

## INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

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### A. OT IS PART OF CHRISTIAN CANON:

"Canon" means something like "measuring stick" (or standard)

Examples of Contemporary "Canons":

**Today there are at least four different versions of the Bible, divided by the religious tradition that has embraced it.**

Jewish, Orthodox (e.g. Greek, Russian), Roman Catholic, and Protestant Christian.

**\*Jewish tradition** supplies three categories that have persisted (called the *Tankh*, created by the first Hebrew letter of each of the major units) :

1.--**Torah** (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)

2.--**Prophets** (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel,

[Plus the 12 minor Prophets, and writings.]])

**PLEASE NOTE: PROPHET DOES NOT MEAN ONE WHO FORETELLS THE FUTURE. RATHER IT REFERS TO ONE WHO SPEAKS FOR GOD, DELIVERS GOD'S MESSAGE FOR HUMANS.**

3.--**Writings** (Psalms, Job, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Ester, Daniel, Ezra- Nehemiah, 1-2 Chronicles).

The Hebrew canon was probably fixed by the Council of Jamani toward the end of the first Century, A. D.

It was later translated into Greek after Greek had become the common language.

The Greek Bible was to become the source of our canon, which Luther embraced.

**\*\*Protestant Christian canon** includes the JEWISH canon plus

1. 4 Gospels, Acts, and 13 epistles attributed to Paul,
2. 7 "general" (Catholic) epistles:
3. James, 1& 2 Peter, 1-3 John, and Jude along with Revelation.

**\*\*\*The Roman Catholic tradition includes seven more books taken from manuscript traditions from the Greek [Septuagint] and the Latin [Vulgate] Bible.**

This expanded version is now called "the deuterocanon."

(A collection of writings sometimes classified as part of the "apocrypha" or hidden or secret Books including Tobit ... Judith ... 1-2 Maccabees ... Wisdom ... Sirach ... Baruch, and Additions to Esther and Daniel.

## **B. OUR OLD TESTAMENT IS USUALLY DIVIDED INTO THREE PARTS:**

### **1. TORAH ( or LAW -- 5 books) – GENESIS, EXODUS, LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, AND DEUTERONOMY,**

a. Some issues related to these book include these questions:

**FIRST, WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH ALL OF THE LAW CONTAINED WITHIN THESE BOOKS?**

– In general, two concerns are prominent in these books of law—

**proper sacrificial worship and moral behavior.**

–On the one hand, we can pretty much disregard the laws that pertain to the clean and the unclean, given these considerations:

For the most part, the concepts of the clean and unclean in the Torah are rooted in ancient tribal life, and are irrelevant to worship of the Jewish-Christian God.

For example, in ancient tribal life humans were thought to become unclean when they have contact with a corpse or bodily fluids of any kind.

–On the other hand, these are in large part laws which involve moral and justice issues.

Therefore, these are in many ways of vital importance for our Christian lives,

for example:

**First**, The 10 commandments, e.g. Exodus 20: 1-17 and Deut 5:6-21

— And the laws concerning slaves, violence, property, and restitution, (social relationships and morality).

E.g., listen, for instance, to this passage in Deuteronomy 22:

“You shall not watch your neighbor’s ox or sheep straying away and ignore them.”

(WE MIGHT SAY THE SAME THING ABOUT OUR PROPERTY,

e.g. The Caddie or Lincoln

**Moreover, The history of Israel is, in general, worth our attention for several reasons:**

(1). Their needs and problems are not unlike many of our own.

E.G., The search FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, and

THE RESTLESSNESS OF ASKING WHERE IS GOD IN OUR struggles.

(2). God’s involvement in Israel’s history may also give us clues as to where God is to be found today.

## 2. THE PROPHETS

(There are actually TWO DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF THE PROPHETS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: The Classical prophets and certain of the miscellaneous writings)

a. Note furthermore, that the category “prophets” is used in several different ways in the OT:

(1) For instance in the three divisions: TORAH, PROPHETS AND THE WRITINGS.

Here the Canonical prophets simply comprise the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the OT .

(2). The PROPHETIC LITERATURE actually includes books

a. which *claim to have been written* BY a prophetic figure,

b. as well as those that are written ABOUT a prophet (e. g., Elisha and Elijah in 1 Kings).

b. *However, be aware too, the category of THE CLASSICAL PROPHETS*

*(Sometimes spoken of as the "writing prophets," e. g.,*

*Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Obadiah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, and Malachi.)*

*(This as opposed to those who are only mentioned as characters in other books such as Nathan in 2 Samuel e.g. 7:1-14.)*

### **3. THE WRITINGS—**

As the title suggests, this is a broad category into which we can classify almost anything that does not fit one of the two categories (either Law or Prophet)!

Therefore, our concern here is simply with any literature that cannot be classified Torah or Prophets.

These include among others:

THE PSALMS, PROVERBS, JOB SONG OF SOLOMON , RUTH, LAMENTATIONS,  
ECCLESIASTES, ESTHER, DANIEL, EZRA-NEHEMIAH

I will simply make a couple of descriptive statements about each, which I hope will represent their major significance.

#### **a. PSALMS**

Poetry designed for use in worship – praise, lamentation, doubt, etc.

#### **b. PROVERBS**

Expressions of wisdom which are supposed to support and enrich our faith.

#### **c. JOB**

The story of one man's search for justice in what seems an entirely unjust world

#### **d. THE SONG OF SOLOMON**

A puzzling book which is interpreted in many different ways, but which seems, however, to invited reflections on love in both its human and divine forms.

