

GRACE BIBLE TRAINING CENTRE (GBTC)
SCHOOL OF MINISTRY
ARUSHA - TANZANIA

SUBJECT: BIBLE SURVEY

LESSON 2: OLD TESTAMENT

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Introduction: -

Reading the Old Testament may seem like reading any other ancient history book, but the Old Testament is much more than just a history book. It contains God's covenant relationships with His chosen nation, Israel. It also contains the history of Creation and stories of the Jewish nation.

Prophecies have been carefully recorded, some with their fulfilment 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 or classifications.

Old Testament Classifications

The 39 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

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

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.

Explaining the Classifications

1. The Law

The first 5 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. The Pentateuch highlights God’s dealings with humanity for an estimated period of 2500 years. It lays the foundation for the story of redemption.

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.

2. History

The 12 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. They add up to about a third of the Old Testament.

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 400 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 & 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 & Second Kings and First & 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.

3. Poetry

Many of the books of the Bible contain poetical passages. 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.

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 hymn book 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.

Songs 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.

4. 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 70 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 70 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.

5. Minor Prophets

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 9 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 Saviour 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 400 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.