

Confirmation 2020-21
Session 3 – Old Testament
September 27, 2020

It is likely that for your entire life, you have referred to the first section of the Bible, the Hebrew Bible, as “the Old Testament” and there is nothing wrong with that. You probably aren’t aware that there is a movement within the larger Christian church to call the Old Testament the “Hebrew Bible” rather than the Old Testament. Personally, I don’t think it’s going to catch on. Behind the movement is the idea that calling something “old” is to say that it has less importance or out of touch.

And at the same time, we want to avoid the temptation to say that all the Christian really needs to know is the New Testament, after all, that is where Jesus shows up, and so it must be the only important stuff in the Bible. The fact is, even in church though we read Readings from the Old Testament, I as the preacher, rarely preach on them or even refer to them, so I can see how one might conclude that there isn’t anything in them worth our time.

But Jesus was Jewish, and the Old Testament was all that Jews of his generation had, and so the Old Testament was essential to his ministry of bringing about the Kingdom of God. So for that reason alone, we should hold it in high regard.

The identity of the Old Testament is a profound one. Its complex, it’s huge, and it is beyond important to more than just Christians. In these ways, it’s similar to the character of the God we find portrayed in that part of the Bible. God’s relationship with God’s people in Genesis through Malachi is a fully illustrated complex relationship. There is a wide range of emotions from everyone involved, people making big mistakes, there is upsetting violence, and tender mercy, and God can even seem unpredictable or unfamiliar. But remember this, the Old Testament paints images of God in a variety of ways from many different perspectives, but they are still one God, our God. It is the same God who breathed life

across the waters, who sent Jesus to redeem creation, and who works in us today.

What you need to know

The Old Testament is foundational to both the Jewish and Christian faiths. That means it doesn't "belong" to us. But neither is it somebody else's scriptures. It is the story of God that Jesus engaged with and fulfilled. It's the basis for a deeper and more meaningful understanding of everything that happens in the New Testament.

The Old Testament paints a full picture of humanity in relationship to God. We get all the happy stuff – rainbows and freedom and unconditional promises – but we are also called to wrestle with the ugly stuff like anger, violence, unfaithfulness, punishment, and doubt.

Violence is a reality in the world, but it not the point. Kids who live in today's society are often surrounded by violent images. TV, movies, video games, sports, and other transmitters of violence don't need any extra help from the story of God's people, but the Old Testament certainly provides it. We can't avoid the violence found here, but if it becomes a distraction, we need to remember that the Old Testament leads us to the redeeming story of God's love.

So you may come to the study of the Old Testament with some preconceived ideas of what you think God is like. Depending on your sources, your God might be a holy scorekeeper of your rights and wrongs, a heavenly Santa, a wise old man with a long beard dressed in a robe, or maybe something else altogether. In the Old Testament, there is no evidence of what God looks like, but plenty of material of what God is like apart from whatever physical being God has. Remember that the Old Testament is not one single book, but a collection of 39 books written by many different authors from many different times periods, with many different perspectives. So our brief journey through the Old Testament that begins today and will continue for the next several weeks, mostly

thematically, will reveal the complicated story that has been experienced by God's people, faithful and not so faithful, for thousands of years.

Let's face it, the Old Testament has sections that are, by most standards, really boring: laws, genealogies, and numbers, and so forth. Some stories seem like they are repeated over and over. There is a lot of historical, cultural, and legal writing. But there is also poetry, adventure, and drama.

The Old Testament is long, accounting for about three-quarters of the Bible. It can be intimidating. What I will do over the next several weeks is introduce it to you through nine sessions. That is the best I can do. The rest is up to you. If you want to learn more about a particular theme or genre or subject of the Old Testament, then I would suggest you ask me about your interest and I can lead you deeper. But understand this, as you approach "confirmation" the confirming of your faith, the burden is on you to claim the Christian faith as your own. It makes sense to me that you would want to learn more about your God, and how God has revealed Godself throughout the ages.

Well, that is a whole lot of stuff about nothing very specific. Let's get more specific.

About the Lutheran Study Bible (LSB)

Open your LSB to page 24 where you will find an article entitled "What is in the Bible?" "The Old Testament," and "How the books of the Old Testament are grouped." Read these articles. Then notice that the bookmark that I provided you is categorized in nearly (I used "Wisdom and Poetry" as a heading while the LSB used the title, "Writings").

Into the Story

Open your Bibles to Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and read the verses out loud to yourself.

Verses 4-5 are a creed central to the Jewish faith and are known simply by one word, one important word that every Jew knows, *shema*,

pronounced *shuh-MAH*. Faithful Jews repeat it twice a day as a reminder of their relationship with God. I found a good video made by a rabbi that I would like you to watch at the link below. Watch it and then continue on.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9geXjErjvfw>

Essay Questions

In 100-150 of your own words, answer three of the following essay questions and return them to Pastor Jesse by email at pastor@zionohio.org no later than next Sunday, October 4.

1. Why do you think the *shema* includes the phrase "the Lord alone"? What else might have been mistaken for God by the Israelites? What might we mistake for a god in our day?
2. Name something you try to do every day? Why is it that important to you? Do you have a motto you live by or a set of personal values that you keep and would never violate?
3. The passage from Deuteronomy tells us to "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart." How is that different from keeping them in your mind? Hint: heartfelt versus intellectual. What would keeping them in your heart look like?
4. If Jesus is the Messiah, why do we need the Old Testament?
5. Write what you know about the way God is revealed in your knowledge of the Old Testament, and how that may or may not be different than the way God is revealed in the New Testament.
6. Think about one story that you know about from the Old Testament. Look for it in your LSB and read it. Then write a summary about it including where you found it in the Bible and why you chose it.