

STORY OF ISRAEL: GETTING STARTED

Why study OT?

4 reasons:

1. Used so much in NT. NT is only a small part of the Bible. From the very start, it ought to give all us Christians an appreciation of how much we share in common with our Jewish neighbors.

2. Learn who God is. Not a part of nature, but its creator.

3. Learn what God does. God creates and redeems his people.

4. Learn how we should respond.

*Overall theme of OT (NT, too): The Presence of God with his People.

Method of this course:

1. CONTEXT: “behind” the text, literary-canonical contexts

2. CONTENT: “within” the text, the narrative and its theology

3. CONNECTIONS: “in front of” the text, later OT and NT intertextuality

A. Content of OT

Language of OT.

1. Hebrew Bible. a. Law (Torah), b. Prophets (Nebi'im) (former and latter), c. Writings (Kethubim). TaNaK.

2. English Bible.

a. Pentateuch.

b. Historical.

c. Poetry.

d. Prophets (major and minor).

Constant question of comparison with two corpora of literature:

1. Comparing with ancient near eastern (ANE) literature. How similar, how different, is the OT?

2. Comparing with NT. How does OT shape our view of God in NT? What binds together the OT and NT is the revelation of God as king and his presence among his people.

Contexts and Meanings in OT. The NT does not come right out and say how it uses the OT, so we have to learn from the examples what is going on.

Storyline.

Creation (Adam and Eve) – Patriarchs (Abraham, son, nation, land, blessing) – Exodus (Moses, law, covenant) – Enter land – Judges – Kings (David, covenant, Solomon, divided monarchy) – Exile (sin, prophets, N. Israel, S. Judah) – Return (second exodus)

B. Literary Analysis

Textual criticism.

Versions.

Genre. The OT contains recognized literary types. We must understand how certain genres functioned in ancient Israel to understand the message of the OT.

Taking the Bible at face value sometimes means interpreting it figuratively, when that is its intention.

Oral culture. In cultures where the literacy rate is very low, oral tradition is a way of life. There is amazing attention given to accuracy in the story telling. Here are some contrasts between an ancient near eastern (Israelite) historian and a modern scientific historian: Does not have exact information on dates vs. researching to present an exact chronology.

The ancients did not write as much as we do, and when they did write, they did so at great intellectual and spiritual cost. Rhetorical criticism focuses on the literary

qualities of each book, showing how rhetorical devices add to the meaning and beauty of the work. Eg, the use of conventional motifs. Same with any recognizable genre. Same in some OT genres. The conventions are not named because the original audience recognized them, even if we don't.

C. OT World

We won't focus on dates, but we must be willing to pay some attention to them; otherwise, the facts and stories will become jumbled and disconnected.

Fertile Crescent.

Egypt. OT connections: In the middle of the second millennium, foreign invaders overthrew the Egyptian royalty. Rameses II (the Great) (d. 1280 BC) was regarded by Egyptians as their greatest monarch. Neco II was the pharaoh whom Josiah later met in battle.

Asia Minor. Hittites.

Mesopotamia. The land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. People called the Sumerians, and later Akkadians lived there.

These people were famous for their star-gazing and astrological predictions (cf. Magi). They believed that Marduk was the creator of heaven and earth. Their religion had a very dim and unhappy conception of the afterlife.

Later the Assyrian Empire rose to prominence, farther to the north, along the banks of the Tigris. Sargon II completed the destruction of Samaria. Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem, but never took it.

Chaldeans/Neo-Babylonians.

Iranian Plateau. The Persian Cyrus the Great conquered Media and Babylon and into Asia Minor and Lydia. His son, Cambyses, succeeded him, then Darius I. His son, Xerxes I, continued his father's war with Greece.

Syncretism.

D. Archaeology

Knowledge of languages. Key to ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. Deciphered in 1821.

Corroboration of biblical accuracy. E.g., Hittites. Moabite Stone (ca. 830 BC). Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (841 BC, pictures King Jehu of Israel kneeling and offering tribute to Shalmaneser III of Assyria). “House of David” inscription.

It illuminates the stories in the Bible.

E. Application

What is the OT, and what does it do for us? The end in this course is to answer what the OT means to our world, and to me. We cannot simply read it as if it were written directly to us. It is 2,500 to 3,500 years old, written in Hebrew and Aramaic, to an original audience with very different values than ours, in a very different context than ours.

Should we apply the text? If we think it is inspired, then yes.

Different theories of inspiration:

Natural- inspired like Shakespeare; terrific idea.

Conceptual- God gave the idea and let the writer describe.

Partial/Limited- Only the unknowable things were given.

Verbal- God chose the words. God kept the writer from error.

Mechanical Dictation- God used the writer’s hand and pen.

So we should apply the text. But *how* do we apply it? Polygamy was a common practice of the OT patriarchs. Do we simply take their examples and replicate them?

Case Study

In the bustling town of Dugger, IN, booming business and job growth have created the need for more housing to accommodate the influx of eager workers. An area of land on the west side of town has been purchased and designated for housing development. Since the other fields surrounding the town either cannot be purchased or have been destroyed by strip mining, this tract of land is the only viable option. The plans for the first subdivision are under way.

However, it has been discovered that this field is the primary habitat of the Indiana spotted tree frog, a species once highly regarded for its bright, purple spots and its dry sense of humor. It has been driven to this small haven largely by the local mining. Unfortunately, the frog's gaudy appearance and perceived snobbery have attracted animal and human predators alike, causing the amphibian to be near the top of the federal government's endangered species list.

Due to its already fragile disposition and emotional baggage, past attempts to transplant the tree frog to another region have been unsuccessful. Thus, if the woods vanish, so will this endangered species. Moreover, if housing is not available soon for its employees, Necking, Inc., will be forced to outsource its necktie factory and 5,000 jobs to India, leaving Dugger in a state of economic depression from which it will not soon recover. There is no way out of the dilemma: either the housing plans must go or the tree frog will be extinguished forever.

Read Gen. 1:28-30. Interacting with this passage, and using your own theological ingenuity, make a decision in support of the housing or the tree frog. Sustain your conclusion with clear reasons.