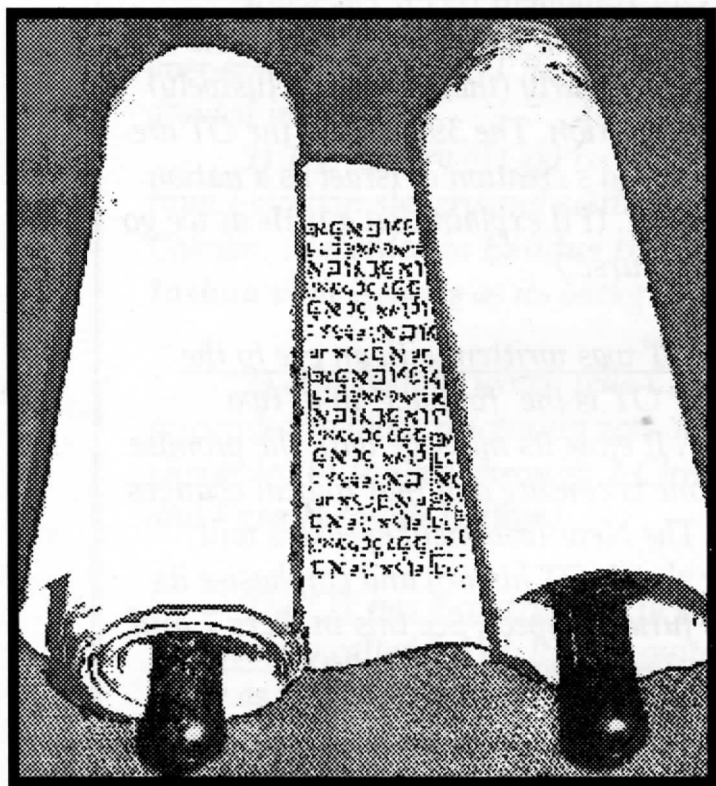


LISTENING TO GOD



AN APPROACH TO BIBLE STUDY

Part Three In A Series Of Seven

3. *The Bible: Act I*

THE OT IS THE FIRST PART OF A TWO-PART DRAMA

THE FIRST MAJOR DIVISION OF THE BIBLE

1. The first major division of the Bible is called the Old Testament (OT). The word 'testament' is used in the sense of 'covenant'. It was written peculiarly (though not exclusively) for the Jewish nation. The 39 books of the OT are built around God's creation of Israel as a nation at Mount Sinai. (I'll explain that a little as we go through the course.)
2. The OT was written with an eye to the future. The OT is the 'first act' in a 'two act' drama. It ends its message with the promise that Someone is coming and that radical changes are ahead. The New Testament speakers will frequently sketch OT history and emphasise its 'eye to the future' aspect. See this in **Acts 7 and Acts 13** as illustrations of the point.
3. The OT spoke to the people of its day. The OT has many predictive sections. But while the whole of the OT is written as part of a drama which demanded a future, Part II, it speaks nevertheless to the people of its own time. God wasn't interested only in future generations. The ancients mattered to him also. (**Everyone** is of importance to God!)

THE OT HAS A CENTRAL CORE OF COVENANTAL LAW..

AN OVERALL PICTURE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

4. The OT has a central historical core usually called HISTORY. What I'm about to say is a useful over-simplification (but it is an over-simplification). OT history can be divided into two:
 - 1) The history of God rescuing Israel from Egyptian slavery and settling them in Caanan. (Recorded in **Exodus through Joshua** with Genesis as its background).
 - 2) The history which tells us how Israel responded to those redeeming acts of God. (Recorded in **Judges through 2 Chronicles and Ezra through Esther**.)
5. The OT has a central core of covenantal law usually called LAW. It isn't quite the same thing as what we mean by 'law'. It is the word 'torah' and it has more of the idea of 'instruction' or 'guidelines' in it. Nevertheless part of the 'instruction' took commandment form. There were legal or 'law' requirements in the 'torah'. This torah included a sacrificial system, a priesthood, prescribed holy days and feast days. These things bound Israel to God in a life of loyalty by reminding them of their

THESE WERE SHADOWS OF REALITIES TO COME IN CHRIST

origins as an elect nation (which was their immediate purpose). In addition they were 'shadows' of truths and realities which would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ (see **Hebrews 10:1**). This material is found woven around the history of God saving Israel from Egypt and is recorded in **Genesis through Deuteronomy**.

6. The OT has a large block of literature produced by prophets and called just that, PROPHECY. OT prophets were people who received their message directly from God. They all spoke and some of them wrote. The prophetic writings of the OT range from the 8th century before Christ down to the 5th century before Christ. Here are several useful things to remember about the prophets:

1) They included a great deal of information about Israel's history which is not covered by the historical books.

2) Essentially they were preachers of repentance, who called the people to turn back to God to avoid judgement and regain hope.

3) They tirelessly called Israel to remember their roots as a people rescued by YAHWEH (Israel's covenant name for God).

THE PSALMS WERE MADE PART OF THE NATIONAL HYMNAL

4) They often predicted the coming of the Messiah and a great deal of what that would involve. These writing prophets are grouped together as Isaiah through Malachi.

7. The OT has a prominent devotional section called PSALMS. These psalms often began as an individual's personal expression of devotion or lament or praise or confession. Then they were taken (as good songs often are) and made part of the national hymnal. Psalms is an important book for many reasons. Jews and Christians alike have found it a rich source of material for expressing their feelings toward God (sorrow, confession, pleas for forgiveness, appeals for justice, expressions of joy and thankfulness and so forth). And it is an important source for discovering Israel's "creed". That is, in Psalms we can learn what enlightened and spiritual Jews held as their heart's convictions. This sheds so much light on other OT material.

8. The Old Testament has a section which records man's search for God's answers to life's great questions. It is called WISDOM literature. It takes as its starting point, the truth that the world and everything in it was created by a good and wise God. In light of

PSALM 73 HAS A VERY MODERN RING TO IT

that, there are difficult questions which arise. The suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked is a big question. It's not unusual to hear questions about bad things happening to good people. Biblically, it isn't uncommon to come across the question: Why do good things happen to bad people? (The bewilderment of the psalmist in **Psalm 73** has a very modern ring to it.) How should righteous people respond to these questions? **Job** and **Ecclesiastes** wrestle with this and urge us to **trust**.

9. How are we (in general terms) to view the blessings of life and lay hold of them? **Proverbs** and **Song of Solomon** speak of honourable human love and the way to a prosperous and happy life. In short, they urge us to seek the wisdom of the wise God (**Proverbs 3:19-22**) who created the world and life. And in understanding his ways we have the edge on how to live well. A key text in wisdom literature would urge us to remember that (**Prov 1:7**): "The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." The wisdom spoken of in these books is given by God to those who thoughtfully examine life through the years (**Prov 1:8;4:1-4**). This wisdom comes in the school of Life!

WE DIVIDED THE OT INTO FIVE KINDS OF WRITING

WHAT HAVE WE SAID?

10. We said the 'Old Testament' has 39 books written especially (though not exclusively) for the Jewish people.
11. We said it dealt with the different generations of Jews to which it was written but it also had an eye looking toward the future when the Messiah would come.
12. We divided the OT writings into **five kinds of writing** (a useful simplification):

History (Genesis—Esther)

Law (Recorded in connection with Genesis through Deuteronomy)

Prophecy (Isaiah through Malachi)

Psalms (Especially related to praise, prayers, confession and pain.)

Wisdom (This wisdom is the kind God gives through the 'school of life'. It is the result of experience with life. It's what parents learn and pass on to their children. It isn't the 'direct revelation' kind.)

EVALUATION SHEET
Listening To God LESSON 3

Name: _____

Tick The Box When You Have Read The Entire Lesson

Give The Name:

1. The OT's central historical core is called _____
2. The OT's central core of covenantal law is called _____
3. The OT's prophetic literature is called _____
4. The OT's devotional literature is called _____
5. The OT's 'search for answers' material is called _____

Tick The Box When You Have Read These Scriptures

1. Hebrews 8:6-9

2. Acts 13:16-33

3. Hebrews 10:1 and Galatians 3:23-25

4. Proverbs 1:7,8 with 3:19-22 and 4:1-4

5. Psalm 73:1-17

True Or False?

(If the statement is true write T, if false write F.)

- ___ 1. The OT has 93 books!
- ___ 2. YAHWEH was the covenant name of God!
- ___ 3. **Psalm 73** talks about good things happening to bad people!
- ___ 4. Part of the story of God rescuing Israel from Egyptian slavery is told in the book of **Exodus!**
- ___ 5. The OT's devotional section is called 'Wisdom'!
- ___ 6. The 'Old Testament' means the 'Old Covenant'!
- ___ 7. The OT has 36 books!
- ___ 8. Prophets were essentially preachers of repentance!
- ___ 9. Prophetic writings are grouped together as **Isaiah through Malachi!**
- ___ 10. The 'Law' material in the OT is especially connected with **Genesis through Deuteronomy!**

Complete This Statement:

(As found in the booklet.)

- 1. It ends its message with the promise _____

- 2. We said the 'Old Testament' has 39 _____

- 3. Jews and Christians alike have found it _____

- 4. It takes as its starting point _____

- 5. They tirelessly called Israel to remember _____
