

**Old Testament Introduction**  
**and the Ministry**

A paper demonstrating how students and preachers of God's Word  
may benefit from the Old Testament Introduction course  
prepared by the Rev. David P. Murray,  
and taught in the Free Church Seminary, Inverness.

# Contents

Introduction		1
Chapter 1	Ten Problem Areas	5
Chapter 2	Purpose of the Course	17
Chapter 3	Preaching from the Old Testament	25
Chapter 4	Methodology of the Course	22
Chapter 5	Historical Analysis	24
Chapter 6	Literary Analysis	37
Chapter 7	Thematic Analysis	49
Chapter 8	New Testament Analysis	56
Chapter 9	Original and Present Message	62
	Bibliography	68

## INTRODUCTION

The church and the world desperately need faithful and fearless preachers of God's Word, for God has chosen the preaching of His Word as the primary means to save sinners and edify saints. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism 89 puts it:

The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

The Church may often be involved in a number of important activities: organising Christian education, housing the homeless, distributing tracts, visiting the sick, organising support for missionaries, publishing Christian books, etc. However, while important, these are all secondary matters to preaching the Word. The primacy of preaching must remain the ultimate focus of all who are concerned for the Church's welfare, the good of sinners, and the glory of God.

It is for this reason that educating and equipping preachers is of such vital importance. The courses taught in theological seminaries and colleges will determine, to a large extent, whether future ministers and missionaries will keep their primary focus on preaching. The courses will also influence the content and manner of their preaching.

If the courses concede too much to critical scholarship, then the student's preaching will be too concessive. If the courses are too defensive in the face of critical scholarship, then the student's preaching will be too defensive. If the courses neglect the Old Testament then the student's preaching will also. If the courses fail to show the relevance of the Old Testament in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then so will the student's preaching. If the courses fail to edify the student, then the student will likewise fail to edify his congregation.

In the light of the above, the ultimate purpose of the Old Testament Introduction [OTI] course, which accompanies this paper, is to equip ministers and missionaries to be faithful preachers of the Old Testament. If there is a lack of faithful preaching today, and there is, then there is an even greater lack of faithful preaching from the Old Testament. The reasons for this are manifold and will be explored in this paper. As a response to this situation, this OTI course stresses the importance of communicating the message of each Old Testament passage. The aim, purpose and

emphasis of this course, then, is practical. This has heavily influenced the underlying methodology and the overall content of the course.

This introductory paper will first of all explore ten problem areas in some Old Testament courses and books. This is a necessary first step in formulating the aim of this OTI course.

Secondly, the paper will define the practical purpose of OTI studies, a purpose which guided the preparation and presentation of each lecture in the course.

This will naturally lead into the third area this paper seeks to explore; a survey of the obstacles hindering the successful achievement of that purpose. This section will highlight how this OTI course attempts to remove or overcome these obstacles.

Fourthly, having set out the overall aim and the practical purpose of this OTI course, this paper will then explain the four analytical tools used in the lectures to achieve that purpose; Historical Analysis, Literary Analysis, Thematic Analysis and New Testament Analysis.

Fifthly, the original and present message of Old Testament books will be highlighted.

Throughout the paper, shaded boxes will be used to summarise the practical benefits of this OTI course.

## **1. TEN PROBLEM AREAS**

This paper will first of all explore ten problem areas in some Old Testament courses and books.

### **1.1 Hebrew Grammar**

Firstly, there is the problem of over-concentration on Hebrew Grammar. In some Old Testament courses more time is given to the study of Hebrew Grammar than the study of the Old Testament. Certainly, the ability to read and exegete the Hebrew Bible is vital, and ought to be pursued. However, it is not the first and most important area of study. Students may leave their courses with an ability to parse the many forms and stems of Hebrew verbs, and yet have little or no knowledge of the contents of Joshua or Chronicles. This is like studying a flower under the microscope without having looked at the field or landscape it came from.

Study of the whole Old Testament will give the preacher the “big picture” and so increase breadth of understanding.

### **1.2. Excessive Concessions**

Secondly, while some Old Testament courses and books rightly recognise the importance of breadth before depth, and so commence with a book by book “Introduction to the Old Testament”, some of these courses and books tend to concede too much to historical and literary criticism. It often seems that evangelicals are prepared to concede evangelical truths and certainties in order to gain a hearing and win respect in the scholarly world.

For example, it is worrying to read the following in the first chapter of Dillard and Longman’s *Introduction to the Old Testament*:

An evangelical doctrine of Scripture, however, does not answer all hermeneutical and interpretive questions, nor does it prevent us from learning from the tradition of historical criticism. Indeed, our introduction will provide example after example of dependence on the previous labours of scholars in both the evangelical and critical camps.<sup>1</sup>

While much that follows in Dillard and Longman’s book is excellent and useful, the worries

excited by the statement above do prove to be justified in a number of other chapters.

It is not wise for a Christian scholar to abandon the presuppositions of biblical inspiration and infallibility and attempt to approach the Word of God with an “open” mind and so-called “neutral” presuppositions, in order to interact with unbelieving scholarship. In *Beginning at Moses*, Michael Barrett highlights the need for biblical presuppositions in Bible study and also the impossibility of anyone truly having an “open mind”.

When we approach the Scriptures through faith we do so with a set of beliefs that we take for granted to be true. These presuppositions are essential and inevitable. It is absolutely impossible to come to the Bible with an open mind. Liberal scholars often claim they approach Scripture with an open mind in order to evaluate the Word of God and judge its accuracy. In reality they come with the presupposition that human reason is superior to divine revelation. That is not an open mind; it is a closed heart that evidences a mindset predisposed against God and truth. Man cannot stand as the judge of Scripture; Scripture stands as the judge of man. As believers, we must come with an open and receptive heart to receive and believe what God says. The mindset of a believer every time he opens the Bible must be the conviction that whatever *the Bible says is true*. We cannot trust our reason to determine what is true or false, right or wrong. By faith we believe in the inspiration of the Bible, and therefore we affirm its authority, infallibility, sufficiency, and effectiveness from cover to cover.<sup>2</sup>

The evangelical Old Testament scholar E J Young put this succinctly in the preface to his *Introduction to the Old Testament*:

The approach to the Old Testament adopted in these pages is expressed in those words of the sacred Scriptures, which Wilhelm Moeller used as the motto for his *Introduction*, “Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from *off* thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). This verse effectively disposes of the so-called “scientific” method, which assumes that man can approach the facts of the universe, including the Bible, with a neutral mind, and pronounce a just judgment upon them. It is

---

<sup>1</sup> R Dillard & T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 19.

time that we cease to call such a method scientific. It is not scientific, for it does not take into consideration all the facts, and the basic fact it overlooks is that of God and His relation to the world which He has created. Unless we first think rightly about God we shall be in basic error about everything else.<sup>3</sup>

In this quote E J Young also emphasised not just the importance of right thinking but also right “feeling”. The student of Scripture must not only adopt the right presuppositions but also the right attitude of reverence for the Scriptures. There has to be a receptive, teachable, and humble spirit if any spiritual progress is to be achieved. E J Young further underlined this in his preface:

In approaching the Bible, therefore, we need to remember that it is sacred ground. We must approach it with humble hearts, ready to hear what the Lord God says. The kaleidoscopic history of negative criticism is but further evidence that unless we do approach the Bible in a receptive attitude, we shall fail to understand it. Nor need we be ashamed to acknowledge that the words of Scripture are of God. For these words are resplendent with the glory of the Divine majesty. The attempt to explain them as anything less than Divine is one of the greatest failures that has ever appeared in the history of human thought. What courage this fact should give us!<sup>4</sup>

In summary, the approach of this OTI course is accurately conveyed using the words of introduction attached to Lasor, Hubbard and Bush’s *Old Testament Survey*:

We venture to state succinctly here what we have tried to make apparent throughout the book: we are committed to the inspiration and the authority of the Bible, including every part of the Old Testament, and seek to honor it as Holy Scripture in all we say about it.<sup>5</sup>

One consequence of this approach is that this OTI course will consider the Old Testament text as the church has finally received it. Liberal scholars tend to focus on the sources behind the biblical texts and the history of development of the texts. The results of this are highly speculative and hardly edifying. This OTI course does not deny the possibility of sources. It does not deny that

---

<sup>2</sup> M P Barrett, *Beginning at Moses* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2001), 5.

<sup>3</sup> E J Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1953), 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

books were sometimes composed over a period of time. It does not deny that a book's final composition may have been a considerable period of time from the events described in the book. However, while not ignoring these aspects totally, the primary focus of this course will be on the finished form of the canonical text as the church received it. This focus reflects a welcome change in modern Biblical studies, as noted by Sidney Greidanus. He wrote:

In the light of the criticism levelled at source criticism, form criticism, and other methods studying the prehistory of biblical texts (e.g., tradition criticism), it is not surprising to observe a shift in biblical studies. Biblical scholars are increasingly gravitating to studying the texts in their present literary form. Rudolf Smend remarks that "the final written form of the material. . . . is not only a neglected and hence fertile field, but also a more certain one, since the finalised texts are not imaginary entities. Here we are less under the influence of speculations, but can make observations on material that clearly lies before us, and are often also in a position to prove and disprove."<sup>6</sup>

Firmly held presuppositions concerning biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility will give the preacher confidence and boldness in preaching.

### **1.3. Excessive Defence**

In the face of critical attacks, and some evangelicals' "critical accommodation", some scholars tend to focus all their attention on defending the Old Testament from critical attacks. Some books on Old Testament Introduction make this their explicit purpose. For example, in the preface of his *Introduction to the Old Testament* E J Young argues that since the defence of the Old Testament from destructive criticism is of "such overwhelming importance to the well-being of the Church of Jesus Christ today...it has been necessary to omit discussion of other problems which are not immediately germane to the purpose of this volume. Thus, for example, I have said practically

---

<sup>5</sup> Lasor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), xiv.

<sup>6</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 55. Quoting R Smend, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 16 (1980) 45.

nothing about chronology and archaeology....Nor have I devoted much attention to the question of interpretation, unless, as in the case of Job and Song of Solomon, such attention will aid in the understanding of the structure of the book itself.”<sup>7</sup>

Dillard & Longman also highlight this feature of much conservative evangelical scholarship:

A characteristic of conservative scholarship as represented in most of these volumes is an apologetic interest....conservative scholars have felt it necessary to direct much of their discussion toward combating the historical-critical method and, in particular, source analysis of the Pentateuch.<sup>8</sup>

While it is important for Evangelicals to robustly defend the Scriptures and expose the false assumptions and methods of Liberal scholarship, the actual contents of individual books tend to be forgotten in the midst of the academics’ arguments and debates. It is as if a beautiful book was written and then subsequently attacked by literary critics. Friends of the author then went to the defence of the book, writing articles and giving lectures on the weakness and faults in the critics’ case. However, in the midst of all the literary attack and counter-attack, the book went unread and the message went unheeded.

The Old Testament scholar and commentator, Keil, refers to this over-defensive scholarly posture in the preface to his commentary on Joshua.

And although it is true, that it is of great advantage to institute an unprejudiced and careful comparison between the text of the Hebrew and the ancient versions, and also between the contents and spirit of the historical writings of the Old Testament, and the manner in which Hebrew history was afterwards treated by both Jews and Samaritans, inasmuch as it serves to confirm both theology and the church in their belief in the integrity and authenticity of our canonical books; yet the great want of our church, at the present day, is a clear comprehension of the meaning of the Old Testament, in its fullness and purity, in order that the God of Israel may again be universally recognized as the eternal God, whose faithfulness is unchangeable, the one living and true God, who performed all that he did to Israel for our instruction and salvation, having chosen

---

<sup>7</sup> E J Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1953), 9.

Abraham and his seed to be his people, to preserve his revelations, that from him the whole world might receive salvation, and in him all the families of the earth be blessed.<sup>9</sup>

The crucial words in this quote are, “the great want of our church, at the present day, is a clear comprehension of the meaning of the Old Testament, in its fullness and purity.” It is the intention of this OTI course to satisfy this want. So, while the critics’ arguments will be regularly noted and rebutted throughout, the focus will be on the contents and meaning of the Old Testament.

A focus on the contents rather than the critics will better satisfy the need of the Church to hear the message of the Old Testament.

#### **1.4. Cursory Survey**

Fourthly, while some courses avoid the previous pitfalls, and do concentrate on communicating the contents of the Old Testament books, they fail to give more information than a cursory reading of the scriptures would also yield. More is needed than just numerous summaries of the contents of individual books. Analysis is also required, and different analytical tools are available and will be used in this OTI course. The tools of Historical Analysis, Literary Analysis and Thematic (or Theological) analysis are all essential if we are to understand the form, content and message of the Hebrew Scriptures. They will be used extensively in this OTI course.

Analysis will provide the preacher with more than just the summarised contents of the Old Testament, as it will advance his understanding of the meaning and message of the Scriptures.

#### **1.5. Selective Study**

Some Old Testament courses go to the opposite extreme of rapid cursory survey and instead focus on the detailed study of selected passages. For example, Genesis 1-3, or the Covenants, or other well-known passages may be studied in minute detail in Hebrew and English. However, the student may then lack an overall grasp of the Old Testament.

---

<sup>8</sup> R Dillard & T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Keil, Preface to Joshua, pp.v, vi.

This situation is partly the fruit of form criticism, which often followed an atomistic approach, in neglecting the larger context. This is remarked upon by Greenwood:

The form critics have tended to lose sight of the forest by concentrating on the individual trees: by dealing exhaustively with individual pericopes... and, in general, small blocks of material, they have sometimes neglected to regard biblical books as individual entities.<sup>10</sup>

In his *New Testament Introduction*, M C Tenney emphasised the importance of understanding the “big picture”, an emphasis which Old Testament studies also requires.

If a student expects to comprehend any part or doctrine of the Scriptures, he must know what they teach as a whole. Each book is a part of that whole, and can be fully understood only when it is seen in relation to the entire stream of divine revelation that begins with Genesis and that ends with the Apocalypse.<sup>11</sup>

In-depth knowledge of a few selected passages, in the absence of an overall view of biblical history and biblical theology, is like a surgeon specialising in the kidney and liver, but knowing little or nothing about how they relate to the heart and other vital organs.

The preacher will preach parts of Scripture better when he has a knowledge of the whole, and of how the different parts relate to the whole.

### **1.6. Limited Analysis**

Sixthly, some Old Testament Introduction books and courses, while focusing on the contents of the Old Testament books, concentrate all their attention on either Historical Analysis (eg: *Kingdom of Priests* by E Merrill), or Literary Analysis (eg: *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* by D Dorsey), or Thematic Analysis (eg. *The Faith of Israel* by W J Dumbrell), instead of combining the strengths of all these approaches. This is like trying to drive a car with only one tyre inflated. It does not lend itself to balance, or smooth and efficient running. This problem has been recognised by

---

<sup>10</sup> D Greenwood, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89/4 (1970) 418.

<sup>11</sup> M Tenney, *The New Testament: A Historical and Analytic Survey* (London: Intersociety Fellowship, 1954), 7.

others. For example, the authors of *Old Testament Survey* defended the need for their book as follows:

This book has been in the making for some years. The plan for it developed when one of us taught Old Testament survey courses at the collegiate level and was frustrated by the lack of an adequate text. Though teachers of Scripture have been blessed amply with specialised works like histories, theologies and introductions, no one volume was available that combined those elements in a framework whose theological and scholarly approaches we found congenial.<sup>12</sup>

This OTI course will attempt to combine and unite the different strands of legitimate biblical analysis in order to provide a stronger cord of understanding.

An overall view of the contents of the Bible is made even more necessary by the trends towards specialisation in Biblical studies, as noted by Greidanus:

In both Old Testament and New Testament interpretation, critical methodologies have forced biblical scholars into such a high degree of specialization that a perspective of the whole was (and often still is) nonexistent. Interpreters have tended to focus on details of the text or its prehistory rather than on the text in its biblical context. This atomistic approach has led to a crisis in homiletics: biblical texts are perceived not only to be distant and objective but also irrelevant for contemporary congregations. The homiletician Dwight Stevenson tried to overcome fragmentation by advocating sermons on whole Bible books. This kind of sermon may “provide one way... for a return from the fragmented world of textual preaching to the wholeness of the biblical view upon life and destiny.” But to overcome the perceived irrelevance of biblical texts requires not simply new homiletical techniques but a holistic hermeneutical approach.<sup>13</sup>

The need to move away from an atomistic approach and towards a holistic approach is being increasingly recognised. Greidanus defines a holistic approach as a hermeneutical method that “seeks to take into account *all* aspects that contribute to the meaning of biblical texts and attempts

---

<sup>12</sup> Lasor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), xii.

<sup>13</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 48.

to understand these aspects in the light of the whole – and vice versa.”<sup>14</sup>

The “big picture” may be viewed from different perspectives. For example, Historical Analysis attempts to place the events under consideration in the wider historical context. Literary Analysis presents the overall literary structure of each book, as well as proposing the relevance of each book’s canonical context. Thematic Analysis demonstrates the contribution each book makes to the progressive unfolding of God’s revelation. New Testament Analysis shows how the ultimate destination of God’s revelation in Christ is necessary to understand many of the Old Testament roads travelled to get there. Clines argued that “the holistic, total view, while always open to revision in the light of the merest detail, must have the last word in interpretation. In the quest for meaning the essence, message, function, purpose....of the work as a whole is our ultimate ambition.”<sup>15</sup>

This argument is accepted by the writer of this course and it underlies the final aim of each lecture, which is to present the “original message” of the book or major section of Scripture being studied.

A “holistic” approach will enable the preacher to arrive at a more reliable understanding of the original message of Scripture.

### **1.7. Disconnection from New Testament**

Seventhly, some Old Testament courses fail to connect Old Testament studies with the New Testament. The result is that both the Old and New Testament studies suffer from a lack of mutual support and interaction. It is like trying to study a room in the dark, even though a torch is lying on the table. The tool of New Testament Analysis, then, needs to be added to those of Historical, Literary and Thematic Analysis.

Proper use of the New Testament will enable the preacher to preach the Old Testament in a Christocentric manner.

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>15</sup> Clines, *Beginning OT Study*, (London: SPCK, 1983), 35.

## **1.8. Inconsistent Presentation**

Eighthly, Old Testament Introductions often approach the books of the Old Testament in different ways. The outline of the lectures or chapters is perhaps unpredictable and often inconsistent. Some Introductions regard this as a virtue. For example Lasor, Hubbard and Bush say:

We have not followed a rigid outline for each biblical book but have sought to let the contents and style of each book dictate the way we have studied it.<sup>16</sup>

The human mind, however, greatly benefits from recognisable and consistent structures. It is much easier for a builder to vary and change the outward appearance of a house, if the basic foundation and structure is always the same. Most students seem to appreciate a uniformity of approach in the lectures, and the benefits of this considerably outweigh any disadvantages.

Consistent lecture structure will aid memory of the content and develop patterns of thinking which will guide the preacher in his approach to any portion of Scripture.

## **1.9. Devotional Deficit**

Ninthly, some Old Testament courses end with academic conclusions. However, all study of the Scriptures should aim at bringing the student to worship God and to personal, experimental application. Reading Old Testament stories without a keen interest in the Spirit's transforming influence in our lives can turn these texts into dry relics of ancient history. Technical, detached examination must not be substituted for personal encounter with God. As Dale Ralph Davies has said:

I do not think I can expect my students to warm to the Old Testament unless they sense it nurturing them as they hear it taught.<sup>17</sup>

This is one reason why these lectures are being recorded on cassette and CD. The simple reading of lectures by students cannot compare with actually hearing the voice, character and devotional spirit of the lecturer. Faith comes especially by hearing (Rom.10:17). The recorded lectures will,

---

<sup>16</sup> Lasor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), xiii.

<sup>17</sup> Dale Ralph Davies, *Joshua* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), Preface.

therefore, contain frequent, spontaneous and unscripted application and exhortation of the students, so that the heart is engaged as well as the head. If the lectures do not result in more worship and more godliness, it is highly unlikely that the student's Old Testament preaching will result in his hearers living more devoted and obedient lives.

Professor J Pipa focussed on this in a recent paper examining Seminary Education. He wrote:

Hardly a day passes that I do not think about the fact that no Christian institution of learning has ever remained faithful to God, none even as long as Princeton. This fact is sobering. A number of reasons may be offered, but the two most important are seeking academic acclaim and failure to teach from an experimental point of view – with love for God so that we do not turn our subject matter into abstractions. We must worship as we study, teach, and learn. Pray for us that we will be faithful, humble, and worshiping teachers.<sup>18</sup>

The course will bring the Old Testament into the experience of the preacher, increasing his love for it and desire to communicate it.

### **1.10. Neglect of Bible reading**

Many Seminary students can testify that they read less of the Bible during the years of their formal training than at most other times in their lives. It is sadly possible to be engaged in the full-time study of the Bible and yet be reading little or nothing of it. In response to this, this OTI course emphasises the importance of reading the book or portion of Scripture associated with each lecture.

Lasor, Hubbard and Bush conclude the preface of their Old Testament Survey with words we can heartily agree with:

In no way is our design to substitute for the Bible. What book can? Our hope is that it will be read as a guide and supplement to the biblical text itself, and that, as such, it will enhance the devotion and obedience of its readers to Scripture and to Scripture's Lord....Obedience to God and worship of his holy name are our ultimate aim as God's people. Such obedience and worship will be best informed where we have grasped the

how, why, when, where and by whom of his sacred revelation. Both piety and study are essential to sound discipleship. To combine them has been the goal of our ministries and of this book.<sup>19</sup>

The course's aim of encouraging Bible reading in conjunction with the lectures will increase the preacher's worship of and obedience to Scripture's Lord.

---

<sup>18</sup> J A Pipa, *Seminary Education* (Chalcedon Report, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Lasor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), xiv.

## **2. PURPOSE OF THE COURSE**

It is important to define the purpose of any academic course. Before giving the purpose of this OTI course, we shall note what other writers and academics give as definitions and descriptions of the rationale and purpose of their own Old Testament Introductions. For example, E J Young wrote:

The English word *introduction* is derived from the Latin *introducere* (to lead in, introduce) and denotes the action of bringing or leading in. It also connotes initiation into the knowledge of a subject and particularly has reference to the material which paves the way for the study of some special subject. In its widest sense, the term Biblical Introduction refers to all those studies and disciplines which are preliminary to the study of the contents of the Bible. However, the word has come to be employed in a far more restricted sense. It may be regarded as a technical term and as such is borrowed from Germany where in comparatively recent times it was introduced as a designation of certain studies which are preparatory and preliminary to the interpretation of the Bible. It is in this latter sense that the word is employed in this volume. Biblical Introduction, then, is that science or discipline which treats of certain subjects that are preliminary to the study and interpretation of the contents of the Bible. It is sometimes designated by the word *isagogics*.<sup>20</sup>

In this OTI course, our use of the word “Introduction” is wider than E J Young’s. It goes beyond the study of “subjects that are preliminary to the study and interpretation of the contents of the Bible”. We will actually study and analyse the contents of the Old Testament Scriptures.

The purpose of Lasor, Hubbard and Bush’s *Old Testament Survey* is more akin to this OTI course’s. They said:

Our purpose is straightforward: to introduce the reader to the background, content, literary quality, and message of the Old Testament as a whole and of its various books.<sup>21</sup>

Lasor, Hubbard and Bush emphasise that their course book is to be “read as a guide and supplement to the biblical text itself.”<sup>22</sup> This intimates that better reading of the Bible is their aim.

---

<sup>20</sup> E J Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1953), 23.

<sup>21</sup> Lasor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), xiii.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, xiv.

Dillard and Longman state this aim more explicitly. In their *Introduction to the Old Testament*, they state that their aim is “to provide the student with the resources needed to achieve reading competence.”<sup>23</sup>

This is certainly a major, though not ultimate, aim of this OTI course. The words of Dillard and Longman might be paraphrased to describe the ultimate purpose of this OTI course. It is “to provide the student with the resources needed to achieve **preaching** competence.” In other words, the primary purpose of this OTI course is to equip students for the ministry to be educated and spiritual preachers of the Old Testament. Better reading of the Word is not the end, but rather is a stepping stone to the end of better preaching of the Word.

The ultimate purpose of preaching has been held in view in the preparation of this course. It has influenced the content and also the presentation of the content. It has also influenced the choice of methodology in approaching the biblical text. For example, there is little space given to “Source criticism” whose concern is mainly with the written sources underlying the biblical text, and whose limited practical use was highlighted by Greidanus:

Although source criticism may be beneficial at times for discovering the specific meaning of a passage, its speculative character calls for extreme caution. Moreover, it must be remembered that the preacher’s task is not to preach the sources of the biblical text but the biblical text itself.<sup>24</sup>

The practical purpose of this OTI course is to provide the student with the resources needed to achieve **preaching** competence.

---

<sup>23</sup> R Dillard & T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 17.

<sup>24</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 51.

### **3. PREACHING FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Although the purpose of this course is to equip students to preach from the Old Testament, we must acknowledge that there is undoubtedly a widespread crisis in the preaching of the Old Testament today. Less and less sermons are being preached from this part of the Bible, and those that are do not command the same interest or respect as New Testament sermons. There are five reasons for this.

#### **3.1. Critical attack**

Firstly, there is the sustained critical attack on the Old Testament by Liberal scholars. This has shaken the confidence of preachers and hearers alike. Any Old Testament Introduction has to interact with such scholarship to some degree in order to prove the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures and so increase confidence in them. This Introduction will interact sufficiently, though not exhaustively, with critical views in order to show the consistent weaknesses of the critics arguments.

By regular interaction with critical arguments, this OTI course will increase confidence in the Old Testament, and so will increase confidence in preaching from the Old Testament.

#### **3.2. Ignorance**

Secondly, there is the ignorance of, impatience with, and even disinterest in biblical history and geography. It is almost impossible to preach from large parts of the Old Testament without a knowledge of the historical context and geographical setting. However, while this knowledge was once widespread in many churches, most hearers now know little or nothing of biblical history. The preacher, therefore, has to begin many Old Testament sermons with an extended introduction to the relevant biblical history and geography. As the attention span of many congregations has grown shorter and shorter, many preachers find that by the time they have completed their introductions, the congregation's attention has long gone. This OTI course, therefore, will not go into great historical or geographical detail. Instead students will be encouraged to "paint/preach with a broad brush". It is better that we and our hearers have a clear outline of Old Testament history and

geography rather than get lost in a mass of detail.

This OTI course will give historical and geographical data in a form which will enable the preacher to inform and interest his hearers.

### **3.3 Relevance**

Thirdly, there is a problem related to the need for historical knowledge mentioned in the previous paragraph. The problem is that the historical and geographical details, which are necessary for a right understanding of the Old Testament, seem to distance the preacher and hearer from modern reality. The fact is that we stand approximately 6,000 years from the earliest recorded Old Testament event and over 2,000 years from the most recent. This opens up a “relevance gap” in the minds of many modern preachers and hearers. Michael Barrett explains this difficulty and obstacle:

From Genesis to Malachi, the reader encounters hard sayings, obscure details, unfamiliar and enigmatic expressions, forgotten customs, family trees with unpronounceable names, and detailed laws that have no immediately discernible application or relevance to modern life. Much of the Old Testament *seems to have no apparent value or purpose...*[There] is a lot of hard reading without a lot of blessing. It seems to have no value for Christian living....Other passages *seem to be outdated*, both theologically and culturally.<sup>25</sup>

Barrett goes on to illustrate the difficulty from the book of Leviticus. His basic point is that many are asking what is the purpose of reading chapter upon chapter about animal sacrifices when the New Testament “makes it unmistakably clear that there is no place for animal sacrifices after the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.” In addition there are detailed laws relating to “a culture long dead.”<sup>26</sup>

This OTI course will demonstrate the relevance of the whole Old Testament to 21<sup>st</sup> century audiences.

---

<sup>25</sup> M P Barrett, *Beginning at Moses* (Greenville, SC.: Ambassador Emerald International, 2001), 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

### **3.4. Dispensationalism**

Fourthly, there is the influence of “dispensationalism”. Dispensational theology, with its division of Scripture into different eras, tends to relegate the Old Testament to a minor role in the life of the Church and the individual Christian. However, even some who are “non-dispensational” in theory, have become dispensational in practice. The desire to be “relevant”, coupled with the seeming irrelevance of the Old Testament to many has led to a disproportionate amount of preaching and writing on the New Testament, leading to the *practical* neglect of the Old Testament.

This OTI course will help the preacher to acquire a right balance in his ministry between preaching from both Old and New Testaments.

### **3.5. Minimising of Christ**

Fifthly, there has been a tendency in academic circles, even in Reformed and Evangelical circles, to minimise the place of the Son of God in the Old Testament. This has also contributed to the tendency to turn away from the Old Testament and towards the New in order to “find Jesus” and “preach Christ crucified”.

This OTI course will show preachers that they can “find Jesus” and “preach Christ crucified” in the Old Testament also.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY OF THE COURSE**

We have looked at some problems connected with Old Testament Introductions and suggested some principles to guide our solution. We then considered the “purpose” of this OTI course, which is “to increase preaching competence from the Old Testament”. In this connection we also examined some of the problems associated with preaching from the Old Testament today and how this OTI course might address these. We come now to consider what are the component parts of this OTI course.

“Introduction” courses are usually divided into two parts, General and Special. The former examines subjects which concern the whole Bible, such as Text and Canon. The latter, “Special Introduction”, considers the individual books of the Bible and discusses authorship, date, historical background, theological themes and principles, etc. It is “Special Introduction” which this course will focus upon. It studies the contents of the books of the Old Testament from four perspectives: Historical Analysis, Literary Analysis, Thematic Analysis and New Testament Analysis. As the course progresses the constant use of these analytical tools will become so familiar that a habit and methodology of study will form in the mind and so supply models and patterns for future study of the Old Testament.

While distinguishing these four analytical methods, it must be remembered that each form of analysis relies on the others. Thematic Analysis easily moves into *eisegesis* without the restraint of historical and literary perspectives. Historical Analysis loses its theological moorings without thematic and literary controls. Literary Analysis becomes speculative without the constraints of thematic and historical outlooks. Douglas Stuart commented on the link between historical and Literary Analysis:

Some overlap is bound to exist between the historical context and the literary context.

The Old Testament is a historically oriented revelation, and therefore its literary progressions and orderings will tend to correspond to the actual history of Yahweh’s dealings with his people.<sup>27</sup>

Smart warned about the danger of viewing the historical and the theological as existing “in

---

<sup>27</sup> D Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 9.

separate compartments, the theological being an additional compartment added on to an untheological historical one. The theological and the historical content of Scripture are not two separate realities but are one reality with two aspects, each inseparable from the other and interfused with it.”<sup>28</sup>

Greidanus also highlighted the fusing of different types of analysis:

Although I believe that all aspects of a holistic approach can be covered adequately with the literary and historical dimensions – the goal of both being the “theological” message – a separate discussion on theological interpretation can highlight certain aspects that are easily overlooked today.<sup>29</sup>

Greidanus introduced his section on “Methods of Literary Interpretation” with these words:

One may also note that although I have grouped these methods together under literary interpretation, some can equally be classified under historical or theological interpretation. For example, methods such as source criticism and form criticism also have a bearing on historical matters, “to reconstruct the events of the past,” and redaction criticism and biblical theology focus on theological aspects, the “theology” of an author/redactor or the “theological” themes of a book. This overlap only underscores the point made earlier that literary, historical, and theological questions are so intertwined that these three dimensions should not be thought of as rigid, disconnected categories.<sup>30</sup>

We may miss many of the blessings that await us if we limit ourselves to just one or two of these approaches. We will certainly miss out on blessings if we fail to use the benefit of New Testament light to illuminate the Old Testament Text, and *vice versa*.

The constant and appropriate use of all the analytical tools will not only cultivate a habit of study in the preacher, but will also let the light in on the text from all the available “windows”.

<sup>28</sup> J D Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 78.

<sup>29</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 50.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

## 5. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Historical Analysis is a chronological survey of the events of the Old Testament with a focus on dates and facts. The practical importance of this analysis is highlighted by Sidney Greidanus:

The message of all biblical genres of literature is in one way or another dependent on the reality of specific historical events proclaimed in the Bible. It is not accidental that by far the largest genre of biblical literature is that of historical narrative (found in most of Hebrew narrative, the Gospels, Acts, and to some extent in the Prophets, Psalms, and Epistles). The faith of Israel and the faith of historical Christianity is founded not in lofty ideas or ideals but in God's acts in human history.<sup>31</sup>

Greidanus went on to note how the historicity of Scriptural events is under a cloud of suspicion today, resulting in a lack of confidence among preachers to preach these texts with the same confidence as past preachers did. He concluded:

Before all else, therefore, it is necessary for preachers to be clear on the historical foundations of their message. The issue is, Is the Bible historically reliable or is it not? Do we approach the Bible with skepticism or with confidence?<sup>32</sup>

Confidence in the accuracy of Old Testament history will increase confidence in Old Testament preaching.

The foundational nature and practical importance of Historical Analysis is highlighted by Douglas Stuart in his book *Old Testament Exegesis*. In this, Stuart follows two sections on "Text" and "Translation" with a third section entitled "Historical Context." He argues that the Old Testament expositor must research the historical background:

Try to answer the following questions in your research: What is the setting of the passage? Exactly what events led up to this point? Did major trends or developments in Israel or the rest of the ancient world have any bearing on the passage or any part of its content? Are there any parallel or similar passages in the Bible that seem to be related to

---

<sup>31</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 24.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

the same historical conditions? If so, do they provide any insight into your passage? Under what historical conditions does the passage seem to have been written? Might the passage have been written also under very different historical conditions? If not, why not? Does the passage bring to an end or represent some particular stage in the progress of any events or concepts?<sup>33</sup>

As well as considering the historical setting, the geographical setting is also important.

Douglas Stuart again suggests the questions which should be asked of any passage:

Does the passage have a provenance (a geographical setting or “origin”)? In which nation, region, tribal territory, or village do the events or concepts of the passage apply? Is it, for example, a northern or southern passage (i.e., either reflecting a northern or southern origin, or else focusing especially on northern or southern kingdom matters), or an intra-Israel or extra-Israel passage, or is that impossible to discern? Does it have a national or regional perspective? Is it localized in any way? Do issues such as climate, topography, ethnic distribution, regional culture, or economy play a role? Is there anything else about the nature of the geography that illuminates the passage’s content in some way?<sup>34</sup>

This OTI course will highlight the questions and answers which enable the preacher to set each book or portion of Old Testament Scripture in its historical context.

Everyone accepts that we must read the Bible “in its context” and not treat passages in isolation. However, as Dillard and Longman highlight, “many understand the context to be literary only and then forget to read the Bible in its historical context, that is, the time period in which it was written and about which it narrates”.<sup>35</sup>

One reason for this is that many misunderstand what is meant by the Bible being a “timeless” book. The Bible is a timeless book only in the sense that it has relevance for and influence on every

---

<sup>33</sup> D Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> R Dillard & T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 21.

generation. However, the specific books were written for a specific people, in a specific culture, at a specific time. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to read the Bible in the light of the time period from which it comes. To understand the written material we have to look at the words on the page, but we also have to consider the time when the words were written. Douglas Stuart wrote:

Knowing the background, social setting, foreground, geographical setting, and date are normally essential to appreciating the significance of a passage. Most OT passages contain material that relates strongly to such considerations. The Bible is such a historically oriented revelation that ignoring historical context tends to assure misinterpretation.<sup>36</sup>

Accurate historical knowledge will help the preacher avoid misinterpretation.

The preacher must understand the passage in the context of the author's place in redemptive history. Greidanus argued that the message must be related to the whole of kingdom history:

A key hermeneutical principle holds that a part can be fully understood only in the light of the whole.<sup>37</sup>

A broad historical knowledge will help the preacher to understand each historical event in the light of the whole of biblical history and communicate to his hearers that the Bible should not be read in an "atomistic" manner.

The practical benefits of knowing the historical context are also highlighted by Stuart:

In general, you want to avoid talking to your congregation about the passage in isolation, as if there were no Scripture or history surrounding it. To do so is to be unfair to the sweep of the historical revelation; it suggests to your congregation that the Bible is a collection of atomistic fragments not well connected one to another and without

---

<sup>36</sup> D Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 44.

<sup>37</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 100.

much relationship to the passage of time. That is surely not your conception of the Bible, and it should likewise not be the impression that you leave with your parishioners. Try to pay attention to those things (even in summary) that will help them realize that God has provided us with a Bible which can be appreciated for the whole as well as the parts, and that God controls history *now*, thus controlling *our* history with the same loyalty that he showed to his people in OT times.<sup>38</sup>

Seeing the significance of God's ordering of history in the Old Testament will increase confidence in His sovereignty, then and now.

M C Tenney wrote a historical survey of the New Testament. However, the practical usefulness of knowing the historical background to New Testament passages, which he refers to below, also applies to the Old.

The message of the New Testament can be apprehended best when one has some comprehension of the world into which it first came. The literary, political, social, economic, and religious backgrounds of the first century are the context for the revelation of God in Christ. The terms which the apostles and their associates used for teaching were taken from the common life of their day and were familiar to the average man in the streets of Alexandria, of Antioch, or of Rome. As these terms become plain to the modern reader, their message will become increasingly clear.<sup>39</sup>

Knowledge of the historical and geographical setting will help the preacher ascertain the original message of Scripture.

Historical Analysis, then, will consider areas like chronology, archaeology, geography, genealogy, and cultural practices. It also has an "apologetic" element as it focuses on defending the text from critical attacks by seeking to reconcile seeming inconsistencies within Scripture, and also

---

<sup>38</sup> D Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 76.

<sup>39</sup> M Tenney, *The New Testament: A Historical and Analytic Survey* (London: Intervarsity Fellowship, 1954), 7.

between Scripture and extra-biblical sources and evidence.

This OTI course will equip the preacher with arguments to defend the Scriptures from critical attacks.

It is of great practical importance to understand the nature of biblical history, as in some respects it is quite different from secular history. Biblical history is true, selective, purposeful, relevant and redemptive. We shall now consider what each of these terms mean.

### **5.1. Factual/True**

Archaeology and chronological studies may help to confirm the historicity of biblical events. For example with respect to the Old Testament, R. K. Harrison asserts that “comparative historiographic studies have shown that, along with the Hittites, the ancient Hebrews were the most accurate, objective, and responsible recorders of Near Eastern history. . . . As a result, it is possible to view with a new degree of confidence and respect those early traditions of the Hebrews that purport to be historiographic in nature....The current flow of archeological discoveries tends to confirm, rather than repudiate, the claim of the Old Testament to historicity”<sup>40</sup>

However, for all the helpful confirmations of archaeology, it is noteworthy that the Bible simply states its history and does not set out to prove it. The concern of the biblical text is not to prove the history, but rather to impress the reader with the theological significance of the events and acts. This is one reason why biblical history, in the same manner as secular history, may not always be presented in a chronological manner.

In his book, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, Eugene Merrill explains one of the presuppositions of the evangelical biblical historian:

This history of Israel approaches the task with the frank confession that the Old Testament is the revelation of God in written form. This confession, of course, presupposes its inspiration as the Word of God and asserts its inerrancy in every area, including history. This does not mean that one can write a history of Israel without facing difficulties – sometimes insurmountable – but one can do so with full rec-

ognition that the problems vis-à-vis the sources are not inherent in them, but are due to the historian's human inability to integrate and interpret them. The record may be incomplete; accordingly, it can often be profitably supplemented by extra biblical data. It is never wrong, however, when it is fully understood.<sup>41</sup>

This mindset is essential when dealing with extra-biblical sources like archaeology. The texts of the Bible and the material remains uncovered by archaeology make claims about what happened in the past. Does one have primacy over the other? Is one more scientific than the other? What is their relationship?

The nature of the relationship is the subject of an ongoing debate. However, what is often forgotten in this debate is that just as the facts of the Bible need to be interpreted so do archaeological remains. E H Merrill highlighted this oft-forgotten fact:

This [archaeology] involves the presuppositions of the interpreter just as the interpreter of texts begins with certain presuppositions. Indeed, the case can be made that archaeology is a more subjective discipline precisely because the objects are mute (with the exception of extra-biblical textual material, which is subject to the same issues as the interpretation of the biblical text) as opposed to the biblical text, which provides us with interpretation of events. In the final analysis, it is much too simplistic to expect from archaeology either an independent verification of biblical claims or a certain scientific refutation of them.<sup>42</sup>

While this OTI course does, at important points, attempt to defend biblical history from critical attacks, there is a constant underlying assumption that biblical history is true and factual history. It is vital that the preacher believes this and conveys this in all his study and teaching. This approach differs fundamentally from the modern secular historian who approaches his documents with the assumption of "methodological doubt". Radical doubt certainly seems to motivate some biblical critics who approach the Bible with the assumption that there is little or no real, hard history in the Bible. The result of this is that biblical reports are now required to prove their historicity. Greidanus

---

<sup>40</sup> R K Harrison, *Biblical Criticism*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 5.

<sup>41</sup> E H Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1992), 18.

<sup>42</sup> R Dillard & T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 25-26.

highlighted the irrelevance of this critical approach to biblical history.

But what evidence will satisfy biblical critics that a narrative is historically reliable? Some have stated that one should accept nothing in the Old Testament as historical fact “until it can be demonstrated as such by extrabiblical evidence.” But this criterion is obviously unreasonable, for many of the scriptural records have to do with people and situations that were of no interest whatever to non-Hebrews who might otherwise have provided confirmatory source material. Moreover, many other reasons could be given for the silence of extrabiblical sources on biblical history: it might, indeed, be “no interest,” or “no occasion,” or “no knowledge,” or “no time or writing materials,” or “the evidence perished or is still to be found.” In any case, by itself an argument from silence can neither prove nor disprove biblical historicity.<sup>43</sup>

So, while the approach of methodological and radical doubt may be appropriate in approaching ordinary historical documents, it is entirely inappropriate for the Christian approaching the Scriptures. This is summed up by Merrill:

Regarding the Old Testament as the Word of God radically alters the task of writing the history of Israel by raising it to the level of a theological activity. If we grant that the writing of Israel’s history and the writing of the history of any other people are on entirely different planes precisely because, in the former case, history and theology cannot be separated, we must be willing to admit that the kind of skepticism that is a necessary part of conventional historiography has no place in our work. By virtue of our confession that we are under the authority of the very sources we are investigating we have already surrendered our right to reject what we cannot understand and what we find difficult to believe.<sup>44</sup>

The Christian faith stands on historical events. In contrast with other religions, Christianity proclaims that our salvation depends on what God did in history. Without a historical foundation there is no Gospel. Merrill ties together the history and the theological message in an unbreakable bond. He wrote:

---

<sup>43</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 30.

If the message that God made covenant with his people Israel has no historical foundation, then that message loses its point and evaporates. The Old Testament messages that God acted in Israel's history – redeeming, judging, restoring, guiding – lose their very essence unless they are as historical as they claim they are.<sup>45</sup>

Edmund Clowney astutely points out the utter necessity of historicity when it comes to the writing of covenant history:

The brief historical prologue of the covenant at Sinai is the key to understanding the whole preceding history of Exodus and the books of generations in Genesis as well. The history of the Pentateuch is not political or cultural in aim, nor is it a chronicle of stirring events. It is covenantal history: the record of God's dealings with the fathers, his covenant with Abraham and its renewal at Sinai. The force of covenant history lies in its actuality, its 'historicity.'<sup>46</sup>

This OTI course emphasises that the unique nature of biblical history requires a unique approach, that of radical faith not radical doubt, because the truth and power of the preacher's message rests entirely on the history of events as recorded in the Bible.

## **5.2. Selective**

The secular historian does not just give a straightforward narrative of events. He selects, arranges and interprets events for his contemporary audience. The biblical writers do the same in a divinely-inspired manner. One of the keys to a proper interpretation of the historical books of the Bible is the discovery of the writers' intention and how that affects their principle of selectivity. In two separate excerpts, Merrill explains:

It is inevitably necessary in history writing to include certain events and exclude others, usually on the bases of the availability of data and the special interests and concerns of the historian. This selectivity is eminently discernible in the Old Testament account of

---

<sup>44</sup> E H Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1992), 16.

<sup>45</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 93.

<sup>46</sup> E Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 41.

Israel's history because the Author (and authors) had particular objectives in mind. The real thrust of the Old Testament is theological. Those facts relevant to the grand themes of the divine purpose, for example, redemption, are retained while others are excluded. The history of Israel surely involved more than the record indicates. Indeed, frequent references to non-canonical documents such as the "Book of Jashar" and the "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel [or Judah]" tantalize the modern student with the extra-biblical information they must have contained. For reasons no longer clear, however, their contents did not become a part of the historical record.<sup>47</sup>

This process of selectivity should not surprise us, for it was operant as well in various other records written at the same time. For example, some prominent Old Testament events are not recorded in secular histories even when one might expect otherwise. Conversely, many crucial events in the outside world are not mentioned in the Old Testament. It is strange indeed that Egyptian (or, more surprising, Hittite) texts make no mention of Israel's exodus while the Old Testament remains silent about the mighty Hammurabi. The only explanation for such omissions is a highly selective and (by modern standards) unorthodox historiography. The modern historian must accept the situation for what it is and go about the work at hand accordingly. It is not the historian's business to suggest what the sources should or should not have included; one can only work with them and do one's best to understand them.<sup>48</sup>

The selective nature of biblical history is highlighted here in order to explain why this course does not engage in either speculative historical re-construction, nor critical historical de-construction. And, while highlighting the selective nature of biblical history, it should be remembered that this in no way diminishes its truthfulness.

In writing history, therefore, historians cannot help but be selective – selective not only in choosing which events they will write about but also which *side* of the events they will write about. For example, a historian may choose to write a political history, or a social history, or a history of art. This choice will not only influence the limits of his

---

<sup>47</sup> E H Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1992), 16.

study; it will necessarily bring certain facts into prominence or allow others to recede into the background. Different aspects of the same fact will acquire a special significance according to the context in which it is placed. This multidimensional character of historical events must be kept in mind when interpreting Scripture; one cannot legitimately expect a complete history writing in any sense of the term . . . . A complete history writing is an impossibility. Consequently, a crucial question for biblical interpretation is, Which events did the author select and which side of these events did he wish to highlight?<sup>49</sup>

This OTI course will highlight the practice of selectivity by Old Testament authors in order to help the preacher ascertain the message the authors intended to convey.

### **5.3. Purposeful**

The secular historian's selection is purposeful and deliberate. Biblical history is also written with a deliberate purpose in view – an inspired and divine purpose. Thus, biblical history is not an objective reporting of purely human events. It is a passionate account of God's saving acts in history. Accordingly, it has been described as “theological” history, “prophetic” history, and “covenantal” history. Dillard and Longman envision the historians of Israel as preachers.

Their texts are the events and they apply them with zeal to the congregation of Israel.

These texts are a wonderful integration of history, literature, morality, and theology.<sup>50</sup>

The importance of establishing the facts of biblical history, before interpreting the theological purpose of it, is demonstrated in this OTI course's presenting of Historical Analysis before Literary or Thematic Analysis. Once the facts are established, the literary presentation of these facts and the theological significance of them are then studied. This encourages the student not only to ask “What are the facts?”, but also “How are they presented?” (Literary Analysis), and “What do they mean?” (Thematic Analysis). To this is added the question, “Where is this history leading?” (New

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.,18.

<sup>49</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 84.

<sup>50</sup> R Dillard & T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 25.

Testament Analysis). This shows the special nature of biblical history, as Merrill noted:

It [the Old Testament] is a book of history, indeed, but it is far more – it is a progressive revelation of the mind and purposes of the Lord, and so it must be read and interpreted theologically. Though the totality of the facts makes up a corpus of historical information, each fact, each event, each person of the Old Testament has special meaning when seen against the backdrop of the whole. The exodus, for instance, is far more than an exciting episode laying the groundwork for the nationhood of Israel. It is a paradigmatic event that typifies the Lord's salvific actions for his people Israel and indeed for the whole world. To see it as such does not vitiate its literal historicity. To fail to see it as such, on the other hand is to fail to see that the Old Testament is a work of history that infinitely transcends the bounds of ordinary historiography.<sup>51</sup>

Biblical History views events not from a purely human standpoint but from that of God himself.

This special character of biblical history writing should guide interpreters in putting their questions to the biblical texts. The focus of the writers is not on the economic side of the events, nor on the social or political sides; their interest is concentrated on a deeper level of meaning: God's covenant, God's coming kingdom, the religious-theocentric dimension.<sup>52</sup>

As in so many areas of human existence, the over-emphasis on something good and useful can turn it into something that disadvantages the preacher. Greidanus highlighted one danger to be avoided in Historical Analysis.

On the one hand, therefore, the issue of historical reliability is a crucial concern. On the other hand, in interpreting narratives, one ought not to pay undue attention to this question of historicity, for ironically it may result in a distorted interpretation – as when one views the text as a clear window through which to look at what actually happened. For the text is much more like a stained glass window, and the preacher ought to focus on the author's prophetic *interpretation* of the event rather than on the (bare) event.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> E H Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1992), 18.

<sup>52</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 87.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 94

This OTI course will not simply study the bare facts of biblical history but will also consider the purpose of the history in order to assist the preacher in interpretation.

#### **5.4. Relevant**

As previously noted in section 2, preaching from the Old Testament faces the charge of seeming irrelevance. There are vast differences between the world of the Old Testament and the modern world. However, this OTI course emphasises that this “relevance gap” cannot be bridged by forgetting Old Testament history. Attempting this may make the sermon relevant but it makes the Scriptures irrelevant. Rather, it is emphasised that a right understanding of Old Testament history enables the student to understand the original message to the original audience at the original time and place, and that having done this, the bridge to the present message is far easier to construct safely.

Historical Analysis, then, provides the vital first step towards relevance by ascertaining the cultural, religious, and political situation the original words addressed. Historical Analysis reminds the preacher of the importance of having an objective point of control to confirm the meaning of the passage. It helps to keep the preacher on the track of the original intended meaning.

The desire to be relevant can lead the preacher into many dangers. Krister Stendahl suggested that Historical Analysis helps avoid these dangers in two ways.

Its first advantage is that it guards against apologetic softenings and harmonizations, against conscious and unconscious modernizations in the interest of making the Bible more acceptable and conterminous with religious and ethical sentiments and concerns of the contemporary reader . . . . [A second advantage is] its fostering great respect for the diversity within the Scriptures.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> K Stendahl, *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 2.

Historical Analysis will help the preacher maintain an objective point of control in the quest for relevance, and will also help to engender his hearer's respect for the diversity of the Scriptures.

### **5.5. Redemptive**

The Old Testament is redemptive history. God actively directs human history for the purpose of redeeming sinners to Himself. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Old Testament to record what would adequately reveal that redemptive purpose. The biblical history, then, is not just facts to teach us theology. These historical facts will serve to bring in God's elect.

Merrill commented on the importance of accurately establishing the historical facts if the biblical history is to have this powerful saving effect.

Any success in this endeavor will be of importance to the search for a true understanding of Israel's Old Testament past – a worthy objective in itself – and to the establishment of the historical factualness of the Old Testament record, the truthfulness of which is absolutely critical if the religious and theological message is to have any effect.<sup>55</sup>

A good grasp of biblical history will help the preacher to declare biblical history in a manner which God has promised to bless powerfully to the saving of His elect.

---

<sup>55</sup> E H Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1992), 11.

## **6. LITERARY ANALYSIS**

Having established the facts of the text, using Historical Analysis, Literary Analysis is then used to study the literary form, structure, and characteristics of the text. The difference between Literary Analysis and Historical Analysis is clarified by Douglas Stuart, who also highlights the paramount interest of the literary context step in exegesis.

The analysis of literary context has different interests from Historical Analysis. It is concerned not with the entire historical context from whatever sources it may be learned, but with the particular way that an inspired author or editor has placed a passage within an entire block of literature. Often the most important literary context for a passage will be the book in which the passage itself is found. How the passage fits within that book – what it contributes to the entire flow of that book and what the structure of that book contributes to it – constitutes a paramount interest of the literary context step in exegesis.<sup>56</sup>

Dillard and Longman also argue that “the literary genre, shape, and style of a book are essential keys to its proper interpretation.”<sup>57</sup>

This emphasis on the literary character of the Bible is a relatively recent phenomenon in biblical studies. Previous generations of scholars did remark on the literary quality of texts and also engaged in literary tasks, but usually it was for the purpose of answering historical questions. David Robertson described the increased emphasis on literature as a paradigm shift and says:

Today, by contrast the paradigm, or controlling idea, guiding the research of literary critics is literature. Consideration of the Bible as literature is itself the beginning and end of scholarly endeavor. The Bible is taken first and finally as a literary object.<sup>58</sup>

This paradigm shift to the literary dimension, like the earlier exclusive emphasis on the historical dimension, is again indicative of an atomistic approach, insofar as not all aspects are taken into account. For example, many new literary critics, especially structuralists, contend that it is irrelevant whether a text describes historical events or, for that matter, whether a text is sacred. This

---

<sup>56</sup> D Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 45.

<sup>57</sup> R Dillard & T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 20.

<sup>58</sup> D Robertson, *The Bible as Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 547-8.

OTI course rejects this one-sidedness, however, and also uses the complementary analytical tools of Historical and Thematic Analysis.

## **6.1 The importance of Literary Analysis**

Before considering the different components of Literary Analysis, we will consider why Literary Analysis is such an important step in exegesis. There are five reasons.

### **6.1.1. The Old Testament consists of literary units, not historical or thematic units**

We must pursue Literary Analysis because the Old Testament comes to us in literary units. To ignore this approach is to overlook how God structured the Scriptures. The Bible is structured not simply by history or according to the themes of Systematic Theology. Instead, single books like Genesis cover several major periods of redemptive history, whereas large groups of books like the prophets cover a single epoch. Similar theological themes appear not in one place but repeatedly in various combinations within the books of Scripture. So, clearly, if the Old Testament is made up of literary units we must discover the limits and nature of these units if we are to understand the Scriptures.

Awareness of the limits of literary units will increase understanding of the Scriptures.

### **6.1.2. Biblical texts exhibit literary qualities**

In His wisdom, God inspired Scripture in the forms of poems, songs and narratives. These texts exhibit many literary characteristics such as imagery, figures of speech, and intricate structures. Had God wanted us merely to concentrate on historical events and theological themes, He would not have given us revelation with literary qualities. Dillard and Longman comment:

In the Old Testament we encounter nothing quite like our modern history or scientific textbooks and certainly nothing approaching a theological essay or confession. Surprisingly, we encounter stories and poems. Why? Stories and even poetry speak to a broader segment of the people of God than would a more technical and precise form of communication. Even the youngest and the uneducated can appreciate and understand the stories of Samson and Delilah, Esther, or Ruth. In addition, stories and poems do

more than inform our intellect. They also arouse our emotions, appeal to our will, and stimulate our imagination in a way that a modern systematic theology cannot.<sup>59</sup>

An awareness of the different literary types and forms found in the Old Testament will increase exegetical accuracy.

### **6.1.3. Old Testament texts have a literary structure**

When we read the Old Testament, it is not immediately obvious that there is any clear structure. Indeed there often seems to be a lack of order and even confused or careless organization. However, recent studies have discovered that Hebrew writers organized their compositions according to literary conventions that were different from ours. They used structural patterns such as chiasmus (symmetry), parallelism and sevenfold patterns. What this means will become clearer as the Old Testament course progresses. The importance of this cannot be overestimated because human beings need and appreciate communication that is arranged and organized, and also, as Greidanus notes, because there is a relationship between each book's structure and its meaning and message.

Rhetorical criticism looks on the biblical text as a work of art and therefore emphasizes the unity of form and content. Thus the interpreter cannot lay hold of the specific content of a text without paying close attention to the form into which the artist-author (redactor) has cast his message in that particular instance. Clines remarks that rhetorical criticism "is not a mechanical matter of identifying stylistic devices, but, on the premise of the unity of form and content of a work of art, moves towards the work's meaning and quiddity from the standpoint of form rather than of content, of the 'how said' rather than the 'what said.'"<sup>60</sup>

Structural analysis will help the preacher discover not only the form but the meaning of the text.

### **6.1.4. Literary Analysis often offers insights that thematic and historical approaches overlook**

---

<sup>59</sup> R Dillard and T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 26.

The more that is learned about the document, writer and audience, the better the student will be equipped to investigate the Old Testament. This is testified to by Dillard and Longman in two separate quotations:

The literary genre, shape, and style of a book are essential keys to its proper interpretation.<sup>61</sup>

A Literary Analysis, while only a partial analysis, is helpful toward getting at the author's meaning in a book or passage of Scripture.<sup>62</sup>

In his influential presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1968 James Muilenburg argued for a far greater role for Literary Analysis or, as he put it "rhetorical criticism". His argument was not just academic but practical. It was about getting to the meaning of the text. He argued that "form and content are inextricably related. They form an integral whole. The two are one."

What I am interested in, above all, is understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I should describe as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism.<sup>63</sup>

Greidanus comments on the effects of this speech:

Accordingly, rhetorical criticism began by focusing attention particularly on two areas: the relation of form and content and the structural patterns of the received text.<sup>64</sup>

Literary Analysis is often the most important tool in discovering the original message as intended by the author and as understood by his original audience and readers. It is, therefore, of great practical value to the preacher. In addition to helping discover the original message, there are other practical benefits:

Although these structural patterns are all too often passed off in the scholarly literature as mere literary niceties, a structural tour de force which serves only aesthetic ends, their

---

<sup>60</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 58; Quoting D Clines, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 1* (1976), 37.

<sup>61</sup> R Dillard & T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 20.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>63</sup> J Muilenburg, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88/1 (1969) 5.

<sup>64</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 58.

value for biblical interpretation and preaching should be quite apparent. For if the biblical authors – in the New Testament as well as in the Old Testament and in “prose” as well as in “poetry” – did indeed use these structural patterns to mark their text in order to signal how they wished their work to be heard by their audience, contemporary expository preachers can also take advantage of these ancient markings.<sup>65</sup>

For example, it trains preachers when selecting a text to avoid taking a fragment of a text but instead to take a literary unit. Knowledge of how the biblical writers used literary devices to mark units provide clues to the extent and limits of the preaching text.

Structural patterns also help theme formulation. Biblical writers used structural patterns to provide contemporary preachers with clues as to the theme of a passage.

Structural patterns help the preacher to understand the text in its parts and in its larger context. For example, regarding the text in its parts, parallel lines elucidate and explain each other. Regarding the larger context, “being able to place a text in an overall chiasmic structure of a section or book provides an important clue to the meaning of a particular text.”<sup>66</sup>

Literary Analysis will help the preacher discover the original message, structure his own sermons and formulate the theme of his addresses.

#### **6.1.5. The example of New Testament scholarship**

Literary Analysis is not particularly innovative as far as biblical studies is concerned. It has long been applied to New Testament books. It is assumed that they were written for a particular people at a particular time facing particular problems. It is also assumed that until we understand the original writer, audience, and situation that we cannot apply the books’ lessons to our own days. In this course, then, New Testament methodology is transferred over to the Old Testament.

Training in Literary Analysis will help the preacher transfer scholarly practices from the New Testament to the Old Testament.

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>66</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 66.

Having considered five reasons for the importance of Literary Analysis, the component parts of Literary Analysis will now be examined.

## **6.2 The Components of Literary Analysis**

### **6.2.1. Writer**

Many of the Old Testament books do not explicitly state the human penman or writer. However, clues within the books and in the rest of Scripture may provide sufficient information to make at least tentative suggestions. If a specific person cannot be safely deduced then often the type or office of the author may be clear.

Discovering the human writer is an important part in the process of discovering the original message as it may often help to discern the writer's possible motives and reasons for writing.

### **6.2.2. Date**

Knowing the original writer will obviously assist in discerning the date of the book. It should be remembered that the writer may have been inspired to write of events hundreds of years before, often using existing records and sources. Even if an exact date cannot be given, again clues within the book and the rest of the Bible will allow the setting of an earliest date of writing and a latest date of writing.

Establishing the date of writing is an important step in arriving at the original message of the book as it will give clues as to the circumstances in which the book was written.

### **6.2.3. Form**

The meaning of a passage is inevitably affected by its form. Whether a portion is narrative, poetry, apocalyptic or hymnic will influence the way in which the words are understood. Douglas Stuart highlights the practical importance of form:

Knowing the form of a passage invariably pays dividends exegetically. If you can accurately categorize a piece of literature, you can accurately compare it to similar passages and thus appreciate both the ways in which it is typical and the ways in which it is unique. Moreover, the form of a piece of literature is always related in some way to its function.<sup>67</sup>

In another place he again ties in the form of a passage to its meaning:

Your congregation deserves to know whether the passage is in prose or poetry (or some of both), and whether it is a narrative, a speech, a lament, a hymn, an oracle of woe, an apocalyptic vision, a wisdom saying, etc. These various types (genres) of literature have different identifying features and, more important, must be analyzed with respect to their individual characteristics lest the meaning be lost or obscured.<sup>68</sup>

Analysis and comparison of the literary genre will help the preacher understand the passage's function and meaning.

#### **6.2.4. Structure**

The literary structure helps us to appreciate the beautiful orderliness of God's mind and revelation. He is not the author of confusion but of order, and this regard for order can be seen in the literary structures of the Old Testament books. The structure of the Old Testament books is particularly emphasised in this course. There are reasons for this:

Firstly, a structure or outline helps the student remember the contents of the book better. It gives "pegs" on which to "hang" the content.

Secondly, the literary structure helps to confront the destructive criticism of liberal scholarship by showing that Old Testament narratives are not haphazard collections of different bits and pieces of various authors, editors and redactors. Rather they are shown to be skilful and clearly divinely inspired works of art. This "apologetic" use of Literary Analysis is highlighted by E J Young in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*

---

<sup>67</sup> D Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 47.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

It is, therefore, the literary characteristics of the books that are emphasised in these pages. What is the nature of these books? Are they compilations of more or less heterogeneous fragments, composed at various ages and finally pieced together by later editors or redactors? Or are they, as this present volume seeks to demonstrate, literary units which exhibit an inner harmony and underlying unity?<sup>69</sup>

Contrary to liberal critics, we do not believe that the Old Testament books are compilations of various “heterogeneous fragments composed at various ages and finally pieced together by later editors or redactors”. They are homogenous literary units which “exhibit a clear structure, an inner harmony and underlying unity”. So form **and** content are considered.

Thirdly, the structure conveys meaning.

To understand the structure of a passage is to appreciate the flow of content designed into the passage by the mind of the author, consciously or even unconsciously. But beyond this, it is important to appreciate the fact that meaning is conveyed by more than just words and sentences. *How* the words and sentences relate to one another and where they occur within the passage can have a profound impact on its comprehension. Indeed, structure is often the main criterion for deciding whether a block of material is a single passage or a group of independent passages. A key word in structural analysis is “patterns.” Patterns indicate emphases and relationships, and emphases and relationships prioritize meaning. The basic question you must answer in analyzing a passage’s structure is: What can I learn from the way this is put together? Surprisingly often, by careful work one can learn more than meets the eye at first glance.<sup>70</sup>

The ability to distinguish literary units will be learned by studying this Old Testament course. Sometimes the units are differentiated by changes in character, sometimes by changes in scene, sometimes by changes in time and pace, sometimes by changes in form. Other markers are referred to by Douglas Stuart:

Then look specifically for meaningful patterns. Are there any repetitions of words, resumptions of ideas, sounds, parallelisms, central or pivotal words, associations of

---

<sup>69</sup> E J Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1953), 9.

words, or other patterns that can help you get a handle on the structure? Look especially for evidence of repetitions and progressions that may help you understand what the passage is emphasizing. How exactly has the inspired writer ordered his or her words and phrases, and why? What is stressed thereby? What is brought full circle to completion? Is there anything especially beautiful or striking in the structure, especially if the passage is a poem? Remember that the structure not only contains the content but is also to some extent *part of the content*.<sup>71</sup>

After distinguishing the different literary units of a book or passage, this course will present these units in a graphic way.

Sometimes the units will be progressive:

A  
    B  
        C

Sometimes they will be symmetrical:

A  
    B  
        C  
    B'  
A'

Sometimes they will be alternating:

A  
    B  
A'  
    B'  
A''  
    B''

Sometimes they will be circular:

A  
    B  
        C  
A'  
    B'  
        C'

---

<sup>70</sup> D Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 49.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Structural analysis will assist memorising of Scripture, defeat critical arguments, and illuminate the meaning of passages.

### **6.2.5. Canonical Context**

While this OTI course will study the Old Testament books one at a time, recognition will be given to the fact that the books do not exist separately but rather in the context of the wider canon. This will be highlighted by four overviews of the four major canonical sections in the Old Testament – the Pentateuch, the Historical Books, the Poetic Books and the Prophetic Books. It will be further recognised by regular sections under “Literary Analysis” entitled “Canonical Context” and, under “Thematic Analysis”, some attempt will be made to set the themes of each book in their canonical context.

It was Brevard Childs in particular who pioneered this approach and, subsequently, defended it:

We would like to defend the thesis that the canon of the Christian church is the most appropriate context from which to do Biblical Theology.<sup>72</sup>

Childs is of the view that regardless of the text’s pre-history and post-history both are subordinated to the form deemed canonical:

The goal of the enterprise is to illuminate the writings which have been and continue to be received as authoritative by the community of faith.<sup>73</sup>

The advantage to the preacher is that it reminds him to base his messages on canonical texts understood in the context of the canon.

It reminds the preacher and hearer to view the text not as “an objective thing out there that must be *made* relevant but as part of the canon which is inherently relevant, for this channel was formed for the specific purpose of proclaiming God’s good news to future generations.”<sup>74</sup>

Understanding of the canonical context will assist the preacher in communicating the gracious Divine purpose in providing and preserving the canon of Scripture.

### **6.2.6 Original Audience**

The main purpose of the previous steps of Literary Analysis are designed to answer the questions:

<sup>72</sup> B Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 99.

<sup>73</sup> B Childs, *New Testament as Canon*, (Philadelphia: Fortress 1984), 48.

<sup>74</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 77.

“Why did Old Testament writers compose their stories as they did?” and “What purposes did they have toward their readers?” Therefore, discovering who the original readers were should greatly help us to understand how the book was intended to meet their needs. This OTI course will repeatedly attempt to do this so that it becomes second nature for the student. The result should be that instead of first asking “What does this mean for me?” the student will begin asking first “What did this passage mean for the original reader/hearer?” Knowing the date and writer of the book will greatly help to make a decision on the original audience. There may also be clues within the book and in other related portions of Scripture.

This OTI course will encourage the preacher to discover the original audience and, therefore, move closer to the original meaning.

## **7. THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

Historical and Literary Analysis lay the groundwork for thematic (or theological) analysis. Having established the **facts** and the **form** in which the facts are presented in, the **meaning** of the facts can then be more closely considered.

### **7.1 The sequence of analysis**

Both Historical Analysis and Literary Analysis help us to bridge the gap between the present time and the Old Testament's ancient context. However, the bridge remains incomplete without adding theological analysis. Dillard and Longman remark:

Without implying a radical separation of the three categories, however, it is appropriate to remark that the purpose of the Bible is neither historical nor literary; it is theological. Thus, third, we believe it is not only legitimate, but necessary, to introduce students to the theological function of the various Old Testament books in order to achieve reader competence.<sup>75</sup>

Douglas Stuart also follows this sequence of Historical Analysis, followed by Literary Analysis, then theological analysis. In this quotation from *Old Testament Exegesis*, we may substitute "passage" with "book" as we consider the theological questions which should be asked of a portion of Scripture:

Where does the passage fit within the whole corpus of revelation comprising Christian (dogmatic) theology? Under which covenant does it fit? Are aspects of it limited in part or in whole to the Old Covenant as, for example, certain cultic sacrificial practices or certain rules for tribal responsibilities would be? If so, is it still relevant as a historical example of God's relationship to human beings, or as an indication of God's holiness, standards, justice, immanence, transcendence, compassion, etc.? . . . . Is the passage related to far broader theological concerns that encompass both covenants and are not strictly bound by either? To which doctrine(s) does the passage relate? Does it have potential relevance for the classical doctrinal conceptions of God, humanity, angels, sin,

---

<sup>75</sup> R Dillard and T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 34.

salvation, the church, eschatology, etc.<sup>76</sup>

## **7.2 Theological interpretation**

Theology is, by definition, knowledge of God and especially His relationship with His creatures. So, each Old Testament book, studied in this OTI course, will be asked: “What does it tell us about God and His relationship with his creatures?”

Greidanus described this step as “theological interpretation”. Of this term he wrote:

I use it only with the clear understanding that “theological” refers not to theory or the discipline of theology but to *God*, specifically, the revelation *of* God and the revelation *about* God. Theological interpretation seeks to hear *God’s* voice in the Scriptures; it seeks to probe beyond mere historical reconstruction and verbal meanings to a discernment of the message of God in the Scriptures; it concentrates on the prophetic, kerygmatic dimension and the theocentric focus.<sup>77</sup>

He went on:

The Bible requires theological interpretation not only because it is the word *of* God but also because it is the authoritative word *about* God – his acts, his will, his relation to his creation and to his people.<sup>78</sup>

## **7.3 Exegetical Theology**

Geerhardus Vos distinguished theological study into four departments: Exegetical Theology, Historical Theology, Systematic Theology and Practical Theology. The primacy of Exegetical Theology is in recognition of the fact that “at the beginning of all Theology lies a passive, receptive attitude on the part of the one who engages in its study”.<sup>79</sup> God has spoken and man must listen. Vos goes on to argue that Exegetical Theology must not be confined to Exegesis. He points out that Exegetical Theology comprises four steps:

- (a) the study of the actual content of Holy Scripture;
- (b) the inquiry into the origin of the several Biblical writings, including the identity of the writers, the time and occasion of composition, dependence on possible sources, etc.

---

<sup>76</sup> D Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 24.

<sup>77</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 103.

<sup>78</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 105.

This is called *Introduction*, and may be regarded as a further carrying out of the process of Exegesis proper;

(c) the putting of the question of how these several writings came to be collected into the unity of a Bible or book; this part of the process bears the technical name of *Canonic*;

(d) the study of the actual self-disclosures of God in time and space which lie back of even the first committal to writing of any Biblical document, and which for a long time continued to run alongside of the inscripturation of revealed material; this last-named procedure is called the study of *Biblical Theology*.

This logical and chronological order of the way Exegetical Theology ordinarily proceeds closely resembles Douglas Stuart's order of study noted above. It is also similar to the practice of this OTI course which commences with Historical Analysis and Literary Analysis before proceeding to Thematic Analysis or as Vos terms it "Biblical Theology".

#### **7.4 Biblical or Systematic Theology**

Under "Thematic Analysis", then, this OTI course will be studying "Biblical Theology". Geerhardus Vos pointed out that all truly Christian theology must be *Biblical* Theology for "apart from General Revelation the Scriptures constitute the sole material with which the science of Theology can deal".<sup>80</sup> However, he went on to acknowledge that though a more suitable and precise name would be "History of Special Revelation", "Biblical Theology" was now a recognisable description of one particular kind of theological approach to the Bible. He went on to describe its place and practice thus:

Biblical Theology occupies a position between Exegesis and Systematic Theology in the encyclopaedia of theological disciplines. It differs from Systematic Theology, not in being more Biblical, or adhering more closely to the truths of the Scriptures, but in that its principle of organizing the Biblical material is historical rather than logical. Whereas Systematic Theology takes the Bible as a completed whole and endeavours to exhibit its total teaching in an orderly, systematic form, Biblical Theology deals with the material

---

<sup>79</sup> G Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 4.

from the historical standpoint, seeking to exhibit the organic growth or development of the truths of Special Revelation from the primitive pre-redemptive Special Revelation given in Eden to the close of the New Testament canon.<sup>81</sup>

In this OTI course the primary concern is with the Old Testament and so Thematic Analysis will not include the tracing of theological themes and motifs into the New Testament. This will be considered more briefly under New Testament Analysis.

R B Zuck also highlighted the differences and relation between Biblical and Systematic Theology.

Systematic theology is concerned to view and articulate biblical truth in terms of the complete canonical witness without particular concern for the developmental process at work to create its final shape. It is the more synthetic of the disciplines and aims at a unified result. Biblical theology is concerned to discern, trace, and describe the progress of divine revelation throughout the canon from its earliest to its latest expression. It logically precedes systematics and is the bridge between exegesis and systematics.<sup>82</sup>

Biblical Theology then “is that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible”.<sup>83</sup> This definition closely connects the activity of Divine revelation with the activity of Divine redemption. As redemption was not completed in one complete and exhaustive act, neither was revelation. The central and objective redeeming acts of God on behalf of His elect occurred progressively and increasingly. And “as revelation is the interpretation of redemption, it must, therefore, unfold itself in installments as redemption does.”<sup>84</sup>

Gerhard Hasel focuses more on the literary dimension in his definition of Biblical Theology:

A Biblical theology has the task of providing summary interpretations of the final form of the individual Biblical documents or groups of writings and of presenting the longitudinal themes, motifs, and concepts that emerge from the Biblical materials.<sup>85</sup>

While the Thematic Analysis of this OTI course more closely resembles *Biblical Theology* than

---

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>82</sup> R B Zuck, *A Biblical theology of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), Electronic Edition.

<sup>83</sup> G Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 5.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>85</sup> G F Hasel, *Horizons of Biblical Theology* 4/1 (1982), 77.

*Systematic Theology*, it does differ in one respect. Unlike many Biblical Theologies, this OTI course will discuss each Old Testament book separately. This sometimes leads to repetition, because some books have much in common. However, the ultimate purpose of this OTI course is not primarily to produce a neat Biblical Theology, but to introduce students to each Old Testament book. The expense of repetition is not too high a price to pay for the attainment of this aim.

### **7.5 The “periods” of Biblical Theology**

This also explains why this OTI course does not follow the practice of some Biblical Theologies in dividing the course of revelation into certain periods. In justifying this “periodic” approach Vos wrote:

Whatever may be the modern tendency towards eliminating the principle of periodicity from historical science, it remains certain that God in the unfolding of revelation has regularly employed this principle.<sup>86</sup>

While this OTI course will note and often tabulate important periods and epochs in redemptive history and redemptive revelation, the course itself will not be structured around this. The course’s purpose is greater and wider than Biblical Theology. Too much of Historical, Literary and New Testament Analysis would be lost by an over-emphasis on the organising principles of Biblical Theology.

### **7.6 The central theme of Biblical Theology**

This further explains why though certain themes and motifs will recur throughout the course, no one theme or motif will be used to unite all Old Testament theology. This has been attempted by others. Kaiser chose God’s promise as the central motif. O P Robertson chose covenant. Kline chose theophany. However, none of these themes does full justice to the diversity of revelation in the Old Testament. Vos himself admits this:

Such attempts, however, have failed to persuade a majority of the scholarly community.

It does not seem possible to subordinate all of biblical revelation under a single theme.<sup>87</sup>

Sidney Greidanus traced the search for an all-inclusive, overarching and all-encompassing theme, and recorded various proposals made over time: “the holiness of God,” “God as the Lord,”

---

<sup>86</sup> G Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 16.

“the rulership of God,” “the kingdom of God,” “the promise of God,” “the experience of God,” “Israel’s election as the people of God,” “communion,” “the name of God,” “the presence of God.” Greidanus concludes by quoting Hasel:

It is highly significant that virtually all of these suggestions have as their common denominator an aspect of God and/or his activity for the world or man . . . . In short, God is the dynamic, unifying center of the OT.<sup>88</sup>

If we propose that God Himself is the over-arching and all-encompassing theme, it would also be appropriate to note the diversity within the revelation of God. Vern Poythress has called this approach “multiperspectival”. Dillard and Longman endorse this approach and say:

A multiperspectival approach to biblical theology is more in keeping with the rich and subtle nature of biblical revelation . . . . [It] takes account of the many-faceted nature of God’s relationship with his creatures. It notes, in particular, the variety of metaphors that emphasise different aspects of that relationship. No one metaphor is capable of capturing the richness of God’s nature or of the wonder of his relationship with his creatures.<sup>89</sup>

So, though more often presented in narrative or song than didactic statement, the Old Testament ranges over a wide range of theological concepts and categories. The doctrines of God, of Scripture, of sin, of man, of the Church, of the State, and, of course, of redemption are frequently and variously treated. In the course of Thematic Analysis, then, we can also expect to find anthropology, bibliology, ecclesiology, soteriology, eschatology and, of course, Christology.

In conclusion, the practical advantages of Thematic Analysis or “Biblical Theology” are:

---

<sup>87</sup> R Dillard and T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 35.

<sup>88</sup> G F Hasel, *Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 139-40.

<sup>89</sup> R Dillard and T Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 35.

- It moves the preacher towards a theocentric approach and away from an anthropocentric, moralistic reading and preaching of the Bible.
- It helps counteract the anti-doctrinal tendency of the present.
- It imparts new life and freshness to the truth by showing it in its original historic setting.
- It helps the preacher understand the passage in its own historical context and in the light of God's progressive revelation before proclaiming it as God's authoritative word for contemporary congregations.
- With its emphasis on the progressive organic growth of Special Revelation, it enables the preacher properly to distribute the emphasis among the several aspects of teaching and preaching.
- By highlighting the unity of the Bible, it lays bare the themes that connect the Old and New Testaments, leading the preacher from the one to the other and so towards application to his congregation.
- It supplies a useful antidote against the teachings of rationalistic criticism by disproving its denial of the Bible's organism in its revelation structure.
- It avoids the disadvantages of attempting to prove fundamental doctrines of the faith by means of isolated proof texts, by showing how theology grows organically from the main stem of Scripture.
- It gives the preacher a new view of God by displaying a particular aspect of His nature in connection with His historical approach to and intercourse with man.

## **8. NEW TESTAMENT ANALYSIS**

Through Historical, Thematic and Literary Analysis we will study the Old Testament text as it was given to its original and ancient audience. But we cannot stop there without going on to highlight the relationship between Old Testament themes and the New Testament.

To stop short of this in Old Testament studies or preaching is to fail. Norman Geisler emphasised this:

Viewing the Old Testament Christocentrically is not an interpretative option; for the Christian it is a divine imperative. On five different occasions Jesus claimed to be the theme of the entire Old Testament (Matt.5:17; Lk.24:27; Lk.24:44; Jn.5:39; Heb.10:7).<sup>90</sup>

It is impossible to understand fully or preach the Old Testament without utilising the light which the New Testament sheds on the Old. The Old Testament is fulfilled in the New and especially in Jesus of Nazareth.

We shall briefly consider Christ's use of the Old Testament. Then we shall note the Apostles' use of it. The methods of New Testament Analysis will then be highlighted, before concluding this section with a summary of the practical benefits of New Testament Analysis to the preacher.

### **8.1. Christ's use of the Old Testament**

The Christocentric nature of the Old Testament is taught by Jesus Christ himself.

Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself . . . . And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me (Lk.24:25-27; 44).

---

<sup>90</sup> Norman Geisler, *Christ: The Theme of the Bible*, 31.

The New Testament teaches us the abiding authority and usefulness of the Old Testament for the New Testament Church. Jesus taught that He was the true interpreter of the Old Testament. In His first sermon Jesus made clear that much of the then current interpretation of the Old Testament was wrong and that He had come to correct it. As well as rightly interpreting the Old Testament and so guiding all Old Testament students, Jesus also insisted that He was the personal fulfilment of the Old Testament, that He was its major theme (Lk.4:21).

Christ transformed Old Testament interpretation by drawing together in himself various strands of teaching and braiding them into a single cord. The major themes of prophetic expectation found their consummation in him.<sup>91</sup>

## **8.2 The Apostles' use of the Old Testament**

The New Testament writers also viewed the Old Testament Christocentrically, as they had no doubt been trained to do by the Lord Jesus Himself. They saw it as bearing repeated testimony to Jesus Christ. He was the perfect Man, the perfect Law-giver, the perfect Law-keeper, the perfect sacrifice, the perfect Priest, the perfect Prophet, the Perfect King. The New Testament writers also saw Christocentric significance in the historical events of the Old Testament. For example, the crossing of the Red Sea prefigured Christian baptism (1 Cor.10:1-2); Joshua's conquest of Canaan prefigured the Christian's spiritual rest (Heb.3-4); the calling of Israel out of Egypt foreshadowed Christ's experience as a child (Matt.2:15).

In general we may say that the Old Testament presented the preparation of which the New Testament was the fulfilment; it was the seed and plant of which the New Testament was the glorious fruit. Precisely because Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled what the Old Testament predicted, His life and deeds possessed absolute finality, rather than His being a mere religious sage like many others. For this reason also, the Gospel of Christ possesses divine validity which sets it apart from all man-made religions. The Old Testament demonstrates that Jesus and His Church were providential, the embodiment of the purpose of God; the New Testament proves that the Hebrew Scriptures constituted a coherent and integrated organism, focused upon a single great theme and

---

<sup>91</sup> Lasor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), 586.

exhibiting a single program of redemption.<sup>92</sup>

Paul, who had been trained by Rabbis in the Old Testament, depended heavily on it in his writings, quoting from it over 80 times. His main themes and arguments are based upon it. He emphasised its authority and its verdicts. As such, he provides a model for all who preach the Word.

For Paul, Christ was not only a factor giving added meaning to the Old Testament but the only means whereby the Old Testament could be rightly understood; it was not merely that he saw Christ in the Old Testament but that he viewed the whole scope of Old Testament prophecy and history from the standpoint of the Messianic Age in which the Old Testament stood open, fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in His new creation.<sup>93</sup>

Michael Barrett argues that every revealed truth “relates to and is ultimately defined by the central truth of the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed.” He goes on:

Understanding the Old Testament is also impossible without reference to Christ. He is the key that unlocks all the mysteries of the Old Testament. This is not speculation; this is the teaching of the New Testament, both by direct statement and by example . . . . It means that if we read any book of the Old Testament without reference to what it teaches concerning Christ, we are missing the key element in that book. If we do not see Christ, it is not because He is not there.<sup>94</sup>

If we fail to see Christ in the Old Testament books we will miss the central message and so misinterpret Scripture.

If Christ is the central theme of the Scripture and the key that unlocks the meaning and message of the Old Testament, it is imperative that every reader of the Old Testament sees the Lord Jesus.<sup>95</sup>

The words which epitomise the message of the Gospel of John, then, should also apply to Old Testament studies: “These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name” (Jn.20:31).

---

<sup>92</sup> G L Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press), Electronic Edition.

<sup>93</sup> E E Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: n.p., 1957), 113.

<sup>94</sup> M P Barrett, *Beginning at Moses* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2001), 13.

### **8.3 The Methodology of New Testament Analysis**

There are numerous approaches to New Testament Analysis. In his book, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, Greidanus proposes six methods of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. These are summarised below. Greidanus himself admits that these ways “are not scientifically precise and overlap considerably.”<sup>96</sup>

#### **8.3.1. Redemptive-Historical Progression**

Redemptive historical progression traces the progress of Old Testament events to their ultimate climax in Christ.

For example, Matthew uses redemptive historical progression to show that Christ is the ultimate successor of the Davidic royal line, a dynasty which had received divine promises of eternal and worldwide rule (Matt.1).

In Acts there are several sermons recorded which use redemptive-historical progression to proclaim Christ (Acts2:22-23; 7:2-52; 13:16-41).

In his letters, Paul preaches Christ using redemptive-historical progression (Rom.1:1-3; Gal.3:24; 4:4-5).

#### **8.3.2. Promise Fulfilment**

Some Old Testament promises were fulfilled in the Old Testament (Gen.17:8 & Josh.21:43-45). Others were left unfulfilled in the Old Testament and only came to fulfilment with the advent of Christ in the New Testament. It is these latter promises with which New Testament Analysis is concerned. Jesus Himself taught how to understand these promises as fulfilled in Himself (Lk.4:21 & Isa.61:1-2; Mat.1:22&Isa.7:14,16). New Testament Analysis also highlights how in fulfilling OT promises Christ turns them into new promises of even larger scope (Gen.12:3; Acts 3:25).

#### **8.3.3. Typology**

God accomplishes his redemptive plan not only progressively but also uniformly, through the similarity of redemptive acts. It is the role of New Testament Analysis to highlight these analogies between God’s present acts in Christ and his redemptive acts in the OT. This is typology, and involves “tracing of the constant principles of God’s working in history, revealing a recurrent

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 14.

rhythm in past history which is taken up more fully and perfectly in Gospel events. Typology, therefore is characterised by analogy and escalation.”<sup>97</sup>

For example, Jesus used typology both to set forth the correspondence between past redemptive events and His own work and to show the escalation involved in His own coming (Matt.12:40-42).

Paul used typology (e.g. Rom.5:12-19) not to highlight superficial similarities between the type and antitype, but to focus on the theological essence of the events.

#### **8.3.4. Analogy**

Old Testament writers often use analogy by writing about later events and persons in a similar way to earlier events and persons. This enabled them to emphasise both the continuity and progression in God’s dealings with his people.

New Testament writers do the same in order to “establish the continuity and progression in God’s dealings with Israel through Christ with the Church.”<sup>98</sup> For example, Old Testament Israel is Jehovah’s bride (Jer.2:2; Hos.2:14-20), just as the Church is the bride of Christ (Eph.5:32).

Greidanus argues that in distinction from typology, the analogy here lies between the relationship of God to Israel and that of Christ to the church.

#### **8.3.5. Longitudinal Themes**

New Testament Analysis also highlights the way the New Testament takes Old Testament themes and intensifies and progresses them. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reiterates, expands and deepens many Old Testament themes.

#### **8.3.6. Contrast**

Whereas the previous methods outlined above focus on the continuity between the Old Testament and Christ, contrast focuses on the discontinuity Christ brings (Deut.7:1-6; Mat.28:19-20).

### **8.4 The practical benefits of New Testament Analysis to the preacher**

We shall conclude this section on New Testament Analysis by summarising the practical benefits of it for the preacher.

---

<sup>96</sup> S Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 203.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

- By showing the way Old Testament prophecies and types are fulfilled in Christ, the preacher's reverence for the organic unity of Scripture is deepened.
- It reminds the preacher that from wherever he is preaching, the great theme of the whole Bible is Jesus Christ
- By allowing Christ and His apostles to offer inspired commentary on the Old Testament, exegetical decisions are made clearer.
- New Testament Analysis shows how an understanding of Old Testament history, literature and theology assists preaching from the New Testament also
- It teaches us the abiding authority and usefulness of the Old Testament for the New Testament Church.

## **9. ORIGINAL AND PRESENT MESSAGE**

The original and present message of Scripture is the ultimate destination which the four analytical methods are intended to arrive at. The separate and distinct use of these four analytical tools must eventually be brought together like a fourfold cord which will draw out of Scripture the original and present message.

### **9.1 How many meanings?**

This raises the question: “How many meanings does Scripture have?” The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states:

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.<sup>99</sup>

The meaning of every Biblical text “is not manifold but one”.

### **9.2. The problem of meaning**

Before considering the process of discovering the original message, the reason for emphasising this should be remembered. The reason is that post-modern norms of secular interpretation have also invaded the church. Kaiser highlighted the major presupposition of secular literary interpretation which continues to threaten credible and biblical exegesis:

Whatever an author may have meant or intended to say by his or her written words is now irrelevant to the meanings we have come to assign as the meaning we see in that author’s text! On that basis, the reader is the one who sets the meaning for a text.<sup>100</sup>

This basically meant that the meaning of a text was no longer determined by the original author’s intention or the original audience’s understanding. Each and every subsequent reader could read new meanings into the text.

Polzin protested that today many biblical scholars approach the Bible in the same way readers approach certain books, “like a picnic to which the author brings the words and the reader the

---

<sup>99</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.9.

<sup>100</sup> Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 191.

meaning.”<sup>101</sup>

Kaiser describes the effects this philosophy of meaning has on biblical interpretation.

In a legitimate attempt to avoid the stultifying deadness and dryness of mere descriptive retelling of the biblical materials, in which the “then” of the B.C. or first century A.D. historical context controlled the whole sermon, many have swung to the opposite extreme by making the reader sovereign over the meaning process. In this swing of the pendulum, so much emphasis today is placed on the “now” with an emphasis on the application or significance of the text, that little or no attempt is made to see if there is any connection between emphasised significance or application of a text and the meaning that the author intended.<sup>102</sup>

The problem with this, as E D Hirsch points out, is that “to banish the original author as the determiner of meaning . . . . [is] to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation.”<sup>103</sup>

Kaiser’s solution to this dangerous trend is a re-focussing on the original meaning.

The first line of defense in the current debate is to insist that the author has a right to determine what his or her text must mean before anyone else says what the text means. This is critical. Should this battle be lost, the disastrous results of modernity and postmodernity are inevitable.<sup>104</sup>

Re-focussing on original meaning will characterise this OTI course. Each book as a whole, and each major section in it, will be asked: “What did it tell its original audience/readers about God and their relationship with him?”

Focus on the original meaning will help the preacher resist the modern tendency to see the original author’s intended meaning as irrelevant.

The process of uncovering the original meaning is further unpacked by Sidney Greidanus:

---

<sup>101</sup> Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 3, quoting Northrop Frye (Greidanus, 107).

<sup>102</sup> Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 194.

<sup>103</sup> E D Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1967), 5.

We need to ask two basic questions. First, What was the author's intended meaning for his original hearers? We can answer this question by seeking answers to the five familiar questions: Who wrote this text? To whom? When? Where? And why? For proper understanding, however, we need not know the precise answer to each of these questions, for frequently we can understand the message even though we may not know the author, or precisely when or where he wrote. But the questions "To whom?" and especially "Why?" are of crucial importance for preachers, for these questions have to do with the original life-setting (*Sitz im Leben*) of the text. Moreover, they provide information to answer the second basic question. The second basic question is, What need of the hearers did the author seek to address? Every text has a question behind the text, an issue that called the text into being. It may be idolatry, or lack of knowledge, or lack of justice, or lack of love for neighbor, or foreign alliances, or exile, or misplaced trust in large armies. Combining the meaning discovered in literary interpretation with the clues to existential meaning provided by historical interpretation will give us a good idea of the author's original message.<sup>105</sup>

To do this the biblical interpreter has to sit with the original hearers in the synagogue, in the wilderness, in the market or whatever place they occupied when the words originally came to them. We must try to divorce ourselves from contemporary life and attempt to understand the words as they came originally to them. LaSor, Hubbard and Bush highlight the advantages of this focus:

Only when we begin to understand the intent of a passage for the author's own times, can we seek the full significance of the passage for Christian faith and life. The Old Testament context will not tell us all we need to know about the meaning of the passage. But unless we start there, we can easily twist the Scriptures to our own purposes. The intention and meaning of the individual authors must be grasped if we are to capture the meaning put there by the overall Author, the Spirit of God.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 203.

<sup>105</sup> S Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), 285.

<sup>106</sup> LaSor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), 590.

An understanding of the original message will better enable the preacher understand the full significance of a passage for the Christian life.

Asking for the original writer's purpose will also curb subjectivism in interpretation. Because of his prior training the preacher often comes to exegete the text with his mind already made up as to its meaning. This prejudice is further compounded by the desire for the text to fulfil a particular purpose in the congregation. Another complication is that the desire for relevant application may dominate interpretation.

A major reason for seeking the purpose of the author is, therefore, consciously to shift attention away from ourselves to the Scriptures, away from our concerns to the author's concerns, away from our own purposes to the author's purpose. In other words, asking for the author's purpose is an attempt at genuine listening by cutting out all subjective interference.<sup>107</sup>

This OTI course's focus on original meaning will discourage the preacher from letting previous understandings, and the desire for suitable application, distort the true meaning of a passage.

Although this course makes frequent reference to the original author's original meaning, it is accepted that this is not an exact science. Complications do arise from the author having various purposes in writing.

## **9.2 The Present Message**

As God is the ultimate author of Scripture, it is his intention alone that exhaustively determines its meaning. This ultimate meaning, which goes beyond the author's original intentions, has been called the *sensus plenior*, the fuller sense. Raymond Brown defines the *sensus plenior* as "that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a Biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are

studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation.”<sup>108</sup>

William LaSor explains that *sensus plenior* is “not a reading into the text of theological doctrines and theories, but a reading from the text of the fullness of meaning required by God’s complete revelation.”<sup>109</sup> This “fuller sense” is safely established by extending the original sense on the basis of subsequent revelation.

Greidanus distinguishes the step from original message to “fuller sense” as follows:

Having gained insight into the immediate purpose of a book or passage, with biblical literature one must proceed a step further by inquiring after the ultimate purpose of a passage. We may call this ultimate purpose “God’s purpose,” as long as we remember that the inspired human author’s immediate purpose was also God’s purpose. But God’s ultimate purpose can be much broader and farther reaching than the relatively limited, immediate purpose of the human author. This broader, all-encompassing purpose becomes evident especially when a book or letter is interpreted in the context of the whole canon.<sup>110</sup>

Most OTI courses and books stop at the “original meaning”. A few, do take the next step and analyse the “fuller sense”. But, even fewer take the final step of considering the “present message”. This OTI course places high value both the “fuller sense” and the “present message”. The reluctance of some to complete this final step in the exegetical process is referred to by Douglas Stuart.

Everyone agrees that exegesis seeks to determine the meaning of a passage of Scripture. Many exegetes believe, however, that their responsibilities stop with the past – that exegesis is the attempt to discover what the text *meant*, not what it *means* now. Placing such arbitrary limits on exegesis is unsatisfactory for three reasons. First, it ignores the ultimate reason why the vast majority of people engage in exegesis or are interested in the results of exegesis: They desire to hear and obey God’s word as it is found in the passage. Exegesis, in other words, is an empty intellectual entertainment when divorced

---

<sup>107</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 107.

<sup>108</sup> R E Brown, *Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (STD Dissertation, St. Mary’s, Baltimore, 1955) 92.

<sup>109</sup> LaSor, *Sensus Plenior and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 47.

from application. Second, it addresses only one aspect of meaning – the historical – as if God’s words were intended only for individual generations and not also for us and, indeed, for those who will follow us in time. The Scriptures are *our* Scriptures, not just the Scriptures of the ancients. Finally, it leaves the actual personal or corporate existential interpretation and use of the passage to subjectivity. The exegete, who has come to know the passage best, refuses to help the reader or hearer of the passage at the very point where the reader’s or hearer’s interest is keenest. The exegete leaves the key function – response – completely to the subjective sensibilities of the reader or hearer, who knows the passage least.<sup>111</sup>

It is New Testament Analysis in particular that, by looking at Old Testament acts and facts from a New Testament perspective, enables us to move towards the “fuller meaning”, and then to the “Present Message”.

Christocentric preaching requires that a passage receive a theocentric interpretation not only in its own (Old Testament) horizon but also in the broader horizon of the whole canon. In this way one can do justice to two sets of biblical testimonies: on the one hand, Christ as the eternal Logos is present and active in Old Testament times, and, on the other hand, Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament.<sup>112</sup>

This OTI course’s emphasis on “Present Message” encourages the preacher to make the vital moves from exegesis to the fuller sense, then to application, along a safe and reliable track.

---

<sup>110</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 110.

<sup>111</sup> D Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 27.

<sup>112</sup> S Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 119.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### *Selected Bibliography, Works Cited, or Sources Consulted*

- Archer, G L. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998).
- Arnold, B and Beyer, B. *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).
- Barrett, M P. *Beginning at Moses* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2001).
- Brown, R E. *Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (STD Dissertation, St. Mary's, Baltimore, 1955).
- Bullock, C H. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993).
- *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986).
- Childs, B. *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).
- Crossley, G. *The Old Testament Explained and Applied* (England: Evangelical Press, 2002).
- Clines, D J. *Beginning OT Study*, (London: SPCK, 1983).
- Clowney, E. *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).
- Davies, D R. *Joshua* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000).
- Dillard R and Longman III, T. *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).
- Dorsey, D. *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).
- Dumbrell, W J. *The Faith of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).
- Ellis, E E. *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: 1957).
- Greenwood, D. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89/4 (1970).
- Greidanus, S. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003).
- *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999).
- Harrison, R K. *Biblical Criticism*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).
- Hasel, G F. *Horizons of Biblical Theology* 4/1 (1982)
- Hirsch, E D. *Validity in Interpretation*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1967).
- Howard, D M. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993).
- Kaiser, W C. *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament* (Michigan: Baker, 2003).
- Keil, C F. *Commentary on Joshua* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1988).
- Lasor, W S and Hubbard, D A and Bush, F W. *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996).
- Merrill, E H. *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1992).
- Pipa, J A. *Seminary Education* (Chalcedon Report, 2001).
- Robertson, D. *The Bible as Literature*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976).
- Ryken, L and Longman III, T (Editors), *The Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1993).

- Smart, J D. *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972).
- Stendahl, K. *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).
- Stuart, D. *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).
- Tenney, M. *The New Testament: A Historical and Analytic Survey* (London: Intervarsity Fellowship, 1954).
- Vos, G. *Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975).
- Wolf, H. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991).
- Wood, L J. *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999).
- Young, E J. *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1953).
- Zuck, R B. *A Biblical theology of the Old Testament* .(Chicago: Moody Press: 1976).