

A Gift From Heaven

The Books of the Old Testament

The Holy Spirit

God Remains Redeemer

Lesson 17

REFORMED
EVANGELISM
TASKFORCE

The Books of the Old Testament

In the previous lessons the Bible has been quoted numerous times. Those who have taken the lessons seriously have gone through the whole Bible already or at least made an acquaintance with the Word of God. With the help of this lesson and the next we will continue to study the way the Bible is put together and also look at an overview of the books of which the Bible consists. This will also help you to discover and view the Bible as a single unit.

The Unity of the Old Testament

The Bible contains 66 books: 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. The books of the Old Testament are very diverse in character. Superficially this gives the Old Testament an appearance of inconsistency. It seems to be put together randomly, but this is an illusion. The books of the Old Testament form a close unity. Jesus clearly explained to His disciples, and therefore to us, that the Old Testament is written with a view to Him, His coming, and His work (*Luke 24:44-47*). The Old Testament deals with God, but the contents can be combined in one word: Christ. It is sometimes called "the self-revelation of God in Christ".

In order to see this self-revelation in all those books with so many different stories, prophecies, and songs you must study the Old Testament very carefully and extensively. This also involves asking God for understanding and insight by letting the Holy Spirit show you the message of the Old Testament.

The Main Division of the Old Testament

The main divisions of the Old Testament are taken from the New Testament. Parts of the Old Testament are often quoted in the New Testament. By looking at these quotes and the introductions to these quotes it has been determined that the Old Testament can be split up into three main parts: the law, the psalms, and the prophecies. The "law" includes the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The "psalms" not only include the book of Psalms but also all the rest of the poetical books. The "prophecies" are all the prophetic books. This section is subdivided into the earlier and later prophets.

The Books of Moses

The Old Testament starts with the five books of Moses, sometimes called the "pentateuch" (set of five).

Genesis (Origin)

You must read the book of Genesis in order to fully understand the Bible. In this book God shows that He is the Creator of everything which exists. This immediately contradicts the practice of worshiping men, animals, or natural forces. Everything we can see, including man, is created by God to His glory. Therefore, we must serve Him alone. But man became unfaithful and disobedient. In Genesis God shows His greatness and mercy, but also His justice. When man sins, God punishes him. At the same time, however, he promises a Redeemer and shows His mercy and love by giving the "mother promise" (*Gen. 3:15*). This promise announces a time-long struggle between "the seed of the serpent" and the "seed of the woman", between all those who follow Satan and those who

serve God. This does not sound like a very beneficial promise until we are told that the Messiah, Jesus, will come and conquer Satan in this battle. With this promise the book of Genesis sets the stage for the rest of the Gospel of salvation.

However, this promise would be worthless if God did not live up to His commitment. Fortunately for us though He does. Genesis contains many examples of this. He saved Noah, confused the languages at Babel, ensured the birth of Isaac and Jacob, and finally set up His nation Israel, all to keep His end of the promise.

Exodus (Departure)

The great nation of Israel came into existence despite the effort of the Egyptian government to destroy it. God led His people out of Egypt and entered into a covenant with them at Mount Sinai. The worship service in the tabernacle and the sacrifices of animals are a sign of the deliverance which eventually will be brought by Jesus.

Leviticus (After the Name Levi)

Levi was one of the twelve sons of Jacob. His descendants were given the job of taking care of the tabernacle and the worship service of Israel. They were set apart and separated for the service of God. Later they served in the temple and had to teach the people how to serve God. Especially in the book of Leviticus we find specific instructions on how God wants to be served by His people.

Numbers (Counting)

In this book two census accounts of the Israelites occur. In this book we are also told of the miraculous way in which God often feeds and sustains His rebellious people during their journey through the wilderness. The book ends with the people ready to enter the promised land.

Deuteronomy (Repetition of the Law)

This book contains the great farewell speech of Moses. In this speech Moses repeats God's laws and explains them to the people. This book is filled with God's power and faithfulness. It is one of the greatest testimonies of the love which God has for His covenant people. In Deuteronomy Moses is making his last appeal to the people to be faithful to God.

Joshua, Judges

In the book of Joshua God's promise is fulfilled. The people of Israel conquer, or rather receive, the land of Canaan (*Ps. 44:3,4*). Later, in the time of the Judges, everybody does what is good in his own eyes. However, God sticks to His promise despite the unfaithfulness of His people. Time and again judges deliver the people from their enemies. Repeatedly, they have to lead the people back to their God.

Ruth

This beautiful little book is also about God preparing the path for Christ. The young Moabite woman Ruth is led by God to Israel. She is one of the maternal ancestors of King David and therefore one of the maternal ancestors of the great Son of David, Jesus (*Matt. 1:1-17*).

Samuel, Kings, Chronicles

These books record the history of Israel while it was governed by kings. The first king, Saul, was appointed by the last judge Samuel (*1 Sam. 8,9,10*). Saul, however, was rejected by God as king because of his disobedience. God appoints David as king in his place (*1 Sam. 16:1-13*). After David, his son Solomon becomes king of Israel and over the next centuries his whole line of descendants follow.

After Solomon the nation of Israel split in two parts. The two tribes of Judah and Benjamin follow David's sons. The other ten tribes experience a host of different kings. In both the kingdom of Judah (2 tribes) and the kingdom of Israel (10 tribes) faithful and disobedient kings are to be found.

However, the kings, regardless of how faithful they were, could not save the people. After times of devotion to God the people repeatedly fell into states of unfaithfulness. God punished them by having the kingdom of the ten tribes led into captivity in Assyria. To a great extent, this part of Israel disappears among the peoples of the east. One hundred and fifty years later the kingdom of the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, is also led into captivity in Babylon. After seventy years a remnant of the captives returns to the land of Canaan (*1 Kings 12; 2 Kings 24:11, 36:21-23*). These tribes did not deserve it, but God had promised that from Judah the Saviour would come forth and He always keeps His promises.

The books of Chronicles record the same history as in the book of Kings. However, these two books limit themselves more to the history of the two tribes. The influence which the kings had on the way the people served God becomes very clear in these books. You can also see the faithfulness of God who preserves His work. He is the real King of Israel.

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

These books describe the history of Judah and Benjamin during and after the captivity in Babylon. God's work continues; He is the maker of history. Time and time again He saves His people from peril. The cry for the real Saviour becomes progressively louder.

The Poetical Books

Job

The book of Job uses Hebrew poetry to show that Satan is not able to bring even one of God's children to ruin if God does not allow it. Job does not at all merit reinstatement because he is so pious. God sustains His children in sorrow, in doubt, and even when they rebel against Him.

Psalms

The Psalms are songs which describe how God's people live in covenant fellowship with Him. They describe their joys, doubts, praise, comfort, strength and blessing in the Lord.

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes

These "books of wisdom" deal with the "wisdom" which is from above, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. They give deep insight into the folly of man, a folly which can only be overcome by the wisdom of God. It should be noted here that when Proverbs uses the word "wisdom" it is usually referring to Christ.

Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon is a prophetic poem about the pure love of man and woman, bride and bridegroom, as a gift of God's deliverance. This love is often seen as a symbol of the love of Christ for His people (*Eph. 5:31,32; Rev. 21:2*)

Lamentations

A collection of five songs: complaints about the destruction of Jerusalem, the suffering and the expectation of the prophet who fulfills his calling among an unfaithful and punished people.

The Prophetical Books

The main function of the prophetic books is to deal with the coming Messiah. The prophets warn the people Israel in the name of God against the sins of faithlessness and lovelessness. At God's command the prophets urge the people to listen to what God tells them. The prophets announce how they will be punished if they ignore God's Word or if they refuse to repent. On the other hand, the prophets also announced the coming of the Saviour. They prophesied about the suffering servant of the Lord, and of the promised King who will sit on David's throne forever, long before Jesus came to earth (*Is. 53*). The last three prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, prophesy after the captivity. After these three the prophecy is silent for some three hundred years. Then John the Baptist,

who pointed to the Saviour and ushered in the New Testament came (*John 1:29*). John the Baptist is the herald who goes before Christ, but he still lives as if he were in the shadow. Whoever has heard or read the words of Jesus Christ, whoever has believed these words and has made them known, is greater than John (*Matt. 11:10-15*). This is because through Jesus it has become Light in this world.

The Holy Spirit

Article 8

Most people associate the Holy Spirit with Pentecost. It was on that day that the Holy Spirit was "poured out" on the believers (*Acts 2*). However, the Holy Spirit is mentioned earlier in the Bible. In the very first chapter of the Bible we read: "...and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (*Gen. 1:2*).

A good number of texts in the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament, mention the Holy Spirit. The reason many of these texts are overlooked is that the Holy Spirit is not always called the Holy Spirit. He is called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of Christ, or also briefly "the Spirit" (capitalized in order to distinguish Him from other spirits).

Who Is He?

In the lesson about the Trinity we mentioned who the Holy Spirit is (pg. 2). The Holy Spirit is true God, together with the Father and the Son. Therefore, the Holy Spirit receives divine honour. The Holy Spirit must be worshipped and the believers must be baptized in His name (*Matt. 28:19*). The Holy Spirit is not a sort of "divine power"; the Holy Spirit is not a thing; He is a person. The Holy Spirit is just like the Father and the Son - a somebody. We can grieve the Spirit, deceive Him, or hurt Him (*Eph. 4:30; Acts 5:3,4; Heb. 10:29*). It is unfortunate that in our language the word "spirit" creates the impression that we are dealing with something imperceptible, something unreal. Actually the Holy Spirit is very real. He is a person. Whatever the Holy Spirit does has tangible results. For example, He is the author of the Word of God, the Bible. He is also the one who works faith in the hearts of men.

The Spirit Gave Us the Bible

The Holy Spirit is the real author of the Bible. God used men as His instruments to write down His Word, but these men were only secondary authors. The real author is God Himself, through the Holy Spirit.

The writers of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit. "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (*2 Pet. 1:20,21*).

The Holy Spirit also adds security to your life. He does so not only because He is the real author of the Bible, but also because He works faith in the hearts of men. You cannot believe on your own (*Eph. 2:8*). The Holy Spirit has to enter your heart and persuade you to turn away from sin to God.

The Holy Spirit Gives Us Faith

Faith consists of two things which cannot be separated. First, faith is knowing God and His Word. Second, faith is trusting that God's promises are also for you personally. Whoever believes the promises of God must also accept that those promises are for him

or her personally. Whoever does not trust this, does not know the Word of God. Whoever knows the Word of God, however, also knows of his own salvation. The Bible says that everyone who believes in the Son of God has eternal life (*John 3:36*).

As a part of believing, you have to know the Word of God and try to understand it more fully. God does not require that you know all sorts of little facts from the Bible by heart. To believe is to trust. To believe is to consider totally trustworthy that which God has promised in His Word. God gives the foundation for this trust in His Word, the Bible. God has taken great care to make Himself known to us in a real and loving manner. Nobody may pass this by superficially. God demands that we get to know Him from His Word, and that we base our trust in Him on that foundation.

When you read the above statement, it seems as though faith depends on your own decision, study, or knowledge. But this is not so. Faith does not enter your heart by intellectual consent or emotional agreement with what the Bible says - not in the least. Man will never accept the Word of God by himself. Human emotion will only contradict what the Word of God says (*Rom. 1:21,22*). The channel through which the Gospel reaches the hearts of men, must be opened by the Holy Spirit. Faith is not an achievement of man. Faith is a gift of God, out of grace. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (*Eph. 2:8*).

Faith Is a Gift of God

Does that mean that you should wonder whether God will give you faith or not? Can you blame God for your unbelief? Most certainly not. Everyone may ask God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, for faith. He who asks God for this, also receives it (*Luke 11:13*). You should be happy that faith is a gift of God. It is a gift that is prepared and waiting for anyone who asks Him for it. If faith was a human achievement only then the greatest faith would soon fizzle out. Faith, as a gift of God, gives you the assurance that even the smallest spark of faith will, in the end, grow into a blazing fire. Whatever God starts, He also completes. The Holy Spirit gives you this security.

God Remains Redeemer

1 Kings 10,11

Do you ever hope for utopia on earth? Socialism promises to establish a "paradise on earth" by creating a community where everyone receives the same benefits and privileges. This ideal is sung about in the "Internationale". Communism wants to make utopia a reality by means of a world revolution. From an entirely different corner, by means of "modern" Bible reading, liberal theologians are busy changing the Gospel into a doctrine of human responsibility and emotion, and so create a new world. There are numerous groups who promise to change society on earth into a utopia. Men from all around the world strive for a life of peace and humaneness. But the Bible does not speak about such a utopia. On the contrary, the Bible states that such a utopia will never come to the earth in its present state. This earth must be destroyed and renewed first. Then, and only then, may we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth. Jesus will return to earth, judge the living and the dead, and create a new heaven and new earth on which perfect justice will reign (*Rev. 21:1-8; 2 Pet. 3:13*). No utopia will ever be made by men, but something entirely new will be created by God. "Behold, I make all things new!" (*Rev. 21:5*).

God Gives

Israel, like so many nations today, longed for utopia. After the period of Israel's judges came a time in which the people were governed by kings. Israel's first king was Saul. At first he seemed like a good king for Israel: young, wise, and most importantly, obedient to God. Things did not remain so. After some years Saul's life fell apart and in the end he committed suicide (*1 Sam 11, 31*). Israel's second king was David, a "man after God's own heart" (*1 Sam. 13:14*). David, unlike Saul, was a descendant of Judah who had been promised the Saviour. Was David finally that promised ruler? Would the peoples of the earth be blessed in him? Was he the fulfillment of the promise in *Gen. 12:3*? At first it seemed that way (*1 Sam. 16:1-13*). The simple shepherd boy from Bethlehem was anointed as king by Samuel. After some years of civil strife David took control of Israel, and under his reign the nation became a powerful empire. All the enemies were conquered, and a long period of peace and prosperity followed. When you read the second book of Samuel, it seems as if an earthly utopia had been created. Jerusalem became a beautiful city with a magnificent palace, constructed by the smartest architects and of the most beautiful materials (*2 Sam. 5:9-11*). God blessed His people greatly. "And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him" (*2 Sam. 5:10*).

What was the secret of David's success and of Israel's prosperity and peace? God was with him. He gives prosperity and peace. David was a man after God's heart, but he was also a man who, although he trusted God, was just as sinful as you and I. If God would have dealt with Israel according to what it deserved, they could have expected neither peace, nor prosperity, nor well-being. Never trust in men, because only God gives real peace (*Ps. 146:3,4*).

Looking Forward to Jesus

As righteous as David may have been, the Bible does not hide his sins. The Bible never makes people better than they are. After David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed, he was truly sorry for his sins (*2 Sam. 12, Ps. 51*). And we

can be confident God forgave David's sins. God punishes, but He is also merciful. David does not turn out to be the Saviour whom God has promised. We must wait for David's descendant, Jesus Christ.

Israel's Golden Age

During the reign of Solomon, David's son, not a single war waged in Israel. There was complete peace. Had utopia finally come to earth? Israel was in her golden age. There was prosperity, peace, and wealth. Trade flourished and there was plenty of work for everyone. Even the neighbouring countries contributed to the economy (*1 Kings 4:21*). Along with the prosperity came fame and popularity. Solomon's wisdom became world famous. People from far and near came to listen to his wisdom (*1 Kings 10:1-13*). They also came to see one of the world's great tourist attractions, the breath-taking temple in Jerusalem. Solomon had built a beautiful temple to honour the God of Israel. Yes, it seemed as if everything in Israel was in order, but upon closer inspection the thought of utopia in Israel soon fades.

Solomon was not a Redeemer. He was just a normal man, sinful man. He became proud and only served God with half of his heart (*1 Kings 11:4b*). This pride becomes evident if you compare *1 Kings 6:38* with *7:1*. The building of the temple lasted 7 years, while that of his own palace lasted 13 years. And despite the express command of God, Solomon had hundreds of heathen women as wives (*1 Kings 11:1-13; cf. Ex. 34:12-16*). Even wise Solomon turns his back to God. He is disobedient to God and compromises his faith in the God who had given him all his wisdom and prosperity.

Enmity

Throughout the whole history of the Old Testament, including the history of David and Solomon, the battle of the devil against God's people appears, time and again. When God blesses, the devil does everything he can to cut the tie between God and His people. The enmity between the devil and his followers and God and His children started in *Gen. 3:15*, and this battle will exist till the end of the world. Only Jesus, the son of God and man, has won this battle. David was not the Saviour of the world, and neither was Solomon. Their empires did not bring utopia to earth. People were disappointed when they put their trust in these kings (*Ps. 146:3,4*). After Solomon's death his nation was torn in two, The golden age passed and as you continue to read the book of Kings you see how severely God punishes His chosen people.

The lesson you can learn from the history of the people of Israel in the books of Kings and Chronicles is that utopia here on earth is impossible. That is a bitter disappointment for many people, but it simply cannot be built in our world the way it is. Only when sin is gone, and this earth is purified by fire, will God give a new heaven and a new earth, which will be completely free from evil.

God Remains Redeemer

After many monarchs, some who were God-fearing, but many others who were corrupt, the Israelites were taken into captivity in hostile countries. Jerusalem and its spectacular temple were destroyed. Had the devil won the battle? Did the captivity of the people mean that God would not keep His promises? How could the promised Redeemer be born?

Read the last words of the second book of Kings. The captive king is set free (*2 Kings 25:27-30*). The "house" of David continues. Also read the last words of the second book of Chronicles (*2 Chron. 36:22,23*). The Israelites return.

No, God is not defeated. No matter how hard He punishes, He remains faithful to what He has promised. God's power is so great that He uses the heathen ruler Cyrus to fulfill His plan. "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up' " (*2 Chron. 36:23*).

God does not let history slip out of His hand. The way He uses history is incomprehensible to us, but no matter what happens, we can be sure that God will remain faithful. He will perform what He has promised. The promised Redeemer is coming.

Questions 17

The Books of the Old Testament

1. There are also prophets who have not written any books. Can you name some?
2. How do you know that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied after the captivity? (*Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Ezra 5:1*)
3. Several wise men wrote the Book of Proverbs. Who were they and who put it all together? (*Prov. 1,10,25,30, and 31*)

The Holy Spirit

1. You cannot believe on your own accord. Faith is worked by the Holy Spirit. How is this shown in *Acts 16:14*?
2. In what manner can man grieve the Holy Spirit? (*Eph. 4:25-32*)
3. What does the Bible say about the Holy Spirit and Jesus? (*Luke 3:21,22; 4:1,14,18*)

God Remains Redeemer

1. Why did God select David although his brothers ranked ahead of him? (*1 Sam. 16:7*)
2. David wanted to build God a temple during his reign. Why did God not allow him to do this? (*2 Sam. 7; 1 Kings 5:3; 1 Chron. 28:3*)
3. What gift did Solomon ask from God after his ascension on the throne? (*1 Kings 3:5,9,12*)