

THE  
DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Telling the Old Testament  
Story of God



**SESSION 1**

Introduction to Old Testament Studies

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# Introduction to Old Testament Studies

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**Revelation in the Old Testament**

**An Abbreviated History of Historical Criticism**

**Application**

**Exam**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- identify various ways in which God communicates to humanity.
- recognize the unique importance of God's revelation through Scripture.
- express the significance of inspiration as it is applied to the Bible.
- comprehend an introductory exposure to historical criticism as it has been applied to the Old Testament.

## INTRODUCTION

As we begin our investigation of the Old Testament, this session begins with a discussion of the ways God reveals Himself and the inspiration of the Bible. This session concludes with a brief introduction to the methods of study of the history of the biblical texts, also called historical criticism, that have been applied to Old Testament studies.

## REVELATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT



### NOTES

#### DIVINE REVELATION

God's Word is communicated in various ways. In relation to the Bible, we think of the written forms of God's Word. These include: narrative or historical literature (communicated through scribes and other authors), law (communicated through priests and the person of Moses), prophetic literature (communicated through prophets), poetic and wisdom literature (communicated through poets, sages, and wise ones).

The written Word also points to other ways in which God reveals Himself. The Bible testifies of God's revelation through nature (Ps. 104:24, Ps. 19:1-7; Rom. 1:20). The Bible also testifies to God's revelation through divine action in relation to humanity. Such revelation is sometimes referred to as the Mighty Acts of God. Examples in the Old Testament include: the Exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and conquering and settling in the Promised Land.

Notice that God's revelation is intimately involved with human life and history. That is, God does not simply write out a message with a divine hand and send it to earth from some other realm. Rather, God communicates by divine involvement in and through human history. God inspires humans to write, and God acts within nature and human history to communicate His Word.

There are two main purposes of divine revelation: to communicate the truth about God and to communicate the truth about creation, especially about humanity. From the Scriptures, we learn who God is, how to relate to God, and what God's will is. In addition, we learn who we are as humans and what God intends for humanity.

#### THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, NRSV).

In Paul's letter to Timothy, quoted above, Paul is referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, or the Old Testament. At the time Paul wrote this letter, the New Testament was not yet complete or canonized. Over the centuries, Christian groups and denominations have argued over what is meant by inspired by God.

 **NOTES**

The debate normally focuses on the amount of human versus divine involvement behind the writing of the biblical text. Views range from only divine involvement on the one hand (in which every letter and punctuation mark is dictated and penned by God), to only human involvement on the other hand (in which the entire Bible is simply a human creation).

There are many views of inspiration that lie in between the range just described. For example, some hold that God revealed the message of the Bible but allowed human authors to put that particular message into their own words. Others believe God simply inspired human authors to produce the biblical text, based on their own human reflections in relation to their experience of God.

One of the key concerns related to this debate about the inspiration of the Bible has to do with the inerrancy of the text. Next, we'll examine the Nazarene position on this issue in order to set the tone for the approach taken in this course.

### **THE NAZARENE POSITION ON INSPIRATION**

The Nazarene statement regarding the Holy Scriptures, taken from the *Manual* of the church, includes the following phrase: "inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation." The Nazarene Church recognizes God's revelation comes in and through human history, and God made use of imperfect humans in the transmission of the written Word of God. However, God has ensured, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the message necessary for our salvation has been clearly preserved throughout the history of the transmission of the biblical text.

Our task as students of the Bible is to seek to understand God's message within God's written Word. Thus, our approach includes the investigation of both the historical setting of the Bible and its transmission.

Our guiding methodology is that of *exegesis*. Exegesis literally means to lead out of, or show the way: to expound. The idea is to read out of the Scriptures their intended meaning. That is, to derive the intended meaning out of the text. This is in opposition to *eisegesis*, which means to lead into, the idea being to read meaning into the text which may not have been the author's intended meaning.

## AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM



### NOTES

#### BIBLICAL CRITICISM

The term criticism is often used negatively. To criticize is understood as demeaning or finding fault with someone or something. It is important to recognize that these negative connotations of the term criticism do not apply to its use in biblical studies.

The term criticism as it is used in biblical studies has to do with analysis and evaluation, without necessarily finding fault. The concern of biblical criticism is to provide an accurate analysis of the Scripture. This is critical and crucial for proper interpretation.

The concern is not to be judgmental, but rather to be as precise as possible. Consequently, critical methods in biblical studies (historical criticism, literary criticism, source criticism, etc.) reflect a desire for accuracy in biblical understanding and interpretation.

#### BRIEF HISTORY OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM

*Literary Criticism* is the study and evaluation of literature as artistic production. It is concerned with the rhetorical, poetic, and compositional devices used by an author to structure thought and communicate messages.

*Source Criticism* has sought to identify sources (in Genesis through Deuteronomy, also called The Pentateuch, for example) based on such elements as repetitions and language and style tendencies, and variations in theology. It is concerned with placing each source in its historical context, and tracing its development and incorporation into the final form of the text. One of the major results of source criticism in the Old Testament is the four-source Pentateuchal theory (the theory that the Pentateuch is actually the compilation of four different sources).

*Form Criticism* is concerned with identifying the origin and function of a biblical text based on its form. We recognize forms of language that relate to specific situations. For example, when you hear the following terms, you know that they refer to a specific setting: ram, megabyte, virtual memory, disk, hard drive, etc. These terms reflect the setting of the computer world.


**NOTES**

In a similar fashion, biblical form criticism seeks to identify and classify units of oral or written material and relate them to their setting in the life of the community. This type of investigation has been especially productive in classifying the Psalms (laments, hymns of praise, songs of thanksgiving, etc.). This approach to the investigation of the Bible has also influenced the classification of biblical material into genres including legal material, historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, etc.

### THOUGHTS AND QUOTES ON BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

- “. . . the message of the Bible is solidly grounded in history.”
- “It follows that the biblical writings cannot be correctly understood without an examination of the historical circumstances that shaped them.”
- One cannot study the Bible in the same way one studies human literature. “As the exegete (one who practices exegesis) must keep in mind the historical character of the revelation of the word of God through human means, even so the exegete must also recognize the ultimate source of that revelation as Divine.”
- “The Holy Spirit is considered the principal author of the Bible.”
- “The Christian exegete is not just searching for the intent of the biblical authors and editors, but for the message of the Holy Spirit as principal author of the texts. Thus, the exegete must be sensitive to the guidance of the Spirit, through prayer, meditation, and in the direction given through the church.”

(Quotes taken from: *Pontifical Biblical Commission*, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” *Origins* 23 (1994): front, 499-524.)

## APPLICATION

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**NOTES**

1. Look at the learner objectives for this session. Can you:
  - identify various ways in which God communicates to humanity?
  - recognize the unique importance of God's revelation through Scripture?
  - express the significance of inspiration as it is applied to the Bible?
  - comprehend an introductory exposure to historical criticism as it has been applied to the Old Testament?
2. Read the following passages: Ps. 104:24, Ps. 19:1-7, Rom. 1:20. Think about what these texts imply in relation to God's revelation to people. What do the mighty acts of God communicate His nature and will?
3. Based on your own recollection of Bible events, make a timeline from creation to the time of Jesus. Simply list any significant Old Testament events, in order between creation and the birth of Jesus. Don't worry about including any dates.



## EXAM



### NOTES

1. God's Word is communicated by \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. the Bible
  - B. through nature
  - C. through divine action in relation to humanity
  - D. all of the above and more
2. God's revelation is not involved with human life and history.
  - A. True
  - B. False
3. There are many views and theories concerning the way God inspired the Bible.
  - A. True
  - B. False
4. The Church of the Nazarene recognizes God made use of imperfect humans in the transmission of the written Word of God.
  - A. True
  - B. False
5. The Church of the Nazarene teaches that God has ensured, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the message necessary for our salvation has been clearly preserved throughout the history of the transmission of the biblical text.
  - A. True
  - B. False
6. The Church of the Nazarene uses \_\_\_\_\_ (to read out of the Scriptures their intended meaning) to interpret the Bible.
  - A. *exegesis*
  - B. *eisegesis*
  - C. *exojesus*
  - D. all of the above
7. Biblical criticism has to do with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. demeaning or finding fault with the Bible
  - B. providing an accurate analysis of the Scripture
  - C. what you say about your pastor's sermon at Sunday lunch
  - D. none of the above

**NOTES**

8. Literary criticism is concerned with the rhetorical, poetic, and compositional devices used by an author to structure thought and communicate messages.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
9. Source criticism has sought to identify sources based on such elements as repetitions and language and style tendencies, and variations in theology is really not concerned with placing each source in its historical context, and tracing its development and incorporation into the final form of the text.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
10. Form criticism is used to do which of the following \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. seeks to identify and classify units of oral or written material
  - B. seeks to relate oral and written material to their setting in the life of the community
  - C. helps with the classification of biblical material into genres
  - D. all of the above
  - E. none of the above

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. What are the primary ways in which God reveals Himself?
2. Of literary, form and source criticism, which seems most important to you, if any?
3. Which, *exegesis* or *eisegesis*, seems the better method of interpretation? Why? Which do you believe is most common in preaching?
4. If God reveals himself through nature, why is scriptural revelation important?
5. What are your thoughts on the Church of the Nazarene's article of faith concerning scriptural interpretation? Which points seem correct to you? Which, if any, might you see as needing revision?
6. What are some different theories on God's inspiration of Scripture? Why does it matter which method of scriptural inspiration our denomination teaches?