

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Telling the Old Testament
Story of God



SESSION 2

Literary, Historical, and Geographic Divisions and
Important Archaeological Discoveries

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Literary, Historical, and Geographic Divisions and Important Archaeological Discoveries

SESSION OVERVIEW

Major Literary and Historical Divisions of the Old Testament

Peoples and Places Significant to the Old Testament

Archaeological Discoveries Related to the Old Testament

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- recognize the different content and divisions between the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant canons of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament).
- identify traditional dates attached to major periods of Old Testament history and significant events.
- recognize the background of the ancient Near East (peoples and places).
- appreciate significant archaeological discoveries pertaining to the ancient Near East.
- identify the contribution of ancient Near Eastern archaeological finds to the understanding of the Old Testament.

Literary, Historical, and Geographic Divisions and Important Archaeological Discoveries

INTRODUCTION



In this session we continue to investigate background concerns to the study of the Old Testament. We will examine ways in which the Old Testament and its content have been organized historically, by type of literature and by location. As well, we will look at the peoples and places making up the greater context of the ancient Near East. We will discuss significant archaeological discoveries that pertain to the Old Testament.

Don't be overwhelmed by the technical-sounding terms, or by the number of items. You aren't being asked to memorize, only to see that people, places, and archaeology have played a significant role in our understanding of the Old Testament.

MAJOR LITERARY AND HISTORICAL DIVISIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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The word canon is derived from the Hebrew word meaning measuring reed. The canon refers to the official writings accepted as authoritative by a particular religious group, and recognized as Divine revelation. For example, we consider Genesis through Revelation to be the Christian canon. The Gospel of Peter is not canonical, not a part of the canon.

The Hebrew Scriptures refers to the scriptures originally accepted as canonical by the Hebrew- Aramaic speaking Jews in Palestine. These scriptures are also called the Old Testament. The books of the Old Testament have been accepted as being canonical, or authority-bearing, by Christians. Note the following differences for Jews, Catholics, and Protestants in the makeup and organization of the canon:

Difference between Jewish and Christian (Catholic and Protestant) canons. Both Jews and Christians see the revelation of God in the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures. Jews do not, however, see JESUS as a binding revelation of God, or the Messiah. Thus, Jews do not accept the New Testament as authoritative scripture (i.e., the New Testament is not part of the Jewish canon of scripture). The Protestant and Jewish canons of the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament are the same (though organized differently).

Difference between Catholic and Protestant canons. Since most of the ancient world became Greek-speaking, including the world of the ancient Hebrews, the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament was translated into Greek. This Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament was called the Septuagint. Catholics recognize seven extra books which were included in the Septuagint as being authoritative, or canonical.

Early Christians used the Greek Septuagint more commonly than the Hebrew Bible. All seven of these extra books were referred to by authors of the New Testament, along with other writings not accepted in any contemporary canon of scripture (i.e., Enoch, Assumption of Moses). A number of terms are used to identify various collections of books generally considered outside of the canon of scripture. It is helpful to distinguish between these terms and the collections to which they refer. Note the following definitions:

- Apocrypha. Hidden books. Protestants often use this designation to refer to the seven deuterocanonical books, as well as some additional material that does not appear in any traditionally accepted canon. This name is used most commonly.



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- Deuterocanonical. Literally, second canon. It refers to the seven extra books in the Catholic canon which are not recognized in the Jewish or Protestant canon. These books include Judith, Tobit, Baruch, I and II Maccabees, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon.
- Pseudepigrapha. Literally, false writings. It was given this title because many of these books claim the author to be some great religious hero of ancient times, such as Enoch or Moses. However, the books are likely not written by these persons. Protestants apply the term Pseudepigrapha to still other noncanonical books. Catholics, however, apply the term apocrypha to the deuterocanonical books and to pseudepigraphal works.

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Archaeological Periods. Ancient times are often identified broadly in terms of archaeological periods. Though these periods can be broken down into a number of divisions, there are three major archaeological periods related to the material out of which tools are made at the time, as follows:

- Stone Age: Prehistoric times to about 3500 BC.
- Bronze Age: 3500 BC to about 1200 BC.
- Iron Age: From about 1200 BC forward.

Major Biblical Periods. Major historical periods in the Bible are also often identified according to important events, figures, or national dominance. The dates given below are debated among scholars.

- Primeval History. "Belonging to the first or earliest age(s)." This includes the accounts of creation, the Flood, and the tower of Babel.
- Patriarchal/Matriarchal Period. 1900-1800 BC; Abraham/Sarah, Isaac/Rebekah, and Jacob/Leah/Rachel.
- Exodus. 1280 BC; the period of the Exodus from Egypt; period when God brought the descendants of Jacob from slavery in Egypt.
- Conquest. 1250-1200 BC; period of the conquest (military takeover) of Canaan.
- Judges. 1200-1020 BC; period of the judges who governed over the various tribes of the Hebrew people.

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- United Monarchy. 1020-922 BC; Reign of Saul, first king of the nation of Israel (1020-1000 BC). Reign of David, second king of Israel (1000-961 BC). Reign of Solomon (961-922 BC).
- Divided Monarchy. 922-722/721 BC; the split of the Kingdom into North (Israel) and South (Judah) (922 BC).
- Fall of Israel (Samaria). 722/721 BC; fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel at the hands of Assyria.
- Fall of Judah (Jerusalem). 587 BC; fall of Jerusalem, as the Southern Kingdom of Judah is taken into exile to Babylon.
- Exilic Period. 587-538 BC; period in which the Southern Kingdom of Judah is in exile in Babylon.
- Postexilic Period. 538 BC+. In 538 BC, the edict of Cyrus released the Jews to return to Palestine.

PEOPLES AND PLACES SIGNIFICANT TO THE OLD TESTAMENT



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KEY LOCATIONS AND CIVILIZATIONS

The following terms identify some important locations and civilizations related to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. It is strongly recommended that you track the locations mentioned below on a world map containing a detailed view of the Middle East.

Ancient Near East. This region includes the boundaries of Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Turkey. Locate the Ancient Near East on any world map. This is the location of all Old Testament narratives.

Semitic. A classification of ethnic groups bound together mainly by the type of language they spoke. This is important to Old Testament study because Hebrew is a Semitic language.

Fertile Crescent. A wide arc of agricultural land extending from the Nile valley in Egypt, through Palestine and Northern Syria, and then down along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to the Persian Gulf. Due to the surrounding deserts and mountains, this fertile farmland was most valuable, and Palestine was right in the midst of it.

Palestine. The location of Palestine is significant, as it forms a natural highway for merchants and invaders moving between the greater empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia and also Turkey. Though mountainous and desert in terrain, this area was a strategic passage between major civilizations.

Gift of the Nile. This is a term attributed to Egypt by the Greek historian Herodotus. Rainfall was rare, and life revolved around the water of the river Nile, which provided drink, irrigation, communication, and transportation.

Mesopotamia. The region northeast of the Jerusalem in which the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers run. This area includes present-day Iraq.

Hyksos. Foreign invaders (Semitic) from Asia who dominated Egypt from 1750 to 1550 BC.

Philistines. Part of the groups of Sea peoples who tried to invade Egypt and finally settled along the coast of Palestine. The Sea peoples were groups of Indo-Europeans who migrated down through Turkey, Greece, and the islands of Crete

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and Cyprus. These invasions occurred around the middle of the 12th century (period of the judges). Goliath was a Philistine, and Philistines play prominently in the Old Testament, including in the story of Sampson.

Sumerians. At the beginning of the Bronze Age, the Sumerians appear in lower Mesopotamia. Sumerians invented writing about 3200 BC. They appear to have developed the potter's wheel, the first systematic law books, the concept of collecting proverbs and wisdom sayings, and formal schools.

Babylon and Assyria. After the short-lived empire of Sargon, northern and southern Mesopotamia developed differently. The southern region was called after its chief city, Babylon. The northern component was called Assyria. Babylon and Assyria were settled by related Semitic peoples and shared the same language and culture. Babylon had two centuries of early greatness under Hammurabi and his successors (1750-1550 BC).

Syria. Thanks to tablets from Ugarit and Ebla, cities in Syria, it has been revealed that the religious ideas the Israelites encountered in Palestine were close to the thought of the peoples of Syria and Phoenicia.

Edom, Moab, and Ammon. About the time of the Exodus from Egypt, new groups began to settle the Transjordan (area East of the Jordan River), including Edom, Moab, and Ammon. In the Bible, these groups are continually hostile to Israel.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES RELATED TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

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DISCOVERIES RELATED TO MESOPOTAMIA

Cuneiform. Wedge-shaped writing system used in Mesopotamia. Cuneiform is not a single language, but rather a system of writing used for different languages such as: Sumerian (related to no other known language), Akkadian (language of the Semitic family), Hittite (an Indo-European language).

Library of Assyrian King Ashurbanipal (668- 633) in Nineveh. Site of one of the earliest groups of tablets discovered. The library is dated from the 7th century BC. The king instructed his scribes to seek out and make copies of earlier texts; copies which were deposited in the king's library. This library revealed parallel accounts to the biblical stories, such as: a Babylonian creation account, and a flood story.

Nuzi Tablets. The town of Nuzi to the east of the Tigris in Mesopotamia yielded clay documents giving insight into the culture of the 2nd millennium BC. Some of the customs portrayed in these tablets seem to reflect the customs of patriarchs like Abraham and Isaac, including legal and social structures. The collection includes 20,000 clay tablets dated to the 15th century BC. These were found in the family archives of several of the villas of the town.

The Black Obelisk. A memorial column erected by King Shalmaneser III of Assyria that depicts King Jehu of Israel bowing down to submit to Assyrian rule. Jehu's story is told in 2 Kings chapters 9 and 10.

Sennacherib's Prism. It includes a detailed account of the attack on Jerusalem by King Sennacherib of Assyria. In this account, Sennacherib does not admit defeat but hints he failed to take Jerusalem. The biblical account of this battle claims Jerusalem was spared by divine intervention after an oracle was pronounced by Isaiah (1 Kings 18-19).

Enuma Elish. Ancient creation story. This is a Babylonian-Sumerian epic concerning how the god Marduk overcame the god Tiamat and formed heaven and earth from her body. This account is older than Genesis chapter 1 and is considered to have some parallels to the first chapter of Genesis.

Gilgamesh Epic. Ancient flood story found among Babylonian tablets. The epic concerns a hero, Utnapishtim, who was saved in a ship with people and animals from a great flood.


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Law Code of Hammurabi of Babylon. This is the most famous collection of laws from ancient Mesopotamia. It is dated from the 18th century BC and has added insight to legal sections of the Old Testament.

DISCOVERY RELATED TO ASIA MINOR

Cappadocian Documents. In Kanesh of Anatolia these documents were found, dating to around 1900 BC, which gave information concerning trade, caravans, legal procedures, and various customs.

DISCOVERIES RELATED TO SYRIA

Ugarit. This is the second major site in Syria containing significant groups of texts. Deciphered in 1930, these texts have revolutionized our understanding of the Canaanite religion and clarified many obscure biblical passages. The Ugarit has also helped in the translation of certain Hebrew roots.

Archives of Mari. Located on the upper Euphrates River in Syria, these archives produced information about tribal society among early northwest Semitic peoples. They also contain information on the backgrounds of the prophets in later Israel.

DISCOVERIES RELATED TO EGYPT

Rosetta Stone. Accidental find by Napoleon's soldiers when he invaded Egypt in 1798. The stone was found at a place called Rosetta on the Nile Delta. It is written in Greek and both forms of the Egyptian language: Hieroglyphic (ancient picture writing) and Demotic (late form of Egyptian). Scholars who knew Greek could then translate the meaning of the Egyptian languages.

French scholar Jean François Champollion finally broke the system. He steeped himself in Coptic (the surviving descendant of the language of ancient Egypt), and with the help of the work of others, he laid the foundation for full recovery of the ancient language (Hieroglyphic). Because of this work, inscriptions that covered the walls of tombs and temples of ancient Egypt became accessible to interpretation.

Amarna Letters. Cuneiform tablets found in ruins of the capital of Pharaoh Amenophis IV. These revealed information about international relations in the 14th century BC, and specifically about the city-states in Canaan. The letters include correspondence between Babylonian and Canaanite rulers to Pharaohs Amenhotep III and Akhenaton. Some include letters from Canaanite city-states requesting help against the *hapiru* a word possibly related to the word Hebrew.


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Merneptah Stele. A stele is an upright slab or pillar similar to a tombstone containing a poem commissioned by Pharaoh Merneptah celebrating his victories over the Libyans. The conclusion of the poem describes the results of this victory. The peoples of Asia were impressed and submitted to Egypt without trouble. In the list of Asiatic lands and peoples was discovered the first occurrence of the name Israel outside the Bible. The Stele is dated about 1220 BC.

Sheshonq Inscription. This Pharaoh attacked Israel and Judah in 918 BC. The attack is recorded in 1 Kings 14:25-26. The Pharaoh also recorded an account of the attack on the walls of the temple of Karnak in Thebes.

Hittite Treaty. Ramses II (1290-1224 BC) sought to regain Egyptian power in Asia. He came to acknowledge that the Hittites of Asia Minor were a major force to be reckoned with. Therefore, he formed a nonaggression treaty with the Hittites. The treaty has been preserved in both Egyptian and Hittite forms. It has been argued that the pattern of the treaty is similar to the literary form of the Sinai covenant.

Tale of Sinuhe the Traveler. An Egyptian writer (a fugitive from the Egyptian king) in this story gives a description of the land in the general area of Palestine. The glowing account of parts of the land has been associated with the biblical phrase referring to the land as flowing with milk and honey. This story is dated about 1900 BC.

DISCOVERIES RELATED TO PALESTINE

Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls. These are scrolls found in caves near Khirbet Qumran, on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. The scrolls are a major group of documents, among others found in caves and ruins located from the Wadi (river) Daliyeh north of Jericho to Masada toward the southern end of the Dead Sea. The scrolls date from the 4th century BC to 8th century AD.

Arad. Originally was an Early Bronze Age city. It yielded the discovery of ostraca (potsherds with writing in ink on them) containing commercial and political accounts dating from about 700 BC.

Lachish. Important ostraca found at this site shed light on the invasion by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 598 BC.

Siloam Inscription. An inscription carved in script typical of 8th century BC. It describes the final phases of the digging of the Siloam tunnel under Jerusalem to bring the waters of the spring Gihon within the city walls. The project was

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probably undertaken by Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:30; Eccles. 48:17). Found in the tunnel itself, the inscription described how two work groups digging from opposite ends successfully met in the middle.

Moabite Stone. The Moabite stone is a stone carved for King Mesha of Moab commemorating his war against the rule of Israelite kings in the 9th century B.C. The stone gives insight into Moabite writing, religion, and relationship to Israel. It names Omri as the king of Israel who subjugated Moab before Mesha freed it.

Samaria Ostraca. A few potsherds with notations regarding the delivery of olive oil and wine, possibly from the royal warehouses of Jeroboam II or Menahem, kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Look at the learner objectives for this session. Can you:
 - recognize the different content and divisions between the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant canons of the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament)?
 - identify traditional dates attached to major periods of Old Testament history and significant events?
 - recognize the background of the ancient Near East (peoples and places)?
 - appreciate significant archaeological discoveries pertaining to the Ancient Near East?
 - identify the contribution of Ancient Near Eastern archaeological finds to the understanding of the Old Testament?
2. Scan through different sections of the Old Testament and list at least 15 people groups (nations, tribes, etc.) and/or places (countries, or regions, or cities/towns).
3. Write in a journal. Include your reflections and insights from this session and from your reading and study. Include a discussion of: What did you learn about archaeological discoveries and how they support, add to, or detract from scripture?

EXAM


NOTES

1. Mesopotamia includes present-day_____.
 A. Hungary
 B. Sweden
 C. Ireland
 D. Iraq

2. The word canon is derived from the Hebrew word meaning _____.
 A. Large gun
 B. Short stick
 C. Measuring reed
 D. Loud noise

3. The Septuagint is a translation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament into _____.
 A. Greek
 B. English
 C. Latin
 D. Aramaic

4. Both Catholics and Protestants include the same number of books in the Old Testament canon.
 A. True
 B. False

5. Early Christians used the Hebrew Bible more commonly than the Septuagint.
 A. True
 B. False

6. The Protestant and Jewish canons of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) _____.
 A. Are the same (though organized/divided differently)
 B. Include completely different books
 C. Are never to be placed in the same room
 D. Date from different time periods

7. The major archaeological periods relate to the material out of which tools are made at the time.
 A. True
 B. False

 **NOTES**

8. Major historical periods in the Bible are often identified according to important events, figures, or national dominance.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. This period includes the accounts of creation, the Flood, and the tower of Babel.
 - A. Exilic Period
 - B. Patriarchal/Matriarchal Period
 - C. Crustaceous Period
 - D. Primeval History

10. The Gilgamesh Epic _____.
 - A. Has its origins in Asia
 - B. Concerns a hero, Utnapishtim, who was saved in a ship with people and animals from a great flood
 - C. Concerns the creation of the world from a battle between the Babylonian gods Marduk and Tiamat
 - D. Is the tragic story of a three-hour boat tour which never returned to port

11. During the Exilic Period, God's people were exiled into _____.
 - A. Assyria
 - B. Indiana
 - C. Babylon
 - D. Judea

12. In 538 BC, the edict of Cyrus released the Jews to return to Palestine, beginning the Postexilic Period.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Choose one of the people, places, or archaeological discoveries detailed above and discuss its significance to understanding the Old Testament.
2. Which of the items above surprised you? Did any make you think differently about the ways in which the Old Testament came about?
3. What might it mean for our understanding of the Old Testament that the Epic of Gilgamesh seems to bear similarity to the story of Noah's ark, and that the Enuma Elish bears some parallels to the creation account in Genesis 1?
4. What might the Black Obelisk do to aid those who would argue for the historical accuracy of the book of 2 Kings, if anything?
5. What is meant by the word canon?
6. What are the differences in the Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant Hebrew Bible/Old Testament canonical books?
7. What are the different names by which the apocrypha is called, and what does each name, including apocrypha mean?