One Evaluation. Review the previous lessons, then follow the directions on the Unit One Answer Sheet. You should complete and send your answer sheets to your instructor for corrections.

Check Your Answers

- 1** a) 4
b) 1
c) 3
d) 5
e) 2
- 10** b) 1 Chronicles
- 2** five
twelve
- 11** a) 5) Song of Solomon
b) 2) Psalms
c) 3) Proverbs
d) 1) Job
e) 4) Ecclesiastes
- 3** a) Genesis
b) Exodus
c) Leviticus
d) Numbers
e) Deuteronomy
- 12** a) Isaiah
- 4** a) 2) Exodus
b) 3) Leviticus
c) 1) Genesis
d) 4) Numbers
e) 5) +Deuteronomy
- 13** c) Lamentations
- 5** a) rules for God's people.
c) the Ten Commandments.
d) instructions for the Levites.
- 14** b) Ezekiel and Daniel.

- 6 a)** 8) Esther
 - b)** 3) Ruth
 - c)** 2) Judges
 - d)** 6) Ezra
 - e)** 7) Nehemiah
 - f)** 1) Joshua
 - g)** 4) 1 and 2 Samuel
 - h)** 5) 1 and 2 Kings; 1 and 2 Chronicles
- 15 c)** Daniel.
- 7 c)** Judah and Israel.
- 16 a)** 2) Isaiah
- b)** 3) Daniel
 - c)** 1) Jeremiah
- 8 a)** Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.
- 17 a)** 4) Obadiah
- b)** 5) Jonah and Nahum
 - c)** 1) Hosea
 - d)** 3) Amos
 - e)** 2) Joel
 - f)** 6) Micah
 - g)** 9) Malachi
 - h)** 7) Habakkuk and Zephaniah
 - i)** 8) Haggai and Zechariah
- 9 a)** getting together the books of the Old Testament that existed then.



Lessons

5 The Books of the New Testament

6 How We Know the Bible Is the Word of God