Kingdom, Covenant & Canon of the Old Testament

Lesson 4

The Canon of the Old Testament

Lesson Guide

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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or manuscript versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**

    o **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.

    o **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.

- **While you are watching the lesson**

    o **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.

    o **Record comments and questions —** As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.

    o **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.

- **After you watch the lesson**

    o **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.

    o **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I.   Introduction (0:28)

The Scriptures were designed to be the canon or standard of faith and life for every generation of God's people.

II.   Canon as Mirror (3:04)

When we approach the Old Testament canon as a mirror, we look for the ways the Old Testament reflects on themes or topics that are important to us as we seek to be faithful to God ("thematic analysis").

A.   Basis (5:13)

1.   Character of Scripture (6:11)

The Old Testament consists of smaller elements and segments that come together to form larger sections, which form entire books.

Thematic analysis recognizes the entire range of the significance of biblical passages, often drawing attention to minor topics.

It is appropriate to benefit from related themes of Scripture as long as we don't read our own ideas into them.

2.   Biblical Examples (10:40)

Biblical writers and authoritative characters often drew attention to relatively minor aspects of Old Testament passages.

The writer of Hebrews drew upon minor themes in the stories of Jephthah and Samson for positive examples of faith (Hebrews 11:32-34).

B.   Focus (13:45)

Although we can focus on a wide variety of issues in the Old Testament, certain topics typically move to the foreground in thematic analysis.

1.   Doctrines (14:41)

For millennia, the Old Testament has been viewed as a source of authoritative teachings on traditional doctrinal issues.

- Christian theologians often ask questions that derive from the topics of systematic theology.

- Doctrinal thematic analysis often takes the form of proof texts.

2.   Examples (16:58)

We look to the Old Testament for characters whom we should imitate or reject (e.g., David).

Searching for examples is a legitimate way to delve into the authoritative teaching of the Old Testament.

3.   Personal Needs (18:55)

Thematic analysis helps us discern how Old Testament passages address issues that believers face in their personal lives.

III.   Canon as Window (21:52)

We can approach the Old Testament canon as a window that allows us to see into past events and what the Old Testament says about these events ("historical analysis").

A.   Basis (24:05)

1.   Character of Scripture (25:11)

The Old Testament is inspired, or "breathed out by God," so every claim the Scriptures make is true (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Old Testament is highly selective in the history it reports. (John 21:25).

As followers of the risen Christ, we should have no trouble believing the supernatural events described in the Old Testament.

Three reasons why the Old Testament might seem to contradict scientific evidence:

- Scientists misunderstand the evidence supporting their claims against the Scriptures.

- Biblical interpreters have misunderstood the Old Testament itself.

- Scientists and biblical interpreters are prone to error.

The divine inspiration of Scripture establishes its historical veracity.

2.   **Biblical Examples(36:23)**

Scripture contains many examples of biblical authors and characters who affirmed the Old Testament's historical veracity.

The writer of Chronicles relied on the historicity of the Old Testament in his genealogies (1 Chronicles 1:1-4).

Stephen spoke of Old Testament historical figures and affirmed that the stories about them were factual (Acts 7).

B.   **Focus (40:02)**

The Old Testament has been used to discover the actions and words of God in the past and to apply their theological significance to God's people.

The term "biblical theology" can refer to several different approaches to the Scriptures.

1.   **Synchronic Snapshot (41:40)**

Biblical theologians focus on a period of biblical history and then summarize what took place during that period.

There are many ways to create synchronic snapshots:

- historical periods

    o   the primeval history

    o   the history of the nation of Israel

    o   the future New Testament history

- covenantal periods
  - universal covenants
    - Adam
    - Noah
  - national covenants
    - Abraham
    - Moses
    - David
  - new covenant
    - inauguration
    - continuation
    - consummation

The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 7 refers to the period of the "covenant of works" and the "covenant of grace."

Geerhardus Vos divided the Old Testament according to major shifts in divine revelation.

Biblical theologians typically focus on the more formative or central events of biblical history. For example:

- period of promise

- period of law

2.   Diachronic Trace (49:50)

A diachronic trace focuses on the ways God's actions and words connect with each other through time from one period to another.

When we compare the formative events of various periods of biblical history, we recognize alignments or affinities between them.

As an example of diachronic tracing, we can look at God's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham (Genesis 15:18):

- God first established humanity as his royal priests and instructed them to take dominion over the entire earth (Genesis 1:28).

- In Noah's day, God maintained his command to spread his kingdom to the ends of the earth. (Genesis 9:1).

- In the period of the patriarchs, God's promise of land was a step toward an even greater fulfillment in the future (Genesis 22:18).

- In the time of Moses, God established Israel in the Promised Land as the nation's homeland (Joshua 1:6).

- In David's day, the security provided by David's house solidified and expanded the initial conquest of the land (Psalm 72:8-17)

- Had Israel been faithful at the time of restoration after exile, dominion would have spread throughout the world (Haggai 2:7-9).

- God acted in Christ to reverse the curse of the exile and to bring fulfillment of the dominion of redeemed humanity over the earth (Revelation 2:26).

Looking through the Old Testament to the history that it reports is a vital way to discern the significance of the Old Testament canon.

IV.   Canon as Picture (1:02:27)

By approaching the books of the Old Testament as pictures, we focus on how biblical writers designed their books to impact their original audiences ("literary analysis").

A.   Basis (1:05:34)

1.   **Character of Scripture (1:06:00)**

Literary analysis is based on at least three features of the Old Testament Canon:

- Literary Units:

    The Old Testament is a collection of books written to address the needs of ancient Israel over 1000 years.

    The names of Old Testament books are not original.

    The order of Old Testament has differed throughout history.

    To approach the Old Testament canon as a picture, we should concentrate on understanding each book as a unit.

- Literary Qualities:

    Old Testament books display sophisticated literary qualities.

The books of the Old Testament are among the most elaborate literary works known from the ancient world.

Understanding the Old Testament's literary qualities helps us grasp how authors sought to impact their audiences.

- Literary Variety

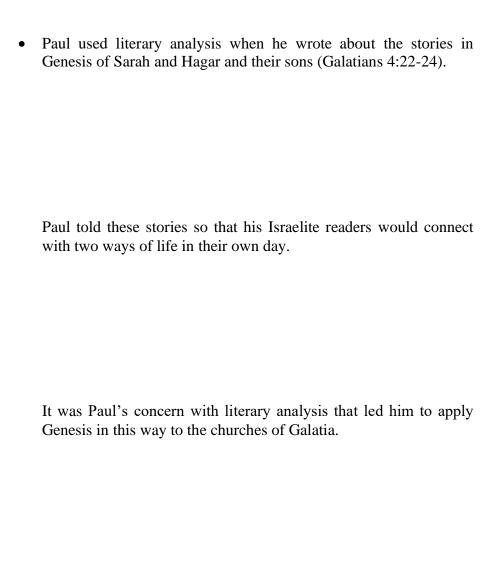 The books of the Old Testament represent a variety of genres or types of literature.

  Each genre had its own ways of impacting audiences.

2.   **Biblical Examples (1:15:23)**

When biblical writers and characters approached the Old Testament, they often employed a kind of literary analysis.

- Jesus focused on literary analysis as he dealt with what Moses wrote about divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1 (Mark 10:4-5).

- Paul used literary analysis when he wrote about the stories in Genesis of Sarah and Hagar and their sons (Galatians 4:22-24).

Paul told these stories so that his Israelite readers would connect with two ways of life in their own day.

It was Paul's concern with literary analysis that led him to apply Genesis in this way to the churches of Galatia.

B.   Focus (1:21:34)

It is crucial in literary analysis that the grammar of a biblical text be viewed in light of the author and original audience.

1.   Writer (1:22:41)

God used the backgrounds, thoughts, feelings, and intentions of his chosen human authors to create the books of the canon.

Dangers and benefits of focusing on the writer:

- Dangers: "the intentional fallacy" – giving too much weight to reconstructions of a writer's intentions

- Benefits: A careful and responsible focus on biblical authors lets us grasp many things that will help us understand their writings.

To illustrate the benefits of focusing on the Bible's authors, we can compare the author of Kings with the author of Chronicles:

Author of Kings	Author of Chronicles
wrote during Israel's exile in Babylon	wrote after Israel's release from captivity
among the educated elite	among the educated elite
emphasized God's justice in sending Israel into exile	emphasized the practical steps needed after returning to the Promised Land
focused on Israel's need to repent	focused on the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience

2. **Audience (1:29:34)**

Responsible literary analysis of the Old Testament also considers the original audience.

Dangers and benefits of focusing on the original audience:

- Dangers: "the affective fallacy" – overemphasizing our speculations and reconstructions of the original audience

- Benefits: We frequently know lots of helpful information about the audience's general location, major events, and covenant responsibilities before God.

To illustrate the benefits of focusing on the original audience, we can compare the audiences of Kings and Chronicles:

- The audience of Kings was in exile and needed to understand that repentance was required before they could return to the Promised Land.

- The audience of Chronicles had returned to the Promised Land and needed to grow in devotion to rebuilding God's kingdom in Israel.

3.   Document (1:34:35)

The documents of Scripture are the primary focus of literary analysis because they are the fully-authoritative Word of God.

Dangers and benefits of focusing on the document:

- Dangers: "the graphic fallacy" – focusing exclusively on the document and ignoring the writer and original audience.

- Benefits: The particular features of the document, all contribute greatly to discovering the original meaning and modern applications of Scripture.

We gain the most benefits when we consider every passage in light of the writer and the original audience. For instance:

- In 2 Kings 21, there is not one positive feature of Manasseh's reign.

- In 2 Chronicles 33, the account of Manasseh's reign starts by paralleling Kings, but then recounts that Manasseh repented, worked to rebuild the city, and restored proper worship of God.

The notable differences in records of Manasseh's life can be explained by their different writers and audiences.

Authors designed their writing to emphasize particular ways their original audience were to live.

V.   Conclusion (1:45:14)

Review Questions

1. How is the use of the Canon as a mirror justified by the character of Scripture and biblical examples?

2. Describe the three common focuses of thematic analysis.

3.   How do the character of Scripture and biblical examples provide a basis for using the Canon as a window to history?

4.   How do synchronic snapshots and diachronic traces function? Why are they useful?

5.   How do the character of Scripture and biblical examples provide the basis for viewing the Canon as a picture?

6.   Describe the value of a threefold focus on the writer, audience and document in literary analysis.

Application Questions

1. Describe a situation in which you might appropriate thematic analysis to gain guidance and insight for a personal concern.

2. Have you ever found it difficult to believe the historical events of the Bible? Why should Christians believe the supernatural events of the Old Testament?

3. How does understanding the diachronic trace of biblical events enrich your understanding of Scripture?

4. Give an example of how knowing the writer's intentions can help you understand Scripture better.

5. In literary analysis, how can you avoid the fallacies regarding the writer, the audience, and the document?

6. In what ways is the Bible like any other book? In what ways is it different? How should these similarities and differences affect the way you read it?

7. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study? Why?

Glossary

Abraham – Old Testament patriarch, son of Terah, father of the nation of Israel with whom God made a covenant in Genesis 15 and 17 promising innumerable descendants and a special land

affective fallacy – Interpretive mistake of focusing too heavily on how a passage of Scripture affected its original audience

biblical theology – Theological reflection drawn from the historical analysis of acts of God reported in Scripture

canon – Authoritative standard; the exclusive collection of documents in the Judeo-Christian tradition recognized as Scripture

covenant – A binding legal agreement made between two people or groups of people, or between God and a person or group of people

covenant of grace – The covenant relationship God established with humanity after the fall into sin that provides forgiveness and redemption on the basis of God's mercy in Christ

covenant of works – God's covenant made with Adam that emphasized the goals of God's kingdom and the role of human beings in his kingdom

Cyrus – Persian emperor from 559-530 B.C. who decreed that the Israelites could return to the Promised Land

David – Second Old Testament king of Israel who received the promise that his descendant would sit on the throne and reign forever

diachronic – Occurring across a period of time

diachronic trace – Term for the ways biblical events connect with each other through time, from one period to another

doctrine – A synthesis and explanation of biblical teachings on a theological topic

exegesis – From a Greek term meaning "led out of" or "derived from"; the process of drawing out the proper interpretation of a passage of Scripture

Galileo – (1564-1642) Italian astronomer, philosopher, scientist and mathematician who made countless contributions to modern science and challenged the traditional belief that the earth was the center of the universe

Goliath – Great Philistine warrior who challenged Israel to fight him and was killed by young David

grammatico-historical method – A method of hermeneutics which investigates the Scriptures in their original languages and in view of their original contexts

graphic fallacy – Interpretive mistake of overemphasizing the document itself, to the relative exclusion of contextual considerations like the writer and audience

Hagar – Sarah's handmaid who slept with Abraham and gave birth to Ishmael

historical analysis – An exegetical approach to the Bible that views Scripture as a window to history

intentional fallacy – Interpretive mistake of relying too heavily on what we think we know about a writer and his intentions, and de-emphasizing the things we learn about the document and audience

Isaac – Son of Abraham and Sarah; heir of God's covenant promises

Ishmael – Son of Abraham and Hagar

Jehoiachin – (also Joachin, Jeconiah, Coniah) Son of Jehoiakim and king of Judah for three months before surrendering to Babylon

Jephthah – A judge in Israel who defeated the Ammonites and made a vow that led him to kill his only child, a daughter

Josephus – (A.D. 37-ca. 100) Jewish historian from the 1st century A.D. who wrote *Antiquities*

King Manasseh – King of Judah who ruled for 55 years; known for his evil acts and idolatry and for leading Judah astray; was exiled to Babylon and later repented

literary analysis – An exegetical approach to the Bible that views Scripture as a literary portrait designed to influence readers in a particular way

national covenant – A covenant made with an individual who represented the nation of Israel (Abraham, Moses, and David)

new covenant – The covenant of fulfillment in Christ; first mentioned in Jeremiah 31:31

organic inspiration – View of inspiration that asserts that the Holy Spirit used the personalities, experiences, outlooks, and intentions of human authors as he authoritatively and infallibly guided their writing

proof text – A reference to a specific Scripture passage used to support a doctrinal position

Samson – A judge in Israel who was known for his supernatural strength; deceived by Delilah into disclosing the secret of his strength and died by pulling down a pagan temple on top of himself and 3000 Philistines

Sarah – Abraham's wife, originally called Sarai, who gave birth to Isaac at an old age

Septuagint – Greek translation of the Old Testament

Stephen – A deacon in the early church at Jerusalem who was known for his faith and for being full of the Spirit of God; considered the first Christian martyr (see Acts 6-7)

synchronic – Occurring at the same point in time

synchronic snapshot – A focus on a set period of time in order to summarize the complex network of God's acts and words during that period

systematic theology – A theological discipline that seeks to give a rational and orderly presentation of the doctrinal truths of Christianity

Tanakh – An acronym for the Hebrew Bible derived from the first letters of the Hebrew words for "Law" (T), "Prophets" (N), and "Writings" (K)

thematic analysis – An exegetical approach to the Bible that views Scripture as a mirror that reflects the readers' interests and questions

Torah – In Judaism, term for the Law given to Moses in the first five books of the Old Testament (also called the Pentateuch)

universal covenant – A covenant made with an individual who represented all of mankind (Adam and Noah)

Vos, Geerhardus – (1862-1949) Theologian and Chair of Biblical Theology at Princeton Seminary for 39 years; sometimes called the father of Reformed Biblical Theology

Westminster Confession of Faith — An ecumenical doctrinal summary composed by the Westminster Assembly of Divines and published in 1647