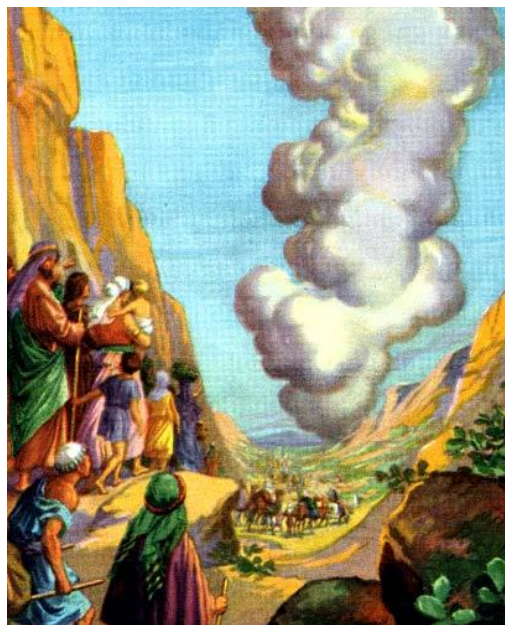


Progressing Together



BIBL 210

Old Testament Survey



Leader's Guide

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BIBL 210

Introduction to the Old Testament

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Lesson 1:

Course objectives and challenges to interpreting the Old Testament

Key Concept: This course aims to train you to be faithful and practical Christian ministers in the context where you live, which involves growing in knowledge, character and practical ministry. Beware of problematic approaches to reading and applying the Old Testament.

Lesson Goals:

Content and Cognitive Competencies (CCC)

- a) Know about and understand the objectives and design of this course.
- b) Know about (recognize) negative views (misunderstandings) about the Old Testament
- c) Know about problematic (unwise and unfruitful) ways of interpreting the Old Testament

Character and Spiritual Maturity (CSM)

- a) Reflect on times when you have approached the Old Testament negatively
- b) Recognize and give relevant examples of the dangers of misusing the Old Testament
- c) Pray and ask the Lord to open your eyes to his message to you in the Old Testament
-Pray for a love and hunger to know Him and his message in the Old Testament

Mission & Ministry Competencies (MMC)

Reflect and write about how you hope this course will impact your marriage and/or family, your work and ministry in your church.

Introduction

Our purpose in this Old Testament overview course is to learn to faithfully read and apply the Old Testament in our lives, church communities and local context. We will seek to understand its place in the narrative of the whole Bible, how it testifies to Jesus and its place in God's mission through his people throughout history.

Three objectives: Knowing, Being and Doing

Because we are committed to training believers in faithful and fruitful ministry in our context of the world, we have designed the teaching and learning in all the chapters with the purpose of facilitating growth and maturity in three areas; knowing, being and doing in Christ. We have called these *Content and Cognitive Competencies* (the knowing), *Character and Spiritual Maturity* (the being) and *Mission & Ministry Competencies* (the doing). The teaching and learning activities and the assessments are shaped by the goal of seeing progress in all three areas. This might be different to some courses that you have completed in the past, which may have put most of the emphasis on learning and reproducing content. Whilst it is important to learn what the Old Testament teaches and ideally read through all of it throughout the duration of this course, the most important thing is that you actually grow as a believer bearing fruit for the glory of Christ in our part of the world. Although these three goals overlap continually, we have deliberately indicated next to the learning activity or task which goal we have designed the task for. So, where you see any of the three letters below next the learning activity, it indicates whether this activity is a *Content and Cognitive Competency*, *Character and Spiritual Maturity* or a *Mission and Ministry Competency* learning task.


CCC = *Content and Cognitive Competency*

CSM = *Character and Spiritual Maturity*

MMC = *Mission and Ministry Competency*

Sometimes 2 or even 3 objectives will appear with the same learning task/activity. If you see **CCC** it signals a learning task that involves knowledge and comprehension. For example the question 'What does the Bible passage say about x, y or z?'

If you see **CCCx** next to each other it signals that the task involves application and analysis of concepts, which is a higher-level cognitive task. For example, the question 'Why is x, y or z difficult in our part of the world?'

The CCCx questions preceded by the  symbol are designed to help you prepare your reflection for group discussion during class review time. If you can, write down your initial responses to these questions and be ready to share them in class. If not, you can wait for the class discussion to write down your answers.

Facilitator's note: It is important to highlight this paragraph in order to clarify what needs to be prepared. Students who want the course to count for the Level 2 program or for the Certificate of Ministry Preparation will not be penalized if the questions preceded by the symbol are not filled out in their notebooks in advance. They do not need to feel frustrated

at all if they have not been able to answer the questions without the help of the facilitator and the class.

Learning in Groups

Our expectation and hope is that you will use this course with other believers, learning in a group. This might be brothers and sisters in your own church or a discipling group gathered from further afield. However we also recognise that for some of you this will not be possible. In this case, we will try to link you with other believers on-line (?).

The Facilitator

We also intend that you learn with a *facilitator*. This may be an older or more mature believer (or teacher) or one of your peers who is gifted to be a *facilitator*. The job of the *facilitator* is to chair (coordinate) the learning and discussion times making sure that all members have the opportunity to contribute, leading the group through the teaching components and clarifying the learning activities or tasks. Learning therefore happens, partly through your own reading of the content, partly through discussion and interaction within the group and partly through tasks that require you to bring all three goals (knowing, being and doing) together.

Finding a Mentor

We also request that all students nominate a *mentor* for the duration of this course. This is a mature believer with whom you can meet periodically to process and work through some of your learning. This person will also be able to make comments on whether progress is being made in all objectives of the course, but in particular in your Christ-like character (being) and ministry (doing). This person doesn't have to be well trained theologically but should be someone respected and approved by the local church or local believers and able to encourage and challenge you as you grow through this course.

Learning Activities and Tasks

The learning activities and tasks are all designed with the 'knowing', 'being' and 'doing' objectives in mind. Some specifically target one of these goals, though most tasks will include all of them. Look for the three-letter symbol next to each activity for an indication of which objective the learning task is targeting. Because we recognize that each student is different and uniquely gifted, there will also be tasks set which provide multiple ways of processing the learning and demonstrating your ability to think and act Biblically in your varied contexts. Some examples are; oral presentations, poetry, songs, a short story, a work of art, etc... xxxx.

Journaling

One of the key ways that biblical knowledge, Christ-like character and fruitful ministry will be evidenced in this course is through *journaling*. You are required to keep a personal journal throughout the duration of the course, which will form part of your assessment. This can either be written or oral. The journal can be kept electronically. You may record yourself either on video or on an MP3 (or other digital recorder). You will be set learning tasks that require you to demonstrate your ability to reflect on the content and ministry activities that you are learning in and through. The emphasis of this journal will be less on 'getting the

right answers' and more on 'showing that you can think and act' biblically in the real world of your life and ministry. They will be personal and therefore no two student's journal entries are likely to be the same.

Activities preceded by the ✍ symbol must be written or recorded in your journal which will be kept separate from the answer notebook for other learning activities. The journal activities are normally found at the end of each lesson. It is preferable to write your response twice: once after your personal study before the class review, and another time as a final synthesis of the class' discussion.

Learning Activity and Task 1 (CCCx, CSM and MMC)

Take some time now to think and then write down answers to the following in your journal then discuss your answers with your learning group and/or mentor:

- (a) What do you hope to learn in this introduction to the Old Testament?
- (b) In what ways do you hope to grow up in Christ-like spiritual maturity?
- (c) How do you hope this will be visible in your life and ministry?
 - (i) If you are married, how will your wife see this in you?
 - (ii) How will your wider family see this in you?
 - (iii) How will your work friends/colleagues see this in you?
 - (iv) How will brothers and sisters in your local church-group see this?]

Facilitator's Note: Take time to listen attentively to the desires and expectations of different students. Help them to identify what changes, and in what areas, they would especially like to see. Encourage them to consider how this Bible course could impact those concrete changes in their character and their witness. Begin by giving your personal response to this question. Be ready to give examples of changes which you hope to see in your own life.

Interpreting the Old Testament

As we begin, we need to recognise that many of us come to the Old Testament with a mixture of attitudes, experiences, knowledge and approaches. In this first lesson, we will consider some negative attitudes to the Old Testament and some of the dangers of misinterpreting it. To help you do this we are going to introduce you to Dr Majdi and his friends.

Negative views about the Old Testament

Majdi is a Palestinian Christian, working as a doctor in Gaza. He was recently asked by Ronaldo a Brazilian Christian friend and colleague, why, when Majdi's church met for worship, they never read from the Old Testament. "Oh its simple" Majdi replied,

"...the Old Testament is full of war and anger, not love and peace, it's not like the Gospels... God is on the side of Israel and since childhood foreign Christians have been using the Old Testament to tell me I don't belong in Palestine... I struggle to find anything helpful for me in the Old Testament, so that's why I prefer to stick to the

New Testament... after all its because of the New Testament and Jesus that we are believers."

Some Christian believers think that the God of the Old Testament is harsh and vindictive, distant from people and that he is not at all like the God of the NT. Like some of Majdi's friends, they think that if the God of the Old Testament loves one group of people more than any others, then they'd rather not believe in a God like that. Others who read parts of the Old Testament come to the conclusion that this is an ancient book that has little if anything to say about modern life, after all, it's full of primitive goat herders, people who practice polygamy and who owned slaves. Still others think that this was/is a book for the Jews and not for Christians or anyone else.

Do these attitudes to the Old Testament shock you? Have you heard these kind of ideas before? Is this what you think? Do you think Majdi is right? If so how? If not, why not? Who has influenced you most in your understanding of the Old Testament?

Learning Activity 2 (CSM)

Take some time now to write down in your journal your own personal concerns about the Old Testament. Be as honest as you can.

(a-d) Free Responses:

Help the students freely explore and express their attitudes toward the Old Testament without judgment. Then keep track of the errors which need to be fixed eventually.

Here are a few potential problems which you may discover:

Israel and the current political situation

The question of the justice of God and his favoritism toward a specific people group

God's violence and severity

Questionable practices: polygamy, slavery

A question you may pose: "When you hear the word "Israel," what is your initial feeling?" What connotations does this word carry?

People's views about the Old Testament vary enormously and if you are like us, then you may also have struggled to understand how to read and apply its message in your personal life, your family, your church group, neighbourhood and your nation. Whether you have recently come to faith in Christ or been a believer for some years, you may have your favourite passages in the Old Testament, but large parts of it still remain uncharted territory.

Problematic ways of interpreting the Old Testament

Whilst rejecting the message of the Old Testament as too harsh, backwards or irrelevant keeps many people from really understanding its message, perhaps an even greater problem comes from those Christians who profess to believe and know the Old Testament, but don't interpret it faithfully or wisely.

Here are four problematic ways of interpreting the Old Testament that can be seen amongst Dr Majdi's friends;

(1) The Old Testament as 'Mirror' (or the pharmacy approach)

One of Dr Majdi's friend's is Mustapha. Mustapha is a pharmacist and is part of an Arab church in Bethlehem. He came to faith listening to many stories from the Old and New Testament. Not long ago he started to pray that God would provide him with a good Christian wife. In the context of praying and reading his bible he was drawn to a beautiful story in the Old Testament that he believed God was using to guide him in his quest for a wife. It was the story of Abraham sending his servant to search for a wife for his son Isaac (you can find it in Genesis 24). You may remember that Abraham didn't want his son to marry one of the young women of Canaan so he sent his servant back to the land of his origin – Mesopotamia. Abraham told his servant to bring his servant back from that place. His servant did as Abraham requested and his journey was blessed. He found Rebekah, Isaac's cousin, and brought her back to marry Abraham's son.

So, after praying Mustapha decided that he should do something similar and he looked for a 'servant' who would be able to find him a future wife. He decided that James, an English believer and good friend who worked with him and Majdi, would be the person to play this role. He knew that James was about to travel to a conference in Europe, so he met with him to share his sense of God's leading as he had read Genesis 24 and asked James to find him a wife. He would accept whomever James chose. He thought that this was the Lord's will for him.

Learning Activity 3 (CCC and CCCx)

✍️ What do you think? Was Mustapha right to interpret this Old Testament story in this way applying it directly to his life? Why? Why not?

No, he had no right to expect God to listen to him the same way he listened to Abraham. An example of why this is the case: Even if you wanted to act the exact same way that Abraham did, it would be almost impossible to reproduce the same circumstances. As for Moustapha, his situation is very different from that of Abraham: he is not originally from Europe, and he doesn't have family there with whom he shares a spiritual heritage and to whom he can send a servant. He is not a foreigner and there are possibilities for him to find a godly wife in his context. How can he demand that God act in that exact way with him? Even if his situation were identical to that of Abraham, Abraham's actions should not be taken as a recipe to be copied. If it doesn't work, would he have a right to blame God? (Prov 19:3) On the contrary, you can see here how Abraham went to great effort to respect the Biblical principal of marrying a person with the same faith in God.

A question you may pose: Have you blamed God for the failure of a project which was built on the same faulty foundation as that of Moustapha?


You might think this is as silly story but the truth is that many sincere and well-meaning believers approach stories in the Old Testament like this. They read the narrative (story) of the Old Testament and use it like a mirror, reading their own situations/lives directly into the Old Testament or the Old Testament directly into their lives. We will call this the 'mirror' approach. But since Mustapha is a pharmacist, we might also use another metaphor and call

it the 'pharmacy' approach because Mustapha has read the Bible as if it was a medical dispensary from which he can simply pull out the right medication to heal his particular ailments. Whilst it might seem very godly to approach the Old Testament (or any part of the Bible) to solve our problems, the fact is that the Old Testament was not given to us to make us feel better or solve our individual problems in that way. This approach uses the Old Testament like a good luck or magic charm because we want God's blessing in our lives.

(2) The Old Testament as an 'Encyclopaedia'

Another of Dr Majdi's friends is Ziad. Ziad is a Tunisian student of natural history at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem. He likes to take an intellectual and scientific approach to the study of the Bible. In his lectures, his professors tell him that the dinosaurs were extinct before humans 'evolved from primates'. As a Bible believing Christian, Ziad wants to read the Old Testament to discover whether and when the dinosaurs existed and when they went extinct. He goes through several Old Testament passages including the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 to work this out. But he ends up confused. He finds 'creatures' of the sea but no dinosaurs. Does that mean that his professors are wrong? Or is the Bible wrong? Have the fossils of dinosaurs placed in the earth to test our faith?

Learning Activity 4 (CCC and CCCx)

 What do you think? Was Ziad right to look in Genesis for evidence for the existence of dinosaurs? Why? Why not?

It is definitely interesting to note what the Bible says regarding dinosaurs. Overall, the Bible does not answer all scientific questions. It has another goal: it does not seek to answer scientific questions, but to reveal the Creator and his design for his creation and for humanity in particular. Whatever the Bible mentions regarding the earth and its creatures at a certain time period corresponds to reality. It is always interesting to compare Biblical texts with scientific themes (and also with fossil remains), always keeping in mind that scientific theories change. They are always in question; it is not necessary to expect the Bible to express these truths in modern scientific language. If you do so, the Bible will be incomprehensible for the vast majority of its readers.

Ziad had scientific questions that he wants to answer. Other believers have questions related to history, politics, literature and other disciplines. For example, what were the customs of the ancient Egyptians during the time of Moses? Did Noah's ark include every species of animal? The Bible may give us useful information in some of these areas of study and others. However when we bring our research questions to the Old Testament, like someone looking up a subject in the encyclopaedia, then we are asking it to do something that God never intended it to do. This is the 'encyclopaedia' approach. The Bible is not an encyclopaedia and when we approach and use the Bible in this way we misuse it.

(3) The Old Testament as a 'Rulebook'

Dr Majdi has another friend who is a mechanic called Seif El-Din. Seif comes from a very conservative religious background, and since coming to faith six months ago, he has been diligently and studiously reading and memorising large parts of the Old Testament. He has

memorised most of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) and he's been a little bit disappointed that he seems to be the only one in his small church group that knows so much of the Old Testament 'off by heart'. Another thing that Seif struggles with in his new life as a believer is lack of rules. In his old life there were rules to guide every part of his life. Rules for how to wash, eat, pray, read and just about everything else. So, when Seif approaches the Bible he looks for 'rules' that he can keep as a kind of instruction manual for what he should do in life. We will call this the rulebook approach. Seif is quite happy that there are some very clear rules in the Old Testament, 'you shall not bear false witness against you neighbour', 'you shall not commit adultery' (Exodus 20) etc... But there are other rules about shaving your head (Leviticus 14) or how to harvest your field (Leviticus 19) or what to do about mould on your clothes (Leviticus 13), that he's not sure how to keep these. Even harder for Seif is that fact that there are so many stories in the Old Testament about not very upright people that God seems to use and bless. Seif doesn't know what 'rules' he should use from their lives.

Learning Activity 5 (CCC, CCCx and CSM)

✍ What do you think? Do you have the same struggles as Seif? Is Seif right to approach the Bible as a rulebook? Why? Why not? Can you see any dangers with this approach?

First of all, you must realize that the goal of the Law is to show God's justice and that it is impossible for humans to perfectly satisfy his requirements. Man, through the law, learns his need for the sacrifice of a perfect Savior: the Messiah.

At the same time, the laws of the Old Testament must be applied correctly and wisely. These laws form a group. They were applied to a people at a certain time period in a given context. When we consider the set of laws, we understand things about God and about his desire to create a just, compassionate and balanced community. However, it will be impossible to reproduce the same social and religious context today in order to apply all the written laws. We must understand the principles of those laws (the spirit) without trying to replicate the form (the letter).


You might know people like Seif who approach the Bible like this. Of course there are very clear rules in the Old Testament (such as the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5) but much of the Bible is not a list a rules or commandments telling us what to do or not to do. Over 40% of the Old Testament is narrative (a story). Drawing out 'rules' from many of these stories can be very challenging. The story of Rahab in Judges 2 is a good example. Rahab clearly lied in order to protect the spies who were investigating the land of Canaan. We run into difficulties because in lying Rahab actually disobeyed one of God's 10 commandments by bearing false witness to her neighbours (Exodus 20:16) in order to protect the Israelite spies. However the story clearly tells us that this was God's will and that he blessed her for her courageous 'lie', saved her life and allowed her to join his people. So, though the Bible does contain commands it is not only or primarily a book of rules.

(4) The Old Testament as a 'Tableau'

Finally, Dr Majdi has a friend called Yacub. Yacub works with Musalaha – a reconciliation ministry amongst Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews (Christian believers from a

Jewish background). Yacub's mum is a practicing Jew and his dad is a Palestinian Arab secular Muslim. He grew up speaking with both Arabic and Hebrew. As a child Jacob memorised large parts of the Jewish Bible (the Old Testament). Since coming to personal faith, Yacub has continued to read and love the Old Testament. Recently Yacub led his brother Benjamin to faith in Jesus Christ. This has been quite a dramatic conversion because Benjamin was a very religious Jew. Benjamin is also passionate about the Jewish Bible (the Old Testament) and Jacob and Dr Majdi have been struggling with the amount of arguments he gets into with secular Jews, Muslims and Christians about the way that the Tenakh¹ is treated. He doesn't like seeing anyone open and read the Old Testament without ritually cleaning themselves, wearing the correct prayer shawl etc... He keeps his Bible in a glass case under lock and key. When Yacub brings round Muslim and Christian friends and wants to read parts of the Bible to them, Benjamin won't let them touch it and recently he has got into a massive argument on Facebook about the superiority and supremacy of Hebrew over Arabic. Benjamin can recite large parts of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) and has a beautiful voice, which has won him many prizes in the past few years. Whilst Yacub admires Benjamin's zeal for the Old Testament, he is struggling to get him to share its message with non-believers.

Learning Activity 6 (CCCx and CSM)

 What do you think? Is Benjamin right to handle the Bible like this? Why? Why not? Can you see any dangers with this approach?

The Bible is above all the message of God who intervenes and changes life. It must be accessible to all. The important thing is that we use it: open it, read it, meditate on it, and let it change us.

Benjamin's respect and love for the Old Testament is admirable, but his attitude to it also an obstacle. We might call his way of handling the Old Testament the 'tableau' approach. He views the Old Testament as a beautiful tableau, like you would find in an art gallery or in a museum... the kind of thing you would hang high on the wall in a beautiful case in pride of place, so that visitors could look at it but not handle or touch it. Sometimes our attitude to the Bible is like this. We proudly defend its beauty, virtue and supremacy, like a tableau, comparing it with other 'inferior' books. Our attitude is something like, 'my book is better than yours'. By doing this we hide behind the tableau rather than exploring the landscape it depicts, discerning the different scenes that are being communicated and entering the world that the artist has created.

Conclusion

We have seen that people approach the Bible as a 'mirror', reading their own situation directly into the text and the text into their own situation to solve their personal problems, as an 'encyclopaedia' to find facts, as a 'rulebook' to find out what standards they should follow and as a 'tableau' to display, defend or hide behind. Of course the Old Testament (and the whole Bible) does help us solve our personal problems, find knowledge, know the standards and law of God and it is beautiful and worth making known! But, not in the ways

¹ This is the Jewish name for the OT. It consists of three divisions, 1. the Torah ('The Law' - first five books of the Bible), 2. the Nevi'im (the Prophets) and 3. the Ketouvim (the Writings), (see Lesson 2).

that Mustapha, Ziad, Seif and Benyamin have approached it. In this course we will begin an important journey in reading and applying the Old Testament faithfully and wisely. We will try to avoid the unfruitful and unwise approaches of Dr Majdi and his friends; Mustapha (the 'mirror' approach), Ziad (the 'encyclopaedia' approach), Seif (the 'rule-book' approach) and Benyamin (the 'tableau' approach). So, let the journey begin...

Learning Activity 7 (CCCx)

Lets begin to familiarise ourselves with the Old Testament text and at the same time think about the dangers of unfruitful or unwise approaches to interpreting it.

Read Genesis Chapters 1-12

Now consider the following statements by four believers after they had read some of the events recorded in the first 12 chapters of Genesis.

☞ What unwise approaches do you observe in each of these believers?

(a) About the story of Cain and Abel in chapter 4, Mohammed said this;

"I have decided to stop working for the department for agriculture and to raise cattle (keeping sheep and goats) instead. The story of Cain and Abel has taught me the biblical principle that raising cattle is more honourable than working the soil like Cain and God will look favourably on me like Abel."

(b) About the story of Noah and the flood in chapters 6-9 Leila said this:

"My husband and I are the only believers in our wider family and in our village. This whole community has rejected the Good news of Jesus Christ. God's judgement will come on them. After reading the story of Noah we have decided to get on a boat and set sail for the West."

(c) About the story of the tower of Babel in ch11 Abdelhak said this:

"This is clear evidence that there were skyscrapers in the ancient world."

(d) About the story of the calling of Abram Amal said this:

"Its clear that Semitic people are more blessed than Chinese or European people and that we Egyptians are especially close to God's purposes. I know this because God chose Abram who was a Semite and then sent him to Egypt."

Learning Activity 8 (CCC):

Study the chart below of the Old Testament library. You will find a label on each book with the book's abbreviation. The books are in the Protestant order of the Bible. Using the abbreviations, write the full name of each book in the right-hand column. Advice: Try to remember the abbreviations and the order of the Old Testament books. These will be a big help to you in all your study of the Bible. If not, you can keep this chart as a reference. (Chart to be provided)

Learning Activity 9 (CCCx and MMC)

☞ In your journal write your first entry for 'Lesson 1'. Imagine meeting Dr Majdi and his four friends at a café late one evening in Ramadan. Either record onto MP3 or write a record of the conversation you would have with them. Address each of them in person, showing

that you understand their different ways of approaching the Old Testament. Then courteously explain to them what you think the dangers are in their approaches to the Old Testament.

(a) Mohammed, why did God refuse Cain's offering? It was certainly not a rejection of his profession. God clearly told Cain's father Adam in Gen 2 to cultivate the earth, and in Gen 3 he told him, "You shall work the earth with great effort."

The Bible does not clearly explain why God rejected Cain's offering. To be sure, the disposition of his heart did not honor God. Also, some commentators suggest that he should have understood that since his parents' sin, God asked for a blood sacrifice in order for anyone to approach him; yet Cain insisted before God that he accept the fruit of his labor. If that was the case for Cain, it is no longer the case today. For since the death of Jesus on the cross, we have no more need to offer animal sacrifices for sins. (Heb 10:3-7, 10)

God commanded that people work with their hands so they won't need to depend on others, but would instead have enough to help others. (1 Thes 4:9-12) He wants us to offer a part of the fruit of our labor to his church with joy. (2 Cor 9:6-9)

(b) Leila, what is the message God communicated to Noah? God will never again judge the earth with water, despite the sin of humanity. God wants to forgive and save his people! It is true that the flood announces a future judgment which will be definitive and which will come with fire. But we are living today in the time of grace and the announcement of salvation to those who believe in Christ. Our role is to be the agents of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:19-20; Matt 28:19-20) In Romans 10:11-15, the Apostle Paul insists that messengers must be sent all over so that all people hear the message of salvation. But if you leave, who will announce the Good News to your neighbors?

Remind the students that they must write down their responses to the learning activities preceded by the ✍ symbol in a separate journal. (See the introduction to the "Using a Journal" section below.) Encourage them to begin writing their summary responses in the journal at the end of each lesson in class if there is time, and to finish them at home during the week.

Lesson 2: Faithfully interpreting the Old Testament Story

Key Concept: To faithfully read and apply the Old Testament in our lives, church communities and local context, we must understand its place in the narrative of the whole Bible, the testimony of Jesus and the New Testament Apostles and God's redemptive story throughout history.

Lesson Goals:

Content and Cognitive Competencies (CCC)

- a) Know/understand that though diverse in authorship and style of writing, the Old Testament is part of one book, with one author and one key subject
- b) Know/understand how Jesus and the early apostles interpreted the Old Testament
- c) Know/understand the wisdom of interpreting the Old Testament as part of God's redemptive story
(Understand and use the 'Five Act Play' metaphor)

Character and Spiritual Maturity (CSM)

- Pray and ask the Lord to open your eyes to his message to you in the Old Testament
- a. Pray for a love and hunger to know Him and his message in the Old Testament
 - b. Pray for the ability to faithfully communicate the core themes and message of the Old Testament in your context

Mission & Ministry Competencies (MMC)

Write a poem or compose a song to communicate the heart of Jesus' teaching and how his teaching interprets the Old Testament passage.

Introduction

In lesson 1 after considering objectives of this Old Testament course and the way in which it will help us to learn and grow, we thought about some of the problematic ways in which people try to read and use the Old Testament. In this lesson we will learn that although the Old Testament is made up of 39 different books with different styles of writing it is nonetheless one book, with one author and one key subject. We will see how Jesus and the early apostles interpreted the Old Testament and find out about the wisdom of interpreting the Old Testament as part of God's redemptive story.

Having been challenged by his friend Ronaldo to read and understand the Old Testament better, Dr Majdi decided to attend some classes at Bethlehem Bible College. A few months ago he was fascinated by a lecture that opened his eyes to many aspects of the Old Testament that he was unaware of. Here are some of the things he learnt...

The Diversity of the Old Testament: different authors, types of literature & books

The Bible contains sixty-six books written by about forty human authors over 2000 years ago in two main languages, Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) and includes different types of literature.

In our Bibles the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are arranged as follows:

| History | Poetry | Prophecy |
|------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Genesis → Esther | Job → Song of Songs | Isaiah → Malachi |

This order follows the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible made in the 3rd Century B.C., which is known as the *Septuagint*. However the original Hebrew Bible (the Jewish name for the Old Testament) arranges the Bible in a different order, as follows:

| The Law | The Prophets | The Writings |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Genesis → Deuteronomy | <i>(a) The Former Prophets</i> Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings <i>(b) The Latter Prophets</i> Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi | Psalms, Job, Proverbs Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles |

For some of our Muslim family, friends and neighbours this diversity and human involvement in the writing of the Old Testament is a big problem! As Dr Majdi's (from lesson 1) Muslim friend said to him recently:

"Surely the Bible cannot be a book from God? With so many human writers, in so many different styles, how can this be a true message from God?"

Learning Activity 1 (CCCx and CSM)

Do you have some friends, family or colleagues who can't accept the authority or testimony of the Bible as God's word because of the different styles of writing or authors? How would/do you respond to them?

Why wouldn't God use different styles to communicate holistically with humans: heart, emotions, intellect, artistic sensibilities, etc.? In addition, humans are not all the same: some may be touched in one way, and others in another. Either way, God speaks to humans by working together with humans. He reveals himself to a prophet and assures that the prophet's message perfectly transmits the desired content. This is possible because man is created in the image of God. Therefore, God can help the prophet understand the message and communicate it without error.

The Unity of the Old Testament

One Author

Although the Old Testament (and the whole Bible) contains a variety of material, written by many human authors, over a long period of time, it nonetheless holds together as a one. Put simply, it is just one book, written by one author, with one main subject. This truth underpins everything that we will learn in this introduction to the Old Testament!

The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16 that "All scripture is God-breathed". God is therefore its ultimate author. Much of what we have in the New Testament had not been written down when Paul wrote those words, so, we know that he is referring to what we call the Old Testament. As believers we do not need to hide or be embarrassed about accepting that the Bible was written by people! God chose in his wisdom to speak his Word through people. The books of the Old Testament (and the whole Bible) were written by a variety of authors at different times in history and therefore they bear the marks of the personalities and the eras that produced them. However God ensured by his Spirit that everything written was exactly what he intended. We can therefore talk about the Bible with the language of paradox² (in the same way that the Bible implicitly talks about Jesus) that it is both fully human and fully divine.

Learning Activity 2 (CCCx, CSM and MMC)

A paradox is "a seemingly self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained is proved to be well founded and true".

(a) Can you think of any other paradoxes in the Christian life?

✍️ (b) Do you think it is helpful to talk about the Bible as fully 'human' and fully 'divine'? Discuss these with your learning / discipling group or mentor.

*(a) Other examples of paradoxes in the Bible:
The incarnation of Christ: fully man and fully God
Jesus said that you must lose your life in order to find it. (Luke 9:24)*

² A seemingly self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained is proved to be well founded and true.

Humans have power and are responsible for their actions, while God is sovereign and everything happens according to his will.

(b) Free Response: start of a possible answer: This idea helps you understand the fact that the writing styles of different authors of the books of the Bible, although distinct, all perfectly preserve the divine author's true message.

One Subject

Although the Bible contains rich and deep themes, covering many different subjects, there is one key subject that holds it all together; that is Jesus Christ and the salvation, restoration and purpose that God offers to humanity through him. Although we see this very clearly in the New Testament, according to Jesus it is also clearly the purpose of the Old Testament. Speaking about the Old Testament Jesus says; 'These are the scriptures that testify about me' (John 5:39). We read in the gospel Luke's Gospel that after Jesus had risen from the dead he met two believers on the road to Emmaus and led them in the most amazing Old Testament Bible study ever!

'Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.' (Luke 24:27)

Then a little later when meeting with the disciples he said;

'This is what I told you while I was with you: Everything must be fulfilled that written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms' (Luke 24:44).

One Subject / The Testimony of Jesus

In the passage from Luke above we see Jesus referring to the three main divisions in the Hebrew Bible, as we saw earlier (note that the 'Writings' were sometimes called the 'the Psalms' because the Psalms made up the largest part of them). Jesus did not come to abrogate or abolish the Old Testament but to fulfil it. In the sermon in the mount he says this clearly,

'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.' (Matthew 5:17)

And yet even those who read, loved and even memorised the Old Testament were so often blind to its message. Jesus said about the Pharisees (religious scribes – members of the Jewish Fugaha),

'You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you possess eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life... But do not think that I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.'

(John 5:39,40,45,46)

One Subject / The Testimony of the Apostles

The apostles also believed that the Old Testament pointed to Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles repeatedly makes this point. We can see this in Peter's sermon after Pentecost when the New Testament church was born (see Acts 3:18, 21-24) and then at Cornelius' house when he says,

'All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name' (Acts 10:43).

Later in Acts 26 when called to testify before King Agrippa in Caesarea, the apostle Paul says that his preaching about Jesus is

‘nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen- that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.’ (Acts 26:22,23)

Later in his letter to his friend Timothy, Paul speaks of ‘the holy Scriptures’ (remember this was the Old Testament) being able to ‘make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’ (2 Timothy 3:15).

Learning Activity 3 (CCC)

Based on the passages in the New Testament (above), write one paragraph summarizing what Jesus and the Apostles believed about the ‘the law’ (Moses) and the ‘prophets’ in the Old Testament.

Jesus and the apostles taught that all the Old Testament (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings) speaks of Jesus Christ: his birth, his life, his death and his resurrection. The writings explain why all this was necessary. Matt 5:17, John 5:40, Acts 10:42-43, Acts 26:22-23, 2 Tim 3:15

Within the community of believers in our part of the world there is often difficulty in recognising the organic connection (the unbroken link) between the key message and subject of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament. Some of us think that the Old Testament message was for the family of Israel and that because they failed to obey his law, then God came up with another ‘new’ plan, to give a new message (the Gospel) to a new people (the Christians). However this is *not* what the Bible teaches. God’s purpose had always been to send Jesus. The whole Bible points to him from start to finish! In the Old Testament, through the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms (the Writings), God points forward to Jesus and promises his coming in the future as the fulfilment of all God’s promises!

One Book

Like Ziad in the lesson 1, many people read the variety of books in the Old Testament as a collection of unrelated works – fascinating and interesting in their own way but not related to each other. Sadly in many theological training schools in the historic centres of our faith (such as in Palestine/Israel, Egypt or Ethiopia) and even more so in the West, the books of the Bible are taught independently without any reference to each other. Another challenge in our part of the world is not just that very few of our Muslim family, friends and neighbours have actually read much, if any, of the Old Testament but that they think of the Old Testament as two books given to the children of Israel; the Torah (to Moses) and the Psalms (to David). However the Bible demands to be read as one book that presents the unfolding story of God’s plan to save and restore the world through Jesus. If we want to wisely and faithfully interpret the Old Testament we need to consider how every book in it fits into that great plan of salvation and restoration. The Old Testament on its own is an unfinished story, a promise without a fulfilment. We therefore need to read on into the New Testament if we want to understand the message and promise of the Old Testament. Similarly we need to read the Old Testament if we are to understand many of the images and themes that the New Testament constantly refers to. We will not make sense of the good news of Jesus and the message of the New Testament if we are not aware of what has

come before. What does it mean that Jesus is the Messiah, the Passover lamb, the son of Abraham and the Son of David, the true vine or the good shepherd? The answers are all found in the Old Testament.

Learning Activity 4 (CCCx and MMC)

Imagine you have been asked by the pastor's wife to prepare a talk for a small group of school-aged children (no older than 12) in your local church group. You have been given no more than 3 minutes to explain how the Bible is made of 66 books and yet is one story, with one key subject and one author. You can use any props or visual aids but your talk must be oral. Either;

- (a) Write down what you would say and how you would say it. Or,
- (b) Make a video (or Skype) diary of your 3 minute talk.

Example answer: Topic for a Sketch

A father sends a number of brothers and sisters, one after the other, each one with an additional message to invite an estranged son to a family celebration.

The goal of this sketch is to illustrate that 1) God uses different people who all carry the same message; however, it is expressed in different ways by each one; and 2) one by one, more details are added to the foundational message without changing it.

To help us understand the story of the Old Testament and how we are to read and apply it in our lives and context let us consider a helpful analogy that Dr Majdi was introduced to by Abu Musa, a wise old Egyptian Bible teacher he met on one of his visits to Cairo.

The '5 Act Play' Metaphor

Imagine that a great discovery is made in Cairo of one of Tawfiq al-Hakim's plays. It's a 5 Act play that was totally unknown and there is a great deal of interest in this major work of literature. Every Tawfiq al-Hakim expert in Egypt, the Middle East and throughout the world that analyses this document recognises it as unquestionably a Tawfiq al-Hakim original and possibly one of his best! However there is only one problem with manuscript. The play is missing a very large part of the final (5th) Act. There are four complete Acts, the first scene of Act 5 and the last scene of Act 5. But the other scenes of Act 5 are missing.

If the best theatrical director in the world wanted to stage this newly discovered play what would he do? Presumably he would consult all the best Tawfiq al-Hakim experts in the world. Then he would hire the best actors available, who would immerse themselves in the script. They would learn their different roles and understand the other characters. They would seek to understand the plot and what themes Tawfiq al-Hakim wanted to explore and present in his masterpiece.

But what should the actors do about the missing scenes from Act 5? They would have to act out those scenes in Act 5 in a way that was consistent with the plotline, themes, values and roles of all the previous Acts and scenes in the play. They would have to discern Tawfiq al-Hakim's intention and then act out the play in a way that seemed consistent with his purpose in writing.

What has this got to do with reading and faithfully applying the Old Testament? As we have suggested already the Bible is a story. It is the story of God's creating and redeeming love for the world. *Abu Musa uses this '5 Act Play' metaphor to explain God's redemptive story. He suggests that God through his Word is the playwright, that the Bible is the story of God's redemptive love and that in our context we are also called to be part of that story.* There are 5 Acts in this play:

Act 1 is the story of *creation* (we can see this in Genesis 1 and 2).

Act 2 is the story of *the fall* - this is how sin separated us from God and his great purpose for us (we can see this in Genesis 3).

Act 3 is the story of Old Testament *Israel* - this is how God began his work of redemption (we can see this is from Genesis to Malachi).

Act 4 is the story of *Jesus* - this is how God finally accomplished his plan of redemption (we see this in the Gospels)

Act 5: scene 1 is the story of the early *New Testament church* – this is how God chose to enact or apply his redemption in the world (we see this from Acts – Jude), then we have **Act 5: the final scene** – this is where we are heading (we see this in Revelation).

The first to third Acts are recorded in the Old Testament. With the exception of the very first chapters of Genesis, Act 3 comprises all the books of the Old Testament. The "Panoramic View of the Story of the Old Testament" table below presents these three acts, the third of which is composed of 8 "scenes" or historical eras. This table will serve as a reference which summarizes the story of the Old Testament and situates each revelation in its context.

Learning Activity 5 (CCC)

Study the "Panoramic View of the Story of the Old Testament" table on the next page, and answer the following questions:

- (a) What are the three eras which Genesis talks about? In your own words, summarize what happened in those eras.
- (b) When (what year) did the period of exile begin? Which prophets revealed the word of God during that period?
- (c) In two sentences, identify the historical context of the book of 2 Kings. Mention a prophet who spoke during that era.
- (d) During which of the ten eras would you have preferred to live? Why?

(a) Creation, the Fall, and Restoration. Example of a summary: God created the world perfectly and without sin, making man and woman his agents under the benevolent care of God. Then, man and woman rebelled and took the fruit from the forbidden tree. They realized that they were ashamed and that all their relationships were affected by sin. Pride, condemnation and death await all people. The Lord showed his wrath against man's sin with the flood, but he saved Noah and his family in order to preserve the human

race. Through Abraham and his descendants, God put in place his plan of salvation for all humanity.

(b) The exile officially began in 586 B.C. with the final fall of Jerusalem during the ministry of the prophets Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Ezekiel. (Daniel did not begin until he was in Babylon.)

(c) 2 Kings presents the story of the reign of Solomon, then the division and the beginning of the northern kingdom, its fall in 722 B.C., and finally the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. During this period, God warned his people who did not repent of their idolatry. He revealed himself through many prophets, including Elisha, Jonah and Amos in the north (Israel) and Isaiah, Hosea, and Jeremiah (and others) in the south (Judah).

(d) Free Response

So Acts 1-3 of the story are told in the Old Testament, while Acts 4 and 5 are found largely in the New Testament. The fourth Act is where the playwright comes onto the stage of his play through his Word (Jesus the Messiah – the Word of God) to act out what no other actor could do. Then he leaves his Holy Spirit (the director) to direct the rest of Act 5. Though we have the earliest scene of Act 5 (the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles) and the final scene of the Act (Revelation) when Jesus will return again onto the stage to fully restore the brokenness of the world, we are still living out those scenes of Act 5.

Just like the director and actors who wanted to stage the newly discovered Tawfiq al-Hakim play, we want to act out our part in God's redemptive drama faithfully. The drama is not complete. We are characters in the drama of God's redeeming love between the era of the New Testament church and the time when Christ will return to restore all things to his reign, bringing this message of redemption and restoration to the world. Like the actors in the staging of Tawfiq al-Hakim's masterpiece we do not want to be content merely to mimic the words and actions of the previous acts. We live in a different time and place and we are called to carry the action of God's drama forward. This is God's purpose for us. However, we are not at liberty to act out our part anyway we like. Therefore we need to immerse ourselves in the characters and scenes of the previous Acts and ask the director (the Holy Spirit) to lead us to better understand the intention of the author (God) in order to faithfully and effectively play out our part in the drama. This course aims to help you understand Act 1-3 in the context of the whole of God's drama.

With this metaphor we can see that the Bible is not merely (as we saw in Lesson 1) divine guidance for how we should live better lives, or primarily a book to answer our questions about science, philosophy, politics and so forth. Rather the Bible is telling God's redemptive story, in which **we are participants!** We are not called in Christ, merely to mimic or copy the previous actors in God's story (characters in Old Testament). We are *in* the drama preparing the world for the final act! The context that we are living in is different to that of the earlier scenes (the Bible's context) and we have new challenges to face that the Bible characters didn't have to face. We do not, for example 'enter the promised land', like Joshua and the Israelites did, and take the land by the sword. Nor do we wash out hands before we pray or read the Bible (like Benyamin in Lesson 1) or sacrifice animals so that their blood will atone for our sins. Those parts of the narrative are finished. They have been fulfilled in Christ. However in our context we have new challenges. We are called to face these in a way that is faithful to the playwright's (God) intentions and consistent with his story. We live constantly

under the authority of the Bible (Old and New Testament) not as a 'mirror', an 'encyclopaedia', a 'rulebook' or a 'tableau' (as we saw in lesson 1), but as a governing narrative, a story, in which we are playing our part. We understand that the Bible does not tell us what to do in every situation, rather it communicates to us God's redemptive purpose and intention for the world and describes how he has accomplished his purpose through his people at different stages in this story.

Learning Activity 6 (CCCx and CSM)

In your journal write down or record on your MP3 (or digital recorder) your thoughts in on the following, then discuss them with your learning group and/or mentor:

- (a) Is Abu Musa's analogy of the Tawfiq al-Hakim 5 Act Play helpful in understanding where the Old Testament fits into the whole story of God's redemptive love for humanity? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- (b) How do you feel about being part of God's continuing drama (story) of redemption in Act 5? Explain.
- (c) If God, by his grace, has honoured you with the privilege the great responsibility to 'perform' in his drama, how do you think that you can/should do this faithfully? What are the obstacles? How will you overcome these?

(a) Some possible answers:

*The metaphors help you understand: 1) the unity of the Biblical revelation and God's plan
2) the progression toward the final goal through different stages of revelation
3) the position God grants us, and our mission today*

It frees us from a mechanical obedience to the will of God.

(b) Free response: Example: As for feelings, it tells us of the importance of knowing all the scenes and hearing the director (the Holy Spirit), along with the importance of each person knowing his or her particular role as an actor.

(c) Among the obstacles which one could encounter are poor understanding (of the plan or roles); refusal to obey, and pride; the attempts of the enemy to oppose us with his different tactics

Among the solutions are: prayer, standing firm on the word, interacting with others (churches or missions)

Note: These questions, and especially question (c) below, require a certain level of reflection and analysis; however, they are very important for the growth of each student. Help them to go deep together and to apply them to their lives.

Learning Activity 7 (CCC)

We have selected at least five references to the Old Testament scriptures in (a) Jesus' teaching and in (b) the teaching/preaching of the apostles. See the table below with these references. If Jesus or the apostles are referring to a text or story in the Old Testament then look up the reference and in the column write down what is being referred to. If they are referring to an event or character, then include that in the middle column also. Two passages have been filled in for you as examples. Then identify the era of each event in the Old Testament story according to the "Panoramic View" table and find the original context of that revelation in the left-hand column of the table. The majority of responses have been provided in the example's title. Complete the table by filling in the empty sections.

It is important to help students to place each text in its historical context. In order to do this, it is necessary to read a part of the text before the reference listed and then to find the original meaning of the quoted text in the Old Testament.

Note that the majority of students find this exercise difficult to do without help or training. You may warn them in advance and also leave the last set of texts to do a written assignment during the group study session.

| Era and Original Context | Old Testament (Act 3) | Jesus (Act 4) |
|--|--|--|
| 3.2 Egypt and the Desert Moses has just led the people from Egypt to make a covenant with God. This law seeks to establish justice between humans and to limit retribution. | <i>Exodus 21:23-25</i> The Lord speaking through Moses. "But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise." | (1) <i>Matthew 5:38,39</i> Jesus said "You have that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth'. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also." |
| 3.2 Egypt Moses meets God for the first time and receives his call to deliver the people. | <i>Exodus 3:6</i> <i>"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses covered his face, because he was afraid to look at God.</i> | (2) <i>Mark 12:26,27</i> "Now about the dead rising-have you not read on the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!" |
| 3.2 Desert Moses passes on the Law to the covenant people | <i>Deuteronomy 6:4,5 and Leviticus 19:18</i> <i>Deuteronomy 6: Hear, oh Israel! The Lord your God is the only God. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength. Lev 19: You must not take vengeance or bear a grudge against one of the members of your people. You must love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.</i> | (3) <i>Mark 12:28-31</i> One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating... he asked him, (Jesus) "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this; 'Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love you neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." |
| 3.5 Idolatry/Divided Kingdom | <i>1 Kings 17: 1-16</i> | (4) <i>Luke 4:24-26</i> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| In order to draw attention to the rebellion of Israel under King Ahab, God declares a drought through the prophet Elijah. | Summary: God announced a drought through Elijah. God provided for him first through a stream and ravens, and then sent him to Sidon to a widow. God promised that her oil jar and her flour would not run out until the crops returned. (a stranger in Israel) | “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his own hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.” |
| 3.2 Egypt and the Desert from the exodus from Egypt to the entrance into the promised land | <i>Exodus 16:31-35 and Numbers 11:6-9</i> <i>During the forty years that Israel spent in the desert, God sent manna to the people each night with the dew. It looked like coriander seed, was white, and provided nourishment for the people.</i> | <i>(5) John 6:48-51</i> “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give you for the life of the world.” |

| Era and Original Context | Old Testament (Act 3) | Apostles (Act 5, Scene 1) |
|---|--|--|
| 3.5 Idolatry/Divided Kingdom, or perhaps 3.7-8 Return/Restoration The people of Israel are in their land and do not respond to their moral decline, despite recent calamities. | <i>Joel 3:1-5</i> I will pour out my Spirit. Young and Old will prophesy and see visions. I will do wonders: blood, fire, and the sun will turn to darkness and the moon to blood, until the arrival of the fearful day. So everyone who calls out will be saved. | <i>(1) Acts 2:16,17,21 (Peter)</i> “No, this what was spoken by the prophet Joel; ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see vision, your old men will dream dreams... And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” |
| 3.5 Idolatry/Divided Kingdom At the time of Uzziah King of Judah and Jeroboam King of Israel (Amos 1:1), Amos warns of a coming judgment due to oppression and injustice, and then promises restoration. | <i>Amos 9:11,12</i> <i>God raises up the house of David and rebuilds it as before. They possess the rest of Edom and all the nations which are called by his name.</i> | <i>(2) Acts 15:14-17 (James)</i> “Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ‘After this I will return and rebuild and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the rest of mankind may seek the |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | | Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord who does these things' things known from long ago." |
| <p>3.5 Idolatry/Divided Kingdom</p> <p>After the fall of Israel and the announcement of the imminent fall of Judah, Isaiah announces a reestablishment through his chosen servant.</p> | <p><i>Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6</i></p> <p><i>I will establish my servant to be a light to the nations to the ends of the earth.</i></p> | <p>(3) Acts 26:22,23 (Paul)</p> <p>"But God has helped me to this very day; so, I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen- that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles."</p> |
| <p>2. The Fall</p> <p>Adam and Even are still in the Garden of Eden.</p> | <p><i>Genesis 3</i></p> <p><i>Genesis 3: Eve and then Adam, in the garden of Eden, eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their eyes are opened and they realize their nakedness and shame. They take on the curse of the earth and the pain of giving birth, and are cast out of the garden. They are condemned to die, along with all their descendants.</i></p> | <p>(4) Paul in Romans 5:14,15</p> <p>"Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!"</p> |
| <p>Unknown Era</p> | <p><i>Choose some passages from the Old Testament that show what the writer of Hebrews was referring to in his introduction to his letter.</i></p> <p><i>Psalms 2:7 is cited directly, speaking of a Messiah King established by God at Jerusalem. He will be called "the Son of God" and will reign with power over all nations.</i></p> | <p>(5) Hebrews 1:1,2,4,5</p> <p>"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe... So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels</p> |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Monarchy: the reign of David, during which he seeks to build a temple for the Lord</p> <p>Unknown Era</p> | <p><i>1 Sam 7:14: The son of David will reign eternally over the throne after him and will be a son for God.</i></p> <p><i>(v 6 with Psalm 97:7 which says that all the "gods" (angels) bow down before the Lord. Therefore, the Lord is Jesus.)</i></p> <p><i>(You may use your Bible concordance (looking up key words) or reference notes in the margin of your Bible to help you with this exercise)</i></p> | <p>did God ever say,</p> <p>'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'?" And again, " I will be to him a Father, and he will be to me a Son?"</p> |
|--|--|--|

Learning Activity 8 (CCCx and CSM)

Now, complete one of the two learning tasks below:

Either;

(1) Choose one example from both Jesus teaching and the teaching of the apostles where they refer to the Old Testament. Then explain (write or prepare to talk about) in your journal.

(i) Who they are talking to?

(ii) What they are trying to teach about God's redemptive story?

(iii) How does Jesus' arrival in 'Act 4' change the way that this Old Testament passage (which is being referred to) is understood?

or,

(2) Write a poem or compose a song inspired by one or two passages in Jesus' teaching (see the table). In your poem or song try to communicate the heart of Jesus' teaching and how his teaching interprets the Old Testament passage.

As an example, below are the 4 verses from a poem called *Jesus on Every Page* by pastor and author, David Murray

Example: John 3:14-16 with Numbers 21:5-9

(i) Jesus cites the story of the serpent lifted up in the desert, which saved and healed all those who had been bitten by the venomous snakes and who looked at the serpent.

(ii) Jesus wants to show what salvation by faith is. What must you do with the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to be saved from your sins (to be born of God)?

(iii) Jesus shows that the story of the salvation of Israel from the snakes in the desert is in reality an illustration of the salvation of the soul of every sinner. It shows us how to put faith in Christ for salvation.

Note that especially question (iii) requires a certain level of reflection and analysis.

*He is the Word by whom all things were made
The Promised Seed who defeats the Serpent's raid
He came as the Covenanter to save a people
Abram saw His day, Jacob saw him as an Angel
It's Jesus on every page*

*With the blood of a lamb He painted His salvation
With an outstretched arm He defeated the Egyptian
Redemption, Relationship, Rules in that order
Dwelling with sinners, in the center, not the border
It's Jesus on every page*

*He skillfully taught using visual theology
Levitical Priests offered sacrifice daily
No blood? No remission, no forgiveness of sin
But need more than sheep, for conscience has pain
It's Jesus on every page*

*The Father chastised His people's rebellion
The years numbered forty in the desert of Sin
Yet still sent His Son to be their faithful leader
Glory-cloud by day, by night a fiery pillar
It's Jesus on every page*

Lesson 3:

Faithfully interpreting stories within the Story

Key Concept: Almost half of the Old Testament is narrative. Understanding how Hebrew narrative works will help us to understand God's story more faithfully. There are three levels of narrative (story) in the Old Testament and discerning these will help us interpret its message in our own context, our own story.

Lesson Goals:

Content and Cognitive Competencies (CCC)

- a) Know/understand that the three levels of narrative (story) in the Old Testament
- b) Know/understand some ways of misinterpreting the Hebrew Old Testament narratives
- c) Know/understand four key features of Old Testament narrative

Character and Spiritual Maturity (CSM)

- a) Think about how God used difficulties and injustices in Joseph's life to build his character and enable him to become God's agent to bring salvation and blessing to many.
- b) Pray and ask the Lord to use you in your weakness and sin.
- c) Pray and ask the Lord to bring about transformation in you.

Mission & Ministry Competencies (MMC)

- a) Read chapters 37-50 of Genesis.
- b) Re-tell parts of this story to a friend or family member.

Introduction

In lesson 2 we thought about how the Old and New Testament should be read as one book, by one author with one key subject. We considered how Jesus and the apostles viewed the Old Testament and we were introduced to the Tawfiq Al-Hakim '5 Act Play' metaphor to help us to think about how we can read and faithfully perform our part in God's story and correctly interpret the message of the Old Testament in our lives, families, churches and context today. In this lesson we will think more about the stories within God's overall story. In particular we will consider the three main levels of story in Old Testament narrative and some of dangers of misunderstanding Hebrew narrative.

You will remember that in lesson 1 we were introduced to the dangers of Mustapha's way of reading the Old Testament as a 'mirror'... reading his own situation into the story of Abraham's search for a wife for his son (in Genesis 24). Of course Mustapha is not alone in having trouble reading and applying stories from the Old Testament into our modern context. This is why understanding what Old Testament narrative is and how it works is so important.

Having been stretched in his understanding of the Old Testament through some teaching at Bethlehem Bible College and through the wisdom and knowledge of Abu Musa, Dr Majdi is hungry for more. He has been deliberately arranging his further professional training time abroad to bring him closer to mature believers who can teach him more about the Old Testament. In a recent visit to a medical conference in Beirut, Dr Majdi had the privilege of hearing Professor Imed at the Near East Theological Seminary, talking about the characteristics of Hebrew narrative. This is what he learnt.

Stories within The Story

Over 40% of the Old Testament is narrative. The table below indicates those Old Testament books that are largely or entirely composed of narrative:

| Containing <i>entirely</i> narrative material | Containing <i>large</i> narrative portions |
|--|--|
| Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Jonah and Haggai | Exodus, Numbers, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and Job |

Narratives are stories, purposefully told to recount historical events of the past that are intended to give meaning and direction for people in the present. This is the case for people of all cultures and certainly is how stories have worked in Arab, Berber and Muslim cultures for centuries. However what is different and unique about the biblical narratives, are that they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. So the story these narratives tell is God's story, a story that becomes our story (as we saw last lesson) as the Lord 'writes' us into it. If you are a Christian believer and a disciple of Jesus Christ, then the Old Testament is *your* spiritual history and the promises and calling of God to the people of Old Testament Israel are *your* historical promises and calling!

The basic plot (story line) of the biblical story is that the creator God made people in his own image for the glory of his name (Act 1 as we saw in the last lesson, which can be found in Genesis chapters 1 and 2). As his image-bearers we were to be stewards of the earth that he

created for our benefit. This is *creation*. But an enemy has entered the story and begun to ruin the scene, convincing people to bear his 'image' instead and hence becoming God's enemies (Act 2, which we can find in Genesis chapter 3). This is the *fall*. The plot is resolved through the long process of 'redemption'. This is the story of how God rescues his people from the enemy's deception, restores them back into his own image (Acts 3, 4 and most of 5, which we find in the rest of the Old Testament, the Gospels and the New Testament). This is *redemption*. And God will fully and finally restore them in a 'new heaven and new earth' when Jesus returns (this is the last scene of Act 5, which we can find in Revelation). This is the *consummation* (completion).

Learning Activity 1 (CCC)

List the main stages in the story line of the Old Testament, from Act 1 to Act 3?

The creation placed before man was a paradise on earth, with perfect intimacy and communion between God and his partner.

The fall of man, who rebelled against God and put himself under the control of Satan and death.

The redemption through which God promised a King-Savior who would shatter the reign of Satan and who would remove the people's sin. God would establish a covenant with man and live with his people while still remaining inaccessible behind the walls of the tabernacle.

Show the "Panoramic View of the Story of the Old Testament". Note that Act 3 includes many scenes or historical eras which set the context of the prophecies and the historical stories of the Old Testament.

In the next lesson (lesson 4) we will explore the importance and influence of these key themes in the God's story, but in the rest of this lesson, by walking with Dr Majdi on his journey of discovering the Old Testament, we will learn about three levels of narrative (story) that if understood will help us to faithfully powerfully apply the Old Testament to our own story.

Three Levels of Story (Narrative)

To help us do this we will consider an extract from a letter that Dr Majdi's wife Zakiya received for a Tunisian Christian journalist friend that she has known for many years and who had visited her and Majdi in Gaza. She was in Tunis at the time of the fall of President Ben Ali, which was brought about by the Tunisian Revolution. Although Zakiya received this letter a few years ago in late January 2011, Majdi keeps a copy of it in his Bible to help him pray for those mentioned in it. After one of the lectures at the Near East Theological Seminary Professor Imed prayed with Majdi and some of the other students. When the prayer meeting had finished Professor Imed asked Majdi about the letter. Majdi explained that he kept it to remind him to keep praying for their Tunisian friend Naiima and all her close friends. With tears in his eyes Majdi began to read an extract to the group;

“...it was pretty scary and yet really exhilarating. There we were, stuck in the basement of the Hotel Africa on Avenue Habib Bourguiba... a place I had visited for the Tunis film festival and various meetings of the Amateur Cinematographic Society, but now I was on the floor of the main reception along with hundreds of protestors... There were men, women and many children. There was Rafika, my Atheist Communist friend, Walid my Khwanji friend, and Ismahan, the journalist for women’s issues (you know the one I’ve been writing to you about)... and me, who they all know as a believer... all taking action for our future together. We could all hear bullets flying past the doors of the hotel.... The last few days have been building towards this. Some of the reports coming in this morning are saying that he’s actually left, fled! Can you believe it? It’s only been one month since Mohammed Bouaziz set himself alight in desperation... And now, after 23 years of increased oppression and lack of freedom he’s escaped! I really hope they get that evil wife of his... she and her family represent all that has gone wrong with our country... because of her family, my father lost his job and is still suffering from depression. Zakiya, I really hope that our role as believers in these changes will help Tunisians to recognise our role in the future and our great nation...”

Majdi stopped reading and looked up at the others in the group and choking back the tears he said;

“This the story of how God is changing the nation of Tunisia, humbling proud leaders and raising the humble... Tunisia has witnessed the first Facebook Revolution the world has known... it will never be the same again...”

Khalid, an Omani student in the group interrupted;

“I think it’s a story of how God’s people, the Tunisian church are taking their place in society, being salt and light engaging in the transformation of the nation...”

Malika, an Algerian student interrupted again;

“No... it’s a story of individual friendships that crosses religious, political and gender boundaries...”

Professor Imed sighed, looked up at the group for what seemed to Majdi like an age, then smiled and said;

“Or could it be all three of these? A story of God changing a nation, of Him raising His people and a story of individual friendships?”

The group was silent. Then Professor Imed went on to explain how God’s redemptive story can also be understood on three levels. These are the three levels:

- (3) *The **top (or third) level** is God’s redemptive drama. This is what we learnt about at the end of lesson 2. This is sometimes called the redemptive meta-narrative (meta – meaning ‘over’ or ‘beyond’ and narrative meaning ‘story’) or redemptive history. This has to do with the whole universal plan of God worked out through his creation. As we will see in lesson 4, key themes of this top level story are; creation, the fall of humanity, the power and influence of sin, the need for redemption and Christ’s incarnation and sacrifice.*

- (2) The **second level** is God's story of redeeming a particular people for his name and glory. These people are formed twice – once by the former covenant (Old Testament) and once by the 'new' covenant (New Testament). Our focus in this lesson is with the former covenant, the story of the people of Old Testament Israel. The key themes in this level are:

| Key Events and Themes | Biblical Reference |
|--|---|
| a. The call of Abraham | Genesis 12:1-9 |
| b. The establishment of Abraham's line through the patriarchs (the early fathers of the faith) and The beginning of Old Testament Israel | Genesis 37-50 Genesis 12-36 |
| c. The enslaving of the Israelites in Egypt, God's delivering of them from bondage in Egypt (the Exodus) | Exodus 1-18 |
| d. His covenant with them on Mount Sinai | Exodus 19-40 |
| e. The conquest of the promised land of Canaan | Joshua, 1 and 2 Samuel |
| f. The Israelites frequent sin and disloyalty to God | Numbers, Judges, 1Samuel, 1-2Kings, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah |
| g. God's mercy and patience with them | Numbers, Judges, 1Samuel, 1-2Kings, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah |
| h. The destruction of northern Israel | Amos, Micah, Hosea and 2 Kings 14-17 |
| i. The destruction of Judah | Isaiah 1-12, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah 1-39, 2 Kings 21-25 |
| j. The restoration and return of the people after exile | Ezra 1-10, Haggai, Zechariah 1-14, Esther, Nehemiah 1-13, Malachi |

Learning Activity 2 (CCC)

Compare the historical stages in the "Panoramic View" chart using the chart below. For each event or theme, identify the corresponding theme(s).

a,b. 3.1. Patriarchs

c,d. 3.2. Egypt and the Desert

e. 3.3. Conquest

f,g. 3.2-8. (Egypt- Restoration)

h,i. 3.5. Idolatry/Divided Kingdom

j. 3.6-7. Return and Restoration

Note that f and g above are parallel themes and took place at the same time, up to the destruction of the two kingdoms and even beyond.

You may invite the students to comment on the aspects that each table brings out. (Note that the table above is a mixture of key events and themes, while the "Panoramic View" table shows the successive historical eras.) Help the students see the link between the two tables and the second level. You must highlight the importance of learning the summary of the eras in the "Panoramic

View” and their chronological order so that students can place each story in its context and then bring out its meaning for the people of the old covenant (the second level).

- (1) Finally there is the **first level** of story. These are all the hundreds of individual narratives that make up the other two levels. We will finish the rest of this lesson thinking about how to understand and faithfully interpret these first level stories. The most important thing for us to ask ourselves as we read these first level stories is, how they fit into the second and third levels of the biblical story.

Learning Activity 3 (CCC)

- (a) With your learning group and/or mentor discuss which level of the Tunisian story you think Naiima’s letter is all about.
- (b) Now discuss which level of the story are you most aware of when you read the Old or New Testament narrative (God’s letter to us)?

(a) The letter speaks more specifically about friends’ experiences with events that shake personal plans (first level) and which are at the same time historical and significant for the country (second level). You can glimpse the role of God in all of this (third level), but that belongs to the ultimate plan.

(b) In general, beginning readers of the Bible have no trouble with the first level, while they lack experience and understanding to discern the lessons they can draw from the experiences of characters in the stories. As they gradually learn the story of the Old Testament and then the central role of Christ throughout the Bible, they will be more able to discern the message and the importance of those stories in the metanarrative of the Old Testament (second level) and in the overall plan of salvation for humanity (third level).

Professor Imed went on to explain that if believers are able understand how these levels work, then we will be far more able to faithfully apply God’s word to our own situation and faithfully perform God’s story in our own context. So, when Jesus spoke of the Scriptures (the Old Testament) ‘testifying about him’ in John 5:39 (as we saw in lesson 2), he was speaking about the ‘top’ (or third) ‘redemptive narrative’ level, in which his atonement (Christ work in reconciling us to God) was the central act and the submission of all creation to him is the climax of the plot (the story line). He was not talking about every individual short passage of the Old Testament.

To help the group understand these levels of Old Testament narrative, Professor Imed set the group some homework. We are going to do the same activity.

Learning Activity 4 (CCC)

Below there is a list of Old Testament passages. Some are quite a long (a few chapters) some are short (a few verses). Read through the passages and try to summarise what is happening in the story according to the three levels (as explained above). You must be brief! Use your own words and *don’t* write more than two sentences. Working out the first level should be quite easy. However try to summaries what you think the passage might be telling us about the other levels of the narrative (story). If you are not sure (especially about Level

3) then leave it blank and discuss it with the group next time you meet. The first four examples have been done to show you what to do and we have filled in some additional Level 3 boxes.

Like the table in the last lesson, this exercise is difficult to prepare without help or training. You can warn them in advance and also limit the number of texts they need to prepare in advance. Choose 2-4 texts below to do in class. Set the historical context and ask them to identify the era which corresponds to the "Panoramic View" table. Then you can give them one or two stories to do in class and/or as homework to be done for the next session.

| | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 |
|-----------------|--|--|---|
| Text | Story of individual characters and events | Story of Old Testament people of God (Israel) | Story of God's redemptive plan and purpose |
| Genesis 12: 1-3 | This is the story of Abram being called by God and God making a covenant (agreement) with him. | This is the story of God choosing Abram to be the father of a great nation (Old Testament Israel). | This is the story of God choosing Abram and his descendants in order to bless <i>all</i> the nations (peoples) of the earth. |
| Exodus 6:1-12 | This is the story of God speaking through Moses about liberating the Israelites from the Egyptians. | This is the story of God telling the people of Israel (OT Israel) that they are his covenant people and promising to free them from the Egyptians. | This is the story about God hearing the suffering of his people and showing that his purpose is to redeem and liberate his covenant people. |
| Exodus 15:1-18 | This is the story of Miriam (Moses' sister) and Moses singing a song of praise to God for giving them victory. | This is the story of God keeping his covenant promise to the Israelites and freeing them from the powerful Egyptians. | This is the story about God being faithful in keeping his promises to his people and giving them victory. |
| Exodus 19: 3-6 | This is the story of the Lord speaking to Moses on mount Sinai about His covenant with OT | This is the story of God making a covenant with OT Israel (God's | This is the story of God wanting His people (who are a treasured possession to him) to |

| | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|---|
| | Israel. | treasured possession) in order to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. | be 'kingdom of priest', a holy nation (set apart for his glory) amongst the nations. |
| 2 Samuel 7: 1-17 | <i>In this story, God refuses to give David the privilege of building him a house (a temple) and rewards him by promising to build him an everlasting house (his throne).</i> | In this story, God establishes the throne of David over Israel and then over the tribe of Judah (until the exile to Babylon in 587 B.C.). | God promises David that He will build an enduring 'house' through his son (Jesus) that the Lord will bless eternally. |
| 2 Chronicles 6:14-21 | In this story, Solomon accomplishes the task with which his father David charged him: building the temple. He celebrates his achievement and asks God to dwell in it. | <i>In this story, Solomon dedicates the temple and prays that God would be willing to specially inhabit that place in order to meet his people and to hear their prayers.</i> | After the dedication of the Temple, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Solomon declares that no human temple (house) can contain the Lord! |
| Isaiah 4:2-6 | In this story, Isaiah conveys to contemporary rebellious Judeans the promise of the purification and restoration of the remnant of the people after their punishment. | In this story, God announces the punishment of the Jewish people, but promises through the "seed" a holy restoration and a glorious future in his presence. | <i>In this story, God purifies his people by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the seed, and he lives, blesses and eternally glorifies his people.</i> |
| Isaiah 9:1-7 | <i>In this story, the prophet Isaiah gives hope of a reestablishment and future glory in the midst of messages of severe and imminent judgment for the rebellious people.</i> | <i>In this story, God promises to deliver his people using a child who is a son of David, called by divine names and who reigns with justice forever.</i> | This is the story of the 'servant of the Lord' (Jesus) coming as the counsellor and prince of peace. |

| | | | |
|--------------------|---|--|---|
| Isaiah 49:1-6 | <i>In this story, Isaiah is encouraged as a prophet to hope in God despite the disobedience of the people, and the rebellious people are encouraged because God will glorify them before the nations.</i> | In this story, God will glorify his people Israel before the nations by raising up a servant. | <i>In this story, Jesus Christ, the servant, will bring back the people to God and will at the same time be the savior of the nations.</i> |
| Isaiah 52:13-53:12 | <i>In this story, God reveals the gravity of the sin of the already-condemned people and God's provision by grace for their future healing.</i> | <i>In this story, God cures the sin of his people by pouring his wrath against their sins on his just servant.</i> | This is the story of the suffering of 'the servant' (Jesus) of his passion and his atoning for the sins of the people. |
| Jeremiah 31:31-37 | <i>In this story, God speaks of a future new beginning for the people in the midst of the imminent fall of Jerusalem before the Babylonians.</i> | <i>In this story, God promises the people to make a new and eternal covenant which will be kept, because God will give them a new, obedient heart.</i> | <i>In this story, God makes a new covenant and (thanks to the sending of his Holy Spirit) will make the people know his Law and will make them disposed to obey it.</i> |
| Ezekiel 47:1-12 | <i>In this story, God reassures the exiles in Babylon by promising them that God will restore his temple (now in ruins) in a more glorious, eternal way.</i> | <i>In this story, God promises to restore the temple and to dwell with his people Israel forever. His presence will give life and healing to the nation.</i> | <i>In this story, God speaks in a symbolic way (according to the interpretation), either about his presence with the church by the Holy Spirit, about the time of a future kingdom on earth, or about eternal life in heaven.</i> |

The next day before Majdi returned to Gaza, he met with Professor Imed, Khalid and Malika at the school. They had all been helped by reading through the different passages in the Old Testament and thinking about the three levels in Old Testament narrative. But some of them had got a bit carried away in trying to read too much into some of the stories. So the professor took some time to warn them about not misinterpreting the narrative (story) and helped them understand some important characteristics about Old Testament narrative. Let's think about this advice and immediately try to apply it to the story of Joseph in Genesis chs 37-50. This story is one of the longest narratives focussed on one person in the Old Testament.

Learning Activity 5 (CCC)

To prepare and become very familiar with the story, read Genesis chapters 37-50.

You may check if the students have done this course.

Old Testament Narrative | Three warnings and four important characteristics**Warnings**

(1) *Old Testament narratives are **not** allegories³ or stories filled with hidden meaning.* Whilst there may be many Old Testament stories that are hard to understand, you should always assume that they had meaning for their original hearers. For example, Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel is not an allegory of Jesus' battle with evil spirits in the New Testament - it was a clear demonstration of the reality of the one God of Israel and of the worthlessness of idols.

Other examples of stories considered to be purely symbolic by some: Adam and Eve, Noah. These stories tell the truth of the real story of humanity.

(2) *Individual Old Testament narratives are **not** intended to teach moral lessons.* The primary purpose of the various individual narratives is to explain what God has done in the history of Israel, not to offer moral examples of wrong or right behaviour. Beware of directly taking a 'moral lesson' from a story. Unless the narrator makes such a point, then we should not assume it.

(3) *But, though Old Testament narratives do **not** necessarily teach directly, they often illustrate (implicitly) what is taught explicitly elsewhere.* We see this for example in the story of David committing adultery with Bathsheba (in 2 Samuel 11). Nowhere in the text does it explicitly say that David did wrong by committing adultery. You are expected to know that it is wrong because it is taught explicitly elsewhere (such as in Exodus 20:14). The narrative illustrates the very harmful effects of adultery even though it does not state explicitly that adultery is wrong.

Characteristics**1. The Narrator**

(1) *He is the one who chooses what to say in the story.* He is everywhere and knows everything about the story he is telling. However he never shares all he knows, nor does he normally comment or explain everything that is going on as the story unfolds. His purpose is to draw you into the story so that you will see things for yourself.

(2) *He is responsible for the perspective for which the story is told.* He thus presents God's point of view. Sometimes God's point of view is disclosed directly.

³ A story or picture that is interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral, spiritual or political one.

Learning Activity 6a (CCC)

(a) Read Gen 39:2,3,21,23. How is God's point of view shown directly and repeatedly in these verses?

The narrator underlines that it is by the special blessing of God that Joseph was successful in all his endeavors.

Often the narrator's 'perspective' comes through one of the characters.

Learning Activity 6b (CCC)

(b) How can we see this with Joseph's words in Genesis 50:20?

Joseph interprets and gives meaning to everything that has happened, revealing the fact that God is the one who willed and accomplished—through the failures and even sins of men (his very brothers)—a plan of salvation and extraordinary grace in order to, in the end, bless and save the wrongdoers themselves.

2. The Scenes

In Hebrew narrative, rather than building the story around one particular character, the action moves along by a series of scenes that together make up the whole. This is similar to a Ramadan *musalsal* (soap opera) where the drama is being told through a succession of scenes, each with its own characteristics, but together making up the story as a whole.

Learning Activity 7 (CCCx)

(a) How can you see the development of these scenes in the story of Joseph in Genesis 37?
(b) Look at the opening scenes where Joseph tells on his brothers (v2).
Why do they hate him? (v3,4)

(a)

v.2-4. Introduction of the family: Joseph gets preferential treatment; his brothers are jealous

v.5-8. First dream about sheaves: Joseph's brothers hate him even more

v.9-11. Second dream about stars: The brothers are jealous, but his father takes note

v.12-17. Sending and investigation of Joseph: his penalty and his obedience

v.18-22. Conspiracy and Reuben's attempts, Joseph's suffering

v. 23-28. Sale to the Midianites

v.29-32. Reuben's return and the lie

v.33-35. Jacob's mourning

v.36. Narrator: Joseph in Egypt

(b)

Jacob loved him more than his other sons. They were jealous because of Jacob's favoritism. (In addition, he was reporting to their father everything they did.)

Later in ch37 the scene shifts to Joseph recounting his dreams (vv5-11), then Joseph searching for his brothers but not finding them (vv12-17). Then the arrival of Joseph, the

plot to kill him, the arrival of the Midianites are all clearly divinely ordained to end up with Joseph in Egypt as the servant of a well-placed Egyptian official (v36).

3. The Characters

However to say that the scenes are central understanding the main point of the narrative is not to take away from the importance of characters. In this scenic development of the narrative, the characters are a central element. The most important point to note here is that the characterisation has little to do with physical appearance – visual appearance is not important. What is far more significant are matters of status (wise, influential, wealthy etc...) profession or role (such ‘captain of the guard’ in Gen 37:36, ‘wife’, ‘cupbearer’ or ‘baker’ in chs 39-40).

For further understanding of Biblical characterization, dialogue and other features of Hebrew narrative, plot and structure, see the **Going Deeper** section at the end of this lesson.

4. God is the hero

The most important thing to remember about Old Testament narrative is the presence of God. This does not always come in the form of explicit teaching, but it is behind all that happens in the story. God is the ultimate character and the supreme hero of the story. Sometimes however, this is explicitly stated, such as in 39:2 “The Lord was with Joseph” and also constantly through God’s implicit presence.

Learning Activity 8 (CCC)

(a) What other examples can you see of explicit reference to God being the main character of the story of Joseph? Look at 40:8, 45:7, 50:20-24?

(b) What evidence can you see of God’s implicit presence in the story of Joseph? Look at ch37 – who was the source of Joseph’s dreams?

What about the timing of events in the narrative that brought Joseph, his brothers and the Midianites together in 37:25-28?

(a) Joseph interprets and explains God’s role:

In 40:8 Joseph says that God gives the interpretation of dreams.

In 45:7 he explains the plan of God to his brothers when he reveals himself.

In 50:20-24 he explains the plan of God to his brothers after the death of his father.

In addition, in 41:16 he acknowledges God before Pharaoh.

(b) What is clear is that God is the one who caused Joseph’s dreams. Here is the chain of different circumstances which led to Joseph’s departure to Egypt:

long absence of his brothers

their estrangement from home

the sending of Joseph (Jacob is more concerned for the 11 than for Joseph!)

- *presence of well/cistern*
- *Rueben’s concern to preserve his life*
- *Midianites pass by*
- *Rueben’s absence*
- *brothers’ lie so he’ll never return*

Learning Task 9 (CCCx, CSM and MMC)

- (a) In your journal, write about five new things that you learnt about faithfully reading narrative within the big narrative of the Bible. Use the story of Joseph as an illustration.
- (b) Find someone in your family or a work colleague or a neighbour. Tell them about one or two new things that you have learnt about (a) God's nature, (b) Human nature and (c) God's purposes and redemptive plan.

(a) Example of five things learned regarding the need to place stories in the overall framework of the Biblical narrative:

- Bring out what God did. Remember his role as the hero of the story.*
- Make sure you don't moralize without criteria when considering, for example, characters' actions.*
- Pay attention to the progression of the scenes from beginning to end.*
- Bring out the comments of the narrator or of key characters in order to find God's interpretation.*
- Pay attention to the story at three levels:*
 - the actors*
 - the covenant people*
 - the 5 acts in God's plan of redemption*

For Further Study

(a) Characterisation

Two points are worth noting in characterization:

(1) Characters either appear in contrast or in parallel.

When they are contrasted (which is most often), they must be understood in relationship to each other. Characters in parallel can be seen at the second level of narrative between the Old and New Testament. For example John the Baptist is a re-enactment of Elijah and Mary's story (in Luke 1-2) is an echo of the story of Hannah (in 1 Samuel 1-2).

In the Joseph narrative the contrast between Joseph and his brothers begins in ch37 and lies at the heart of the narrative that follows in chs 42-45

Learning Activity 10 (CCCx)

- (a) What contrasts can you see between Joseph and his brothers from chs 37 – 50?
- (b) What changes do you notice have taken place between both Joseph and Judah in ch50:15-21?

(a) Contrast Joseph and his brothers (possible answers):

Joseph sought to obey his father, while his brothers sought their own interests.

Joseph knew he was fully loved by his father, while his brothers doubted that truth for themselves.

Joseph was favored over his brothers: clothes, responsibilities

Joseph took great care to help his estranged brothers; their response was betrayal and a desire to kill.

(b) Judah shows tenderness and compassion toward his brother who has become his father's favorite after Joseph's departure. He is close to sacrificing himself for him, in the same way that Joseph accepted his sufferings for the good of his family and the surrounding peoples. The proof of change in Judah's heart touched Joseph profoundly.

(2) The main form of characterisation occurs in the character's words and actions, not in the narrator's own descriptions.

See how with Joseph's moral character develops from passive participant to positive and responsive player fully aware of God's purposes. This is a main theme. His moral character comes through especially in the encounter with Potiphar's wife (which the dialogue makes explicit) and his sexual morality results in him being imprisoned (see ch39).

Learning Activity 11 (CCC and CSM)

- (a) How can we see Joseph's transformation further in the firm but loving and forgiving way in which he handles his brothers in chs 42-45?
 (b) How does this make you feel? Is it encouraging? If so, why?

(a) Joseph receives his brothers coldly and puts them to the test at the beginning, while always richly providing for their needs. He also wants to know how they will treat his little brother. They gradually show him more tenderness until the moment that Judah proves his change of attitude toward his little brother, his father's baby.

(b) Free response (a number of possible kinds!)

(b) Dialogue

In Hebrew narrative there is a rhythm between the narrative and the dialogue. We need to note three things;

(1) The way the dialogue starts is often an important clue to the story plot and the character of the speaker.

Read Gen 37:5-11.

Look at how this happens at the start of the story of Joseph (Gen 37:5-11). Joseph describes the prophetic dream he receives from the LORD to his family. This prepares the reader to see God's working in the story to follow. (Was Joseph arrogant or simply naïve and insensitive to his brother's feelings in the way he shared the revelation (vv6-7)? In any case, his brother and father's responses set the plot in motion ("Will you actually rule us?") until the dream is precisely fulfilled in the narrative at the end (50:18). However in contrast to the brothers' hatred early in the story, his father "kept the matter in mind" (37:11).

Learning Activity 12a (CCCx)

- (a) What do you think the narrator wants the reader/hearer to notice here?

Free response: It seems that the author wants to highlight the fact that this dream will actually be important to keep in mind for the story that follows. It is from God and comes true.

(2) *Contrasting dialogue often functions as a way of characterisation.* I.E. the contrast in the dialogue shows you the contrast in the characters.

Notice the length of Joseph's reply (39:8-9) to the very brief invitation of Potiphar's wife (v7).

Learning Activity 12b (CCCx)

(b) What might this tell us about the difference between the character of Joseph compared to that of the Potiphar's wife?

Joseph tries to be faithful toward his master and his God, while she tempts him to betray them with her.

(3) *Very often the narrator will emphasise the crucial parts of the narrative by having one of the characters repeat or summarise the narrative in a speech.* So be ware not to go through those repetitions too fast and don't assume that this can be skipped over!

Learning Activity 12c (CCC)

(c) How can you see this in the speeches of the brothers in 42:30-34 and in Judah's speech in 44:18-34?

(c) Plot and Features of Structure

Old Testament narrative always has a beginning, middle and an ending, which together focus on the build-up of dramatic tension that is resolved by the end of the story. Often the plot is moved forward by a kind of conflict. Plots can be very simple, like the inserted story about Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 or more complex, like the whole the Joseph narrative that we are looking at. Hebrew narrative moves very fast, so look out for the devices that the narrator uses to slow the pace of the story. The most common device is the use of dialogue the use of repetition as we saw above.

The features of Hebrew narrative that we have mentioned above are there to catch the hearer's (or readers) attention. In our context in North Africa, the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula, we have an advantage listening and reading Old Testament narrative because our cultures value the oral tradition. This is because even though these narratives were written down, they were intended to be told and heard. This is a challenge to us, not just to hear them but to tell them to others. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they are told to us not just for own instruction, but so that we may tell others.

So, here are some of the features that we should pay attention to as we listen to the narrative:

(1) *Repetition. Especially repetition of key words.*

Notice the repetition of “brother” in chapter 37 the word appears 15x in the narrative. Note also how the conflict is carried forward by repetition of the word “hated” in 37:4,5,8 and that in due course the conflict and jealousy intensifies.

Learning Activity 13 (MMC)

Find a willing listener and re-tell the story of Joseph from ch37 making a deliberate point to emphasise the repeated words ‘brother’ and ‘hated’.

Free Response

(2) Inclusion or chiasm.

These are technical terms to describe the pattern of narrative where the story begins and then is brought to conclusion on the same note. This *chiasm* is sometimes known as an A-B-A pattern. The story starts with theme A, then develop theme B, then is concluded with theme A again.

Learning Activity 14 (CCC) Read ch37:6-8 and then 50:18.

How is this chiasm evident in Joseph’s story through the theme of Joseph’s brothers bowing to him?

The picture of the dream in which the brothers bow down before Joseph, which seemed strange at the beginning of the story, actually comes true at the end.

The following is a chiastic outline of the entire section. Note that the crucial moments and concluding moments are found in the middle and at the end of the outline, respectively, and that the two halves of each section/parallel theme (in which one is found before F and the other after it, in inverse order) are either complimentary or contrastive of each other.

Outline of Genesis 37-50: Jacob’s Family

| | |
|--|-------------|
| A. Jacob in Canaan | ch 37-38 |
| B. Joseph in Egypt: sufferings despite his innocence | 39:1-41:45 |
| C. Joseph prepares the people for the famine | 41:46-57 |
| D. Jacob sends his sons to Egypt for food | 42:1-43:24 |
| <i>Jacob releases Benjamin, Joseph sees him</i> | |
| E. Joseph with his brothers: invitation | 43:16-24 |
| F. The ultimate proof: Benjamin! | 44:1-13 |
| F. Judah offers himself | 44:14-34 |
| E. Joseph with his brothers: unveiling | 45:1-15 |
| D. Joseph provides/Jacob takes his family to Egypt | 42:1-43:24 |
| <i>Jacob meets Joseph</i> | |
| C. Joseph saves the people from the famine | 47:13-26 |
| B. Israel in Egypt: Benediction | 47:26-49:33 |
| A. Return to Canaan | 50:1-26 |

Lesson 4:

Key Themes in the Story: Creation, fall and God's Redemption Plan

Key Concept: The first three chapters of Genesis set the tone and course for our understanding of the story of the whole Bible. Understanding God's purpose in creation, the extent and impact of the fall and God's plan to redeem mankind through his chosen people is fundamental to our reading of the Old and New Testament and to our knowledge of God and ourselves.

Lesson Goals:

Content and Cognitive Competencies (CCC)

- a) Know/understand that God created a beautiful world that reflected his love, beauty and creativity and it was good.
- b) Know/understand that men and women were created in his image for his glory, and they were good.
- c) Know/understand that tempted by the devil, men and women disobeyed God and were separated from his holy presence by their rebellion and cast out to live in a world cursed because of their sin.
- d) Know/understand that shame, fear and sin are covered, removed and atoned for by God's plan of redemption.

Character and Spiritual Maturity (CSM)

- a) Recognize the beauty and goodness of God's creation and of mankind.
- b) Recognize and confess our personal sinfulness and rebellion towards God.
- c) Give thanks for God's purpose and plan to redeem the world and us.
- d) Commit ourselves to being transformed by the Holy Spirit, in order that the Lord can use us in His plan to redeem and transform the world.

Mission & Ministry Competencies (MMC)

- a) Repent of sin/sins committed towards God and towards particular people/person and confess those to God and to the person/s. Write a letter, send an SMS (text) or arrange to have a coffee with someone to do this.
- b) Explain sin, death and man's lost perfection and communion with God and fellow man to (a) a member of your church and (b) a non-believer friend, neighbour or member of your family.

Introduction

In lesson 3 we thought about the stories within God's overall story in the Old Testament. In particular we considered the three main levels of story in Old Testament narrative, some of dangers of misunderstanding Hebrew narrative and four characteristics to help us read and faithfully interpret Old Testament narrative. In this lesson we will be learning from Genesis 1-3; three vitally important chapters in the Bible. We will learn about God's purpose in creation, the extent and impact of 'the fall' and God's plan to redeem mankind through his chosen people and how this is fundamental to our reading of the Old and New Testament and to our knowledge of God and ourselves.

You will remember in the last lesson that we were accompanying Dr Majdi in his on-going journey of discovery in the Old Testament. He has learnt much with fellow believers from Professor Imed in Lebanon and his close reading of the story of Joseph in Genesis chapters 37-50 has given him an even greater appetite to read more of the Old Testament. Before going back to Gaza to continue his medical work Professor Imed encouraged Majdi to take time and start at the very beginning of the Old Testament. As Majdi journeyed from Beirut back to Gaza, something that Professor Imed's said stuck in Majdi's mind, moved his heart and began to result in a changed attitude to the message of the Old Testament. It was these words;

*"The opening chapters of Genesis are certainly the foundation of the whole of Scripture and in some ways these chapters are the most important ones in the Bible. Remember Majdi, the **beginning** unlocks the **principle themes**. You must listen to these first chapters as the beginning of a symphony whose interpretative and illuminative power transcends all cultures and time."*

"The beginning unlocks the principle themes..." This stuck in Majdi's mind and he remembered the Tawfiq al-Hakim 5 Act Play metaphor that Abu Musa had told him about (see Lesson 2). Genesis 1-3 was only three chapters of the Bible, but it covered two vital Acts in the drama of God's story. In Genesis 1 and 2 – Act One and in Genesis 3 – Act Two. Majdi spent the rest of his journey reading the first three chapters of Genesis over and over. Then as soon as he got back home, he shared all he had been learning with Zakiya. This is what Dr Majdi has been learning...

Learning Activity 1 (CCCx)

- (a) With your learning group and/or mentor discuss what you think Professor meant by saying that the beginning of Genesis unlocks the principle themes.
- (b) Lets accompany Majdi, and read Genesis chapters 1-3. Read it at least three times.

(a) We have already seen the goodness and power of God, his special interest in humanity, the perfection of his creation, the resemblance and relationship of man to God, the temptation of Satan and man's rebellion, the judgment of man and the effects of sin, the grace of God to allow man to live with complete dignity, the necessity of a savior/redeemer, the control of Satan over man, marital and relational problems, the idea of sacrifice and physical and spiritual death.

The introductory chapters of Genesis introduce us to the Bible's view of God and of humanity. As we have already seen with Professor Imed's explanation to Majdi, they are the introduction that sets the scene to the whole story of God's redemptive purpose. In the last lesson we saw how one of the aspects of Old Testament narrative was the development of characters. Well, these opening chapters of Genesis introduce us to the main characters in the story, the plot, the problem and the seeds of how this problem is going to be resolved.

Learning Activity 2 (CCC)

Remember what we learnt last lesson about noticing repetition in the narrative? As you reread chapter 1 what words or acts of God are repeated in the creation story?

Repeated words or actions: There was evening, and there was morning; God called it (progressive, systematic, ordered); He said it, and it was; He saw that it was good (perfect execution the first time around); all species (according to its species) (diversity, creativity)

God's Creation

The first and most obvious thing that we notice in these chapters is that it all starts with God. The primary character (or protagonist) in the story is God himself. "In the beginning God..." The very first words of the Bible tell us about God's 'being'. The rest of the Bible will unveil who this God is and what he is like, but we are left in no doubt that he is the primary author and actor in this story.

Order and Beauty from Chaos

However this is quickly followed by the first verb (action) attributed to God, creation. "In the beginning God *created*..." As we read the opening chapters of Genesis it is impossible to miss the structure of creation described in seven days. This corresponds to a week. Six days of work and one day of rest.

Learning Activity 3 (CCC)

Did you notice the repeated verbs that are used in his creating the heavens and the earth? See if you can spot some of them on day one of creation in v4, on day two in v6, on day three in v9,10...

God spoke, saw, called.

In Genesis 1:1-2:3 we find a poetic device which uses a symmetrical structure to tell the story of creation.

Learning Activity 4 (CCC)

- Complete the box below: **IN THE BEGINNING** and the rows below it.
- In the six boxes **THEN GOD CREATED** we have divided the week of creation into two columns: in the first 3 days (boxes on the left) write what God created and then separated; in the 3 boxes on the right write what God put in to fill the environments He had separated. (The two upper boxes have been done to help you)
- Complete the box **IN THE END** and the row below it.

| IN THE BEGINNING | |
|--|---|
| Gn 1:1,2 God's actions: <i>He created (made from nothing), his Spirit hovered over the waters</i> The earth's condition: <i>Formless and void</i> | |
| THEN GOD CREATED | |
| And separated... | and put into... |
| First day – Gn 1:3-5 a) <i>God made light</i> b) <i>He separated light from darkness</i> | Fourth day – Gn 1:14-18 a) <i>the sun – to give light to the earth</i> b) <i>The moon and the stars – to shine in the darkness</i> |
| Second Day – Gn 1:6-8 a) <i>The expanse below the waters</i> b) <i>The expanse above the waters (the sky)</i> | Fifth Day – Gn 1:20-23 a) <i>fish of the sea</i> b) <i>birds of the air</i> |
| Third Day – Gn 1:9-13 a) <i>dry ground which produces vegetation</i> b) <i>the waters</i> | Sixth Day – Gn 1:24-27 a) <i>the land animals</i> b) <i>man (man and woman)</i> |
| IN THE END | |
| Gn 2:1-3 The earth's condition: <i>It is completed and filled with many creatures.</i> God's action: <i>God saw that it was very good; he rested from his work.</i> | |

Made in the Image of God: The creation of man and woman

If you were to read the creating account for the first time, you would not be able to miss the priority and importance of mankind in the creation order. This is noticeable not just in the amount of detail that is given in the creation account (in comparison to the rest of the creation) but in particular in what the Genesis 1:27 says about mankind's 'being' and identity - namely that we have been made as the 'image-bearers' of God the creator himself.

Learning Activity 5 (CCCx)

- (a) What problems or issues do your non-Christian friends or family in our part of the world have with the idea or the phrase in Genesis 1:27 “In the image of God he created them...”?
 (b) What does this phrase **not** mean? (For clues read; Exodus 20:1-4 and Deuteronomy 5:7-10)
 (c) What **do** you think it means?

(a) In the majority religion, it is considered blasphemous to associate man with the things of God. God is above all and is of a different nature.

(b) We must neither treat God lightly nor make images, idols or material representations of God. God is spirit and relational. He is unique and above his creation.

(c) Man resembles God in his moral consideration (judgment),

his notion of good and evil

in his intelligence and ability to analyze

in his emotions

in his will, his capacity to choose and to put an idea into action.

Therefore, man can have a significant and reciprocal relationship with God.

The idea of mankind being the ‘image-bearers’ of God is often problematic for many of our friends and family in our part of the world. However failing to understand our identity, our being, our honoured status and our responsibility as ‘image-bearers’ of God is at the root of failing to understand who God has made us to be and how far we have fallen from this position.

For the first hearers or readers of this text it would bring to mind the idea of the kings or rulers of the earth as ‘sons of God’ (not in the literal but metaphorical sense) ruling on behalf of God, as vice-regents, ensuring that the will of God was done. However what is noticeable here is that it is *all* of humanity that is made in the ‘image of God’, not just the rulers or leaders. Over all the creatures God created, mankind is given dominion. Male and female, they not only have dominion but are also made to create and procreate, so that they fill the earth.

Over all of this, as with every other aspect of God’s creation, Genesis 1:31 says, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”

God’s purpose for humanity in Genesis 1 and 2

The importance and significance of humankind, of men and women is further developed in chapter 2. From chapter 2:4 to ch3:24 we have a re-telling of the overview to the creation that we have seen in ch1:1-2:3. This is not a separate account, but rather a re-focussing in on the narrative of events in which the earth will be the theatre and in which mankind will be at the heart of his creative and redemptive purpose. The shift from the two parts of the creation narrative is indicated by the order of ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’. The first part begins with the ‘heavens and the earth’ (ch1:1),

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

The second part starts by inverting ‘the heavens and the earth’ to ‘the earth and the heavens’ (ch2:4),

“This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.”

What do we learn in this chapter about humans and their purpose?

- 1) *Mankind lives by the breath of God.* Ch2:7 – God breathes into the man’s nostrils, the breath of life.

Learning Activity 6 (CCCx and CSM)

Think about how it makes you feel that mankind lives because God himself breathed His own life into the first man and woman? Discuss this with your study group or your mentor.

The fact that God breathed his life into the man testifies to his intimacy, his careful attention, his natural resemblance to us. God is very close to us. We are like his beloved children.

- 2) *Mankind is given meaningful and important work* to do in keeping the Garden of Eden (ch1:15) Remember that this is before ‘the Fall’ after which ‘work’ become ‘toil’ because of the curse.

Learning Activity 7 (CSM and CCCx)

- (a) Do you think of work as ‘toil’ or a joyful privilege?
- (b) Have you ever considered that the pain and ‘toil’ of work is not part of God’s original purpose in creation?
- ✍️ (c) What difference might this make to how you think about your work?

(a) A man who doesn’t work may feel useless. To finish a job and enjoy its fruit brings pleasure.

(b) Everything should be successful for man, without needing to repeat anything.

(c) The psalmist says in Ps 45:2, “My work is for the King.” How wonderful to be able to glorify God like that!

- 3) *Mankind is invited to participate in the work of God.* The animals are brought to man to *name* them. Remember in ch1 God ‘separating’ and ‘naming’? Well here in ch2 we have God inviting mankind to be an apprentice to His work by classifying and naming the animals.

Learning Activity 8 (CCCx and CSM)

Before we move on, consider how amazing it is that God has invited us to be his apprentices in his creative work, classifying, naming and creating order and beauty.

- ✍️ How do you think the different disciplines of engineering, mathematics, architecture, art and even law and politics be expressions of being made ‘in the image of God’ to be God’s apprentices?

We reflect God's nature when we engage in activities like that. We must think of God while doing them.

4) *God's intention is that man is not alone.* Gen ch1:27 has already told us that mankind is created in God's image, male and female. Therefore man was never intended to be alone. Relationship is at the very heart of who God is and mankind is created to live in relationship. So the Lord God made a woman because "it was not good for man to be alone" (ch2:18). She was created to be a suitable helper or companion. None of the animals that God created were sufficient to be man's helper and man's response upon meeting her is pure joy; "this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh..." (ch2:23)

Learning Activity 9 (CCCx and CSM)

Some people say that women are inferior and less important because God created man (Adam) first and woman (Eve) second.

(a) Do you think this?

✍️ (b) From your reading of Genesis 1 and 2 and especially 1:27 and 2:18-25, how would you respond to this view about the superiority of men?

(a) The equality of man and woman is affirmed in Gen 1:27, as both are created in the image of God. Yet there is an order to creation, as Paul alludes to in 1 Tim 2:12-13.

(b) We may speak of the difference between man and woman, but not of superiority. The role and authority of women are not necessarily the same, but their importance and their value must be respected just as they are for men.

Notice that the Lord created the woman by taking one of man's ribs. She was taken from man's side to be by his side. She was neither taken from his feet, nor his back nor from his head, but from his side. Woman was not an afterthought because man was bored. The first part of the creation account indicates that to us – that God made human beings in his image, 'male and female he created them' (Ch1:27)

Chapter 2 finishes with a beautiful expression of intimacy and trust. The man and his wife are naked before each other and they "felt no shame" (ch2:25). The woman was created from man to live in intimate relationship with the man free from guilt and shame. That is what we are told in ch2:25. Man and woman through becoming 'one flesh' (ch2:24) - diversity expressed in profound unity - reflects the image of God. Before God and before each other they felt no shame.

Learning Activity 10 (CCCx and CSM)

(a) How is this similar or different to the creation story/ies about the first man and woman in your part of the world?

(b) How does this make you feel about God's purpose in creating you to be in a complimentary relationship with a man/woman?

(c) What is the implication (the potential impact) of being made 'male and female' in the image of God? Is this only important for married people? If yes, why? If no, why?

(a) In the majority religion, neither man nor woman is created in the image of God, but man is superior to woman. To be human is to be as humans were when they were created in the beginning: imperfect and weak, but capable of doing good.

(b) You could ask yourself, if you're married, if you experience this deep intimacy with your spouse.

(c) Implications of the image of God in man and woman:

- *To be human has an infinitely great value*
- *God himself is outraged when we mistreat a human being*
- *We can have an intimate relationship with God*

This gives us an idea of the persons of the Trinity (equal, alike but different, intimate relationship, working together). Thus, this helps us appreciate the diversity of the types of humans.

Man and woman each individually bear God's image.

So by the end of chapter 2 we have a clear picture of God's amazing creation and in relationship with Him, God's unique and exalted place for human beings in this creation. God has provided everything for human beings; satisfying work, satisfying relationships, freedom from any shame or guilt before God and before others, dignity and responsibility in their dominion over creation, beautiful surroundings and much more... Over all of this creation story we have God's words of approval "it was good." (ch1:4,12,18,21,25 and 31). God had created a perfect world for his image bearers and in every way it was 'good'.

Understanding the Key Themes of Genesis 1 and 2

As we saw with Ziad in lesson 1, people often approach Genesis 1 and 2 as an 'encyclopaedia', bringing their empirical research questions about the origins of humanity to the text. While these are important questions, we have learnt that Genesis 1 and 2 was not written to answer questions framed in this way. We need to approach the text seeking to know what God is communicating to us through it rather than using the text to satisfy our curiosity or defending it from those who don't believe in God.

When we listen to the story of creation in Genesis we discover some incredible things about God, the creation and about humanity. As we mentioned at the start of the lesson, understanding these truths unlocks the *principal themes* for the whole Bible. Let us consider two of the key themes;

- 1) *The God of Genesis 1 and 2 is creative and loving.* He creates beauty and order from chaos and in self-giving love creates mankind in His own image, to share in His creative work and enjoy relationship with him and with each other. Unlike other old creation stories God is NOT angry at mankind. He is not a vindictive or harsh and distant God. He knows and is known by mankind. He creates not because he is compelled by any outside factors but because he is a relational and loving God.

- 2) *Human beings are created as 'image-bearers' of God*, to lovingly govern, lead and care for God's world. As we will see in Genesis ch3 this purpose is twisted and broken by sin, so that mankind's image-bearing purpose is marred. However this *is* the purpose for which we were created. The remainder of the story will demonstrate how mankind failed to fulfil this purpose, until one man appeared who totally fulfilled this purpose and was 'the very image of God' – Jesus Christ. You can see this in Romans 5:14, 1 Corinthians 15:22,45 and Colossians 1:15-23.

Learning Activity 11 (CCCx and CSM)

Genesis 1 and 2 reveal to us a loving and creative God.

(a) Think back to the ideas that Dr Majdi had about the Old Testament revealing an angry and hateful God in Lesson 1. Take some time to look back over Genesis ch1 and 2 then list the different evidences of God's love in creation.

✍ (b) With your learning group and/or mentor discuss in what ways you fail to be a faithful 'image-bearer' of God? Talk about how you think God can change you into being a more faithful 'image-bearer'?

(a) The love of God is manifested in creation:

- *God created an amazing setting for man*
- *He lets man participate in managing the garden*
- *He gives him the privilege of naming, ordering and leading creation*
- *God shows his pleasure in discovering and performing work, in the organization of man*
- *The way in which he created woman and presented her to him as a special gift*

(b) Free response: (Are we always conscious of his constant presence?)

Genesis 3: The Fall

So with all the love, beauty, purpose, dignity, honour and healthy relationships, what went wrong? Chapter 3 of Genesis answers this question. 'What went wrong?' is *one of the most profound* questions that people from all cultures have been asking since as far back as we know. The answer in Genesis 3 is that the first humans believed the lies told by a new character introduced in ch3, "the serpent", who we are later told represents Satan, the 'father of lies' (John 8:44).

The very first words of the serpent introduce who he is and what his role is. The antagonist in the creation story's very first words in ch3:1 are "Did God really say?..." He immediately casts doubt about the goodness of God and at the same time appeals to Adam and Eve's self-interest by suggesting that they are missing out on something, that God is deliberately spoiling 'their fun' – limiting their enjoyment of life by forbidding them to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He goes even further by directly contradicting God's clear instruction to Adam and Eve in ch2:17 when he says in ch3:4,5, "You will certainly not die... For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Learning Activity 12 (CCCx and CSM)

With your learning group and/or mentor discuss why you think God forbade Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in ch2:16,17. Was he motivated by fear that Adam and Eve might somehow rival his power?

Why did he forbid the fruit?

to give man the choice to disobey

to give him full responsibility

to test Adam's obedience

to allow humanity and other heavenly beings to see the grace and goodness of God and the emptiness of all rebellions against God

No, this seems like a ridiculous suggestion given all that we know and have seen about both God power and goodness in Genesis 1 and 2. So then why was this one tree forbidden to Adam and Eve?

Many people in our part of the world think that the tree was forbidden as a kind of test from God. Mankind was being tested to see if he could obey the command of God. Undoubtedly this forbidden tree did test mankind. However is this the main reason why God placed it there? As we read Genesis 1 and 2 and immerse ourselves in the story we are given clues as to why it is there.

Genesis 1 and 2 make it perfectly clear that God is both perfectly powerful and perfectly good. The New Testament confirms this: God is Love (I John 4:8-20). Mankind is created to share in God's love and to enjoy his creation. But this love is never coerced. It is freely given. If mankind is to love God it must be a free choice. The choice or potential to not love God is therefore part of God's created world. In this perfect garden with so many expressions of God's goodness human beings had the potential and the choice to reject all of this and go their own way. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the door to that choice. God clearly warned them that opening that door would lead to death. They therefore chose to believe the serpent's lie rather than trusting and obeying God.

The women saw the tree and it was "pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom" (3:6). The doorway to Eve's temptation was her senses, what she saw and heard (from Satan). She believes Satan's lie that it would make her wise rather than God's warning that it would lead to misery and death. This is the first step towards death, believing that God's intentions towards us are not good and that there is a better way than his.

Learning Activity 13 (CCCx)

(a) With your learning group and/or mentor discuss whether you think it was a difficult thing for Adam and Eve to obey God, even if there was only one rule.

(b) Eve took the fruit first (see 3:6) ate it and gave some to her husband. Does that mean that really she is primarily responsible for 'the Fall'?

(a) It is not difficult to think that God knew what he would do and that he sought his good.

(b) Yes and No! Yes in that she was the one who took the initiative. But Adam was present with her and God addressed him first as the one responsible for the results.

Some people believe that the woman bears the responsibility for the Fall of humanity from God because she was the one first tempted by the serpent to eat from the tree. However quite clearly in Gen 2:16, the man was specifically given instructions not to eat from the tree and was warned about the consequences of eating from it. This might be why the New Testament refers to the sin of eating the forbidden fruit as 'Adam's transgression' and not 'Eve's transgression' (see Romans 5:14). Also we should notice that Adam was with Eve when she was tempted. At the end of ch2:25, they were together. Then after the serpent speaks to Eve and she believes the lie, takes the fruit and eats it, it clearly says in Gen 3:6 "She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." So, Adam was with her throughout this episode and apparently did nothing about it. So, both Adam and Eve are together responsible for the Fall.

Read Ch3:7-12

Learning Activity 14 (CCCx)

- (a) According to 3:7 what were the effects of Adam and Eve eating the fruit?
- (b) Why was it now a problem that they were naked? How is this so different from Genesis 2:25?
- (c) What does 3:10 say is the reason they tried to hide from God?
- (d) Adam and Eve's 'natural' reactions had changed. How do we see this in 3:7-13?

Their disobedience had destroyed the intimacy that they had with God and with each other and their attempts to cover their shame and guilt were ineffective. They then hid amongst the trees, which had been given by God for their enjoyment, to keep God from seeing them.

- (e) What else do we see them doing as a result of the change in their nature in 3:12,13?

- (a) Their eyes were opened and they realized that they were naked.*
- (b) The different is that their perception or their perspective of their state had changed. They were ashamed before God.*
- (c) Their fear and their shame pushed them to hide from God.*
- (d) They experienced shame and blamed others for their own actions*
- (e) They blamed others*

When the Lord confronts them in the garden, none of them takes responsibility for their sinful choices. They simply blame others. The man blames the woman; "The woman you put here with me-she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it". Rather more shockingly, implied in his response is his blaming God! "The woman **you** put here..." (3:12) The man has denied his responsibility in allowing his wife to eat, accepting the fruit himself and now he blames the woman and even God himself. The woman also passes on the responsibility and points the finger at the serpent (3:13).

Learning Activity 15 (CCCx and CSM)

It is 'fallen' human nature to blame someone or something else for our sin.

With your learning group and/or mentor discuss these questions:

- (a) Do you observe this tendency to blame someone or something else for our sin in your family, friends or neighbours where you live?
- (b) Do you sometimes make excuses for your own sinful attitudes, thoughts or actions and blame others? If so, you are not alone. This goes back to the first human beings. Take time to pray and ask the Lord to deliver you from this and make you someone who confesses your sin to God and where appropriate to those you have sinned against.

Free Response

So neither the man nor the woman accepts responsibility for their choice to disobey God and break his commandment. By doing this they 'Fall out' of relationship with God.

The Curse

Because of God's holy character and his unbreakable word, Adam and Eve's sin has to be dealt with. God responds with what has come to be known as 'the curse'.

Learning Activity 16 (CCC)

Do you remember what God cursed after man's disobedience? Write your answer and then check it by reading Gen 3:14-19 carefully.

The serpent and the ground

It is not mankind that is cursed! The curse falls on the serpent (3:14) and the ground (3:17). Part of the curse placed on the serpent is enmity between him and Eve and between the serpents 'offspring' and Eve's offspring; "he will crush your head and you will strike his heel" (3:15). As we will see, in these words we have the promise of God's redemption plan right at the very start of our story. However from now, note that by trusting the words of the serpent, Adam and Eve have entered into a kind of relationship with him. The consequences of this rebellion have been felt from that time until now. They are in our very being (metaphorically we could say they are in humanity's DNA) and we can observe them in babies and small children, who don't need to be taught how to be selfish or disobedient, it is in their 'fallen' nature.

But God doesn't allow this relationship to remain – he breaks the link of trust between the serpent and the woman and her 'seed' or offspring. God declares that there will be enmity between the Woman's seed and the serpent's offspring. And, most importantly, that the seed of the woman will ultimately conquer the seed of the serpent.

Although the text of Genesis doesn't tell us explicitly that the serpent was Satan, we learn this from other parts of the Bible, such as in Revelation 12:9, 20:2. God cursed the serpent and the ground not humanity. However God has allowed pain and brokenness to affect the lives of men and women because of the Fall. To the woman he promises pain in child bearing and warns her that her desire will be for her husband and he will 'rule over' her (ch3:16). Oppression has entered their relationship. So, the Bible sees this oppressive rule of man over women, not as a creation ideal for the woman, but as the result of mankind's disobedience to God.

Learning Activity 17 (CCC)

- (a) In ch3:14-19 what is cursed?
(b) What are the consequences of the curse?

(a) God curses the serpent and the ground

(b) Consequences:

- *Work becomes arduous and capable to failure*
- *Childbirth becomes difficult for women*
- *A change in human nature: hostility*
- *Human relationships become oppressive*

- Man is bound and controlled by Satan
In the New Testament we see the continuing story of how God seeks to redeem all of humanity through Christ. This means not just defeating Satan through his death and resurrection, but also, because of this, redeeming the effects of the Fall. This is why Paul writes that husbands should love their wives and treat them with respect (Ephesians 5:21-28). This shows the importance of reading the Bible as a whole story. If we read about the curse in 3:16 without continuing with the story, we fail to understand God's desire for husband and wife in Christ. We might read the curse and assume that this was God's will for all time rather than the tragic consequences of the Fall which God set about reversing and redeeming in Christ.

Genesis 3: The Seed and the Promise

The Seed

If God's love is seen clearly in Genesis 1 and 2 in the beauty of creation and in harmonious relationships, it is seen even more clearly in his plan to redeem and recover humanity from the ugliness and brokenness of sin and rebellion. As we have begun to see, in Genesis 3:15 God's redemptive plan is introduced. The offspring (or 'seed') of the woman will conquer the serpent and crush his head. This conflict will be costly and as we have seen, he will 'strike the heel' of the woman's seed. This is sometimes called the 'proto-evangel' (*proto* – meaning miniature or first type and *evangel* – meaning Good News or 'Gospel').

We need to hold on to the promise in Genesis 3:15 and interpret it in light of the rest of God's story. As we look at the world and experience continuing pain, broken relationships, people dominating other people we are called to hold the promise of Genesis 3:15 up and recognise that in Christ, God is seeking to restore and redeem all things and people to himself.

Despite his sin, in the face of God's promise to destroy the serpent through the 'seed', Adam must have believed God because of the name he gave his wife. As in our part of the world names in the Old Testament are full of meaning. Adam names his wife Eve which means "mother of all the living" or more accurately 'life-giver'. (Gen 3:20) Despite the death that came through the serpent and mankind's rebellion, life would come through the promised seed. Adam and Eve's attempt to cover their shame was pathetic and useless. In

anticipation of a greater covering of their sin, God clothes them with animal skins. Here at the start of the story we have the idea that a sacrifice has to be made (and blood shed) in order to 'make right', redeem and 'cover over' humanity's shame and sin. (3:21) But the promise is that only through the promised 'seed' would their shame be fully removed.

The Promise

This promise in Genesis 3 is at the heart of the redemptive story of the whole Bible, not just the New Testament! Here in these early chapters God is communicating the gospel (his Good News) to Adam and Eve right after they have rebelled and fallen away from him. God will restore humanity to the intended relationship we see in Genesis 1 and 2. He will defeat the one who brought lies that lead to death and he will re-establish the relationship of intimate presence with his people. Until then, he is covering them so that their shame is not exposed.

Understanding how this 'seed-promise' theme is developed throughout the Old Testament and the whole Bible is crucial. Let's consider eight points in the development of this theme.

1. Genesis 3:15 is the fundamental promise at the start of the Bible's story. It directs us toward the future coming 'seed' who will bring an end to mankind's alienation from God. This the start of God's redeeming work.
2. Later in Genesis 12:1-3 God makes a promise to Abraham that he will be uniquely blessed and that this blessing through him and his 'seed' is for all nations. Though Abraham has no descendants of his own, and struggles to see how this will promise will be fulfilled (with the advice of his barren wife Sara even trying to take matters into his own hands by having a son with his servant Hagar) he does believe the promise made by God (Gen15:4).
3. Because of his faith, he receives a son. Isaac is Abraham's 'seed' and becomes the heir of God's promise to Abraham.
4. Jacob and his twelve sons make up the nation (Old testament Israel) that carries forward the hope of the promised seed.
5. Later God promises David that his 'seed' – his son, will possess a kingdom that will last forever. He will be the 'Son of God' and will build an eternal temple (2 Samuel 7:13-14).
6. When the New Testament writers introduce Jesus, they list the genealogy as coming through the line of promise, especially Abraham and David (look at Matthew 1:1-17).
7. Later, Paul interprets the Old Testament promise of the 'seed'. In Galatians 3:16 he writes;

"The promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed. Scripture does not say "and to his seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person who is Christ."

We can see this same interpretation of the 'seed' as Christ in many places in the New Testament, such as; Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:45-49.

Not only is Christ the 'seed' of the woman in Gen 3:15, but those who believe in Christ become the seed of Abraham as we are united to Christ in faith (see this in Galatians 3:29).

Learning Activity 18 (CCC)

- (a) What is the promise at the heart of Genesis 3:15?
- (b) Who is the woman's 'seed'?
- (c) Through which characters in the rest of the Old Testament can we see the theme of the promised seed developing?

(a) The promise: God will bring the victory of the woman's seed over Satan and his armies. A descendant must crush his head after having been injured by him.

(b) The seed is Jesus Christ.

(c) This promise passes to the descendants: Isaac, Jacob, Abraham, David.

The Covenant

The other theme related to the 'seed-promise' that emerges in these early chapters and is seen especially in Gen 3:15 is the concept of *covenant*. The Bible repeatedly refers to the relationship between God and his chosen people by using the word 'covenant'. In Hebrew the word *Hesed* is used to describe God's never stopping, never-giving up, un-breaking, always and forever covenantal love. The concept of covenant is at the heart of the relationship between God and his people. There are a number of covenants mentioned between God and his people throughout the Old and New Testaments. In the next chapter we will consider the five most important ones, the covenants with; Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and most importantly Jesus Christ.

Though the word 'covenant' is not used in Genesis 1-3, as we have seen, the concept clearly emerges here. One Old Testament prophet, Hosea referred to Adam's sin as his "breaking the covenant" (see Hosea 6:7). In Genesis 1-3 God binds himself to Adam and Eve, first in creation, then in his judgment of their sin and finally in providing for their redemption. Adam and Eve's descendants would continue to break God's covenant but God would remain faithful to his word and make a way for them/us to be restored to him again.

Learning Task 19 (CCCx, CSM and MMC)

In your journal write down the following:

- (a) Explain in your own words what Professor Imed meant in his statement: 'Remember Majdi, the **beginning** unlocks the **principle theme**.'
- (b) Which aspect of what Genesis 1-3 teaches us about God's creation, our 'fall' and God's Redemption plan has challenged (convicted) you the most.

- (c) Which aspect has encouraged you the most.
- (d) In which relationships (your wife/husband or your children or your boss or your employees or your neighbours) can you see the effects of the 'fall'.
- (e) This week either;
 - (i) Tell someone in your family the story of Genesis 1-3 or
 - (ii) Write a letter to someone that you have sinned against in thoughts or words or in action. Confess your sins to them and ask for their forgiveness. Try to tell them why you are doing this.

(a) All the themes (from activity 1 above) are brought up in these chapters: the goodness and power of God, his special interest in humanity, the perfection of his creation, the resemblance and relationship of man to God, the temptation of Satan and man's rebellion, the judgment of man and the effects of sin, the grace of God to allow man to live with complete dignity, the necessity of a savior/redeemer, the control of Satan over man, marital and relational problems, the idea of sacrifice and physical and spiritual death.

(b) Free response (possible answers): God is patient; he lets man discover on his own and then considerably reduces the consequences. God prepared an immediate and provisional cure to sin and then a long-term solution.

(c) Free Response: Ex: God gives hope; only he can rebuild the situation after sin.

(d) Free Response

Lesson 5: A story of covenants: Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus

Key Concept: The covenant between God and His people is one of the central themes of the whole Bible. God, who is faithful, holy, all-knowing and all-powerful, in love enters into covenant with mankind who is unfaithful, weak, sinful and flawed. The five covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David, along with the New Covenant through Jesus, tell us about the nature of God and the nature of humanity.

Lesson Goals:

Content and Cognitive Competencies (CCC)

- a) Know/understand the concept of covenant in the Old Testament
- b) Know/understand the Old Testament Hebrew concept of *hesed*
- c) Recognize the particularities of 4 major covenants in the Old Testament
- d) Recognize the redemptive promise theme running through all the major covenants in the Old Testament
- e) Recognize the fulfillment of all the Old Testament covenants in the New Covenant in Christ

Character and Spiritual Maturity (CSM)

- a) Think about the necessity of God's redemptive plan for all humanity including myself
- b) Reflect on my own sinfulness and confess my need for God's redemptive love
- c) Commit myself and other believers in my family to understanding the story of covenant in the Old Testament
- d) With my brothers and sisters (in church or learning group) re-commit ourselves to our covenant with God in Christ.

Mission & Ministry Competencies (MMC)

- a) Write out a covenantal promise, recommitting my family and/or church-learning group to the redemptive purposes of God in Christ for the year ahead
- b) Read this covenantal promise out together with my family and/or church-learning group

Introduction

In lesson four we immersed ourselves in Genesis 1-3; three vitally important chapters in the Bible. We learnt about God's character and purpose in creation, the extent and impact of 'the fall' and God's plan to redeem mankind through his chosen people.

Learning Activity 1 (CSM and MMC)

Feedback

- (a) With your learning group and/or mentor discuss whether you were able to write a letter to someone that you had sinned against or confessed your sins to someone you have sinned against.
- (b) How hard was it?
- (c) What reaction did you get?

(a) Personal Answer

(b) In a general way, yes

(c) Free response

In this lesson we will consider the concept of the 'covenant' between God and His people. We will see how this central theme runs through the Old Testament and the whole Bible and reflect on what it tells us about the nature of God and of mankind. We will consider four important covenants in the Old Testament and how they lead to *the* final and complete covenant in Christ.

*In our last lesson we accompanied Dr Majdi in his journey through the Old Testament as he immersed himself in the first three chapters of Genesis. As he shared with his wife Zakiya, Dr Majdi and his wife were drawn to the concept of 'covenant' in these chapters. Although they didn't find the exact word 'covenant' in the first three chapters of Genesis, they were intrigued by the reference in the book of Hosea (Hosea 6:7) to Adam's sin of breaking the covenant. It was clear to them that in Genesis 1-3 God clearly binds himself to Adam and Eve, first in their creation, then in judging their sin and finally in providing for their redemption. As Dr Majdi and his wife read through the Old Testament together they repeatedly found this 'covenant' concept. Majdi told Zakiya about how Professor Imed had got very excited about the Hebrew word *hêsed*, which he said described 'God's never stopping, never-giving up, un-breaking, always and forever covenantal love'. Majdi and Zakiya were deeply moved by this and as they read through most of the Old Testament this *hêsed* covenantal love of God began to transform them. They found themselves crying as they read the scriptures and realised that God has made a way for them to be drawn into this 'never stopping, never-giving up, un-breaking, always and forever covenantal love'.*

Whilst Majdi and Zakiya found this 'covenant' in many stories in the Old Testament, there were five particular covenants that stood out as important. These were the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and most importantly the one that all of them seemed to be pointing to, the 'new' covenant through Jesus Christ. Let's keep journeying with Dr Majdi and his family and friends in his discovery of five major covenants in the Bible.

Learning Activity 2 (CCCx and CSM)

Think about then discuss the following with your learning group and/or mentor.

- (a) Are you good at keeping your word?
- (b) Are you known as someone who is true to his/her word?
- (c) What are the most important agreements or oaths that you have made in your life (think of marriage, or promises to your employer, or to your children...)?
- ☞ (d) How do you think these are similar to or different from God's *hesed* covenantal love?

(a) Free response

(b) Free response

(c) Important contracts or promises: baptism, marriage, a word given to children

(d) Love is expressed by a promise which reassures the other through a sacrificial relationship which seals and enacts this promise. This is an expression of love in a long-term relationship. At the same time, it is possible to make promises and to keep them out of a spirit of pride and perfectionism.

Parents, you represent the love of God our Father to your children. It is thus very important to be faithful to keep your promises to them. It is better not to say anything than to vainly promise rewards in order to change their behavior. May your "yes" be yes and your "no" no! (Matt 5)

What is a 'covenant'?

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. Covenants in the Ancient Near East were normally initiated by greater party with the lesser party. In the Bible, as the greater party, God takes the initiative. *He* comes to us, we do not make our way to him. The covenant is a bond where God binds himself to his people. The covenant also has two parts to it; God's commitment to his people and their commitment to him. There were in this way mutual obligations in the relationship. An important point to realize is that in covenanting (committing himself to his people in the covenant) God was reflecting his character as loving and all-powerful. He was not acting out of self-preservation. Unlike how some people in our part of the world think about God, keeping the covenant has nothing to do with defending God or appeasing him with good works or gifts. Rather, God's people are obligated to him through a relationship of faith and trust in His character and His promises. Like a marriage relationship God's covenant people are committed to him exclusively. God's covenant love has no place for any other deities.

1. The Covenant with Noah (for all of humanity)

Read the story of Noah in Genesis chapters 6-9.

By the time of Noah, the world had become a very wicked place. The scriptures tell us that God's heart was grieved and that he 'regretted' his creation of mankind. (Genesis 6:1-8)

Learning Activity 3 (CCCx)

- (a) Why is God so grieved in ch6:1-8?
- (b) Why do you think that God responded to the people's sin so drastically?
- (c) Why do you think that it took God so long to punish the wickedness of humanity?

- (a) The heart of man is always inclined to evil (v5) and rebels against God (v3).*
(b) God acts in a radical way because sin is both serious and horrible. It was necessary to:
 - deliver man from a never-ending hell on earth
 - show the gravity of sin and the severe judgment coming at the last day
 - be able to restart with a godly family and to restore humanity (partially and provisionally, at least)
- (c) The time that passes before judgment shows that God is patient and slow to be wrathful. He gives people time to consider the consequences of their rebellion and to repent in the midst of insistent and continuous warnings.*

But Noah was different from the rest of mankind at that time. He was a righteous man. Like his great grandfather Enoch Noah was in a very small minority of those who 'walked with God' (see 5:22, 6:9). God sees this and shares his plan to destroy the world but to save Noah and his family (Genesis 6:9-12). God instructs Noah to build a bui boat (a massive barge) to escape God's judgement and crucially, despite how bizarre this might have seemed, Noah believed God (See Genesis 6:22 and Heb 11:7). Faith should always translate into action and obedience; otherwise it is not real faith. Noah started building a boat in the middle of the desert! He also preached judgement and mercy for almost 120 years (2 Peter 2:5) and saw very little fruit (there were no converts!). God also waited, but no one turned to him and in the end only eight souls were saved from the flood (1 Peter 3:20).

Noah, his family and representatives of the animal kingdom spent more than one year shut away in the floating ark and safe from the waters that judged and cleansed the world of sin. God in his holiness cannot stand sin. The flood was a place where judgement and mercy meet (see Psalm 85).

Learning Activity 4 (CCCx and CSM)

- (a) What made Noah different from other people around him? (See Gen 6:5-14,22)
 (b) Noah believed God's plan and acted in faith on his instruction. Do you think that was easy? If God shared his plans with you, do you think you would respond in a similar way?
 (c) How easy is it for us to submit ourselves to God and his plans for us and the world?

- (a) Noah found grace and favor in the eyes of God. He was just and full of integrity (v8). (But he was not perfect—he needed the grace of God!) He obeyed God in everything—the construction of the ark and in announcing of the message (v22).*
(b) This certainly wasn't easy—he was God's only representative in the midst of hardened rebels. His message and the construction project seemed ridiculous to them. This situation went on for years and decades.
(c) The price to pay (or which you risk paying): to be different, insulted, assaulted...

Once the flood subsided and Noah, his family and the animals were on solid ground, Noah built an altar and made a sacrifice to God. The sacrifice was accepted by God (Genesis 8); it was Noah's faith in the word of God and the promise of God that saved his family and the rest of creation.

Learning Activity 5 (CCCx)

- (a) Why is sin such a big deal to God? Why can't God just forgive without punishing sin so severely? Look at Genesis 6:5-8, 11-13 and see if you can find any other passages that might explain why sin is such a big deal.
- (b) Why is it important that Noah sacrificed 'clean animals'?
- (c) Why is death the punishment for sin?
- (d) How does God's treatment of sin contain both his mercy and his wrath against sin?

(a) According to 6:5-8, the heart of man is always inclined to evil. He has a spirit of rebellion and enmity toward God.

6:11-13 speaks of the corruption and violence of all creatures on earth.

Other passages: Rom 3:1-19, Rom 1:18-31

(b) God's wrath against sin is evident in the judgment of the death of all humanity. This shows his justice in punishing sinners and the guilty.

The compassion of God is seen in his patience and all the prior warnings—the ark itself was an unavoidable witness of the coming judgment. It is seen also in the reward and relief which it is for Noah and his family that their evil neighbors would be wiped out. It is also seen in the fact that it prepares a better land for future generations. Finally, it is seen in his regret for having punished man and his promise never to destroy the earth by flood again.

Some supplementary questions which you may ask after having read Gen 7:21-23:

Why is death the punishment for sin? (look back at Gen 2:17, together with Rom 6:23)

after having read Gen 8:20-22:

Why was it important that Noah sacrifice "blameless animals"?

What was God's response to the animal sacrifice?

Note that this sacrifice announced the death of Christ on the cross.

Read 9:1-17

Learning Activity 6 (CCC)

- (a) What are the requirements for mankind in this covenant? (See 9:4-6)
- (b) What does God promise in this covenant? (See 9:8-11)
- (c) What is the sign of that covenant? (See 9:12-16).

(a) God commanded them not to eat the blood of animals—respect for living beings.

Not pouring out humans' blood—respect for the image of God in man

(b) God promises to no longer judge man with a flood.

(c) The sign of the covenant: a rainbow

God in his grace gives man the privilege of eating animals for the first time, but with certain rules to follow.

One aspect of this covenant is an affirmation of the sanctity of human life. The shedding of human blood is punishable by death because humanity is 'made in the image of God' (Gen 9:6).

Learning Activity 7 (CSM)

Do you think that God's plan to rescue the world is powerful enough to reach the world with all its problems today? (See Romans 1:16,17)

God is certainly mighty to save today.

If we truly believed this, what impact would that certainty have on our family relationships or our work, on our free time, our prayers...?

2. The Covenant with Abraham (for Abraham's descendants and the 'nations')

The story of Abraham can be found in Genesis chapters 12-25

While the covenant with Noah represented a covenant with all of humanity, God's covenant with Abraham focussed in on this one man and his descendants. However from the very beginning of the covenant (in Genesis 12:1-3) it is crystal clear that God's purpose is to bless 'the nations' (all people), through him.

Abram, his name before God changed it to 'Abraham' (which means 'Father of man nations'), was the patriarch of a big wealthy family in Ur (modern day southern Iraq). At the age of 75 he received a 'call' from God to go to a place that he didn't know.

Learning Activity 8 (CCC)

- (a) What does God promise Abram in this covenant? (See Gen 12:1-3 and 17:1-8)
- (b) What are the requirements for Abraham in this covenant? (See Gen 12:1 and 17:9)
- (c) What was the sign of that covenant? (See Gen 17:10-14).
- (d) What do both the Old and the New Testament say was at the heart of Abraham's motivation to keep the covenant? (See Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3, 18; Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23)

(a) He promises to bless him and thus his family and all the families of the earth through him; he will protect him and give him a new name (12:2-3)

He will give him numerous descendants and the land of Canaan as a heritage to his descendants.

(b) God commands him to leave his country and to go where God will lead him (12:1) and to obey his covenant (circumcise every male as a sign of the covenant 17:9-14).

(c) Circumcise every male member of a family in the covenant with God.

(d) The most important thing to remain faithful to the covenant: faith in God. "Abraham believed God."

God promised blessings on and through him, of land and descendants (even though he had no children through his wife Sarai), and promised that he would be a blessing to the

'nations' (Gen 12:1-3). Abram believed God's promise and looked to see how it would be fulfilled. Not seeing how it was going to be fulfilled, he and Sarai came up with their own solution to how it would be worked out. This is how Ishmael (Hagar's son) was born (See Genesis 15:1-6 and 16:1-4).

Abraham's part of the covenant was to trust God and 'go' (note again, faith that translated into obedience), even though he didn't know exactly where. God's part was to make Abraham a great nation and a blessing to 'the nations'. Genesis 15:7-21 shows us the ceremony (common in the ancient world) used to formalize the covenant.

Learning Activity 9 (CCCx and CSM)

- (a) Abraham is sometimes called the 'friend of God'. What makes Abraham so special?
- (b) How long did Abraham and Sarah have to wait before the Lord fulfilled the promise he had made to them? Look at when the Lord first called Abram in Genesis 12:4 and then when Isaac was born in 21:5.
- (c) Can we control when and how God will fulfil his promises in our lives?

(a) Abraham is extraordinary in his confidence in God, his readiness to obey quickly even when what God commands is difficult or incomprehensible, and his patience to wait for God to fulfill his promises (even if sometimes he tries to intervene with his own ways and for his own benefit).

(b) The wait took 25 years (75-100)

(c) As with Abraham, we can see examples during our lives, but it is only at the end of our lives (or perhaps after) that we will be able to see the total fulfillment.

Invite students to share their personal examples of the faithfulness of God. Be ready to give them an example to start.

The Lord gave Abram and Sarai new names and told them that Ishmael was not the son of promise that God had in mind. God then renewed His promise that they will have a son. This would have seemed pretty unlikely (unbelievable!) because Sarah was childless (11:30-31, 17:5). But Abraham believed and obeyed God!

Isaac was born and there was tension between Sarah (Abraham's wife) and Hagar (her servant) and between Ishmael and Isaac. But God promises also to bless Ishmael (21:1-21). However the line of promise (the covenant) was to pass through Isaac (17:15-22). We can see the covenant being passed down through Isaac (Gen 17:19). Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:1-8 summarises the story of Abraham well, then shows how the covenant is passed from Abraham to Isaac, then to Jacob and the 12 patriarches.

Read Genesis 17

Learning Activity 10 (CCC and CCCx)

- (a) What is the meaning of Abram's new name? (See 17:5)
- (b) How is his new name related to God's promise to him?
- (c) Why does Ishmael not qualify to fulfil God's promise to Abraham? (See 17:15-16, 19 et 21)

- (d) Does God abandon Ishmael and his mother? How will he be blessed? (See 17:20 ; 21:12-13)
- (e) Why do you think that God's redemptive plan/promises have to pass through Isaac? (See 17:16, 19,21)

(a) Abraham = "father of a great number"

(b) It was what God promised him and what began to take place only one year later, with the birth of the miraculous son. (Gen 21:1-6)

(c) The promise God gave to Abraham could not be fulfilled in Ishmael because the promise was for Sarah also, just as it was for Abraham.

(d) Ishmael was to have many descendants, with 12 princes as sons (17:20), who would become a great nation. (21:18)

(e) God wanted to include Sarah in his covenant and to show his power and faithfulness through it and to Sarah herself. God wanted to show that he alone can fulfill his promise, without the intervention of his servants, when everything seems impossible.

Later God tests Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah. Abraham keeps believing that God will provide and the Lord does provide a sacrifice in the place of his son Isaac (Gen 22:1-18).

Learning Activity 11 (CCC and CCCx)

- (a) What kind of offering was Abraham asked to make? (Read Gen 22:2)
- (b) This was a very, very hard thing for the Lord to ask Abraham to do. Why did the Lord ask him to do this?
- (c) Did Abraham really believe that he would receive his son back from the dead? How do we know this? (Read Gen 22.5 and Hebrews 11.16-19)
- (d) In Lesson 3 we looked at the three levels of in Old Testament narrative. In this the first level narrative of this story (the story of Abraham being asked to sacrifice his son Isaac) what is the 'symbol' or 'sign' that we are given which points us to the third level narrative of God's redemption (rescue) plan? To help you, have a look at Hebrews 11:17 then John 3:16-18.

(a) God required a human sacrifice from him: his own son.

(b) Why? Maybe to shatter the idol of his son in his heart—God requires first place! Abraham must have faith in God for all the rest.

(c) He knew that God could bring him back to life, because God is good and faithful and had promised descendants for Isaac.

(d) God offered his own Son to save Isaac and all his descendants. Hebrews 11:7 shows that Abraham offered his only son as a sacrifice, while God the Father offered his only son to save Abraham, his son and all of humanity.

3. The Mosaic Covenant (for Old Testament Israel)

While the covenant with Moses is specifically aimed at the people of Old Testament Israel, it tells us much about the holiness of God and his standard for humanity. In the Old Testament Moses is identified with 'The Law' and understanding the place of God's Law given through

Moses is important in the unfolding story of God's redemptive plan for all humanity. But we must consider the particularity of Old Testament Israel and Moses first.

For the story of God's covenant with Moses, read the '**For Further Study**' section at the end of this lesson.

4. The Covenant with David (For the descendants of David + Heirs of the throne)

God established a covenant with King David in which David and his descendants were to be royal heirs to the throne of the nation of Israel (2 Samuel 7:8-16). This imperfect human kingdom was a sign pointing towards an eternal heavenly Kingdom. The Lord tells David that one of his descendants will be the saviour of the world.

For the story of God's covenant with David, read the '**For Further Study**' section at the end of this lesson.

5. The Covenant of Christ (for all humanity)

All of these covenants reflect God's plan and purpose to keep his promise and restore humanity to himself. Despite repeated unfaithfulness from humanity and the testimony of honoured and godly prophets, God maintained his holy character, which cannot stand in the presence of sin *and* his loving kindness, which has made a way for us to be restored, forgiven and redeemed. This *hesed* covenantal love running through all the major covenants in the Old Testament finds its fulfillment in the New Covenant in Christ.

When the New Testament refers to the Old Testament covenants, it makes a clear distinction between, (a) the covenant of the Mosaic Law and (b) the covenant of Promise. The covenant of the promise is what we have been learning about in the course of this lesson. The whole narrative of the Old Testament leads to the climax of a full and final covenant in Christ. In the New Testament Paul speaks of these 'two covenants', one originating from Mount Sinai (a) and the other from "the Jerusalem above" (b).

Learning Activity 12 (CCC) *Read the Galatians 4:23-26.*

How does Paul compare these two covenants?

Mount Sinai
slavery
source: human will
(shame)

Jerusalem
freedom
source: the fruit of God's promise
joy and celebration, coming from on high

Paul explains elsewhere that the covenant established at Sinai was a ministry of 'death' and 'condemnation' (see 2 Corinthians 3:7,9). However the death of Christ ushered in a new covenant in which we are justified by God's grace and mercy and true forgiveness of sins and restoration of our dignity and honour in upright relationship with God is now possible. The New Testament teaches that Jesus is *the* mediator of this 'better' 'new covenant' (see Hebrews 9:15). This 'new' covenant (based on the shed blood, death and resurrection of

Jesus Christ) achieved what the others had failed to do, but that God had promised he would achieve (see Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:7-13). Under this New Covenant God would write 'his law on human hearts'.

Learning Activity 13 (CCC and CCCx) Read Hebrews chapter 8

How does the writer of Hebrews compare the new covenant with the old one? Read 8:6-13 in particular, then in the appropriate column of the table below write down what he says about each covenant.

| Old Covenant | New Covenant |
|---|--|
| <i>established by human hands (v2)</i> | <i>established by the Lord himself</i> |
| <i>a model of the real thing (v5)</i> | <i>the true sanctuary</i> |
| <i>The people did not continue to follow its requirements (v9).</i> | <i>founded on better promises (v6)</i> |
| | <i>God writes his Law on our hearts (v10).</i> |
| | <i>God will forgive once and for all (v12).</i> |
| | <i>Everyone will teach, and will know (v11).</i> |
| <i>It is outdated: it is passing away</i> | <i>It is new, and replaces the old (v13).</i> |

Jesus affirmed this 'New Covenant' when he ate his last Passover meal (Last Supper) with his disciples. He said "this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28, Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25). This is seen most

clearly in the letter to the Hebrews. The whole of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12. Here Jesus is presented clearly as the 'Mediator of the New Covenant' (Hebrews 9:15; 12:24). This 'new' covenant is described as a 'better covenant' established on 'better promises' (Hebrews 8:6) and it makes the old covenant obsolete (Hebrews 8:13). But most importantly of all, it rests on the sacrificial work of Christ and it is for all mankind! (Matt 28:18-20)

Review and summary of the most important covenants

(a) Complete the column for the promises of the old covenant according to the examples given below.

☞ (b) Complete the column "fulfillment in Christ", showing how his new covenant completes and accomplishes the promises connected to each old covenant.

☞ (c) Show how the promises of the successive covenants did not replace the preceding ones, but developed them and made them more precise every time.

The old covenants and their fulfillments in the new

| Character | Promises of the Covenant | Fulfillment in Christ |
|----------------|---|---|
| Noah | <i>grace offered to sinful humanity (Gen 8:21, 9:11)</i> | <i>Jesus satisfies the wrath of God against our sins. (John 3:16)</i> |
| Abraham | <i>descendants who will become a nation and the source of blessing for the nations (Gen 12:2-3, 22:17-19)</i> | <i>Believers of all nations join the people of God as children of Abraham. (Rev 5:9, Mt 28:19- 20, Gal 3:6-9)</i> |
| Moses | <i>God will dwell with his ransomed people who belong to him and who live in the holiness of the Law. (Ex 19:4-6, 29:45-46, Lev 11:44-45)</i> | <i>Jesus frees his people from the slavery of sin; the Holy Spirit lives in them and writes the Law on their hearts .(Rom 8:2, 4, 9)</i> |
| David | <i>His descendant will reign forever as king. (2 Sam 7:12-14)</i> | <i>Jesus reigns eternally as the Son of David. (Luke 1:31-33, Acts 2:39-46)</i> |

(a,b) See the table above

X

Learning Activity 15 (CCCx, CSM and MMC)

Choose one of the following activities:

(1) (a) In your journal (or on a separate piece of paper), either; (i) Draw a vine or tree with five branches... On each branch, draw fruit or leaves and write on them five words that describe the key aspects of God's *hesed* covenantal love. Or (ii) write a poem with five verses that describe the key aspects of God's *hesed* covenantal love.

(b) Find someone in your family or a work colleague or a neighbour. Show them your picture or recite the poem to them.

Or:

(2) (a) Write out a covenantal promise, recommitting my family and/or church-learning group to the redemptive purposes of God in Christ for the year ahead

(b) Read this covenantal promise out together with your family and/or church-learning group

Hesed Love =

eternal: *It is unwavering and inexhaustible. It does not change just as God himself is constant. It does not depend on our circumstances or even our faithfulness.*

faithful: *God fulfills all his promises because he has the will and the ability to do them; he continues even when we drop the ball on our side; he carries us and lifts us up.*

patient: *He knows that we have a hard time remaining faithful to our side, and offers us ways to escape our slavery until we realize our mistake and return to him.*

compassionate: *He wants our good, even when we are helpless and rebellious.*

intimate: *He wants to have a deep and strong relationship with us, based on our confidence in his goodness.*

unwavering: *His love perseveres and is persistent, even when we do not do anything to deserve it (and even when we do everything to discourage it!).*

immutable (unchangeable)

unconditional: *The strength and quality of his love does not depend on our attitude or our actions. (Yet the way he treats us can change as a result, especially if we need to be corrected and disciplined.)*

Covenant Commitment

*As the **father of a family**, I commit myself to reflect the hesed love of God in my family relationships—to keep my promises and commitments to my wife and my children, to meet their needs and protect them, to seek their interests before my own, to remain faithful in my exclusive love for my wife until death. I seek to be an example of a life attached to the love of Christ and obedient to his commands.*

For Further Study

3. The Mosaic Covenant (for Old Testament Israel)

The Story of Moses' covenant can be found in Exodus chapters 1-3, 5-14, 19-20, 26-27 and 36-40.

While the covenant with Moses is specifically aimed at the people of Old Testament Israel, it tells us much about the holiness of God and his standard for humanity. In the Old Testament Moses is identified with 'The Law' and understanding the place of God's Law given through Moses is important in the unfolding story of God's redemptive plan for all humanity. But we must consider the particularity of Old Testament Israel and Moses first.

The Israelites moved to Egypt in the time of Joseph to escape famine. Their number increased and years later a new Pharaoh rose up and oppressed the people. Moses was born and grew up in Pharaoh's family. However he later fled to Sinai where he met God on the Mount. The people cried to the Lord and he heard them and crucially "he remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Exodus 2:24).

Read Exodus ch 1-3

Learning Activity 16 (CCC and CCCx)

- (a) When God called Moses, was he ready to lead his people out of Egypt?
- (b) How does God reassure Moses?
- (c) How can we see the continuity between God's promise in previous covenants and God's initiation of the covenant with Moses?

(a) Not at all. He thinks the idea is impossible.

(b) He remembers the people's sufferings and their need for deliverance. (v7-10)

He promises to personally accompany him and to bring him back. (v12-13)

He reveals to him his personal name (v14) and gives him the message to take. (v15)

He promises him that he will use signs to convince Pharaoh. (v20, 4:1-9)

He gives him Aaron his brother as his spokesman. (4:14-16)

(c) The God of Abraham will fulfill his promises to him, including the exodus and the creation of a nation in Canaan.

Though a man of faltering lips, Moses trusts God and obeys. Here again notice 'faith' and 'obedience' is the model response of the man of God! Moses confronts Pharaoh without an army or weapons but rather a series of ten plagues upon Egypt, the last of which is the slaughter of the firstborn (See Exodus chs 5-11). When the Lord visits Egypt every first born is struck down. Only those whose doors are covered with the blood of a sacrificed lamb are free from God's judgement (see Exodus 12:1-30). The Israelites escape but Pharaoh pursues them to the Red Sea, where the Lord opens the sea and through the water delivers them from the hand of Pharaoh (see Exodus 12:31-14:31).

Learning Activity 17 (CCC and CCCx)

- (a) What did God want to show to both the Egyptians and to the Israelites through the ten plagues?
- (b) How does God make sure that the Israelites are kept safe from the judgement coming to the Egyptian?

(c) What is the significance of lambs' blood? Why is this important in dealing with sin here in this narrative and in the bigger (3rd Level) meta-narrative of the Bible?

(a) The Lord is the only true God. The Egyptians must let the people go so they can worship him.

(b) Some plagues don't affect Goshen, where the Israelites live (Ex 8:18). Then, in the 10th plague, the blood of a lamb is spread over the doorways to protect them from the angel of death.

(c) The blood represents the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to protect humanity from the just judgment of God.

Three months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrive at base of Mount Sinai. God affirms his calling to them as a nation and promised to make a covenant with them (Ex 19:3-6) and the people agreed to abide, even before conditions were outlined (Ex 19:8). The Ten Commandments are the moral foundation of this covenant, but Moses also received 'the Law', then spoke the words of the covenant to the people who agreed to obey it all (Exodus 24:3). The conditions of the covenant were written down, then sacrifices were offered to God. Moses sprinkled the 'people' with blood to "seal the covenant" (Ex 24:8).

Learning Activity 18 (CCC, CCCx and CSM)

(a) What was God's calling to the Israelites? How were they supposed to represent God?

(b) The Ten Commandments tell us about the holiness of God and his standards for humanity. Do you think that anyone can keep these?

✍ (c) The priests were set apart and anointed to represent the people before God. However not even they were capable of standing before God. Why not? What might this be telling us about humanity's need for a mediator?

(a) They will become a holy nation (pure, set apart and distinct) and a kingdom of priests, having the role of representing God to the surrounding peoples.

(b) It is not possible to perfectly obey them. (If in doubt, see Matt 5.)

(c) The priests themselves had a need for sacrifices in order to go before God; their access was very limited and precarious. God alone is holy! He needs an extraordinary mediator.

Note for the facilitator: The themes will be explored in far more detail in lesson 7.

This covenant between God and the people of Israel was temporary. God promised a day when he would make a new covenant with *all* mankind (See Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Isaiah 49:6).

4. The Covenant with David (For the descendants of David + Heirs of the throne)

The story of David and God's covenant with him can be found in 1 Samuel 8-13, 16-17 and 2 Samuel 6-7, 11-12:25

The covenant with Moses narrowed the beneficiaries to the people of Israel. The covenant with David pursues God's covenantal promise (from the very beginning in Genesis 1-3 and the subsequent covenants) narrowed it further to a particular family within Old Testament Israel, the line (or family) of David.

After passing through Sinai and into the Promised Land the Israelites were ruled by judges for several years in which there were cycles of occasional obedience and increasing disobedience and rebellion against the Lord. They repeatedly asked to have a king “like the other nations” (1 Samuel 8:19,20) so God yielded and gave them their first king, Saul. But Saul, like many in Old Testament Israel, was more in love with human wisdom and the praise of men, so God rejected him and anointed young David whose heart sought after the Lord (See 1 Samuel 16:7-13, and ch17).

Learning Activity 19 (CCC)

Even as a youth we see something of David’s godly heart. How can you see this in his motivation for taking on Goliath?

(a) The Philistine opposes the armies of the living God. (1 Sam 17:16) He seeks to honor God and has confidence that God will give him the victory, as he did before against wild animals. (v34-37)

A covenant between God and King David was established in which David and his descendants were to be royal heirs to the throne of the nation of Israel (2 Samuel 7:8-16). This imperfect human kingdom was a sign pointing towards an eternal heavenly Kingdom. The Lord tells David that one of his descendants will be the saviour of the world. Despite being a great man and a great king, David is also a sinner and he falls into a terrible sin with Bathsheba. He genuinely repents and is forgiven (See his Psalm 51:1-17) but the promise of blessing through his descendants will not be a human kingdom.

Learning Activity 20 (CCC and CCCx)

- (a) How do we know from the story of David that his repentance was genuine?
- (b) How can we tell the difference between true repentance and that which is done as a show?

(a-b) Free responses

Question (a) requires a careful reading of the story and a high level of discernment and interpretation.

David was a gifted and passionate worshiper. He wrote some of the most beautiful and God-exalting love songs. These are called the Psalms. Some of David’s psalms speak prophetically about the coming Messiah (see Psalm 2:6-8 and Psalm 22:1-24). The covenant with David therefore reaches its fulfilment with Jesus, a descendant in the line of David, who was born in the town of David, Bethlehem. The Gospel of Matthew starts by showing that Christ was the Son of David (Matt 1:1) and therefore he had the right to rule over God’s people. Peter preached that Christ was the fulfilment of God’s promise to David (Acts 2:29-36).

Learning Activity 21 (CCC and CCCx)

- (a) David was an honoured king. Why does the Bible expose him to such shame?
- (b) Why does God renew his covenant (promise of blessing) through someone who is shamed in such a way?

🌀 (c) In your learning group, choose two or three portions of the Psalms of David listed below that speak prophetically about the coming Messiah and read them, then,

- (i) Fill in the table with what these Psalms tell us about the coming Messiah.
- (ii) Who in history can match up to this description?
- (iii) What stops people from recognising the Messiah?

(a) Free response. Some possibilities: to show that all men are saved only by the grace of God; that everyone must stay vigilant against temptation; that sometimes it is necessary to confront leaders with courage as Nathan did; that we must acknowledge our mistakes as David did.

(b) Free response. Example: He is ashamed; he acknowledges the goodness and grace of God.

| Psalm | What do these verses teach us about the coming Messiah? |
|-----------------|---|
| Psalm 2:6-7 | <i>God appointed the King over his people and declared him his Son. He will give him the nations as an inheritance. Happy are those who take refuge in Him.</i> |
| Psalm 16:10 | <i>God will not let his body see decay (but will bring him back to life).</i> |
| Psalm 35:19 | <i>He will be hated without cause.</i> |
| Psalm 68:18-20 | <i>He is powerful, thanks to the Lord's armies, and he distributes gifts from his victories, taking his enemies captive (see Eph 4:7-11).</i> |
| Psalm 72:10-11 | <i>All kings will bow down before him, because he will deliver the poor.</i> |
| Psalm 78:1-2 | <i>He will speak in parables and mysteries (see Mt 13:35).</i> |
| Psalm 89:26 | <i>God will give him the sea and the rivers. He will have the highest place and his throne and his descendants will remain forever (see v27-30).</i> |
| Psalm 110:1-6 | <i>He is declared the one who provides the sacrifice for all time, like Melchizedek, and he will rule over all his enemies.</i> |
| Psalm 118:22 | <i>He is the stone which the builders (the leaders) rejected, but which has become the cornerstone.</i> |
| Psalm 118:26-27 | <i>He will be welcomed with palm branches up to the temple as the one who comes from the Lord.</i> |

Lesson 6:

A historical story: Reliable, selective, God-centered, moral and human

Key Concept: In the Old Testament God reveals himself through history. This history is reliable but selective. It is God-centered and paints a picture of God's standard for humanity, humankind's failings and God's purpose to fulfill his promise and humanities longings in the Messiah Jesus.

Lesson Goals:

Content and Cognitive Competencies (CCC)

- a) Know/understand key events and themes in 1500 years of Old Testament history.
- b) Know/understand that Old Testament is reliable, selective and God-centered.
- c) Know/understand that Old Testament history reveals both humankind's freedom and God's moral character history.
- d) Know/understand that Old Testament history is a story of failure.

Character and Spiritual Maturity (CSM)

- a) Think about the necessity of God's redemptive plan for all humanity including myself.
- b) Thank God that he works in and through sinful people.
- c) Think about the events of the Arab Spring and their aftermath and ask the Lord to show you in what ways he may be sovereignly at work in your region.

Mission & Ministry Competencies (MMC)

Write a letter to a friend explaining how and why the Old Testament is reliable, selective and God-centered and how it reveals mankind's failings and at the same time God's faithfulness.

Introduction

In the last lesson we learnt about the concept of the 'covenant' between God and His people. We saw how this central theme runs through the Old Testament and the whole Bible and we reflected on what it tells us about the nature of God and of mankind and considered four important covenants in the Old Testament and how they lead to *the* final and complete covenant in Christ.

Learning Activity 1 (MMC)

Feedback

- (a) With your learning group and/or mentor show or share your poem or picture describing the key aspects of God's *hesed* covenantal love. Discuss whether you were able to share this with your family, friends or a work colleague.
- (b) What reactions did you get?
- (c) What conversations resulted from this?

Free Response

In the remaining six lessons we will take a series of panoramic overviews of God's story in the Old Testament. With the solid foundation of our previous five lessons very much in our hearts and minds we will consider how the Old Testament is a historical story (this lesson), a religious story (lesson 7), a story of worship (lesson 8), a prophetic story (lesson 9) and a story about living wisely (lesson 10).

As the Lord continues to transform Dr Majdi and his wife Zakiya through their reading and study of the Old Testament, they decide to open up their home in Gaza to their friends (the ones mentioned in Lesson 1). This was risky, but they felt that the Lord was leading to do this. They wanted to live out God's purposes and to faithfully 'perform' their scenes of the 5th Act (remember the Tawfiq al-Hakim 5 Act Play metaphor). They understood that this was at the heart of being God's covenant people: Faith that leads to obedience, so that God's redemption purposes might be fulfilled. So, every two weeks they began to meet up with Mustapha and his new fiancé Hayat, Zied, Seif El-Din, Yacub and his brother Benyamin. In the first five meetings, Majdi and Zakiya worked through all that they have been learning about the Old Testament.

However last week a heated discussion broke out about how historical the Old Testament was. Because they had been following the story of Abraham moving from Ur (Southern Iraq) to Haran (Turkey) Seif El-Din was perplexed as to why the story didn't make any reference to his ancestors who were a well known and prosperous family in southern Iraq and who also made the move along the fertile crescent to modern day Turkey so many years ago. The others thought this was ridiculous and suggested that Seif El-Din's ancestors were obviously not 'holy' or important enough. However Seif was also struggling with why the historical accounts of God's holy prophets and servants included so many examples of failure and sinful behavior. He was brought up to believe that the Holy Books were full of good and successful examples.

Learning Activity 2 (CCCx and CSM)

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

- (a) Is Serif El-Din's surprise at the lack of mention of his illustrious ancestors so foolish? If yes, why? If, no why not?
- (b) Amongst your friends, neighbours or colleagues in your context, what questions or statements have you heard about the history recorded in the Old Testament?
- (c) Do you share these views or questions?
- (d) What questions do you have about history recorded in the Old Testament?

(a) Free response: You can understand his surprise since the Bible tells the story of humanity, and his ancestors are a part of it. On the other hand, the importance of his family in his eyes is exaggerated. The Bible chooses only the stories which reveal his essence and his plan for humanity.

(b) Free response: Often we hear suggestions which put into question the historicity of the Bible, the faithful transmission of the message of the Bible (saying it has been corrupted), the validity of the Bible's message today, given further revelations, its holiness (noting examples of sin mentioned in the Bible).

(c-d) Free response

With these questions in mind the group decided to re-read the Old Testament with a historical lens on. This is what they discovered:

An Overview of the History

There are approximately 1500 years from the time when the Lord called Abraham (Genesis 12) to the time of the last Old Testament prophet Malachi. In this period, the Old Testament tells the story of how God chose one man (Abraham) and through his family made a nation. As we have seen already, through ups and downs (but mostly 'downs') God stuck with His covenant people, never abandoning or forsaking His freely given covenantal commitment to them.

The table below gives us an outline of the story in chronological order. You can compare this with the eras in the panoramic table presented in lesson 2 of this course:

| Event / Theme | Reference | Dates |
|----------------------------|---|--------------|
| The Family: | Genesis | 2000-1500 BC |
| Abraham | Genesis 12-25 | |
| Isaac | Genesis 21-35 | |
| Jacob and his 12 sons | Genesis 25-50 | |
| The Nation: | Exodus – Ruth | 1400-1100 BC |
| Moses and the Exodus | Exodus – Deuteronomy | |
| Joshua and the Conquest | Joshua | |
| Early life in Canaan | Judges, Ruth | |
| The Royal Families: | | 1100-586 BC |
| Saul (the first king) | 1 Samuel | 1050-1000 BC |
| David | 1 Samuel 16 – 1 Kings 2 1 Chronicles 10-29 | 1000-960 BC |

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|------------|
| Solomon | 1 Kings 1-11 2 Chronicles 1-9 | 960-930 BC |
| The Two Kingdoms: | 1 Kings 12 | |
| The Kings of Judah | 1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 25 2 Chronicles 10-36 | 930-586 BC |
| The Kings of Israel | 1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 17 | 930-722 BC |
| The Exile: Babylon | 2 Kings 25 | 586-540 BC |
| | | |
| The Return | Ezra, Nehemiah | 539 BC |

Take advantage of the opportunity to review and consolidate comprehension of the eras in the story of the Old Testament, finding their equivalents in the table above. (Ex: It begins with “patriarchs” (family), then “the nation” includes “Egypt and the desert”, then “Conquest and Judges”). You can also ask them if this table, compared with the other, brings out something specific.

Abraham and the Patriarchs

Through One Man God Blesses the World

We have already considered the heart of Abraham’s commitment to God’s covenant with him. As we saw above, it was faith demonstrated in action (obedience). As the writer of Hebrews explains, Abraham demonstrates his faith and trust in God by ‘going’ “even though he did not know where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8). By trusting in the promises of God Abraham possesses the land and is able to be a universal blessing to the ‘nations’.

Read Genesis 20.

About 2000 years before Christ, God chose one man, Abram, with the purpose of blessing him and making him a blessing to many others and eventually the whole world. As we have already seen the Old Testament and the rest of the Bible tells the story of how God kept that promise. In Genesis 20 we see that when Abraham moved into the region of the Negev he lied about his wife Sarah to Abimelek king of Gerar.

Learning Activity 3 (CCC and CCCx)

- (a) What does that tell us about Abraham? Though a great man of faith, was he perfect?
- (b) Did Abraham’s imperfections stop God using him for His purposes?
- (c) What does this tell us about the Lord?

(a) Abraham sought to protect himself at the expense of his wife. He lacked confidence in God and used trickery and lies.

(b) No, God still used him.

(c) The Lord is faithful and patient. Everything depends not on our righteousness nor on our merit, but on his grace.

Egypt and the Desert/Conquest and Judges

The Promised Land

Although some of the promise was fulfilled in Abraham’s life much of it was fulfilled in subsequent generations and some of it is still being fulfilled today through God’s people (the Church). In Exodus 1:1-7 we see how through Jacob’s sons, Old Testament Israel had

become a large nation. Then, under Moses, they left Egypt and under his successor Joshua entered the Promised Land. The book of Joshua tells us about how the land was conquered (Joshua 1:1-5: 21:43-45). Later, in book of Judges we see how individual tribes claimed their 'promised' inheritance (Judges ch1). However the key point we learn in Judges is that God provides good leadership for the people even if they don't deserve it (see Judges 2:10-19).

Lets look at one snapshot from the Old Testament's history of the people of promise making their way to the 'Promised Land'.

Read Joshua 1:1-9.

The journey from the crossing of the Red Sea to entering the Promised Land was delayed by thirty-eight tough years because of the sin of disobedience. The great leader Moses has just died, but now is the time move ahead with God's purpose.

Learning Activity 4 (CCC and CCCx)

- (a) Why did Moses not lead the people into the Promised Land? (see Deuteronomy 32:48-52)
- (b) Joshua receives several words of encouragement about leading the people into the Promised Land. Look at Deuteronomy 31:1-8, 23 and Joshua 1:5,9. Why do you think he needed this much encouragement?
- (c) What reason does the Old Testament give for the failure of the people to 'enter the Land'? (see, Numbers 14:22,23)
- (d) What therefore, is the key to success and victory for the people of God in accomplishing God's plan?

(a) Moses was unfaithful; he did not set apart the Lord as holy in the eyes of the people at the waters of Meribah.

(b) Here are the words of encouragement: "Strengthen yourself, have courage. The Lord will go before you. He will give you success." Joshua had a faltering faith. He saw the strength of the enemies ahead.

(c) They disobeyed despite the glory which they had witnessed, and they tested God.

(d) The faith that leads to obedience takes bold action. This faith is nourished by the knowledge of God and by mediation on his Word.

Monarchy

The Era of the Kings

As we saw last lesson, the people then asked for a king, but their first king, Saul, failed (1 Samuel 8:1-7; 10:20-24; 13:13-14; 15:26). Later David succeeded him and united a divided kingdom, with Jerusalem as the capital city (2 Samuel 5:6-9). David's son, Solomon further strengthened this unity and built a temple as a 'dwelling place for the Lord' (1 Kings 6:1, 37-38). But Solomon lost his way in the later stages of his life and his son Rehoboam was an even greater failure. The kingdom then broke in two (1 Kings 12:1-19) with Israel (also called 'Jacob' and 'Ephraim') to the north and Judah to the south.

Was a new king really the solution?

Read 1 Samuel 8:1-6. 10:17-25.

God has saved his people in the past, like raising up judges in a time of crisis, but the people continued to doubt God's provision.

Learning Activity 5 (CCCx)

- (a) Why do you think the people wanted a visible institution like the monarchies around them?
- (b) Was Saul, their first king, the answer to their desires? Why?

(a) Free Response. Ex: It is more reassuring to see your protector in flesh and blood. They didn't want to share the responsibility to stand up against their enemies. It is tempting to act like the rest of the world (the nations around them). That is the case especially because they did not believe that the Lord really reigned among them.

(b) He was an answer, but a very faint one.

Having been chosen and tested through years of being on the run, though, as we saw in Lesson 5, also a sinner, David was a king who sought after God's heart.

Learning Activity 6 (CCC) Read 2 Samuel 7:1-22.

- (a) David sets out to build a 'house' for the Lord, but what has the Lord planned to build for him?

In many ways a huge part of the Old Testament is the search for the perfect king. Read Luke 1:30-33

- (b) Where does 2 Samuel 7:1-22 end? How does what the angel says in Luke 1:30-33 fulfill this?

(a) God is the one who will build the house of David and not the opposite.

(b) It is Jesus Christ who will reign forever on the throne of David. (But at the time of the angel's revelation, there hadn't been a Messiah on the throne of David for 600 years.)

Divided Kingdom/Idolatry

Following Solomon's idolatry, God separated the 10 northern tribes from the kingdom of Judah to give them to Jeroboam, who became the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel. Reboam, Solomon's son, kept Judah with the tribe of Simeon and a part of the tribe of Benjamin in the south. In order to consolidate his power, Jeroboam began to institute a new religion and new places of worship for his kingdom.

Learning Activity 7 (CCC)

Read 1 Kings 12:26-31

Despite the fact that the Lord had anointed Jeroboam and had established him as king over Israel, Jeroboam committed a great sin against the Lord.

- (a) What was the "sin of Jeroboam" and why did he do it?

All the kings of Israel without exception perpetuated the idolatrous worship of Jeroboam.

- (b) According to 2 Kings 17:20-23, what consequences of his sin did God impose on the people of Israel?

(a) Jeroboam formed idols in the form of golden calves and put them in the temples at the edges of his kingdom to prevent his subjects from going to the temple in Jerusalem and being attached to the king of Judah.

(b) God rejected the people of Israel and deported them far from their country once and for all.

You can show a map of Dan and Bethel so they can understand better Jeroboam's strategy and at the same time the borders of the northern and southern kingdoms

An important question to pose: "In your context, are there examples of human strategies which are wise human plans but dishonor God?"

Exile, Return and Restoration

The Exile and the Return

So, David's family line (the line of Judah) lasted on the throne in Jerusalem for 400 years. However in the north, Israel (the line of Jacob) went from one king to another. Finally Israel was taken captive by Assyria in 722 BC. But Judah (in the south) didn't fall to Assyria's successor, Babylon until 586 BC. By this time the all the Lord's people were exiled from the land. However as we saw last lesson, the promises of the Lord are maintained (Ezra 1:1) and in 539 BC the Lord brings His people 'home' again. However initially they are only living as subjects of the Persian Empire.

The Old Testament people of God were never again a sovereign independent state, and the line of David was not referred to again until the one whose right it is to reign (Jesus) had come (Luke 1:29-33).

Some Characteristics of the Story of the Old Testament

What sort of history is the Old Testament?

There are five things that we notice. It is reliable, selective, God-centered, moral history and it is a history of failure.

Reliable History

Most outside evidence (from non-Biblical historical sources) confirm that the events recorded in the Old Testament are accurate. This will not surprise believers. However it comes a surprise to many in the Western world who have been influenced by atheistic and anti-supernatural academic scholarship. It also comes as a surprise to some in our part of the world who have been taught that the Christian and Jewish scriptures are 'corrupt' and have been falsified. It is clear from archaeology that the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph accurately reflect life and customs in the period 2000-1500 BC. Beyond one or other historical source, we have the testimony of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. As we learned in Lesson 1, it is clear that Jesus accepted the stories and history of the Old Testament as entirely true and the trustworthy word of God. (For more information on this topic, see the course, "Revelation and Inspiration of the Scriptures" in this same course set.)

Selective History

All history is selective. Seif El-Din may have been annoyed that his ancestors were not recorded anywhere in the Old Testament. But it is totally unreasonable to expect the Old Testament writers to reference every single major family or event of the ancient world. Ibn

Khaldoun's prolific *Al Muqadima* records the history, culture and societies of North Africa and the Middle East but makes no reference to Seif's eminent friend Mohammad's ancestors, even though they lived in that era and in that part of the world. On the contrary, if Seif El-Din were to write a history of that period almost certainly his venerable ancestors would be in it. Selection is the only way to write history.

Let's look at one example of this in the Old Testament.

Read 2 Kings 21:1-18.

King Manasseh reigned over Judah for many years (686-642 BC). He was clearly an astute, shrewd and effective leader. However 2 Kings doesn't expand on any of this. Concerning his more than forty years of rule only 18 verses record anything about King Manasseh's reign.

Learning Activity 7 (CCC)

(a) What do they say? (see 2 Kings 21:2)

We might think that this is not proper history at all, but the clue as to how the Old Testament writers were selecting their material is in v17.

(b) What is the clue?

(a) Manasseh did evil in the eyes of the Lord: idolatry, sacrificing children, changing the Lord's temple, pouring out innocent blood (v 16)

(b) Manasseh's actions, the sins he committed. The essence of the story is: obey God and keep his covenant.


This indicates that the Old Testament writers had all the facts available but, inspired by the Holy Spirit, they selected what was necessary for his purpose. We have a clear indication of what that purpose was in 2 Kings 23:26,27:

"Nevertheless the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger... against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done... So the Lord said: 'I will remove Judah... I will reject Jerusalem...'"

The main points that the Old Testament writers (and the Holy Spirit inspiring them) want us to know is that it was Manasseh's spiritual and moral failure that subsequently caused the ruin of Judah and Jerusalem. The word 'nevertheless' in v26 indicates that despite being succeeded by a morally and spiritually good son (Josiah, who brought Godly reforms to the spiritual 'mess' his father had presided over) nonetheless Manasseh's legacy had long term negative effects on Judah.

Here we need to realize that the history that the Old Testament is concerned with righteousness and not on military, political or cultural astuteness. Old Testament history is written to demonstrate this principle, namely that the fortunes of the nations are settled not by economic, political, military or diplomatic factors, but by their standing before God.

Learning Activity 8 (CCCx and CSM)

 (a) How does this help you to view the events that are evolving around you in a different way?

In lesson 3 we thought about the letter that Zakia had received from her Tunisian friend Naiima talking about the Jasmine Revolution. The Arab Awakening (Arab Spring) has had mixed consequences for believers throughout our part of the world (North Africa, the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula).

(b) Do you think God is working out his redemptive purpose in our current history? If so, how? If not, why not?

☞ (c) How should / can this truth that God is sovereign over history affect the way in which the church in our part of the world responds to these events that we are living through? How should you respond?

(a) Free response. To be sure, it is difficult for us to discern, and nearly impossible to say with certainty, that such and such an event is a repayment or judgment from God toward that person for a given action. Yet the principle of the justice of God remains valid, just as does that of his grace toward sinners and victims.

(b) Free response. But could you say, "Yes, for sure!"? God always wants to draw fallen man to himself and to save him.

(c) Free response. This requires reflection, prayer and fellowship. God wants to reveal himself to his people and to guide them.

God-centered History

This leads on to the next important point to note about Old Testament history, that it is primarily concerned with testifying to God. We have already learnt in all our lessons and especially in Lesson 2 that Jesus spoke of 'the scriptures' (the Old Testament) speaking about him. He explicitly said that he was the fulfillment of everything written in "the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). However we should notice that when the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) divides into three sections; the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, the books of Samuel and Kings are in the 'Prophets' section. This might seem strange to us given that they are so historical. When we speak of 'prophets' we often think of people who come to speak about what God is going to do in the future. However this is only one thing that the prophets did.

We can see in Peter's sermon after Pentecost in Acts 2 that Old Testament history is also prophetic – it speaks about the works of God in history. When Peter refers to the Prophet Joel in Act 2:11 and 17 talking about 'your sons and daughters' prophesying, what his hearers would have noted was not primarily predictions about the future but, 'the wonders of God' – in their own languages! It is in this sense that the Old Testament history books are 'prophecy'. They speak about God and the way in which he works in history. They are a record of his wonderful works.

While God has chosen a special people, a specific and particular nation (Old Testament Israel) through whom to bless the whole world, the Old Testament is clear that his concern is for all the nations and he is behind every movement of history. We can see this in Amos 9:7:

"Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?"

The prophet Amos was challenging the spiritual complacency of Old Testament Israel which saw their status as a 'chosen' and special people as an entitlement and the Exodus as rite of passage guaranteeing their position as blessed by God. He was confronting their lethargy and reminding them that personal trust, obedience and holiness were the real evidence of being covenant people. By introducing the Lord's sovereign hand as instrumental in the migration of the Philistines and the Arameans alongside the exodus of the Israelites, God is saying through Amos, 'I am the Lord of all history'... 'I am behind every movement of the nations'.

Let's look at another example of this in the Old Testament.

Read Isaiah 10:5-15.

Assyria was the superpower of Isaiah's day. The Assyrians had developed the most advanced military techniques and weapons of war of their time. But let's look at what Isaiah says about them.

Learning Activity 9 (CCC, CCCx and CSM)

- (a) What does Isaiah say about this great superpower in v5, 6 and 15?
- (b) What does this tell us about the perspective of Old Testament history?
- (c) Does this give you confidence as you think about God's continuing purpose today (in our scenes of God's redemptive drama)? Why?

(a) God uses the Assyrian army for his purposes: to discipline his people as a man uses a club. He does what he wants! The club should not boast before the man who uses it.

(b) The Old Testament sees the entire story – including the politics—as the realization of God's intervention.

(c) Trust? Yes! Because God directs even his enemies and stops them when he wants.

Moral History

In the context of God's sovereignty over the nations in history, the Old Testament reveals a world in which people are fully responsible for what they do and yet they also live within the control of God's rule. We have already seen this paradoxical dynamic in how Isaiah refers to the superpower of Assyria in the 7th Century B.C.

Read Isaiah 10:5-15 again.

We saw that Assyria was an instrument in the Lord's hand, an expression of his wrath (v5), a messenger bringing His errand (v6) and a tool in his hand (v15) to chasten the Judahites. Of course from King Sennacherib of Assyria's perspective none of this was happening. He was the superior leader of a superior nation and culture and his victories were well earned. Yet here we also saw that God holds him responsible for his 'willful pride' (v12). Under God's sovereignty Assyria's power would be used for God's redemptive purposes (v6, 12), but Assyria's pride would also be punished (v12-15). So, we see that the King Sennacherib is both a tool in the Lord's hand but also a responsible person in his own right. We also see a God who is not only totally sovereign over the nations but also who is unquestionably holy.

Learning Activity 10 (CCCx and CSM)

We were reminded at the start of this course and again at the start of this lesson with Seif's concerns, that many people are troubled by the presence of sin, war, cruelty and suffering in the Old Testament.

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following question:

☞ (a) How can a book that is supposed to be telling us about the redemptive purposes of God be so full of sin and bloodshed?

Free response. We have already seen, in the example of Isaiah 10, that God uses man's wickedness for his own purposes, without being responsible for the sins themselves. The Bible presents the truth of the story without hiding anything, always showing the redemptive plan which God is working through these events.

Here are three additional points to think about in response to this question:

- 1) Firstly, as with Seif at the start of this lesson, Majdi at the start of our course and indeed anyone who dismisses the Old Testament because it is too violent and full of war, we must be careful about not dismissing it for in fact being too realistic. The Old Testament and indeed the whole Bible is a book that deals with the *real* world, the world as it *is*, not a fantasy world.
- 2) Secondly the Bible doesn't necessarily approve of the bloodshed and violence that it records. As we noted earlier in the lesson looking at narrative in the Old Testament, unless the narrator explicitly states it, often the text of the Bible does not state whether the aggression is moral or not. We are left to discern whether an action is right or wrong from the immediate context of the story, the broader context of the book and the context of the whole of scripture.

For Biblical examples on this point, see the exercises in the section, "Going Further" at the end of this lesson.

Let us look at some examples in the life of David.

Read 2 Samuel 11:27

Here we have a more unusual example of the text explicitly telling the reader/hearer that David's acts had displeased the Lord.

Learning Activity 11 (CCC)

What does the text say about God's verdict of David's behavior?

In some ways, this is pretty obvious and we should have known this anyway. So, its inclusion is an indication that it *really* displeased the Lord and was an immoral and sinful thing.

However most other incidents in David's life pass off without the text commenting on the morality of his actions. It is clear throughout 1 and 2 Samuel that the Lord brought David to the throne without David having to fight for it. As we saw in the last lesson, like many of the 'giants' of the faith, David believed God's promise and God kept his promise.

Read 1 Samuel 24:4-7; 26:8-11 and 2 Samuel 7:8-11.

The narrative clearly shows David to have been someone who knew that it was God who gave and took away.

Learning Activity 12 (CCC and CCCx)

(a) How is this clear in 1 Samuel 24:4-7; 26:8-11?

But once he is on the throne we see him going out to war against the remainder of Saul's kingdom (2 Samuel 2:8 - 4:12). In doing this David sows the seeds of bloodshed that harvested hatred and division.

(b) Should he have conducted these wars against Saul's family?

The Old Testament does not approve of this action. But it does record it.

(c) Why?

This reminds us of what we learnt about in our very first lesson, that the Bible is not only God's story it is also the story of humanity. The history of the Old Testament reveals God and people. And even the best people were sinful, lustful, ambitious, cruel and spiteful. The Old Testament is therefore a record not just of their successes but also their failures, a point that we will return to briefly.

- 3) Thirdly, as we mentioned before, we read the Old Testament in the context of the whole narrative of the Bible. This narrative communicates God's governance of the world according to his holy and moral character. We need to remember that although the brutality towards the enemies of God's chosen people seems horrific, it was nonetheless consistent with God's moral character.

A brief example of this can be seen in the treatment of the Amorites in Joshua 6. Majdi is not the only one who cringes at the scene described in Joshua's conquest of Canaan. Joshua's mandate from God was to kill every human being, men, women and children. (Joshua 6:21) However, this horrific event comes at the end of a long story which began in Genesis 15:16.

Learning Activity 13 (CCC) Read Genesis 15:16

What does the Lord say to Abraham about the Amorites?

The sins of the Amorites had not yet reached their full measure. (So Abraham and his descendants had to wait four generations—400 years—for the order to judge the inhabitants of Canaan and to take possession of their land.)

To invade and take the land of the Amorites at that point would have been unjust. However four hundred years later the Amorites sin had reached its “full measure”. We are therefore led to understand that as horrific as their ‘end’ was, it was simply the ‘wages of their sin’ (see Romans 6:23). In case we are in any doubt about the justice of what seems to us brutal and horrific, Genesis 18:25 spells out even more clearly; “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25)

A History of Failure

This all reminds us of the final point about the type of history we find in the Old Testament, namely that it is a history of failure. As we have seen in 1 Samuel 8:5 and 12:12 Old Testament Israel asked for a king because they thought that (like the nations around them) with a king they would have success. This might have been the case if they had found a king who could have done the job! The Kingdom of Judah (in the south of the divided kingdom) saw a dynasty in David’s line. Despite being called ‘the Lord’s throne’ (1 Chronicles 29:23) at first glance it seems that the dynasty died out. In the North, the kingdoms of Israel are an even sorrier sight, with kings ruling through their own power and charisma and mostly in the pursuit of their own ambition. These kingdoms also failed.

So we find that the Old Testament history is a consistent calling out for a better king, a better ruler, who would satisfy the people’s hopes of peace and safety and rule in righteousness. Like every other theme in the Old Testament, the history crescendos into a longing for the true king, the Messiah.

Learning Activity 14 (CCCx, CSM and MMC)

Your old school friend, who now lives on the other side of the country, has just heard that you are now a believer in Christ. He respects you and knows that you are a reasonable, thoughtful and upright person. So he is surprised that you have ‘lost your senses’ and have turned your back on your faith and culture and chosen a ‘foreign’ religion. He rings you one evening and challenges you to explain why you are trusting in a corrupted religion, with a corrupted book that was given to the Jews and not in the final revelation that you have grown up with and recited from childhood.

Write him a letter of no more than 2 sides of A4 paper. In your letter address his criticism and questions and gently but clearly explain to him how and why the Old Testament is reliable, selective and God-centered and how it reveals mankind’s failings and at the same time God’s faithfulness.

Going Further

We have said above that God does not necessarily approve of the violent acts mentioned in these historical accounts. Look a little closer at some examples from the life of David.

Read 2 Samuel 11:27

Here we have a somewhat less common example in which the text explicitly indicates to the reader or the listener that David’s actions were displeasing to the Lord.

Learning Activity 11 (CCC)

What does the text say regarding God's judgment of David's actions?

They displeased the Lord.

In a way, this is clearly evident, and we ought to understand it from the evidence. Yet the fact that it is included in the text is an indication that this action was *very* displeasing to the Lord and that it was an immoral and sinful act.

But most of the other incidents in David's life occur without the text commenting on the morality of his actions. It is clear through 1 and 2 Samuel that the Lord placed David on the throne without his having to fight for it. What we saw in the last lesson is that, like many of the giants of faith, David believed God's promise and God kept his promise.

Read 1 Samuel 24:4-7, 26:8-11 and 2 Samuel 7:8-11.

The story clearly shows that David was a man who knew that God is the one who gives and takes away.


Learning Activity 12 (CCC and CCCx)

(a) How is that clear in 1 Samuel 24:4-7 and 26:8-11?

But once he is on the throne, we see him going to war against the rest of the kingdom of Saul (2 Samuel 2:8-4:12). Doing so, David sows the seeds of spilling blood which were harvested as hatred and division.

(b) Should he have gone to war against Saul's family?

The Old Testament does not approve of the action, but simply records what happened.

 (c) Why?

(a) In both cases, David saves Saul's life because he remembered how he was the Lord's anointed. God alone may take away life.

(b) The narrator does not directly explain; we can only understand through the comments of Abner, the general of Israel's army, when he said to Joab that it was not normal for brothers to pursue each other to death. (2 Sam 2:26)

(c) It should be clear that people do not enjoy killing each other as brothers. Each kingdom should respect the territory and the army of the other without trying to compare one with the other out of pride.

This reminds us of what we learned in our very first lesson: the Bible is not only the story of God, but also the story of humanity. The story of the Old Testament reveals God to men. Even the best people were sinners, greedy, conceited, cruel and vindictive. The Old Testament is therefore the story not only of their successes but also their mistakes, a topic we will return to soon.

Lesson 7:

A religious story: God's holy presence with his people

Key Concept: Old Testament religion tells us about the nature of God and his purpose for his chosen people. At the heart of all the religious requirements of the Old Testament is God's desire to dwell among his people. However due to His holiness and their continuing sin He can only be present through the provision of a sacrifice to atone for their sin.

Lesson Goals:

Content and Cognitive Competencies (CCC)

- a) Know/understand that Old Testament religion is primarily about God's desire to be present with His people.
- b) Know/understand that in his holiness God cannot be approached 'at will' by sinful people.
- c) Know/understand that in the Old Testament God made provision through the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) and the sacrificial system to atone for sin.

Character and Spiritual Maturity (CSM)

- a) Think about and confess our unworthiness to be in the presence of God on our own terms.
- b) Praise God for the His initiative in providing a way for us to be in his presence.
- c) Think about and confess the times when we have been flippant in the way that we approach the Lord.
- d) Submit ourselves to regular prayer of intercession, for our sanctification and that of our local church.

Mission & Ministry Competencies (MMC)

Tell someone in your family or a friend about what you have learnt about true religion in the Old Testament.

Introduction

In the last lesson we learnt about how in the Old Testament God reveals himself through history. We learnt that this history is reliable but selective and God-centered. On the one hand it paints a picture of God's standard for humanity and on the other humankind's failings. It also tells of God's purpose to fulfill his promise and humanities longings in the Messiah Jesus.

Learning Activity 1 (MMC)

Feedback

With your learning group and/or mentor read some parts of your letter addressing your friend's criticism about the Old Testament.

You may take advantage of the opportunity to review the objections mentioned in lesson 6 (an unreliable historical account, filled with violence, racism and favoritism, etc.) and comment and respond.

In this lesson we will learn about what Old Testament religious practice tells us about the nature of God and His standard for humanity. At the heart of all the religious requirements of the Old Testament is God's desire to dwell among his people. However due to His holiness and their (our) continuing sin He can only be present through the provision of a sacrifice that atones for their sin.

Last lesson we thought about Dr Majdi, his wife Zakiya and their friends as they met and studied the Old Testament in their home. This lesson, will begin by following Majdi, Zakiya and Yacuub as they travel to Tunisia for a medical conference. Although not involved in the conference Yacuub was keen to join Majdi and Zakiya for a short holiday in Tunisia because both his mother and father had distant relatives who once lived in Tunisia. Yacuub's mother's family were part of an ancient Jewish community from Djerba and their father's family are descendants of a well known Arab family from the Mu'awiya Caliphate from Kairawan. The group are privileged to be staying with a couple of believers, Abdelaziz and Awatef, who lead a small house church in the city.

As the group made their way from the airport to the district near the famous mosque of Sidi Uqba where Abdelaziz and Awatef live, they received a full commentary about the rich and long history of Kairawan. They respectfully listened as their taxi driver Mohammed and another passenger, Ibrahim, eulogised about Kairawan's reputation as a center of religious learning under the Arab Mu'awiya Caliphate. Nearing the Sidi Uqba mosque, Yacuub ventured to ask the Taxi driver and the other passenger "are you and your families religiously observant?" "Of course we are!" Exclaimed Mohammed, "this is the most religious city in the Maghreb... my ancestors have been praying at this mosque since the late 8th Century..." Ibrahim hesitated then added, "Yes, we are all proud of our heritage, but I'm not religious... at least not like Mohammed..."

Thinking to himself about his own heritage... a Jewish mother, a non-practicing Muslim father and now his own new life as a believer in Christ, Yacuub interrupted Mohammed's

religious discourse with a simple question; “What is religion (Din) and why is it important anyway?”

Learning Task 2 (CCC, CCCx and CSM)

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

- (a) How do people answer the question ‘What is religion?’ in our part of the world?
- (b) Is religion mainly about completing religious duties? Or,
- (c) Is religion mainly about living well with each other?
- (d) Is religion for God or for us? Does God need our religion?

(a) Religion, for most of the people around us, consists of the group of requirements which God imposes on man as his slave. It sets the rules in order to help man treat his neighbor with equality. Religious people try to follow the rules in order to please God and so to avoid his wrath.

(b-d) Free response. Does God have needs...? Of course not! (So what does that imply?)

Several hours and many cups of coffee later, Majdi and Yacuub finally made their way to Abdelaziz and Awatef’s house. They recounted their journey from the airport and the subsequent conversation with the taxi driver. Awatef observed that she had often struggled to answer her friend’s questions about how ‘easy’ the Christian ‘religion’ was. After explaining the Good News message, her friends would often observe that the Christian religion seemed too ‘easy’. Having been so edified by their reading and study of the Old Testament, after the evening meal, Majdi and Yacuub decided to sit down with Abdelaziz and Awatef and look at the place and purpose of religion in the Old Testament. Yacuub explained that, having grown up in a family with a Jewish mother and a Muslim father, he understood how many people in our part of the world thought about religion. “If we understand what God intended for his covenant people in the Old Testament” explained Yacuub, “then we will understand how we should think about ‘religion’ as believers today...” Here is some of what they discussed that evening.

Learning Activity 3 (CCCx and CSM)

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

- (a) How has your understanding of ‘religion’ changed since you became a believer?
- (b) Have your friends or family who know you are a believer sometimes remarked that the Christian faith seems like an ‘easy religion’?
- (c) What do you think they mean by this?
- ☞ (d) How would/do you respond to them?

(a) Believers in Christ generally respond in one of the two following ways regarding the concept of religion in society:

- 1) *The Christian faith is not a religion (but an intimate relationship with God).*

2) The Christian faith is the true religion (the realization that God is truly present with us in every aspect of our lives, and resulting actions: godliness). See James 1:26-27.

(b-c) The Christian faith is considered to be “easy” by many, because they think that if God freely forgives sins, that would encourage believers to do as much evil as they wanted without restrictions. They do not respect the requirements of religion. The Apostle Paul already responded to these objections in his day. See Romans 6:1-2, 15.

(d) Free response. Possible answers:

For the new birth, God works in the believer to change his heart—as if he had been killed and brought back to life. See Rom 6, Gal 2:19-20.

*Whoever realizes what God has done for him in Christ cannot remain indifferent—the price paid was very costly. He is called to do the same himself. I Pet 2:21, I Pet 4:1-2, 6
It is only by accepting the grace of God for himself that the believer in Christ can truly love his neighbor and show him grace as well. This makes the believer humble.*

God Dwells Among his People

At the heart of Old Testament religion is the idea that God longs to dwell among His people.

Learning Activity 4 (CCC)

Do you remember the 5 major covenants we studied in lesson 5?

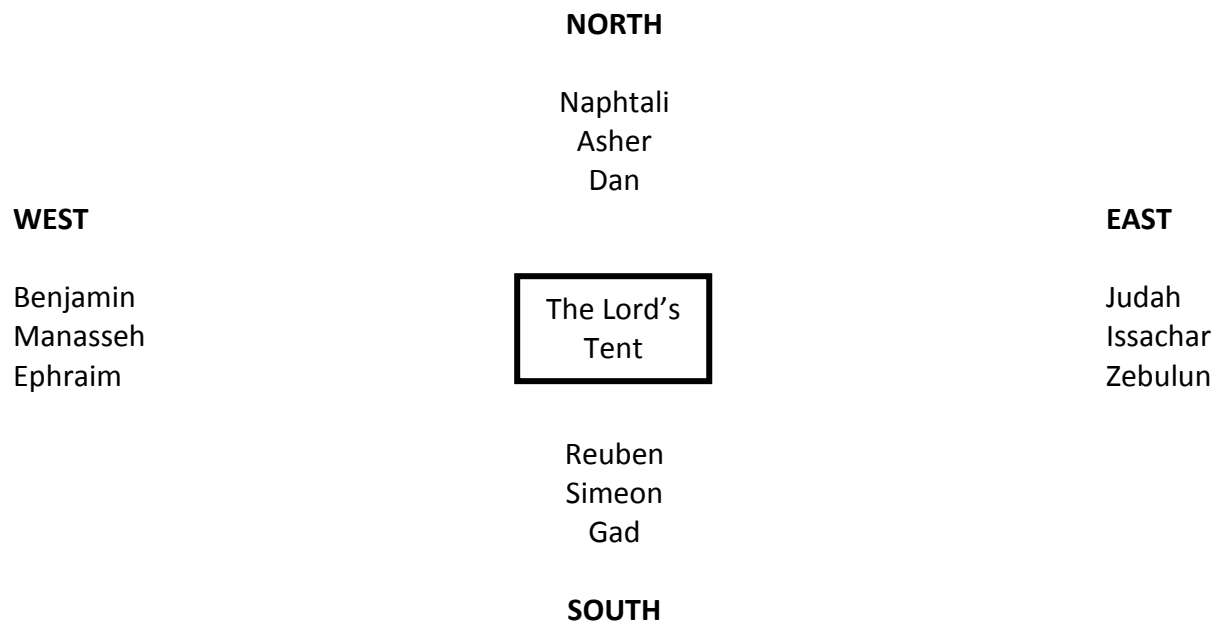
(a) In which did God show for the first time his extraordinary desire to dwell among his people?

(b) Identify the era (according to the “Panoramic View” table) in which this covenant was revealed, and summarize its story in 2-3 lines.

(a) The Mosaic covenant

(b) 3.2. Egypt and the Desert: God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt, showing his power, in order to create a kingdom of priests which reflects his glory. He led the people in the desert where he revealed his Law and formed them to respect his holiness and to serve him.

In the Old Testament narrative we find that actions speak louder than words. The design, objects and actions revealed in the Old Testament to Israel deliberately communicated God’s purpose and plans. Notice this in the instruction for how the camp of Israel was planned out in Numbers ch2, in the days before Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem. This story takes place following the covenant with Moses in the era “Egypt and the Desert” before going into Canaan, the promised land.



Learning Activity 5 (CCC)

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following question:
What does this arrangement tell us about God's desire for his people?

God is in the midst of the camp.

God had not just instructed them from afar to make their way to the Promised Land, He had chosen to share in their journey, to be right at the heart of their camp! Old Testament Israel were camp dwellers at that time and God instructed them to make a tent for Him right at the center of their camp. The Hebrew word used for tent translated in our Bibles as 'Tabernacle', is *Skhana* which, similar to the Arabic سَكَنَ, comes from a word that means to 'dwell' or 'live close to'. This is the heart of God's purpose amongst his people; he desires to dwell with them.

We see that later on in the days of Solomon, the 'tent' was replaced by a 'house' or temple. (see 1 Kings 6:1). However, though the structure was less portable (because the people were no longer on the move) the action (or visual image) still communicates the same message. As the people built more permanent houses, so the Lord would also permanently have a 'house' amongst them. The idea here is NOT that people would go to the 'house' (or temple) to be with God, but that God was coming to be with His people.

An Example from Haggai

To illustrate this vital concept of God dwelling amongst His people let us consider the message of the prophet Haggai. Haggai's ministry took place many years after the Temple had been built by Solomon, in the era of 'the return' (see the "Panoramic View of the Old Testament" table). In his time the Temple was in ruins, having been demolished by the Babylonians seventy years before (in 586 BC) when the people were exiled to Babylon. However, when Babylon eventually fell to Cyrus the Persian King in 539 BC, the people were

allowed to return 'home'. (See this in Ezra 1:1-3) Haggai preaches his message after nineteen years of the people being back in their own land.

Learning Activity 6 (CCC and CCCx)

(a) In Haggai ch1, how does the text show us that:

1. The economy is suffering
2. The people are dissatisfied
3. Inflation is out of control?

Write down the words or phrases that illustrate these points.

(b) Why, according to the Lord, was all this happening? (See Haggai 1:4)

(a1) The harvesters harvest relatively little for their efforts; the rains have been withheld.

(a2) They eat without being satisfied. (v6)

(a3) Wages are placed in a torn sack (v6); they had counted on having more. (v9)

(b) The people have forsaken the building of the temple so each one can build his own luxurious home.

What is clear from Haggai's message is that it is not a lack of means that has stopped the people from re-building the Temple (the Lord's House) but a lack of desire. In fact we can see that the people were relatively well off. They were living in panelled houses (Haggai 1:4), that is, stone built houses with an inner lining of timber. Yet despite this personal luxury, the Lord's house remained in ruins! The problem for Haggai was not that the Temple worship with all its rituals and ceremonial procedures could not operate while the building was in such a state, but rather that the people's priorities showed that they were NOT concerned with ensuring the dwelling presence of the living God among them in the way that He had designed it. Basically they were choosing a life without God, without God's presence and blessing.

What this shows us is the importance that the Lord places in having a 'house' or dwelling among His people. Its not about the importance of a beautiful building or religious ornaments. God is not interested in being a passive spectator adored by His people but rather *the* source of His people's prosperity, well-being and fulfilment.

Learning Activity 7 (CCC, CCCx and CSM)

Look how Haggai makes this clear in Haggai ch2. *Read Haggai 2:18,19.*

(a) What will happen if they prioritise the building of the Lord's 'house'?

(b) Do you prioritise the building of 'God's house' over your own 'house'?

☞ (c) How is this similar and different to what God was asking Old Testament Israel to prioritise?

(d) If this is not about the physical building where you meet as a church, but about the church itself, then how are you prioritising the 'building' of the Lord's 'house'?

Possible answers:

(a) God will bless their harvests.

(b) Free response

(c) We have seen since the sacrifice of Abraham's son that God must be first in our hearts.

(d) What priority does the church have for you? How do you show your love for it? Ex: attendance, prayers, phone calls, meeting needs, patience in the face of hardships and difficult people to love; also, what financial commitment do you have? Does our true love for God and the church show itself (like the example of the Macedonian churches in Rom 8:1-5)?

You may notice the “timing” of the promise of reward in this passage. If you have the time, you may...

Compare Haggai 1:14-15 and 2:1 with 2:18 in this text. The people have restarted construction for how long before God does not repay them, and instead showers his blessing in abundance?

(Answer: 3 months) Does that seem long?

Compare this with the Lord’s confirmations revealed this time though the mouth of Zachariah four months later (Za 1:7, 16, 17). Have you seen the extraordinary blessing of God come following an important commitment to your church? Do you actually expect a reward from him?

God is ‘at home’ yet ‘not at home’ with His people

It seems very strange and even blasphemous to many people in our part of the world to talk about God almighty ‘making a home’ amongst us. We need to realise that for Old Testament Israel, this was no less difficult, and the idea of God dwelling amongst his people was not a flippant or casual (domesticated) idea at all! The second half of the book of Exodus gives the details of how the Tabernacle (God’s tent amongst His people) is to be built and used. Exodus 25-31 describes in detail what is needed for the construction of the ‘tent’ and Exodus 35-40 describes how the work of construction was to be completed. (Reset the historical context based on the era in the “Panoramic View” table.)

Learning Activity 8 (CCC, CCCx and CSM) Read Exodus ch25:8-9, ch 39 and 40:16

(a) What details were important in preparing for the Lord’s coming to his tabernacle?

(b) In your opinion, why was it important to carefully follow these instructions?

In Exodus 29:42,45 the Lord promises to come into his tent and meet His people. He says. *“There I will meet you... I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God”*

(c) What does Exodus 29:46 say is the whole purpose of God bringing them out of Egypt?

(d) However when the tent construction project was complete and the glory of the Lord does come into the tent, what does Exodus 40:35 say about Moses’, let alone the people’s, access to the tent of the Lord?

(e) How flippant or ‘casual’ are you in the way that you approach the presence of God?

(a) All the details were important! It was necessary to do everything as the Lord had instructed.

(b) Possible response: God is holy and man is unworthy to approach him. He should not presume to be able to figure out a way to come into his presence as he sees fit.

(c) His project: “live among” his people.

(d) Moses himself could not enter the tabernacle due to the shining glory.

(e) Free response: (Way too many are very relaxed and asleep in his presence in prayer.)

Note that it is repeated six times in chapter 39 (at the end of each section) that Moses did everything “as he Lord commanded.”

So, even the great Moses could not have complete access to the Lord. If not Moses then how much would it take for the rest of us to have access? The Lord was 'at home' among his people, but He was *not freely accessible* to any who called *on their own terms*.

God is *the* initiative-taker and *the* Holy one

In order to explain the heart of Old Testament religion we need to further consider how God is *the* initiative-taker and *the* Holy one. To do this let us look at two instances in the Old Testament, one in Exodus chapter 3 and the other in Exodus 19.

Read Exodus ch3

In this account Moses comes face to face with the Lord for the very first time. Here we have a bush that is 'on fire' but not actually burning up. Effectively what Moses saw was a flame that didn't need fuel. It was a self-perpetuating flame. A living flame!

Learning Activity 9 (CCC) *Read on in Exodus 3:2-5*

As Moses approached flame and heard the voice of God, what was he told that the flame symbolised?

The flame represents the presence of God. That is why the land is considered "holy."

Now read Exodus ch19

This is another story of God's presence coming as a flame, but this time on Mount Sinai.

Learning Activity 10 (CCC) *Read Exodus 19:18*

(a) How is God's presence on Mount Sinai visible to the people?

Some modern Bible commentators have suggested that the smoke and fire was volcanic action on the mountain.

(b) How does the account in Exodus 19 contradict this? (look especially at Exodus 19:20)

(a) The smoke of a furnace, accompanied by earthquakes, indicates the presence of God. He "came down in fire."

(b) If that were really volcanic lava, Moses could not have gone up.

Some liberal commentators try to explain everything that happened in the Bible by natural causes, as if God could not or did not want to accomplish his purposes through extraordinary interventions. We do not see any difficulty in imagining that an all-powerful God can intervene in his creation, like the testimony of the Holy Scriptures themselves.

The message in both these encounters with God is the same. The Holy God has come among His people. This is why in Exodus 19:23 God commands the people to 'put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy'. God was among them but because of his holiness He kept the people at a distance.

Once the Tabernacle (the Lord's Tent) was built, Mount Sinai was no longer the place where the people of Israel encountered the presence of God. However the 'message' of Sinai remained with them, that the Holy God had taken the initiative to come among them again, yet because of His holiness and their sin, they could not approach Him on their terms!

As we read on in the story we see that the presence of God in the Tabernacle is in the cloud. At the heart of this cloud was the fire of God (see Exodus 40:35,38) right in the centre of God people. (see Numbers 2:17; 10:21) God travelled with his people, however he is the Holy One and they *must* keep their distance!

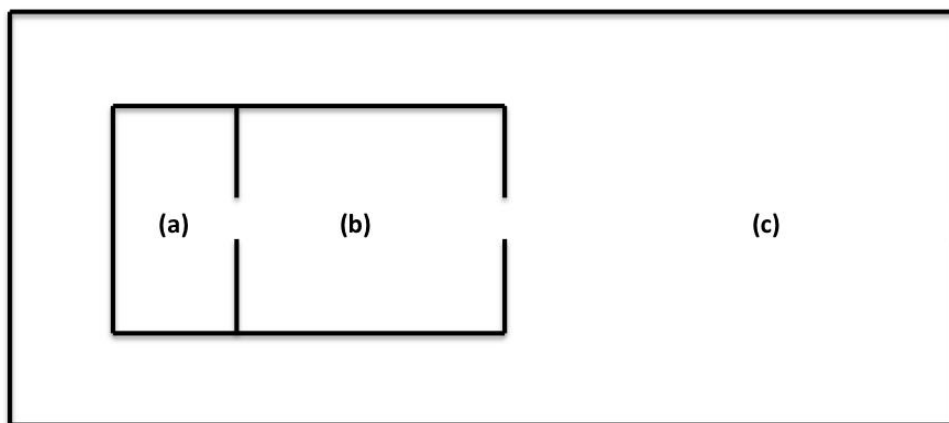
In order to understand this holiness better let us consider how the Lord designed the Tabernacle. As we discovered earlier in the Old Testament actions often speak louder than words.

Learning Activity 11 (CCCx and CSM) Read Exodus 25-31

Now, discuss with you learning group, what the shape the Tabernacle tells us about both God and people?

Access to the tabernacle is very limited: there is only one entry to each section, and access to each section is progressively more restricted, until the Holy of Holies which is not accessible except for one person once per year.

The diagram below will give us some idea of the Tabernacle's design:



In figure (c) we can see the outer Courtyard, in figure (b) the 'holy place', which was the first section of the tent itself, then finally in figure (a) we have the 'holy of holies' or the 'most holy place'. (see this in Exodus 26:31-33) At the very centre of the Tabernacle in the 'most holy place' Moses was instructed to place only one item of furniture – the 'Ark of the Lord'. The Ark contained the stone tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments. (see Exodus 25:10-22) There was nothing else in the 'holy of holies'. In pagan religion, both then and now, the inner, 'most holy places' of temples normally housed an idol. Here rather than coming face-to-face with an idol we find the Word of God – God's moral law.

So, the reason that no one could enter that 'holy of holies' was that no one was worthy to enter! No one was righteous or holy enough to stand in the presence of God. In this 'holy of holies' the holiness of God is present in the moral holiness of the Commandments – these express God's holy standard for our lives. (See Leviticus 19:2) Until the demands of the Law are satisfied and something is done to deal with the way the humanity has broken it, then the door into the presence of God must remain shut in our faces.

The Holy God provides a sacrifice to atone for sin

Of course God did make a way for one representative person to enter the 'holy of holies'. The writer to the Hebrews summarises God's provision;

Learning Activity 12 (CCC, CCCx and CSM) Read Hebrews 9

- (a) Who, according to the writer of Hebrews was allowed to enter the holy of holies? (Read Hebrews 9:1-10)
- (b) How often and under what conditions?
- (c) Why do you think that God made it so difficult for the Israelites to approach him?
- (d) Given the above, is anyone holy enough to approach God?

(a) The all-powerful one who offers sacrifices

(b) once per year, after having offered sacrifices and poured out blood

(c) This was difficult, because the way to God was not yet open. (v8)

(d) No one was holy enough to access the Holy of Holies under the old covenant.

Read Exodus 25:17-22

Here we see that, the Ark at the center of the 'holy of holies' which contained the Ten Commandments, had a very particular lid. It was known as 'the atonement cover' and was designed to fit the Ark perfectly (see v17). In this way it provided a covering over the holy law contained in the Ark. The 'atonement cover' therefore covered over the sin of the people from the holy condemnation of the Law of God. The idea of 'covering' here is not simply protecting people from the force of the Law but also dealing with their sin. This is a physical demonstration and symbol of how God provided 'atonement' for sin. A price is paid that 'covers' the debt, not pretending that it is not there or trying to make up for it by balancing the sin with other good works, but cancelling it out by a full and equivalent or superior payment!

Learning Activity 13 (CCCx and CSM)

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

- (a) How is this concept at the heart of Old Testament religion different to how most people in our part of the world think about dealing with sin?
- (b) Talk about examples of where you see this happening in your extended family or amongst friends in our part of the world?
- (c) In what ways do you notice the old attitude to sin and attempts to 're-balance' the scales with God or with other people still operating in believers that you know?

(d) How do you think you can model a different understanding about God's way of dealing with our sin?

(a) In the majority religion, there is no substitution for sin: each person bears his own judgment. God decides to pardon whom he wants, without needing to justify his decision. As a result, people try to balance out the evil they do with good actions (good actions: giving to charity, helping others, etc.) or by carrying out religious obligations (prayers, fasting, pilgrimage).

(b) Free response. Ex: A young man wants to pay for his past sins by helping a handicapped woman cross the street. He is converted by the testimony of that woman.

(c) Free response. Possible responses:

- It is often the case that Christians get angry when they are involved in serving the Lord and instead of receiving rewards, they find difficulties and misunderstandings. In reality, we can never deserve anything from God.

- We also see a tendency to compensate for transgressions and offenses toward others by acts of kindness to them without asking for forgiveness.

(d) Instead of a demanding spirit, we should have a spirit of humility and gratitude. (Rom 3:19-20) Our boasting will be in Christ crucified. (Gal 2:20-21, 6:14-15, and Phil 1:20, 3:7-11)

It is very important to encourage every student to examine and root out (alone and with his facilitator) every trace of pride and all notions of entitlement or expectation.

But what was this payment that is talked about in Exodus ch25?

The Holy God passes 'over' the blood of the Lamb

It was the provision of a perfect sacrifice. This is seen clearly through a pivotal Old Testament event, which we are reminded of throughout the Bible. The Passover.

Read Exodus 12

The context of Exodus ch12 is that the Lord is ready to come in judgement on Egypt (see v12). This story explains how believers can be safe on that dreadful day when the Lord comes to judge. There are three words which will help us understand what is going on in this event. They are 'satisfaction', 'safety' and 'substitution'.

Satisfaction

The Lord had provided a way for his righteous anger against sin to be satisfied. In v7 we see that they are told to smear the blood of a sacrificed lamb around the doors, because v13 "the blood will be a sign for you... when I see the blood I will, I will pass over you..." Notice, that this was not an act of favouritism to the Israelites, simply because they were Israelites rather than Egyptians. No, "when I see the blood..." the Lord says, not "when I see you". There is something in the blood that turns the Lord from judging and satisfies him.

Theological terms regarding sacrifice in English
satisfaction
propitiation

Equivalent term in Arabic
الرضاء (Erridha)
ارضاء غضب الله (irdha ghadhab allah)

security
substitution
expiation

الأمان (Elaman)
البديلية (Elbedelia)
الكفارة (Elkafara)

Safety

v23 indicates that since the Lord is satisfied through the blood, then the people are safe. If the people stay under the shed blood, then the destroyer cannot harm them. But it still isn't clear exactly why this blood of the lamb satisfies the Lord and keeps his people safe. We begin to see an answer in v3 and 4.

Substitution

There seems to be equivalence between the lamb that died and the people who are sheltered under its blood. The lamb had to match the exact number of people in the house and their needs (what each person will eat). Conversely in v30 we see what happens to the Egyptians, not because they were not Israelites, but because they refuse to obey the word of the Lord. In the Egyptian houses there was the dead body of the firstborn. In the houses of those who obeyed the word of God, there was the dead body of a chosen lamb, a 'substitute'. The blemish is thus "expiated" (transferred from the guilty person's account to that of the innocent animal which was sacrificed). This idea of substitution is explicit in the Old Testament. The Israelites could not miss what was happening here and nor should we! In Exodus 4:22, we hear the Lord calling Old Testament Israel his 'firstborn son'. In the Passover we see the death of a 'substitute' lamb covering Israel in the Old Testament (his firstborn son) from the death of the firstborn in Egypt.

Learning Task 14 (CCC and CCCx) Read Leviticus 17:11

- (a) How does this verse expand and explain the ideas that we have been discussing?
- (b) What does it say about the significance before God of the blood of the animal?
- (c) What does it say about the equivalence between the blood of the sacrificed animal and the covering of sin and the atonement?

(a) The blood represents the life which has been given in exchange for the redeemed person, the substitution of a life for another. The wrath of God is thus satisfied and the redemption is secured.

(b) The blood of the animal represents its entire life, but even more, it represents the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, who gave his life for sinners.

(c) The blood of animals was given to the people over the lid of the ark as a means of covering and expiating their sins.

The Holy God provides a Day of Atonement

The most visual expression of God's provision through sacrifice can be seen on the Day of Atonement.

Read Leviticus 16

Once a year the high priest made atonement for the whole community, through two animals in two ceremonies. One of these was hidden away within the Tabernacle and the other was in public for everyone to see.

Because the main problem of our sin is the breaking of God's holy law and the offence that this brings him, the first sacrifice was before him in the 'holy of holies'. Once a year the High Priest would carry the blood of the sin-offering (16:15) through the separating curtain into the Most Holy place and the 'atonement cover', which as we saw earlier, covered over the sin of the people from the holy condemnation of the Law of God.


However this was visible only to the High Priest and the Lord wanted the whole community to understand the significance of what was happening behind the curtain. So he commanded a second ceremony in which the High Priest laid his hands on the head of another animal and confessed over it all the sins of the people (see 16:20-22). The animal became the 'sin-bearer' – the sins of the guilt were passed onto the innocent – and carried them away from the people.

Although this was a communal exercise this same pattern followed the individual sacrifices made in amongst the Old Testament people of God. You can see this in Leviticus 1:4; 3:2; 4:4,24,29.

God's provision for the people was thorough, clear and merciful. One died in the place of another. The sinner identified his sin (his guilt and separation from God) with the animal and atonement was made. This is the very heart of Old Testament religion.

Note: The provision is complete in the sense that the beneficiary has nothing to add. Yet the blood of animals can never finally satisfy the man's debt. The sacrifices had to be repeated each year until the Lamb offered his own blood. (Heb 9:7-8)

Learning Task 15 (CCCx and CSM)

 (a) With you learning group and/or mentor discuss how this understanding of religion is similar to or different from the majority of those who live in our part of the world?

Read Hebrews 9 again. Look at 9:11-28.

(b) How does the writer of Hebrews compare the ministry of the High Priest at the 'earthly' tabernacle with the ministry of Christ at 'perfect' tabernacle?

(c) Are you grateful that a way has been made for you to access God?

(d) How do you express that gratitude?

(a) It is in radical opposition! Everyone tries to take hold of or procure God's favor in many ways. People compare themselves with others, hoping to reach the "average" and a "passing" grade before the judgment on the last day.

(b) the earthly tabernacle

the true heavenly tabernacle

- made by men (v11, 24)

God's true sanctuary is great and perfect (v11-12, 24)

- earthly representations (v 23)

- the blood of animals (v 23)

- the blood of Christ himself is superior (v 12, 14)

- *purifies the flesh (v 13)*
- *purifies the conscience (v 13)*
- *repeated every year (v 25)*
- *once for all to do away with sin (v 26)*
- *looks forward to an eternal redemption (v 14)*
- (c) *Free response (We have difficulty fully realizing our need and the greatness of the debt paid for our salvation.)*
- (d) *Free response (songs, prayer, forgiveness, obedience, joy, meditation, witnessing, etc.)*

Learning Activity 15 (CCCx and CSM)

In your journal write down the following:

- (a) Which aspect of religion in the Old Testament has challenged (convicted) you the most?
- (b) Which aspect has encouraged you the most?
- (c) How is this likely to affect your understanding of corporate worship?
- (d) What needs to change or be transformed in your understanding of religion?

Learning Activity 15b (MMC)

(e) This week tell someone in your family or a friend about what you have learnt about true religion in the Old Testament.

Encourage them to share these answers as a group and then for each person to reflect deeply on an individual level and then with his facilitator. What needs to change?

Lesson 8: A story of worship: Psalms as personal, joyful and honest

Key Concept: Old Testament worship as seen in the Psalms, charts the full range of human emotions, from exuberant expressions of joy, through the confusion and soul searching of loss and suffering to the anger and indignation in the face of injustice. Through all of this the Psalms teach us to take all our emotions to the Lord and points ahead to a more righteous, perfect, victorious and present King who fully satisfies all our longings.

Lesson Goals:

Content and Cognitive Competencies (CCC)

- a) Know/understand that worship in the Old Testament is primarily about magnifying the greatness of God in all circumstances.
- b) Know/understand that worship in the Psalms deals with the *full* range of human experience, from supreme joy to the depths of depression.
- c) Know/understand the content and context of the Psalms.
- d) Know/understand the way in which the Psalms point to Jesus.
- e) Know/understand what is common to all biblical faithful worship in both the Old and New Testament and what is unique to New Testament worship and to specific cultural contexts.

Character and Spiritual Maturity (CSM)

- a) Recognize that our desire to worship is often related to our emotions.
- b) Repent that we limit worship to those times when we 'feel' like it.
- c) Ask the Lord to show us when and how we can worship him at all times and in all places.

Mission & Ministry Competencies (MMC)

- a) Write a poem or lament that explores and confesses the depth of your personal sin/s, the sin/s of your church and the sin/s of your nation.
- b) Learn to have times of personal worship that explore the full range of emotions and bring all of these before the Lord
- c) Learn to lead times of worship that explore the full range of emotions and bring all of these before the Lord.

Introduction

In the last lesson we learnt about what Old Testament religion tells us about the nature of God and His purpose to dwell among his chosen people and His provision of a sacrifice that atones for the sin so that this could happen.

Learning Activity 1 (MMC)

Feedback

With your learning group and/or mentor either (a) read some parts of your journal activity (Learning Activity 15) from last week or (b) re-tell some of your conversation/s with friends about true religion in the Old Testament.

In this lesson we are going to consider Old Testament worship and what the Psalms in particular, tell us about the breadth and depth of worship in the Old Testament. We will discover that the Psalms chart the full range of human emotions, from exuberant expressions of joy, through the confusion and soul searching of loss and suffering to the anger and indignation in the face of injustice. Through all of this we will discover that the Psalms teach us to take *all* our emotions to the Lord and point us ahead to a more righteous, perfect, victorious and present King who fully satisfies all our longings.

We have travelled with Dr Majdi, his wife Zakiya and their friend and fellow believer Yakuub to Tunisia in the last lesson as they stayed with Abdelaziz and Awatef in Kairawan. This lesson, Yacuub has had to return to Palestine to continue with work. However Majdi and Zakiya have a few more days available and they have decided to visit Algeria on their way home. They have been invited by Arezki, an Algerian Christian who Majdi met at a conference in Paris last year. Arezki is a committed believer and runs a translation business in Bejaia. He is part of large and growing church in one of the big towns in Bejaia.

Majdi and Zakiya fly into Algiers early on a Friday morning and are met by Arezki who drives them on the 4-hour trip to his town in the heart of the Kabylia. As they move away from the city of Algiers into the foothills of the Kabylia they are struck by the natural beauty of this part of Algeria and they enjoy hearing Arezki recounting how he came to faith in the 'dark decade' of the 1990s from a traditional religious background in which his family was turned against itself by religious fanaticism. They also enjoy hearing about the increasing official recognition of the church in Algeria since 2006, with the Protestant Church of Algeria now fully recognized as a 100% Algerian body.

But although there seems to be a lot more freedom for believers here than in Gaza, Majdi and Zakiya also hear about real struggles that Algerian believers are facing. That same 2006 legislation has also put pressure on believers; banning them from meeting in churches that are not registered and making it illegal to proclaim the good news in public, through preaching or the public distribution of Bibles or Christian literature. Arezki tells them about two friends of his, Hamid and Mohend, who are both in prison. Hamid is serving five years for having Bibles in his car and meeting with believers at his work place and Mohend has been in for just three months for 'proselytism'. Although Mohend has never preached in the open or distributed any literature he was arrested because his neighbors know that he is a pastor and he is not ashamed of his faith.

Later in the day, Majdi and Zakiya join Arezki's sisters and other believers in their local church for weekly worship. They are struck by the joy, passion and fervor of the Algerian believers in their public worship. They are also amazed at the numbers involved and the freedom they seem to have to meet and worship. There must have been almost 300 believers crammed into the first floor basement of a large villa. The preaching was in both Kabyle and Algerian Arabic and with the help of their hosts they were able to follow most of the Algerian dialect; there were encouraging testimonies of recent converts and miraculous healings in some families.

When they returned back to Arezki's house they were joined by Ali, a teaching elder from their church. Majdi and Zakiya asked Arezki why he didn't come with them to the church meeting to worship. "I wasn't in the mood to worship today..." Arezki explained. He had just heard that Hamid's release date from prison had been postponed again. Ali gently challenged Arezki... "You could have joined the brother and sisters this afternoon... whatever your mood." Then turning to Majdi and Zakiya he asked "Would you mind if we took some time to think, talk and pray together now, before I head off home later?" Majdi and Zakiya, grateful for the rich fellowship, agreed willingly. Then Ali opened up the Psalms and began to encourage Arezki, Majdi and Zakiya and the rest of the family about the meaning of true worship in the Psalms.

Learning Task 2 (CSM)

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

- (a) Was Arezki right to miss corporate worship because he was feeling sad?
- (b) Do you only worship the Lord when you 'feel like it'?
- (c) Why might it be hard to worship with other brothers and sisters when we are feeling sad or depressed?

(a) We praise God according to our circumstances. We need to fix our eyes on God, to lift them above our circumstances. God is good. He is constant. He has our destiny in his hands.

(b) Free response (depends on the situation)

(c) Free response. Some topics for reflection: We are focused on our current circumstances or our emotions. We forget how much God is good and our glorious future. Sometimes we can pout because God allowed disappointing circumstances to occur.

This is some of what Ali explained to the group...

The Psalms are a window into the worship of the people of God in the Old Testament. Through the Psalms, we get a fantastic perspective on what it was like to worship God in the old covenant. Here, we find the complete range of emotions and in many ways, the Psalms put us to shame in our modern context by our relatively meek worship. The personal quality, the joy, the exuberance and the knowledge of God is so clear in the worship and songs of the Psalms.

The Greatness of God in *all* circumstances

Psalm 18 is a good example of the knowledge of God in the Old Testament. Read verses 1 to 3 and think about every single word.

‘I love You Lord, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise...’

As well as the knowledge of God, the strength of emotion and devotion is so clear. Look at Psalm 119:30, 32, 97, 103.

‘I have chosen the way of truth, I have set my heart on Your laws, I run in the path of Your commandments...’

‘Oh, how I love Your law, I meditate on it all day long. How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.’

Learning Task 3 (CCCx and CSM)

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

- (a) How different is the expression of the greatness of God in the Psalms above to the expressions of the greatness of God that you hear in the worship of the majority of those who live in our part of the world?
- (b) From these expressions of worship, how would you describe the Psalmists relationship with the Lord?
- (c) Can there be any true worship of God without proper relationship with him?
- (d) With your group facilitator/teacher discuss why this concept of ‘relationship with God’ is so problematic for many of our friends and family in our part of the world?

(a) Free response. Examples:

- People around us can think that an intimate relationship with God is impossible and that the idea itself is presumptuous and disrespectful. Everything we could “associate with God” is considered idolatry.

- The psalmists testify to an intense desire and a real pleasure in meditating on the greatness of God. Often in our day we try to create an emotional setting with high-quality music and repeated phrases.

(b) The psalmist is passionate for God and for his Law.

(c) To know him more, to love him more deeply. We cannot truly worship him for who he is if we ignore what he is like. (John 4:22-24)

(d) Possible answers:

- God is unknown and unknowable; he is impenetrable and even terrifying as a judge. We try instead to avoid and appease him.

- Often human fathers are distant and authoritarian; this affects our attitude towards God, the Heavenly Father.

We can also see in two specific ways this intimate knowledge of God in Psalm 74. First of all, it is seen in matters related to the fact that life can be terrifying sometimes. It does not

try to make it seem like things are different or better than they really are. But on the other hand, in the midst of these frightful moments, it speaks of what is true regarding God's person.

We can see this intimate knowledge of God also in Psalm 74 in two particular ways. Firstly, it is realistic about how awful life can be at times. It does not pretend that things are other or better than they really are. But secondly, in the midst of this awfulness it speaks out what is true about God.

‘Turn Your steps towards these everlasting ruins, all this destruction the enemy has brought on the sanctuary...’

‘But You O God are my king from of old; Your bring salvation upon the earth.’ (Psalm 74:3, 12)

What the Psalms tell us is that alongside the problems of life, there is a much bigger reality. What the Psalms do, is magnify who God is in the face of the problems which are magnified in people's eyes. This is what Psalm 74 is doing. Though the Psalmist problems look like ‘everlasting ruin’ that nothing in all the world could fix, yet the great King, the Lord, is still on His throne!

This approach to life is constant in the Psalms. In the midst of all the challenges, difficulties – whether at a national level or personal or social or within domestic households, whether it is the problem of suffering or injustice or depression or mental health problems or persecution or just disappointment – in the face of all of those problems, the greatness of the Lord, the power of the Lord and the salvation of the Lord bring a whole new perspective on those difficulties.

Prayer, forgiveness and hope in all circumstances

Along with an understanding of the greatness of God in the Psalms, comes consistent, persistent and *confident prayer*. We can see this in Psalm 86:6-7.

‘Hear my prayer, O Lord, listen to my cry for mercy. In the day of my trouble, I will call to You for You will answer me.’

We should note also that the Psalmist knew what it meant to be right with God. At the heart of this was an understanding of the *forgiveness* of sins.

Learning Task 4 (CCC)

(a) How can we see this understanding of *forgiveness* in Psalm 130:3-4, 7-8 and 86:5?

In addition to this, the Psalmist spoke of *hope* in what was to come. (see 86:12-13)

(b) How can we see this in Psalm 73:23, 24, 26?

Finally, we can see the exuberance that this brings to worship, the *joy* which is at the heart of the Psalms.

(c) How can we see this in Psalm 47:1, 5?

(a) Ps 13:3-4: No one can live before God without forgiveness, because everyone is guilty. Yet God gives his forgiveness to all those who wait for it.

Ps 130:7-8: Freedom from sin abounds in his grace.

Ps 86:5: God is merciful, "rich in kindness for all those who call on him."

(b) The psalmist in Ps 73 observes the success of the evil people around him. But he knows that 1) God leads him (on earth) and 2) he will be received in glory. He will be his rock even if he loses his grip.

He has no other pleasure on earth: only God!

(c) Ps 47:1, 5: He rejoices in the fact that God has chosen him with his people and has given them a glorious heritage.

The Content and Origin of the Psalms

In the Psalms, we see at first hand the real religion and worship of the Old Testament with its joy, its delight and its spiritual confidence, its knowledge of God and its simplicity of trust in Him at all times right through to eternity. The passages that we have already referred to show the way in which the Psalms came out of actual experiences of life, real experiences of both joy and sorrow. In particular, though by no means exclusively, one person's experiences dominate the Psalms, those of King David.

Here are some examples to look up.

Experiences of Life:

- Joys (Psalm 92, Psalm 113).
- Sorrows (Psalm 42, Psalm 88).

David's Experiences:

- Personal (Psalm 3, Psalm 18, Psalm 34).
- Royal (Psalm 101, Psalm 110).

Religious Experience:

- Processions (Psalm 24, Psalm 118).
- Pilgrim Praise (Psalm 120 to Psalm 134).

As far as we can tell, the bulk of the Psalms occur within the history of Israel. It might look something like this.

| Dates | 1,000 BC | 586 BC | 520 BC |
|---------------------------------|--|--------|--------------------------------------|
| Important Characters and Events | David/Solomon... reforming kings First temple... temple recovery PILGRIM FEASTS | Exile | Return... Second temple |
| Collections of Psalms | The Psalms of David Pilgrim Psalms (120-134) Kingship praise (93-100) Praise collections (113-118, 146-150) | | THE COMPLETION of the BOOK OF PSALMS |

| | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | Choir repertoires (42-49, 72-83) | | |
| | The Choirmaster collection (51-62) | | |

Referring to the "Panoramic View" table, make sure that everyone can identify the eras which correspond to the dates and events in the table.

This table over-simplifies very complicated questions about the dating of the Psalms. There is simply a lot that we do not know. For example, how were the original Psalms preserved? How were they edited into groups and small collections? What we would call hymn books or worship books. Who was the choirmaster? In some of our translations, we have the phrase 'Director of Music'. This person is mentioned 55 times (for example in Psalms 4, 5 and 6). But what did he do? Why are the Psalms of David scattered as they are? Why do the small hymn books or worship books (for example Psalms 93-100 and Psalms 120-134) appear where they do in the final Psalter? Many of these questions we do not have clear answers to. On the other hand, despite much of our ignorance there is no reason to doubt that the vast majority of the Psalms were written before the exile or that the ascription to David was intended to signify that David was the author.

Worship and the First Temple in Jerusalem

The period of the divided monarchy saw great reformations of Old Testament religion under a number of kings. For example, Asa (1 Kings 15:11-15); Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:41-47; 2 Chronicles 17:7-9; 19:4-11); Joash (2 Kings 11-12:2; 2 Chronicles 24); Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-4; 2 Chronicles 29-31); Josiah (2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chronicles 34-35). These periods in the national life of Israel saw a refocusing on God and worship in the temple and stimulated a number of the collections of the Psalms or songs in the worship life of the people of God.

The headings and the texts of the Psalms suggest how they were used in worship.

Learning Task 5 (CCC)

How can we see this in Psalms 45 and 48?

Ps 45

Ps 48

Choir director hymn

in bed

psalm

poem

the sons of Korah

love song

The Sons of Korah = professional singers of the temple from the clan of Kohath of the tribe of Levi. David was the first to establish the professional choir (see 1 Chr 6:31-49).

The word 'song' in the heading to Psalm 48 and in other places indicates that this should be accompanied by music.

The word 'Selah' which is dotted throughout a number of Psalms (for example, Psalm 46:3,7,11) is difficult to understand. However, most Old Testament scholars believe that this word was used to signal a kind of divide between different parts of the worship. It means something like 'silence now'. Old Testament worship was often accompanied by music and was noisy but there would be times when the people of God were silent and quiet before God in their worship.

Learning Task 6 (CCCx, CSM sand MMC)

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

- (a) What is the role of silence in the worship service?
- (b) How often are you completely silent in corporate worship with your church?
- (c) Why do you think it is that we find being corporately quiet before God so difficult?
- (d) If you lead worship in your church plan to include times of silence...

(a) Free response: Ex: Wait and listen to God, meditate on his word and let him transform us, let him allow us to realize who he is, to rejoice in his presence.

(b) Free response. It is quite rare.

(c) It is difficult due to:

- our restlessness

- the opposition of the enemy, who seeks to cut off our reliance on God

- a lack of faith: Will God really speak to me?

Sometimes the place of worship does not allow us to avoid distracting noises.

Note: Psalm 131 is good training for silence in praise.

Worship and the Second Temple (post exile)

By the time the second temple was built (see Ezra 3; 6:13-22; Haggai 1-2) in about 520 BC, there was a time of writing and developing worship songs, which were then gathered into a larger song or worship book. It is from this time that our current Psalms are derived from (see the table above).

As we read through the Old Testament (especially the Psalms and even more so, the book of Leviticus), it becomes clear that often worship seemed very outwardly complicated and involved lots of rituals. As we have learned already it was also very noisy and exuberant. However, at its heart there was a solemn devotion, an awe-inspiring awareness of God and a realisation that before such an awesome God only the lowest place is right for the worshipper. We can see, for example, in Psalm 95:6. It gathers together three words.

Learning Activity 7 (CCC) Read Psalm 95.

What three words/phrases (actions) indicate submission to God in the Psalmist here?

To bow down, to bend, to kneel

Note that joy and delight are also fitting before his glory. (v 1-3)

Prostration in worship was an appropriate response to the Holy God. It is not really that important to try and make a distinction between these three verbs but rather to feel the

force of them as the worshipper brings himself down, that is to bow, or down lower, to stoop, and even prostrate even lower still.

Learning Activity 8 (CCCx and CSM)

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

- (a) In what ways do you think this is similar or different to the 'submission' in prayer and worship that you see all around us in our part of the world?
- (b) How often do you prostrate yourself in worship?
- ☞ (c) With your group facilitator/leaders discuss why this feels like a non-Christian expression of worship.

(a) The difference is the heart attitude: not with fear and terror before an unknown and punishing god but with joy, delight and amazement before his glory.

(b) Free response

(c) Possible answers: Anything that looks like old practices and the old life before Christ can seem repugnant. Still, what position testifies to a real and deep respect for the true God who has revealed himself to us?

Note that at the same time as we grow in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures, we will be more and more influenced, not because we act like other Christians out of tradition or habit, but because we are being conformed to the word of God.

One of the differences in the submission and prostration that we see here from that which we see all around us is that rather than submission and prostration coming because it is commanded as a duty, it comes either because (a) the actual presence of God is so holy and powerful, that the worshiper has no choice *but* to fall flat on his face or (b) the worshiper is so overwhelmed by the creating, saving work and the providential care of God, that he is moved to self-humbling worship.

Let's take a look at two examples of these responses to the presence and the work of God. Look at the example of Elijah in I Kings before returning to Psalm 95.

Learning Activity 9 (CCC) Read 1 Kings 18:24, 36-39, 42.

- (a) What is Elijah's reaction when he encounters the awesomeness of God?
- (b) What was the people's reaction to God's clear and powerful response to Elijah's prayer?
- (c) What does Elijah's body position say about his attitude before God as he prayed for rain?

(a) 1) General context: the divided kingdom, in the northern kingdom (Israel), under the reign of Ahab and Jezebel the idolater who had instituted Baal worship

2) immediate context: Following a prolonged drought and a time of retreat, the prophet Elijah organizes a big meeting to put the prophets of Baal to the challenge, to prove the power of their prayers in his name. This ends in failure for them.

(b) The people bow down, prostrating themselves and confessing that the Lord is the true God.

(c) Elijah put his head between his knees as a sign of humility.

In Psalm 95, however, it is not as it was for Elijah, fire or rain from heaven, which prompted this self-humbling worship, but rather the works of God in salvation and His providential care.

Learning Activity 10 (CCC)

Re-read Psalm 95.

- (a) What attributes and actions of God does the Psalmist praise?
- (b) What response does the Psalmist suggest (and call for) as appropriate to these attributes and actions?

(a) The work of God: protection and salvation (v1)

his power over all the gods (v3)

his power over creation (v 4-5)

intimacy with God and belonging to him (v7)

b) Response: cries of joy (v 1-3)

bowing down before him (v 7)

The sense of v6 and 7 is that God chose His people out of all who live on the earth and having chosen to make them, He never stops tending them as a shepherd God (v7) leading them from pasture to pasture, keeping them as (literally) ‘the sheep of His hand’. In this sense, worship is a response to revealed truth: the truth of God as our creator and as our saviour.

Learning Activity 11 (CSM)

- (a) What motivates you to worship the Lord more? Is it his awesome attributes and power? Or his work in creating, saving and sustaining you?
- (b) How do you express that worship?

(a) Free response. Types of answers: discovering new things about the beauty and goodness of God in his revealed word; the transformation of lives; answers to prayer; remembering what he has done for us; who he is: his goodness, his power, his faithfulness, etc.

(b) Free response. (with a loud voice, in silence, by prayer, singing, etc.)

Our Response to the Lord’s Name

This brings us back to what we learnt at the start of the lesson about the greatness of God being at the heart of Old Testament worship. As well as proclaiming the works of God, the Psalmist proclaimed the name of the Lord. As with Arabic and Kabyle, in Hebrew names are very very important. A name tells you something about the person. To know someone’s name is to know them. Let’s look at this in the opening of Psalm 105.

Learning Activity 12 (CCC) Read Psalms 105:1-4.

What verbs can you see in verses 1-4 that are suggested as a response to the ‘name’ of the Lord?

There are at least 10 in this psalm! (invoke, know, sing, write a hymn, reflect, glorify, rejoice, seek the Lord, seek always, remember)

Notice that at least twice in these verses the name of the Lord is praised. The name of the Lord is a kind of shorthand for all that He has revealed Himself to be. What that means is that worship comes out of what the Lord has said about Himself. It is not primarily coming from our tradition, whatever that may be (see Mark 7:5-7). Nor does it come primarily from what we find 'helpful' (see Amos 4:4,5). However, it comes only by revelation of His name and what He has done (His wonders performed in the salvation of His people).

Learning Activity 13 (CSM)

With your learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

What is your worship of the Lord primarily motivated by?

- (i) Is it your own traditions and culture?
- (ii) Is it your own mood or circumstances?
- (iii) Is it the name, the character and the works of the Lord?

Free response

Encourage sharing, and then highlight the importance of going deeper in reflection with their facilitators.

Blessing the Lord

Meditating on the truths we have just seen leads us to praise God for Himself and for His works and to give thanks for the many heavenly blessings He has given us. That expression to 'bless the Lord' is not always found in our Arabic translations of the Bible. When the Lord blesses us, the same word is used. It is amazing to think that God looks on us in all our unworthiness, our need, our difficulties, etc, and responds in mercy and grace, coming to us in our time of need and providing for us. When we bless the Lord we also review all that He is in His heavenly and eternal glory, in His revealed attributes, in His love and His grace, and in His powerful salvation and also in His daily works of providential care. We respond point by point in wonder, love and praise. That is the meaning of worship.

There are Some Songs that Remain Unsung

While most of the Psalms are full of delight, it will not escape our attention that many of the songs describe a different experience. Some of these experiences are difficult for us. We might not see them as part of worship because they do not seem very joyful or positive or exalting or uplifting.

Read Psalm 139:19-22.

'If only You would slay the wicked, O God. Do I not hate those who hate You...?
I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.'

Or what about *Psalm 55:15*.

'Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the grave.'

About 24 Psalms contain passages like these and they make us ask the question why they are in the Bible at all and in what sense these kinds of sentiments can be called the Word of God and, indeed, if we should be expected to follow such examples of worship. Some Bible commentators avoid the difficulties that come from Psalms such as these. They would describe these 'offensive' passages as 'Old Testament morality' which we have now left behind because we have the superior revelation in Christ. This is the attitude that we saw at the very start of our course in the second part of lesson 1 and is one reason why Dr Majdi and some of his friends didn't read the Old Testament.

But this approach of avoiding or turning away from the offensive passages in the Old Testament is not biblical. We need to notice that even in the New Testament and even on the lips of Jesus, we find these words:

'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees. You hypocrites! ...You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?' (Matthew 23:29,33)

We also find in Galatians 1:9, the apostle Paul saying this:

'If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you have accepted, let him be eternally condemned.'

So we have to make the point that the indignation expressed in such strong terms is not only found in the Old Testament, it is found in the whole Bible and even in the Lord Jesus Himself. However, we should also note that in the Old Testament and even more clearly in the New Testament, vengeance either in thought or deed is forbidden.

Learning Activity 14 (CCC and CCCx)

- (a) How can we see this in Leviticus 19:17,18? And/or in Proverbs 20:22?
- (b) What does this tell us about God's view of vengeance?

(a) He shouldn't hate his brother, seek to take revenge or hold a grudge against him. (Lev 19)

He should hope in the Lord and not repay evil for evil.

(b) We should not take vengeance ourselves, nor keep grudges. But we can express our anger to God and then leave him to act.

Read Deuteronomy 32:35, then Romans 12:19

We should note that Romans 12:19 and Deuteronomy 32:35 bind the two statements together on this topic. We can see some clarity regarding the verses which at first sight seem offensive when we notice that they are actually prayers and we misread them if we see them as evidence of a vengeful spirit or if we understand them as a setting out of an agenda for human action. Quite the opposite! They are an exercise of committing the problem to the Lord and leaving it with Him. Far from backing away from these verses in

the Psalms, we who belong to a different age but also an age in which vengeance exists, should rather admire the desire and the spirit of the Psalmist to go to God with those feelings and not hide them away.

Maybe one of the reasons why we are uneasy about praying like the Psalmist comes from the fact that we do not understand God's holy anger and His righteous moral outrage. Perhaps we cannot pray such a prayer without a sinful, vengeful spirit creeping in. One of the key things to recognise is that the Psalmist, who could and did pray this way, was closer to understanding God's holy anger and His moral outrage.

Learning Activity 15 (CSM)

Think of the last time you expressed to God your anger directed toward someone.

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

- (a) Were you reacting to a true injustice?
- (b) How do you express your emotions to God? How did this affect you?
- (c) How do you think God viewed your prayer? Why?

Free responses

Do not waste this opportunity to unpack the prejudices and the inhibitions that people have for each other and to grow in honesty and intimacy with God. You can bring up God's justice and the exercise of his wrath in judging sin.

Do the Psalms Point to the Lord Jesus Christ?

As we have already learned, many parts of the Old Testament speak of the people of God looking for a king. We can see this very clearly in Judges 17:6:

'In those days Israel had no king. Everyone did as they saw fit.'

In other words, the people acted as if God was not their king. So while they called for a king (like the other nations) to deal with all this religious heresy, this social unrest, all this moral corruption (see Judges 17-19), at the same time they were blind to their rebellion against the true King. Of course when the people of Israel did get their earthly king, they found that they had to reshape and rephrase their hopes. They had to begin to say 'if only we had a perfect king'.

You can reset the context of the story, referring to the "Panoramic View" table.

Learning Activity 16 (CCCx and CSM)

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

Do we still look or expect leaders to be perfect in our day?

- (i) If yes, why?
- (ii) If no, why are we disappointed when our leaders turn out to be less than perfect?

Free response

(We cannot change others' actions. Try instead to live with integrity in your own responsibilities.)

As we have already noticed, in Old Testament Israel such a person could not be found. In the books of the Kings, the attention moves backwards and forwards from the succession of kings in the line of David in the south (Judah) to a bunch of changing kings in the north (Israel). But in reality, they were all quite similar. There were failures, personally and politically, and the idea of a perfect king bringing in the perfect society continued to remain an unfulfilled hope.

But hope sprang out of disappointment and developed in its intensity, and the Psalms reflect this as they sing of a king who faces world opposition.

Learning Activity 17 (CCC) *Read Psalms 2:1-3 and Psalm 110:1*

(a) How can we see this in these Psalms?

(b) In the table below – match the expectations for this perfect king with the correct Psalms.

| Attributes of the King | Psalms |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| was to be victorious | Psalm 72:7 |
| to rule by the Lord's help | Psalm 45:2 |
| establish world rule | Psalm 45:3-5; 89:22,23 |
| based in Zion | Psalm 72:16 |
| marked by righteousness | Psalm 89:28-37; 132:11,12 |
| rule would be everlasting | Psalm 18:46-50; 21:1-13 |
| rule would be peaceful | Psalm 45:6 |
| rule would be prosperous | Psalm 110:4 |
| rule would be devoted | Psalm 2:8-12; 45:17; 72:8-11; |
| preeminent among people | Psalm 72:5 |
| friend of the poor | Psalm 89:18 |
| owns an everlasting name | Psalm 2:6 |
| enjoys everlasting blessing | Psalm 45:2,7 |
| heir to David's covenant | Psalm 2:7; 89:27 |
| in Meliksadok's priesthood | Psalm 45:4,6,7; 72:2,3; 101:1-8 |
| belongs to the Lord | Psalm 72:2-4, 12-14 |
| Is the Lord's Son | Psalm 110:1 |
| sits at Lord's right hand | Psalm 21:4; 45:6; 72:5 |
| is Himself divine | Psalm 72:17 |

Correct answers:

If this king was to be victorious (Psalm 45:3-5; Psalm 89:22,23), by the Lord's help (Psalm 18:46-50; Psalm 21:1-13), he would establish world rule (Psalm 2:8-12; Psalm 45:17; Psalm 72:8-11; Psalm 110:5,6), based in Zion (Psalm 2:6), and he would be marked by righteousness (Psalm 45:4,6,7; Psalm 72:2,3; Psalm 101:1-8). His rule would be everlasting (Psalm 21:4; Psalm 45:6; Psalm 72:5) and peaceful (Psalm 72:7), and prosperous (Psalm 72:16), and devoted (Psalm 72:5).

This king that the Psalms speak of is pre-eminent among people (Psalm 45:2,7). He is the friend of the poor and the enemy of the oppressor (Psalm 72:2-4, 12-14). He owns an everlasting name (Psalm 72:17) and he enjoys everlasting blessing (Psalm 45:2). He is the heir to David's covenant that we learned about in lesson 4 (Psalm 89:28-37; Psalm 132:11,12), and according to Meliksadok's (Arabic spelling) priesthood (Psalm 110:4). He belongs to the Lord (Psalm 89:18) and is His Son (Psalm 2:7; Psalm 89:27). He sits at the Lord's right hand (Psalm 110:1) and is Himself divine (Psalm 45:6)!

It is very likely that these Psalms were used as coronation anthems sung before the new king took his throne. The idea here was to hold the new king up to the highest expectation but the reality was always more than a mere son of David could achieve. It awaited the unique Son of David who is also the Son of God (Luke 1:32).

The Main Lesson of Worship in the Psalms: Take Everything to the Lord

We should note that the Psalms are the longest book of the Bible. As we have noticed already, they are incredibly varied in their style, subject and thoughts, in their poetic expression and their literary form. So it would be superficial to try and reduce the whole of the Psalms to one particular theme, however if we were to try and do that and describe one line of thought that runs through the Psalms it would be this: ***take everything to the Lord in prayer!***

In the Psalms we meet people in sickness (Psalm 88:15), in persecution (Psalm 143:11,12), in loneliness (Psalm 142:4), in joy (Psalm 145:1,21), and so on. But all of them have this in common, that they are determined to bring everything in life to the Lord in committed and urgent prayer. Whatever the circumstances, whatever the troubles are, the Psalmist stops to remember the Lord. How great He is, the wonders that He has done (Psalm 78:9-11; Psalm 74:12-17; Psalm 77:7-12). The Psalmist knows how meaningful and how important and essential it is to give up listening to himself and focusing on his troubles and to start talking to himself about the great and loving God. He is the God who will prove He is sufficient as they lean upon Him in the present and whose promise guarantees a future where all will be well (Psalm 96:11-13).

Learning Task 18 (CSM and MMC)

(a) (i) In your journal write a short reflection on worship. Try to address the questions below honestly, then write a short prayer or Psalm that brings together some of your thoughts and confessions.

- (i) How broad, deep and wide is my personal and corporate worship?
- (ii) Do I only worship the Lord when I 'feel' emotionally happy?
- (iii) Do I rely on someone else (other gifted brothers and sisters) or on something else (musical instruments etc...) to get me worshipping?
- (iv) How do I want to grow as a worshiper and why does this matter?

Or (ii) In your journal, write your own Psalm in the style of Psalm 74. Prepare by considering the realities of injustice, suffering and pain that you see around you, in your own life, family, community or nation. Then try to express these things, with full honesty before God, then in midst of this, like in 74:12, declare those things that you know are true about the Lord.

(b) Lead a time of worship, devotion or prayer in your church or small group. Include the following in your time.

(i) Adoration – try to use a mix of the Psalmists words as well as your own

(ii) Confession of sin - “

(iii) Thanksgiving - “

(iv) Requests and longings – try to focus these on our hope in Christ

Lesson 9: A prophetic story: Holy people, world vision and a coming king

Key Concept: The prophets were both ordinary men with failings and sin but also uniquely inspired and believers who lived in the presence of the holy God. God's revelation to them was not through divine dictation but divine inspiration via their lives, character and circumstances. These prophecies were carefully and faithfully recorded, preserved and announced to the people of their day in both word and action. All of these Old Testament prophecies looked forward to a time when their hopes would be fulfilled by a coming Messiah-King.

Lesson Goals:

Content and Cognitive Competencies (CCC)

- a) Know/understand that Old Testament prophets were both 'ordinary' men with failings but also uniquely chosen and inspired men.
- b) Know, understand and evaluate the distinction between divine dictation to 'empty vessels' and divine inspiration through real people in real circumstances.
- c) Understand the importance of the historical and religious context of the prophecy and be able to set each prophecy in its historical era.
- d) Know, understand and evaluate the messianic hopes in the Messiah-King that permeates the Old Testament prophecy.

Character and Spiritual Maturity (CSM)

- a) Recognize and confess our own failings, fears and frailties.
- b) Trust and believe that God's grace and atoning work can use imperfect believers.
- c) Give thanks that God has revealed himself in the Old Testament prophets.

Mission & Ministry Competencies (MMC)

- a) Write a talk or sermon called 'the unveiling of the Messiah'. Choose two or three Old Testament prophets that we have considered and chart the theme of hope in the long awaited Messiah-King.

Introduction

In the last lesson we learnt about Old Testament worship and what the Psalms in particular, tell us about the full range of human emotions, from exuberant expressions of joy, through the confusion and soul searching of loss and suffering to the anger and indignation in the face of injustice involved in worship. Through all of this we discovered that the Psalms teach us to take *all* our emotions to the Lord and point us ahead to a more righteous, perfect, victorious and present King who fully satisfies all our longings.

Learning Activity 1 (MMC)

Feedback

With your learning group and/or mentor either (a) read some parts of your journal activity (Learning Activity 18a) from last week and/or (b) talk about the time of worship, devotion or prayer that you led in your church or small group.

In this lesson we will be learning about prophets and prophecy in the Old Testament. We will discover that the prophets were both ordinary men with failings and sin but also uniquely inspired and believers who lived in the presence of God. We will see how God revealed his message to them and how they recorded, preserved and announced that message to the people of their day. Finally we will consider the core message of their prophetic ministries.

Dr Majdi and Zakiya have now returned home to Gaza. Their hearts and heads are buzzing with all that they have been learning about worship in the Psalms and the joys of their times of fellowship with their brothers and sisters in Algeria and Tunisia. When Ronaldo, Majdi's Brazilian friend, next joins them as they meet for prayer, fellowship and worship, he is utterly shocked by the transformations that have taken place in Majdi and Zakiya and the rest of their small house church. Ronaldo is encouraged at the way the whole Bible is informing their worship, discussion and daily life and he's amazed at the fact that they are reading, feeding and obeying the message of the Old Testament.

Sometime later, Dr Majdi informs Zakiya that he has one final medical training-visit to make at the end of a strenuous year of travel around the Arab World. This time he is teaching in Muscat, Oman. Because he'll be there for a few days, he decides to stay with Bashir, who he met in Bethlehem (back in lesson 2) when he was doing some study with Abu Musa. Bashir lives in the neighborhood of Al Khuwair close to the beautiful Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque. With another believer, Mohammed, Bashir runs a small painting business in the city.

Bashir came to faith years ago through a Tunisian believer he met when he was working in Beirut. Having come to faith only months before heading back to Oman, he met very few other Christians in Lebanon or anywhere else and upon returning to Oman he faithfully witnessed to his family, friends and work colleagues in the way that seemed best to him. In the course of eight years a group of twelve believers has formed. They normally meet in Mohammed's apartment to pray, study the word and encourage each other, but today, because it is the festival of Mawlid al-Nabi and a national holiday, they gather at Bashir's house. Bashir's wife (who is originally Palestinian herself) and daughters have prepared a

large meal and to honor Dr Majdi with the delights of Palestinian Sumaghiyyeh, fattheh ghazzawiyyeh and farasheeh.

After their meal as they enjoy the sweet Burma Til-Kadayif the sound of the Muezzin followed by a special khotba on the theme of the seal of the prophets can be heard. Mohammed turns to Dr Majdi, "So, Bashir tells me that you and your wife and your church in Gaza have been learning much about the Old Testament in the past months..." Majdi smiles and nods his head... Mohammed continues, "So, tell us... what have you learnt about what the Old Testament says about the prophets? About true prophecy... about the purpose and direction of Old Testament prophecy?" Dr Majdi paused, then asked those gathered, "how long have we got?" Bashir smiled "Take as long as want... we're very eager to learn." So, Majdi, opened the scriptures and shared some of what he had been learning.

Learning Activity 2 (CCCx and CSM)

With you learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

- (a) How do the majority beliefs about the prophets in our part of the world make it difficult to understand, learn from and communicate what the Bible teaches about the prophets?
- (b) What beliefs about the prophets and the 'seal' of the prophecy are especially difficult?

(a) People think that prophets are essentially perfect; they have special grace from God which sets them apart. God dictates his message word-for-word to the prophet. God protects them against their enemies. The prophets prepare the way for the last one who is the greatest.

(b) The last prophet is the "seal" of all the prophets. His message is clearly superior and replaces the messages of the prophets who came before him. All revelation important for our era can be found in the last book.

Note: Try to get students to reflect on the differences in the beliefs brought out in this exercise compared with the Biblical point of view.

This is what Majdi shared with the group about prophets and prophecy in the Old Testament:

Old Testament prophets were key public figures in their own day, speaking for God and very much in touch with the political, cultural and religious life of their times. The prophet Isaiah was attracted rebukes from the political leaders of his day (Isaiah 28:9,10), Jeremiah was flogged and tortured in his time (Jeremiah 20:2; 26:7-11) and Amos was deported because his message upset the authorities (Amos 7:10,12,13). The image of holy prophets as merely religious men, cut off from ordinary national life is far from the picture that the Old Testament gives us.

The Prophets were 'Ordinary'

In one sense the Old Testament prophets were very ordinary. Their testimony revealed them to be people who were called by God, each in different ways with different personalities and experiences. In some way then, they are not that different to us. They were chosen, forgiven, regenerated and called. Let us consider four examples.

Firstly let's look at Isaiah. He met God in the experience of being forgiven from his sins.

Learning Activity 3a (CCC) Read Isaiah 6:1-8

- (a) How does Isaiah's calling to be a prophet start?
- (b) What makes Isaiah conscious (aware) of his sin?
- (c) How does Isaiah react?
- (d) How does God deal with his sin?

(a) His calling begins with a vision of the glory of God before his throne in heaven, in which he becomes aware of his impurity before a holy and powerful God. God removes his sin and commands him to speak in his name to the people.

(b) He saw the glory of the King, of the Lord himself, and he as a result understood his true state: failure and unworthiness.

(c) He confesses his sin and his confusion as a miserable and condemnable creature before God.

(d) God sends a seraph (angel) who takes a coal from the heavenly altar and touches his mouth with it. (This symbolizes the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the heavenly altar for the sins of the whole world.)

If we consider the prophet Jeremiah we can see this ordinariness or sense of inadequacy even more clearly. He felt totally inadequate to be a prophet, but the Lord gave him the assurance that he needed.

*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet" (Jeremiah 1:5)*

Whatever feelings of inadequacy, God makes it clear that before birth Jeremiah was set apart to be God's representative for doing God's work and proclaiming God's Word in God's appointed time. The selection of Jeremiah was not dependent on his feelings or because of his personal decision but because God had chosen him and set him apart.

If we consider a third major prophet of the Old Testament, Ezekiel, we have an even longer account of his calling.

Learning Activity 3b (CCC) Read Ezekiel 1 and 2

- (e) How is Ezekiel's calling similar to Isaiah's?
- (f) How does ch1 (especially v28) show us that Ezekiel was overwhelmed by his vision of God?
- (g) How does the Lord overcome Ezekiel's weakness?

(e) His call is like Isaiah's in that:

1) He receives a vision of the power and holiness of God who reveals himself in glory.

2) He is frightened before this revelation.

3) He is strengthened by God.

- 4) He receives a call to announce a message to a rebellious people who will not accept it.*
(f) He has seen the shining glory of God and falls with his face to the ground as a result.
(g) God puts his Spirit in Ezekiel so that he has the strength to stand up again.

The sense of 'ordinariness' is even more acute with Amos, our fourth example. His account of his calling leaves us in no doubt about his lack of 'professional credentials'.


Learning Activity 3c (CCC) Read Amos 7:14,15

- (h) What 'profession' did Amos have when he was called?
 (i) How does Amos himself reflect on his lack of credentials?

- (h) He was a cow-herder and farmer.*
(i) He acknowledged that he did not have the professional qualifications, as he was a simple shepherd. BUT the Lord himself called him and sent him as his spokesman. (v19)

Learning Activity 4 (CCCx and CSM)

With your learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

-  (a) How similar or different is this Old Testament view of the prophets compared to the way people in our part of the world think about the prophets?
 (b) Do you find the idea that the prophets were 'not perfect', ordinary and weak offensive or challenging? If so, why?
 (c) Can you see yourself or your spiritual experiences reflected in these ancients of the faith? How?

- (a) Free response. The prophet's awareness of sin is remarkable.*
His weakness and his vision of the glory of God could also be remarkable.
The people's rejection of the messenger himself and his shame before them can be remarkable.
The convictions of his call and of his message as having come from God are similar.
(b) Free response. (We have the tendency to want to honor God's representative as if it were God himself we were honoring. But God uses weak things so that he alone is glorified.)
(c) Free response. God has revealed himself to us—an amazing thing—yet we have done nothing to deserve it. Then he purifies us, equips us, calls us and sends us as his messengers.

Like Jeremiah, we also have our place in the eternal plans of God who chose the Lord Jesus before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), like Isaiah we have been brought into God's presence, into fellowship by the atonement (Ephesians 1:7), like Ezekiel, the Holy Spirit has come to live in us, who are His temple (1 Corinthians 6:9) and like Amos (along with all the prophets above and all the Lord's prophet-people) we are called to the task of bearing witness in the world (Acts 1:8 and 2:18).

However, despite these parallels between the Old Testament prophets and ourselves, there were also several things about them that were and remain totally unique. Can you think what some of these are?

The Prophets were Inspired

The biggest difference is that although, as we saw in lesson two, we are actors in God's continuing redemptive story, bearing witness to the Word of God, the Old Testament prophets *actually* spoke the Word of God! This is what Amos says in Amos 1:1,3

*"v1 The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa...
v3 This is what the LORD says..."*

Just like we saw in lesson two, this means that his prophecy is fully spoken by him (therefore the words spoken by a man) yet was fully inspired by God (therefore the Word of God). Amos' words were *his* words, spoken in *his* vocabulary, with *his* accent, yet, the Lord was speaking *His* words, saying what *He* wanted to say!

This is exactly the same with Jeremiah;

"The Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me... 'Now I have put my words in your mouth'" (Jeremiah 1:9)

And again with Ezekiel, the Lord says to him;



"You must speak my words to them." (Ezekiel 2:7)

This is neither divine 'dictation' nor the prophets just 'thinking up' what they thought should be said. It is the divinely inspired word of God in the words and actions (especially clear in Ezekiel— see Ezekiel 2:8-3:3) of the prophets.

The Bible never explains how verbal inspiration happens. However certain phrases give us clues, such as 'The word of the Lord came to...' (1 Kings 17:2,8) In the original Hebrew this phrase is even simpler, 'the word of the Lord *was* to'... in other words, the word of the Lord became a personal living reality to... How this actually happened, we are not told, the Bible simply affirms that it happened.

Learning Activity 5 (CCCx and CSM)

With your learning group and/or mentor discuss the following questions:

-  (a) How similar or different is this view of the revelation of God's word to the way people in our part of the world think about the revelation?
-  (b) What difference might the Bible's view of inspiration make to the way we read the Old Testament?

(a) The common idea is that God dictated a message that the prophet wrote and then retransmitted word for word.

(b) We appreciate the differences of the prophets' and Biblical authors' style and personality, while always remembering the message came from God.

Living in the Presence of God

One of the ways that the Old Testament distinguishes between true and false prophets is by examining whether they lived in fellowship with God. This is a very problematic idea (reality) for many people in our part of the world. The idea of people having ‘fellowship’ with God is a kind of ‘association’ that is blasphemous for many of our friends and family. However if we take a look at what the prophets Jeremiah and Amos say about this, it may help us both understand and communicate to others this idea of ‘being in the presence’ of God.

Talking about false prophets, Jeremiah says that they had never been members of ‘the council of the Lord’.

*‘Which of them has stood in the council of the Lord to see or hear his word? ...
If they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words...’*
(Jeremiah 23:18,22)

Amos says something similar about true prophets;

‘The Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan (opening his council) to his servants the prophets’ (Amos 3:7)

The phrase ‘council of the Lord’ is one of the ways that Bible explains this idea of the prophets being in the presence of the Lord. The word ‘council’ can be understood in terms of being in a *group* that hear from God (like Psalm 89:6-8), those that receive ‘counsel’ or advice and those that have ‘fellowship’ with God and the godly (as in Psalm 55:14). Basically, the true prophet is a living person who is brought near to God.

Note that it is possible that this text refers to angels instead of a human council.

Learning Activity 6 (CCC and MMC) *Re-Read Jeremiah 23:18,22 and Amos 3:7*

- (a) How do Jeremiah and Amos communicate the idea of living ‘in the presence’ of God and having fellowship with him?
- (b) Given that the idea of any person ‘associating’ with God is so problematic in our part of the world, how might you communicate the idea of prophets having fellowship with or being in the presence of God?

(a) Jeremiah speaks of a “council” which suggests a group of persons who are regularly in proximity to the King, who listen to his voice and who understand his plans. Such people could not be permitted to make up false messages which are sent out against the will of their master. At the same time, Amos speaks of a group of servants who are prophets—who listen to the messages of God and who must warn the people of danger beforehand so that they are not surprised.

(b) Many images can help us. For example, those who live in caves are dazzled by the first sunlight upon leaving the cave. Those who spend time with God—near the light—can see, understand how God thinks, what his plans are, and then warn others who are still in ignorance or are on their way out.

Impersonal divine dictation or godly persons

What becomes crystal clear as we read and listen to the message of the Old Testament prophets is that far from the idea in our part of the world, that the prophets were mere receptacles - like impersonal machines that simply received and passed on a dictated message - they were in fact, all personally distinctive. This 'distinctiveness' did not make them less godly. Being close to God did not make them all homogenous and indistinctive either. Rather, God purposefully used the details of their personality and context to communicate/highlight his message. In fact, being close to God made them more human as God intended man to be (before the Fall). Perhaps we have been tempted to assume that because of the Fall, as we saw in lesson three, all humanity is by definition not godly. However what the Bible teaches us is that the closer to God we are, the more truly human (as we were intended to be before the Fall) we become. We more clearly reflect the image of God as we were originally created.

The Old Testament prophets were brought into such closeness to the Lord that they were more truly human, with all their particularity, and in their close fellowship with God they were able to become the vehicles of his pure, uncorrupted word of truth.

Learning Activity 7 (MMC)

- (a) This coming week, talk to one of your non-Christian friends or family members about how and why they think the prophets were holy?
- (b) Tell them the story of how God chose and called one of the four prophets mentioned above.

Note to facilitator:

You might ask the group the following questions:

- (i) Do they think that the personality or life circumstances of the prophets were significant reasons why or how God's message was given to them?*
- (ii) If the answer is 'yes' then ask them how?*
- (iii) If the answer is 'No', then ask them if any person could have been chosen?*

For a fuller explanation of the human element in divine revelation of Scripture, see DOCT 202 The Inspiration and Revelation of Scripture Lesson 3

How did the ministry of the prophets work?

In most cases the Old Testament prophets communicated God's word by speaking it out, such as in Jeremiah 7:2 '*Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there proclaim this message...*'. However sometimes the prophets illustrated (embodied in visual form) their message in certain actions. We can also see this with Jeremiah in 19:1,2, when he is told by God to buy a clay jar from a potter and with it communicate a message of judgment and devastation to the people (Jeremiah 19:3-9).

Learning Activity 8 (CCC) Read Jeremiah 19:3-11

- (a) What does Jeremiah do with the earthenware jar?
- (b) What does he say after this in v11?
- (c) What do you think is the purpose of this action?

- (a) Jeremiah should break it.*
- (b) God will shatter this people and Jerusalem in an irreparable way.*
- (c) The action of breaking the vase is an object lesson which draws attention and marks the gravity of the warning and etches the message in the memory. It is impossible for the audience to ignore. (This also engages the prophet—it is impossible for him to go back on his prediction if it does not take place.)*

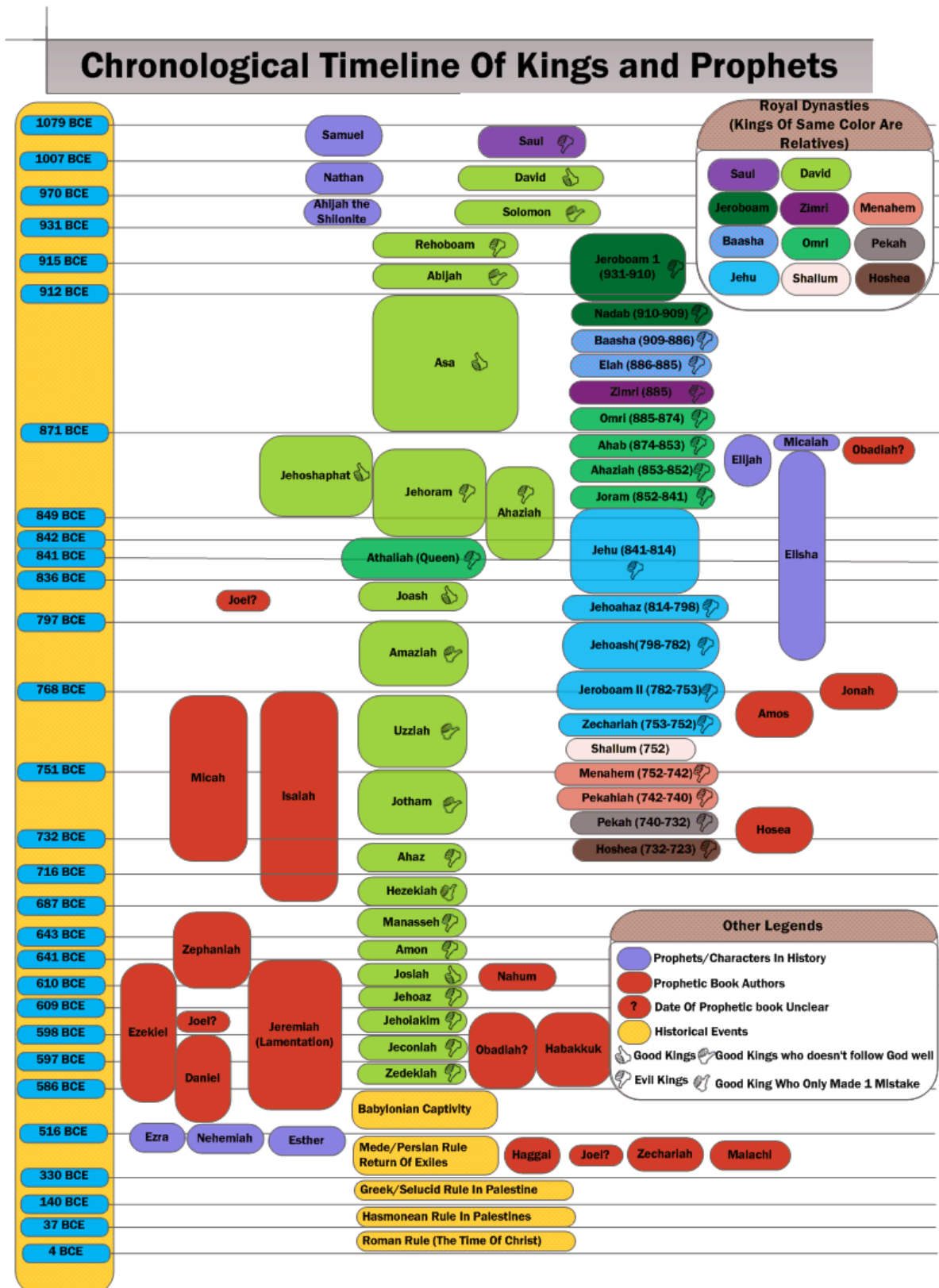
While of course Jeremiah's actions made his message even clearer to his hearers there is an even deeper purpose to this 'spoken act'. It was to send out the effective word of the Lord (see Isaiah 55:11) in two tracks;

- (a) the spoken word and
- (b) the visible word.

This is not dissimilar to the way in which Baptism and Lord's Supper visibly embody the promises of God in Jesus Christ in our corporate worship as a church.

A message addressed to the life situation of a specific people

Each prophet lived and witnessed to a specific people that had its own beliefs and customs, and that lived during a specific period of time with its own circumstances. In order to understand the prophet's message, we must understand the context in which he is preaching. This means that the historical context is as important for understanding the message of the prophets as it is for that of the historical, narrated scriptures (see lesson 2). Here is a chart that shows us the kings and the peoples that each prophet spoke to.



Taken from : <https://tben.wordpress.com/2014/03/09/the-timeline-of-kings-and-prophet/>

Learning Activity 9 (CCC)

a) Using the chart of kings, identify the prophets who mainly had a ministry with Israël, the kingdom of the north.

b) We can separate the prophets into different categories according to the great historical events of the Old Testament. Using the chart of kings and the panoramic view one, complete the chart below by placing the following prophets in their correct ministry period : Malachi, Amos, Jeremiah.

(a) Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea

(NOTES: -The story of the ministry of Elijah and Elisha are found in I Kings 17-22 and 2 Kings 1-9. 2 prophets primarily addressed foreign nations: Obadiah and Jonah)

(b) Malachi, Return; Amos, Divided Kingdom; Jeremiah, Judah

NOTE that Jeremiah carried out his ministry primarily during the period of the Kingdom of Judah, but he continued his ministry in exile near the rebellious remnant before the fall of Jerusalem. The fascinating history of his ministry can be found in Jeremiah 40-45.

(Also, the fall of Samaria (Israel) took place during the ministry of the prophet Isaiah. The first 39 chapters took place before this important event and the prophecies in chapters 40-66 took place after. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah had not yet occurred, Isaiah prophesied as if these events had already happened.)

The prophets according to their time periods

| Key dates | Time period | Prophets |
|---------------|--|---|
| 931 BC | Division of the kingdom: Jeroboam becomes king of Israël in the North | |
| | The Divided Kingdom | Jonas Isaiah Hosea Micah _____ |
| 722 BC | The fall of Samaria (North) | |
| | Judah | (Isaiah ch40-66) Nahum Zephaniah Habakkuk _____ |
| 586 BC | The fall of Jerusalem | |
| | Exile | Jeremiah ch40-45) Daniel Ezekiel _____ |
| 536 BC | Zerubbabel returns to Jerusalem | |
| | Return and restoration | Haggai Zechariah _____ |

Learning activity 10 (CCC, CCCx an CMS)

The context of prophecy for Jeremiah 19

Read Jr 1:1-3 and reread Jr 19:1-20

- What event in the history of Israel is prophesied by the breaking of the flask?
- How was this prophecy accomplished in detail ?

As mentioned previously, Jeremiah was beaten and thrown into prison after this prophecy (20.1-3)

c) Why did this message receive so much opposition?

d) With the help of Jr. 1:1-3 and the chart of kings, i) determine the amount of time Jeremiah had been warning the people before judgement arrived? (Note that Pashhur the head of the temple served under the reign of king Zedekiah)

ii) How does that help us understand Jeremiah's complaint in 20:7-18?

iii) What does this tell us about God's patience towards Judah?

e) Can you think of situations where a faithful testimony is preached to a people or to a group of people who refuse to listen to messages of warning? How can the example of Jeremiah and his message in ch.19 relate to these situations? Give a precise example.

(a) The fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC

(b) Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, set a siege around Jerusalem for two years, causing a severe famine (parents took their own children to eat). The city with the temple and all the houses was destroyed completely. The people were shattered by the massacres and by the exile of the survivors to Jerusalem. Only some poor farmers were allowed to stay. (v16)
NOTE: 2 Kings 25:1-17 is a parallel text with Jer 52.

(c) Jeremiah attacked everything that was precious to the people and put in doubt their security and their very existence.

In Jer 26:4-11, the people respond to these judgments against the temple (which has become like an idol for the people) and against the city (which could be considered treason by the nationalists who tried to encourage the defense of the city against the enemies). In Jer 7:1-15, Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of the temple in which the haughty people had put their confidence.

(d) i) Jeremiah warned the people of the fall 40 years before it took place. This prophecy in ch 19 was announced in the last ten years during the reign of Zedekiah.

ii) One may understand that Jeremiah would complain after more than 30 years of opposition to his warnings in the name of the Lord characterized by reproach and shame, to the point of regretting his life and his ministry. (God does not rebuke him for expressing his feelings!)

iii) God gave his people many opportunities to repent of their idolatry and injustice and to avoid the imminent judgment. He is slow to anger, but when judgment comes, it is decisive and severe.

NOTES: You may also mention the other prophets who announced the fall of Jerusalem: Isaiah and Micah (3.13) in the eighth century before Christ, then Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Ezekiel, the contemporary of Jeremiah.

God explained that the prophecy and the destruction of the vase should take place in the valley of Ben Hinnom (v2). Called "Gehenna" at the time of Jesus, it was the valley where Jerusalem's inhabitants burned their trash—and at the time of Jeremiah, their children also, on idolatrous altars called "Topheth". (see also Jer 7:31-32)

(e) Free response

The important thing to remember about this is that each prophet ministered the word of God in his own time and through his own particular circumstances. That is why by first listening to what he said *then* (with an understanding of their context) can we hear what the word of God is saying to us *now* in our context.

The message of the Prophets

It would be foolish to try to summarize *everything* the prophets said in one concept, sentence or even paragraph. However there are clearly characteristic lines of prophetic thought, which we can mention. Importantly, it should be noted that the prophets were not innovating with their own message but exposing and applying the word of God. Their aim was to make God's truth known to their audience in a fresh and relevant way.

The role of the prophet was to remind the people of the identity of God, the extraordinary relationship he had with them, and the obligations he required them to fulfill as a result. God revealed those things through the covenants he made with their fathers: Abraham, Moses and David.

Teacher's note: You could ask them to recall the 4 principle Old Testament covenants and their respective promises (see the end of lesson 5). Below are some important themes found in these prophecies.

Here are the characteristic lines of Old Testament prophetic thought:

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| One God | A World Vision |
| The God of Abraham | |
| Holy God | A Holy People |
| The God of Moses | |
| Faithful God | A Coming King |
| The God of David | |
| Forgiving God | A Perfect Saviour |
| The God of the Temple | |

Abraham and the whole world

When God called Abraham he gave him and his descendants a message and purpose of universal importance. *'All the peoples (or nations) on earth will be blessed through you.'* (Genesis 12:3). This universal message to the 'nations' is highlighted throughout the Old Testament prophets. We can see this in the vision of Isaiah in 25:6-9.

Moses and the Holy God

Although Moses comes chronologically after Abraham, we might have considered him first because he brought the foundational, early period of revelation to its climax and laid down the basis on which the rest of the Old Testament operates (Genesis 12 – Exodus 40). For this reason we will think a little more about Moses than Abraham, David or the temple.

When Moses encountered God at the burning bush (see Exodus 3:5) 'God' and 'holiness' were explicitly fused together for the first time in scripture. The ministry of Moses is saturated with the overriding truth that the Lord is the holy God and all the Old Testament prophets go on affirming this message. If we look at Isaiah again we cannot miss this characteristic of God's nature. *'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty* (Isaiah 6:3). In order to express the superlative or special characteristic, the Hebrew language uses repetition. So holy, holy, holy means really, really, really holy!! Isaiah 6:3 is the only instance in the Bible of a quality being stated three times. The Old Testament uses 'holy' to describe the Name of the Lord (his holy name) more often than all the other adjectives put together in the Bible. In Isaiah 6:1-8 we discover that this awesome and great holiness is a moral holiness, not a ritualistic holiness. It is the kind of moral holiness before which sinful men and women are convicted and condemned.

Holy God and Holy People

However the holiness of God is not merely for him, it is also for His people. Moses taught that because the Lord is holy, then so also should His people to be holy. *'Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am Holy'* (Leviticus 19:2) This was the purpose for giving such a detailed law. Each of the Ten Commandments arises from some aspect of God's nature, so that his law is requiring His people to obediently live out some aspect of his very character.

Learning Activity 11 (CCC) Read Exodus 20:14

- (a) How can we see this in the seventh commandment?
- (b) How is the Lord's faithfulness in his covenant linked with faithfulness in our covenants? For example, in our marriage or baptism covenants?

(a) The forbidding of idolatry. God requires faithfulness and consecration to one partner only, just as God is faithful to his covenants.

(b) We should reflect on the nature of God in all our relationships. If we are unfaithful to men, we betray God as well.

The Old Testament prophets applied this principle of obedience to the covenant across three main areas of life. (1) to the way people lived, (2) to the way they worshipped and (3) to the way they carried out their business.

Learning Activity 12 (CCC, CCCx and CSM)

- (a) The way people lived

Read Jeremiah 7:11

- (i) What is a den of robbers?
- (ii) How and why is the temple of the Lord being compared to a 'den of robbers?' (7:4-10)
- (iii) When you look around at how people live in our part of the world, can you see any comparisons between them and what Jeremiah is describing here?

- (b) The way people worshipped

Read Isaiah 1:13-15

- (i) Why did Isaiah describe the peoples' worship as meaningless?

(ii) Whilst you might be able to see 'meaningless' worship all around you in our part of the world today, is your own worship as a believer sometimes like this? If so, how?

(c) The way people carried out their business

Read Amos 8:5

- (i) What was it about an apparently religious society that Amos is criticising?
- (ii) Could this same criticism be made of those who live around us in our part of the world?
- (iii) Could this same criticism be made of those who live in supposedly more 'Christian' societies?

a (i) A den of bandits = a hiding place which a band of thieves uses as a base of illegal operations

(ii) (The users oppress helpless people, rob them, kill them, commit idolatry and then come to the temple to be justified.)

(iii) Free response

b (i) Due to the oppression in their daily life (v16)

(ii) Free response

c (i) The religious cannot wait for the end of the services to cheat and win money on the backs of the poor.

(ii) Free response

(iii) Free response (In reality, all are in the same situation!)

Note: Do not forget to bring out the historical context (beginning with identifying the era) of each prophetic text.

David and the Messianic King

In David we can see clearly the Old Testament's hope taking shape in the form of a coming king.

Learning Activity 13 (CCC) *Read 2 Samuel 7*

(a) What does the prophet Nathan promise David about his family line? What kind of dynasty was he being promised?

(b) Was David or David's family line actually able to produce the perfect king that Old Testament longed for?

The prophets had spoken of a king that was coming, a king that would be of human birth and would indeed sit on David's throne.

Read Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:5-6

(c) How can we see this message in these verses?

(a) His throne will be established forever. An eternal dynasty! (v16)

(b) No, Solomon finished in failure, his kingdom was divided (v 13-15)

(c) A son born with the name Emmanuel, "God with us" (7:14)

A son born with the name "Almighty God" and the throne of David will be established forever

However, the prophets also spoke of this King being so much more than this. Isaiah 9:6 speaks of this king being called 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God...' We are not given any clear explanation of how this Messiah-King would be both human and divine in the Old Testament. This is yet to be fully revealed in the coming of our Lord Jesus.

The Temple and forgiveness and salvation

As we saw in lesson 7 the tabernacle ('house' or temple) was the place where the holy God chose to be present with his people. The sacrificial system that we learnt about in lessons 7 and 8 were established so that sinful people could maintain a relationship with a holy God and live with him in peace and safety. At the heart of this we saw the Day of Atonement, when an animal life was sacrificed for the sins of the people. However Isaiah spoke about this 'bearing of sins,' saying that only a person could fully and finally substitute for other persons. The animal could illustrate the truth, but only a person, unblemished by sin and willing to die, could *fully* bear the sins of other people. And this is what Isaiah prophesied would happen.

Read Isaiah 53:12

So, the prophets took hold of these truths revealed and passed down to them, applied them to the people of their day and looked forward to a greater time when all would be drawn to the Lord. +

Learning Activity 14 (CCCx and MMC)

Prepare (by writing or recording onto MP3 or video) a talk / sermon called 'the unveiling of the Messiah'.

In your talk or sermon, chose two or three Old Testament prophets that we have considered and chart the theme of hope in the long awaited Messiah-King. Show how the prophets spoke their message to the people of their day (remember 'Level one' in the three levels of Old Testament in Lesson 3) and yet were also pointing ahead to the redemptive Level 3 narrative.

Or

b) In your sermon, choose three Old Testament prophets that we have studied, and trace the theme of hope for the Messiah-king who is so fervently expected. Show how the prophets told their message to the people of their time (remember the 'Level 1' in the three levels of the Old Testament in lesson 3), all the while predicting the future story of redemption at the third level.

Some notes for question (a):

Isaiah announced his message after the fall of Samaria and the northern kingdom in 722 (and the divine intervention to save Jerusalem from the invention of the Assyrians under

King Hezekiah: see Isaiah 37-39). Beginning in ch 40, Isaiah described the restoration of the people of Israel as if Jerusalem were already destroyed and the people dispersed. (This would occur in only 90 years, in 586. The message is that God intervenes to gather his dispersed people and reestablish his covenant with them through the ministry of a chosen servant.)

The role of the servant and his fulfillment in Jesus Christ can be seen in verses 1-4 (cited in Mat 12:18-21), v 6-8 (compare with Isaiah 61:1-2 and Luke 4:18-19; then Isaiah 49: with Acts 13:47).

The people mentioned: Kedar, the second son of Ishmael (Gen 25:13), Selah, the mountain of Edom (southwest of the Jordan); the islands, the people far away

For the role of the descendants of Ishmael (Kedar and Nebaioth) in the restoration of the Jewish people of God, see Isaiah 60, especially v 7.

Going Further

The books: How were they published and preserved?

In the prophetic books, we have the word which they wrote down (as we have already seen) under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But one may be certain that what is preserved took a lot of time to say: more than it takes us to read it. For example, the long sermon which Amos wrote in Amos 1:2 to 2:16 could be read in ten minutes, but it certainly took much more time to preach. What we have is an inspired account of the divine message, but not necessarily the complete retelling of what Amos said. The image of a “wall of goods” may help us. Much of what is written in the books of the prophets comes in small quantities: compact summaries of the message which can be digested. They must be written and publicly “published.” So, for example, in Isaiah 8:1, the prophet Isaiah rents a public area, like that which one finds in a public market, so that everyone can see him and thus hear the word of the Lord. When we read Amos 7:10-17 and see the way that Amos published the private conversations of Ahaz, it is a little like Wikileaks, which publishes private communications between government leaders.

But we *must* understand that the writing of the message was NOT left to chance, nor to frail human memories, but instead to that which was correctly and carefully reported. We can turn to Jeremiah 36 for an example of this.

Learning Activity 15 (CCC, CCCx, and CSM)

Read Jeremiah 36

(a) What evidence is there for the accurate preservation of the texts? Look especially at v 18.

Read Isaiah 8:16

(b) Again, how do we see the accurate preservation of the teaching (the word) of God?

(c) What kinds of questions or criticisms from your friends, family and neighbors have to do with the trustworthiness of the Biblical testimony?

(d) How many of these questions or criticisms come from their actual research and their interactions with the Bible, and how many are simply propaganda or false information which they hear during childhood?

(e) How could you help them acknowledge the credibility of the prophets’ testimony?

Lesson 10:

A story about living wisely: Discerning the patterns of life and living well

Key Concepts: The wisdom books of the Old Testament deal with the multi-textured tapestry in the human yearning to answer the deepest questions in life. Knowing God is at the heart of living wisely. Truly knowing God is interconnected with truly knowing ourselves and knowing the world. True wisdom in the Old Testament is linked with obeying God. The Bible's revelation of wisdom is fully and finally revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Lesson Goals:

Content and Cognitive Competencies (CCC)

- a) Know which are the main wisdom books in the Old Testament: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and some of the Psalms.
- b) Know/understand that these books deal with some of the most profound themes experienced by humanity as well as very practical advice on how to live well.
- c) Know/understand how these books deal with the nature of God, the nature humanity and the world.
- d) Know some of the distinctive features and key themes of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes.
- e) Know/understand how wisdom is personified in wisdom literature and how this relates to knowing God.
- f) Know/understand how this personification of wisdom is fully and finally revealed in Christ.

Character and Spiritual Maturity (CSM)

- a) Recognize and demonstrate awareness of the search for meaning in life in those around you.
- b) Demonstrate honesty about your own struggles to find meaning in painful and difficult circumstances of life.

Mission & Ministry Competencies (MMC)

Write a pastoral letter to someone in a time of grief. Try to gently address (correct) some of the problematic ways that the Old Testament wisdom literature is often used in this situation. Use parts of Proverbs, Job and/or Ecclesiastes to help this person, explaining how they point to the ultimate source of wisdom, comfort and consolation in the full expression of God's wisdom found in Jesus Christ.

Introduction

In the last lesson we learnt about prophets and prophecy in the Old Testament. We discovered that the prophets were both ordinary men with failings and sin but also uniquely inspired and believers who lived in the presence of God. We saw how God revealed his message to them and how they recorded, preserved and announced that message to the people of their day and we considered the core message of their prophetic ministries.

Learning Activity 1 (MMC)

Feedback

With your learning group and/or mentor discuss the sermon you prepared and/or preached since the last lesson.

- (a) Which Old Testament prophets did you choose?
- (b) How hard was it to explain the different levels of the story?
- (c) Could those who listened see the unveiling of the Messiah in the passage/story that you chose?
- (d) What sort of feedback did you get?

You may ask one or two students to share the sermon's primary theme and to answer questions.

In this lesson we will explore the wisdom books of the Old Testament (in particular Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes) that deal with the multi-textured tapestry in the human yearning to answer the deepest questions in life. We will discover that knowing God is at the heart of living wisely. We will also see that truly knowing God is interconnected with truly knowing ourselves and knowing the world and that true wisdom in the Old Testament is linked with obeying God. Finally, we will discover that the Bibles' revelation of wisdom is fully and finally revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Three years have passed since Dr Majdi has been back in Gaza working hard in his role as medical director for a large development organisation. The fruits of reading and applying the Old Testament (and the whole Bible) to their lives have had a very positive effect on his marriage, his family and especially his growing house church. Life in Gaza isn't easy on several fronts and apart from the political instability, the poverty around them and the daily challenges of living in occupied Palestine as believers they also continue to experience persecution from their families and culture. But they are truly experiencing the presence of the Lord in their midst as they meet, pray, study the word together and seek to obey it in their daily lives. In the last year so many believers have come to faith, that they have formed two other small church fellowships.

1. But when Majdi and Zakiya's group met to praise the Lord today, the happy situation had been completely wiped away due to the tragic events of the past week. It was the first time that the group had met since the unexpected death of Hakim alHakimi, a new convert and a close friend of Yacub. Hakim died in an exchange of fire between Hamas supporters and the Israeli army while he was participating in a kids' camp that Al Musalaha organized. He left behind his wife Sara with four children. The news of his death deeply saddened the team. They all knew Hakim and Sara well. Yacub and Hakim had studied together at Mar Elias

School, and Hakim was the manager of a local hospital and a volunteer who worked with Musalaha. His reputation among his colleagues was unparalleled, and without any doubt the Lord used him in an extraordinary way in the two years that Hakim knew the Lord.

But as Majdi and Zakiya's group met for worship today this happy situation was completely overshadowed by the tragic events of last week. This was the first time they'd met since the sudden death of Hakim al Hakimi a new believer and a close friend of Yacub's. Hakim was shot in cross-fire between Hamas activists and the Israeli army whilst helping with a youth camp organised by Al Musalaha. He died leaving his wife Sara with four children. The news of his shock death has brought a dark cloud over the team. They all knew Hakim and Sara well. Yacub and Hakim studied together at Mar Elias College and Hakim was the manager of a local hospital and regular volunteer with Musalaha. His reputation amongst locals was unrivalled, and there was no doubt that in the two years since he'd come to faith he had been used in amazing ways by the Lord.

Mustapha had just that afternoon been on the phone to a devastated Sara, who, with her supportive non-Christian family, was trying to work out why this had happened to her and what she should do next. Through bitter tears Mustapha listened to Sarah sobbing for almost an hour... "Why...? What have I done to deserve this...? He was such a good man... a good father, a good husband... a faithful brother... With these words still ringing in his ears, Mustapha reached for his Bible and turned to the third chapter of Ecclesiastes (ch3:1-2). He read out loud:

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot."

He commented "this was Hakim's appointed time..." On the surface this sounded fine. Then he turned to Job and read out loud,

*"The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."
(Job 1:21)*

And then came his interpretation of the two passages. "The Lord tested Job's faith, by allowing Satan to strike him... Satan is striking Sara to see if she will carry on with the work... and he is striking us to see if we will remain faithful!" The room was silent. Not everyone felt comfortable with this interpretation but no one said anything, however Yacub was furious at this candy-coated quick fix response to the grief that everyone was feeling.

But it was Seif El-Din who retorted first. He felt sure that somehow the choices that Hakim had made, notably working with the Israeli authorities had been displeasing to God. He and Hakim had disputed sharply about this matter and Seif El-Din felt sure that the Lord had answered his 'improve or remove' prayer. Trying not to sound too judgemental, and side-stepping Mustapha's interpretation of events he read from Proverbs chapter 1,

"Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain; it takes away the lives of those who get it." (Proverbs 1:19)

He continued, "As sad as we all are at Hakim's death... I feel that as with Solomon's compromise with his foreign wives, this is a signal that the Lord wants us to get back to an uncompromised biblical approach to not being yoked with unbeliever and the oppressors..."

"...what utter nonsense!" Yacub interrupted in an open display of passion. "How dare you postulate such utter drivel about my friend... you have no idea... you hardly know the man..." The verses coming to Yacub's mind were from the first chapters of Ecclesiastes. He whispered them to himself. But Ziad was able to make them out.

"Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.' (Ecclesiastes 1:2) Then I thought in my heart, 'The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?' I said in my heart, 'This too is meaningless.' For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!" (Ecclesiastes 2:15,16)

Yacub was tempted to conclude that the atheist might be right after all. Trying hard not to continue on this Godless road to nowhere he slammed his Bible on the table and walked out into the night. Mustapha's grief overtook him till the point he began to sob and then walk out. Ziad followed quickly but he was too late. He returned to room only to find that Seif El-Din had also left.

Learning Activity 2 (CCCx and CSM)

- (a) How would you describe Mustapha's interpretation of Ecclesiastes ch3:1-2 and Job 1:21?
- (b) Quite apart from the insensitivity of the timing of his comments, do you think that he was right to say that God was striking Sara through the death of her husband? Why? Why not?
- (c) What about Seif El-Din's interpretation of the events through his use of Proverbs 1:19? Is that the right way to interpret this Proverb?
- (d) How do you feel about Yacub's response to the 'foolishness' of his two fellow believers in their response to Hakim's death?
- (e) Do you ever feel like the writer of Ecclesiastes, that nothing makes sense and that life is futile?

Free responses for the five questions. Some possible reflections:

(a) It is true that in all circumstances we should recognize, on the one hand, the sovereignty of God and his wisdom (Ecc 2), and on the other hand our mortality: he must have a purpose for everything since the fall (Job 1). The question is: does Sara need to hear these truths in that way at this exact moment? Told in this way? Without speaking about the goodness and the compassion of God and of his presence?

(b) Does Mustapha know what passed through the mind of God and his plans for this very event? Is the debate between God and Satan the same each time before he brings about evil to a just person? When one is hit by death, God acts for the good of those who love him. (Rom 8:28)

(c) To whom does the final judgment belong? There are sins and good deeds in the life of every person. God alone can decide. He grants life to the good and the evil.

(d) This is an answer lacking faith in God. He takes part of the text out of context.

(e) Free response. (Because Ecclesiastes said it, it will be normal.)

NOTE: It is not helpful to give detailed answers and to spend a lot of time in discussion here. In reality, all the suggestions of those who intervene are clumsy. The goal is to give them a desire to find a good interpretation and sensible application of this type of literature and to introduce the upcoming lesson. You may return to these questions at the end of each study to close.

Exhausted, Ziad went to speak to Majdi. They sat together in Majdi's living room, and began pondering how to make sense of this. As they sat there reflecting on their church's search for meaning in this situation they thought back to all they had learned about wisdom in the Old Testament.

What is Old Testament wisdom literature?

Wisdom literature is the books in the Old Testament that deal with the multi-textured tapestry in the human search to answer the deepest questions in life. These books are Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and some of the Psalms. They present a combination of some of the most profound themes in this search along with very practical advice on how to live well. In the Bible the profoundly theological and the everyday practical belong together. But nowhere is this seen as clearly as in the Wisdom books.

In Ecclesiastes we see cynical scepticism, in Proverbs we see assuring simplicity and in the Song of Songs delightful intimacy. Crucially, we must read all of them as part of the Biblical story and not just in isolation. As Majdi expressed it 'one glimpses the full rainbow of biblical wisdom only by reckoning with its several perspectives.' He told Ziad about one writer who summarised the benefits of the various types of OT wisdom literature in the following way:

"...the Psalms teaches you how to pray and praise, Proverbs teaches you how to behave, Job teaches you how to suffer, the Song of Solomon teaches you how to love, and Ecclesiastes teaches you how to enjoy."

What are the main themes?

There are three broad themes that run through the wisdom books; the knowledge of God, the knowledge of people (and ourselves) and knowledge of the world.

1. Knowledge of the Lord

In the Psalms and Proverbs we are repeatedly told that the 'fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' and that wisdom is to be desired and sought out (Psalms 111:10 and Proverbs 1:7; 4:7; 9:10). In the wisdom books we see that wisdom is personified as a woman (Proverbs 1:20; 4:6; 9:1; 14:33) and in wisdom we see the character and qualities of God himself (Proverbs 2:6; 3:19; 9:10). However knowledge of God is not the same as knowledge about God. True knowledge of God and God's gift of wisdom are essentially identical. True knowledge of God is therefore personal not just abstract.

Learning Activity 3 (CCCx and CSM)

- (a) How is this concept of knowledge similar to or different from the concept of *i'lm* (عِلْم) in our part of the world?
- (b) What are the differences in knowledge about and knowledge of God?
- (c) Why are both important for us as we grow as disciples and leaders?

(a) The notion of "alem" in the Muslim religion concerns all systematic knowledge, in the religious and secular domain. It is similar to the concept used by scientific modernists in the West. In contrast, the Bible defines knowledge as wisdom coming from a personal relationship.

(b) That is the difference between someone who learns about a person by reading articles from an encyclopedia and someone who spends time with that person.

(c) Free response. The more you know a person, whether by intellectual research or by personal discussions and sharing, the more you can appreciate and know how to please him.

2. Knowledge of people and ourselves

But we also discover that true wisdom involves not just the knowledge of God but also the knowledge of people. As theologian John Calvin wrote some 500 years ago: “our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”

3. Knowledge of the world

What the wisdom books of the Old Testament teach us is, that people acquire wisdom not only by direct revelation, but also by observing what works or fails to work in daily life in a world created by God. The wisdom of the ages is therefore observable for all people in all times. As Majdi explained to Ziad, ‘wisdom is developed through reading the patterns of life well and applying these with insight, discernment, integrity and care.’

Knowledge and obedience

Throughout Old Testament Israel’s clan existence through to the era of the judges and the Kings (wandering in the desert and as we saw in lesson 6 and 7) and beyond, the affirmation of wisdom literature is that the one God has embedded truth within all reality. The human responsibility is to search for that insight and to learn to live in harmony with the cosmos. As the life of Solomon teaches us, having wisdom does not guarantee that it will be properly used. Only when wisdom as a skill is subordinate to obedience to God does it achieve its proper ends in the sense the Old Testament means.

Learning Activity 4 (CSM)

With your learning group and/or mentor discuss;

(a) Who are the wisest people you have know in your life? How is their wisdom visible? Solomon is described in the Bible (and in other non Christian literature) as one of the wisest men in history.

(b) How do we see in Solomon’s life that having wisdom does not guarantee that it will always be used properly? (see I Kings 11:9-11)

(c) If someone as wise as Solomon can lose his way, how can the rest of us ensure that we keep growing in wisdom?

(a) Free response. Often one sees wisdom in a respectful, peaceful attitude, in a capacity to listen, to discern and to give good counsel. One can often spot a wise person through his relationships with his children.

(b) His lack of obedience to the will of God causes Solomon’s wisdom to not serve him as it ought to have.

(c) We should obey God and put into practice everything we have learned of his will. We warn others who love God when we mislead ourselves.

You may have noticed that the principle of true knowledge and wisdom only coming through relationship and obedience to God underpins this entire overview to the Old Testament. Knowing the Bible (Old or New Testament) alone doesn't guarantee faithful discipleship. Only when these lessons are expressed through obedience to the Lord can he achieve his redemptive purpose in our lives.

Lets keep this in mind as we seek to learn from the Lord through a closer look specifically at the books of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes.

Proverbs: the wise life

Take the time to read and re-read proverbs and you will not miss the humour and insight of its observations on life.

Learning Activity 5a (CCC) *Read Proverbs 26:17 and 27:14-16*

- (a) Do you ever struggle with interfering busybodies?
- (b) Have you experienced the 'curse' of an early morning wake up call? Or
- (c) Have you ever observed the pains of man with a quarrelsome wife?

Free responses

Apart from the humour of folly, the accuracy and honesty of Proverbs is also deeply practical. It speaks of the consequences of sexual immorality (2:16-19, 5:3-6 and 7:24-27) and in direct contrast the delights of true marriage (5:18-19). It also acknowledges the pain of bad marriages (19:13; 21:9,19; 25:34 and 27:15). Very often Proverbs simply states how things are in the world, what people are like and doesn't comment further.

However at other times it probes deeper.

Learning Activity 5b (CCC)

- (a) How can we see this in the psychological analysis of 4:23?, or
- (b) The exposure of the 'quick fix' of 18:13 or 29:20? or
- (c) The dangers and benefits of our work ethic in 10:4,5 and 24:30-34?

(a) In the context of v 20-27, we should orient our heart to observe the word of God, and not follow the inclinations of our hearts. The word should judge our hearts.

(b) One must think before speaking! This is good advice which can bring about considerable fruit!

(c) These verses highlight the importance of working and maintaining your work so as to avoid ruin and poverty.

Wisdom belongs to the Lord

However, as we have already seen Proverbs is more than a random collection of insightful observations on life. Cropping up repeatedly throughout the Proverbs is the bedrock of the books' theology. That is, what it teaches us about the Lord. In almost one hundred verses reference is made to 'God' or 'the Lord', we learn clearly that wisdom comes from God and that it belongs to him.

Learning Activity 6 (CCC) Read Proverbs 8:12-31

- (a) How is wisdom presented in these verses?
- (b) What are its / 'his' characteristics?

Now read 1 Corinthians 1:24,30 and Colossians 2:3

- (c) How does Proverbs 8:12-31 prepare us for the New Testament revelation of Jesus?
- (d) What are the basic claims about the existence of wisdom before the creation?

*(a) She is presented as a person who has been with God since before creation.
(b) Her characteristics: truth, goodness, humility (v 13), justice (v 18, 20). She rewards everyone who seeks after her.
(c) Jesus was always with God, and then entered the world as the New Testament affirms.
(d) She already existed at God's side (v 20-29), accompanied God in all his work of creation (30-31); she has always inspired leaders on earth (14-16), she is more precious than gold (19-21).*

Wisdom in creation

One of the clearest ways that God displays his wisdom is in his creation. If we look back at Proverbs 8:27-31 we can see how wisdom accompanied the Lord in the creation, in ordering heaven and earth and then itself/himself rejoicing in the finished product (look at v31).

Learning Activity 7a (CCC) Read Proverbs 3:19,20

- (a) How can we see this reality in these verses?

The Lord was served by wisdom when he founded the earth. Wisdom in ch 8 speaks to us of Jesus Christ, who was the principal maker of creation. (Col 1:16)

But as with the rest of the Old Testament, the book describes a God who in his wisdom not only creates the world, but also through his wisdom orchestrates his macroscopic purposes in the microscopic details of individual lives.

Learning Activity 7b (CCC)

- (b) How can we see this in Proverbs 21:1, 16:1,9 and 16:33?

*The Lord moves the heart of the king to accomplish his desires. (21:1)
He directs the steps of men despite the plans that man makes. (16:1, 9)
The Lord directs even the dice that men toss when they ought to consider the decisions which they are making. (16:33)*

Wisdom and the knowledge of good and evil

This wise creative, sustaining and imminent God has also revealed the difference between good and evil. He both conceals (Prov 25:2) and reveals (or speaks) it (2:6). In speaking he has made himself known. That is why the writer of Proverbs can say with confidence what he hates (6:16-19) and to compare this with what he delights in (11:1,20; 12:22; 15:8...)

Wisdom and the true purpose of God in humanity

The Proverbs teach us that human lives that conform to God's wisdom (to his standards of right and wrong) are the only truly fully human lives. This is for three reasons. Firstly, they match up with the way in which the world was made (3:19,20), secondly, these lives match up with wisdom itself/himself, so that the life of wisdom becomes the fulfilled life that we were meant to live (8:31) and thirdly, as we have seen in the verses above, they live under the blessing of God.

The teaching of Proverbs, whether through encouragements or warnings is intended to lead us into a life that matches both our true human nature (made in the image of God before the Fall) and the perfect will of God. Lets examine how this is presented in Proverbs 1:2-7.

Read Proverbs 1:2-7

Learning Activity 8 (CCC)

- (a) What does verse 2 say is God's education programme for us in Proverbs?
- (b) In v3, what does it say this instruction or education programme will achieve?
- (c) In v4 what limitations in Fallen humanity are acknowledged?
- (d) Is this instruction only for the foolish? Explain. (v5,6)
- (e) How does v7 fuse wisdom with the Lord himself?

(a) The program: wisdom and instruction

(b) The result: common sense, justice, equity, righteousness

(c) Fallen man needs to discern and to understand.

(d) They are for all: the young, the wise, the intelligent... All may benefit.

(e) It is necessary to know and respect God before acquiring wisdom.

Proverbs 1:29 connects the wise life with 'the fear of the Lord'. In 2:5 we can see how pursuing wisdom leads to the fear of the Lord and turning from evil (3:7; 8:13; 16:6). But this 'fear of the Lord' is not abject fear. In the Bible almost always fear is presented as a result of the Fall, (see Genesis 3) as a product of sin and a tool of the Devil and something that true believers are delivered from (1 John 4: 17,18). However this 'fear of the Lord' is the kind reverential fear.

Learning Activity 9 (CCC and CCCx) Read 1 Peter 1:17-19

- (a) How does Peter speak this reverential fear of God these verses?
- (b) How might this view of the Lord's wisdom that begins with and is fused to the 'fear of the Lord' be similar to different from the view of the majority amongst whom we live?

(a) The fear of God is a deep respect for who God is and what he has done for us. It is founded on the precious and clear understanding of what Christ has paid to save us from the just wrath of God. It leads to a changed life.

(b) Free response. Beginning of an answer: Many live constantly in fear of the punishment of God. They think that this anguish, and sometimes even terror, will motivate them to avoid evil and to do good.

You will do well to go deeper in this discussion with the group.

While Proverbs gives us a taste of God's wise standards and a kind of 'recipe for success' and prosperity, seen clearly in Proverbs 3:9-12, we find in other parts of the wisdom literature that there is another side to life in God's world, a darker side of discipline and rebuke. Although Proverbs acknowledges this, it does not explore or wrestle with it. But the book of Job does!

To lighten the preparation load of the students, you may give them the choice between doing the activities in the section on Job or the section on Ecclesiastes.

Job: life is hard sometimes

At the very start of Job we are presented with one of life's greatest enigma's; personal suffering that is not explained.

Read Job 1 and 2

Unexplained Suffering

The book of Job gives no explanation of why his property was taken away from him, why his children were taken (1:13-19), why he was deprived of his health and estranged from his wife (2:7-9). Job's 'friends' (2:11-13) came to sympathise and tried to 'explain' his suffering (4:1-25:6), but their explanations, though very reasonable sounding in places, were doomed to failure because they were based on an assessment of Job (see for example 18:5-21) which contradicted the Job that God knew (1:8; 2:3) and the life that Job had lived (31:1-40).

Even though we (unlike Job) are given an insight into the fact that the testing of Job is the result of a contest between God and Satan, we are not told why God allowed this (1:8). It's clear that he didn't have to 'test' Job. This is a big enigma. But this is what life is like! Often we simply don't know why trials or suffering occurs, especially to upright people.

However this is not the only problem. The other problem that Job explores concerns God's nature.

A 'Problem' in the nature of God: all-wise and loving, all-just and all-powerful?

If there was no God, the problem of innocent suffering would not exist. The heart of this problem is the question; 'If God is all wise, loving, just and powerful, then why does he allow the upright or innocent to suffer?' After the initial problem is presented (chapters 1 and 2), and Job's friends challenge his protests of innocence and seek to give his advise in an extended dialogue with Job (up to chapter 37) finally in ch38 the Lord begins to speak.

Take the time to look at some of the arguments that Job makes about his own plight (suffering), the nature of God (his justice, goodness and power) and mankind's nature. Then take some time to look at the arguments that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar make. The references below will help you find the arguments.

| | | | |
|-------|----------------|--------|-------------|
| Ch3 | Job's speaks | | |
| Ch4,5 | Eliphaz speaks | Ch6,7 | Job replies |
| Ch8 | Bildad speaks | Ch9,10 | Job replies |

| | | | |
|---------|---|---------|--------------|
| Ch11 | Zophar speaks | Ch12-14 | Job replies |
| Ch15 | Eliphaz speaks 2 | Ch16,17 | Job replies |
| Ch18 | Bildad speaks 2 | Ch19 | Job replies |
| Ch20 | Zophar speaks 2 | Ch21 | Job replies |
| Ch22 | Eliphaz speaks 3 | Ch23,24 | Job replies |
| Ch25 | Bildad speaks 3 | Ch26 | Job replies |
| Ch27 | Job's defence 1 | Ch28 | About wisdom |
| Ch29-31 | Job's defence 2 | | |
| Ch32-37 | Elihu speaks | | |
| Ch38-41 | God speaks – with a few segments from Job | | |
| Ch42 | Job's replies to God + epilogue | | |

Learning Activity 10 CCC and CCCx

With your learning group and/or mentor, divide up the characters in Job. Using the passages mentioned above and depending on you character do activity (a) or (b). Then discuss (c) together.

(a) Chose Job and examine his arguments. In one or two sentences (or verbally in 2 or 3 minutes) try to summarise what Job's main argument is about his plight (why he is suffering), the nature of God (his justice, goodness and power) and mankind's nature.

Or

(b) Choses one of Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar or Elihu and examine their arguments. In one or two sentences (or verbally in 2 or 3 minutes) try to summarise what their main argument is about Job's plight (why he is suffering), the nature of God (his justice, goodness and power) and mankind's nature.

(c) With your learning group and/or mentor discuss what similarities and/or differences between any of these arguments above (about why people suffer, about the nature of God - his justice, goodness and power - and about mankind's nature) and those made by the majority religious people in our part of the world.

Read Job 38-41:34 together.

(d) What baffling questions do chapters 38-39:30 raise? Why do you think they are raised?

In 40:2,8 God acknowledges that Job has questioned God's justice and then ironically invites Job to try to take on the moral government of the world (see 40:9-14). Of course Job can not.

(e) Why do you think God asks Job to consider this?

(a) Job deplores the severe punishment that God allows him to suffer under despite the fact that he tried to honor him in all things in his life. He maintains his innocence (not his perfection) against the suspicions of his friends and he tries to plead his case before God.

(b) The friends of Job encourage him to acknowledge his mistakes and to learn the lessons of his errors so that God will restore him soon. (Because God is just and does not strike without cause.) We see this from the first discourse of Eliphaz (4:17, 5:17-18, 27) through the long final exposition of young Elihu, exasperated by the inability of the elders to convince Job of his fault. (32:1-5)

(c) Free response. The point of view of Job's friends is representative of that of many religious people. God tests all men and repays them as a result.

(d) God asks Job if he is able to manage creation or to fathom all mysteries. Thus God affirms his right to decide himself how to use his creatures without needing to give account to men.

(e) Job should leave to God what only he can understand.

Five markers are visible throughout Job that help us understand why God has given us this book.

- 1) God is absolutely sovereign (in control)
- 2) The Devil is real and has real power (albeit under the sovereignty of God)
- 3) Job is a truly upright and righteous man (though he is *not* sinless yet his suffering is not on account of any particular sin)
- 4) The Lord God gives terrible permissions (allows terrible things to happen to upright people)
- 5) God calls the true believer respond to the above in faith and resolute devotion

Learning Activity 11 (CCC)

How can we see that this fifth point seems to be where Job eventually arrives in the book? Look especially at Job 40:3-5 and 42:1-6.

Job acknowledges his smallness and his silence. (ch 40)

He acknowledges the power of God and his own ignorance. (ch 42)

He does not receive any explanations, but he has met God. That is enough for him.

We can also see this call to confidence and deep devotion in other passages of Scripture, like Ps 23 and Habakkuk ch 3.

Like a king who suffers unjustly

Some of Job's comments make us think of another righteous person who suffered without having done evil.

Read Job ch 29.

Learning Activity 12 (CCC)

(a) What statements in Job's defense make us think of the Messiah, the Christ? Give 3 or 4 examples.

(b) How do the life and sufferings of the Messiah King help us to understand and accept suffering in our lives?

(a) Almost all the chapter may be cited for Jesus, especially v 11-17 and 21-25. At verse 25 he is like a “king” and a “counselor”. Verses 1-6 speak sometimes of his glory in heaven, and sometimes of his ministry with the disciples on the earth.

(b) If the Christ has suffered for us, we ourselves must also be ready to accept suffering for him. We can trust him that our sufferings will not be in vain.

While we know that Job reaches a level of peace in the storm, of renewed trust in God’s purpose in the pain, we must remember that the book started with the evil suffering (with permission from God) of a genuinely upright and good man. At the start of the story the Devil’s challenge to God is that Job only fears God because his life is full of material blessings. Somewhat at odds with the ‘cause and effect’ blessings that we saw earlier in Proverbs 3:9-12 the book of Job asks the question, ‘will we still trust the Lord when those blessings are taken away?’ The life of faith that we see in Job calls us to trust in the all-wise, all-sovereign, all-just Lord, even in the face of unexplained suffering.

But crucially the book also gives us a very clear glimpse of how a transcendent God (who is at the same time all-wise and loving, all-just and all-powerful) enables believers to find peace in the midst of the pain, suffering and confusion that all of us face... of how this gap between a transcendent God and the daily battles (the pain, suffering and toil) of humanity is bridged. At the heart of this is:

God’s word

God presence and

The Redeemer

By the end of the book in ch42, Job confesses his ignorance of God’s greater purpose and rejoices that although he had heard the Lord speak to him – ‘*My ears had heard of you*’ now he has seen the Lord – ‘*now my eyes have seen you*’. (42:5) Job knows that although his suffering was not caused by his sin, he is still not worthy or deserving of God’s richest blessings – his very presence with Job. Back in ch19 we see him crying out for and trusting in ‘his redeemer’ and trusting that through his redeemer he would see God with his ‘own eyes’.

*‘I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him
with my own eyes-I and not another.
How my heart yearns within me! (19:25-27)*

Learning Activity 13 (CCCx and CSM)

Earlier in the lesson we discussed the difference between knowing things about God and actually knowing him. We also discussed the problems that people in our part of the world have with the idea of ‘knowing God’, with having a relationship with God.

- (a) Has Job's story, his struggles with understanding the nature and purpose of God in his suffering and the reality of God's word, God's presence and the Redeemer, helped you to trust God in the face of unexplained suffering? If so, how?
- (b) How might Job's story, his struggles with understanding the nature and purpose of God in his suffering and the reality of God's word, God's presence and the Redeemer, help you to communicate with friends and family in our part of the world who don't know God?

Free (and important) responses

Explore these answers in the group or encourage them to discuss them with their facilitators.

He has heard the words of God, but now he enjoys the presence of God and with the eyes of faith he 'sees' God. The book of Job doesn't tell us how this redemption is achieved, but the rest of the Bible's story does indeed tell us!

Ecclesiastes: life doesn't always make sense

'Meaningless! Meaningless!... Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.' Wow! What a way to start your book! The third major 'wisdom' book of the Bible, can be troubling and confusing for many, especially if they don't make it to the end. Ecclesiastes presents a very dark and depressing view of life. This is a book for the pessimists or some might say the realists amongst us.

Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes, sets out to examine life through the lens of wisdom (1:3) and he clearly knew what he was talking about (1:16). He tells us from the outset that he is someone who has experienced life to the full.

Learning Activity 14 (CCCx and CSM) Read Ecclesiastes 2

With your learning group and/or mentor look at some early examples of this in chapter 2.

- (a) How has he experienced the pleasure and the fun of life? (see 2:1-2)
- (b) Through what lens does he examine this pleasure and fun?
- (c) What experience has he had as a property developer? (see 2:4),
- (d) ...What about as an owner of many servants? (see 2:7),
- (e) ...What about as a business man? (see 2:8)
- (f) Through the lens of wisdom, after all his reflections what does he conclude?

(a) He says that he has tried pleasure.

(b) He found it ineffective.

(c) He built houses and huge businesses.

(d) He had everything, by purchase or by inheritance, on his property.

(e) He amassed a great deal of gold and many concubines.

(f) All this was nothing but vapor, in vain. (v11)

What we see in the opening two chapters of Ecclesiastes can be seen throughout all twelve chapters of the book and it's a depressing read.

Learning Activity 15a (CCC)

With your learning group and/or mentor take some time to look at what the book says about:

- (i) work (2:17-18)
- (ii) mortality (3:19)
- (iii) those who mourn, evil and life (4:1)
- (iv) virtue (4:13-16)
- (v) wealth (6:1-2)
- (vi) purpose of life (4:2-3 and 7:13)

In all these texts, life seems vain and without solid, long-lasting reward.

(i) He hated everything he had done. He will leave it all for someone else.

(ii) Man shares the same end as that of the beasts: death. He will not be worth more than they.

(iii) The oppressed cry without consolation; in another situation the luckiest are the dead, or better yet, those who were never born.

(iv) One does not have enough time to enjoy his wealth, because death puts an end to all that.

However there are another set of truths that run parallel to these throughout the book.

Learning Activity 15b (CCC)

Now take a look at some of these references:

What does Ecclesiastes say about?

- (i) the presence of God and satisfaction (2:24,25)
- (ii) purpose in life (3:1-8)
- (iii) beauty (3:11)
- (iv) the significance of testing (3:18)
- (v) God's presence (5:1)
- (vi) joy in pain (9:1,2, 9.10)
- (vii) judgment (11:9; 12:14)
- (viii) God's revelation (12:11-13)

These passages affirm that there is a meaning to life and a reward for work and good deeds when one puts God in his rightful place.

Ex: (i) Without God, one may not enjoy life: "Who can eat without me?" (v25)

The book of Ecclesiastes seems to go from one extreme to the other. One minute Solomon is deeply pessimistic about life, to the point where life doesn't seem to be worth living and the next life seems to be full of pleasure and fulfilment. But isn't this what life is like? Perhaps we might say, this isn't how the life of a believer *should* be. But the Bible speaks to the truth of how life is!

Some have said that Ecclesiastes is an attempt to give a vision of what life would look like without God. But this is isn't the point of the book! However, it is true that the book

constantly cries out that 'life is meaningless' (see 1:2 and 12:8). The phrase 'life is meaningless' might better be translated, 'life just doesn't add up' or 'make sense'. The circular pattern of history (1:4) and nature (1:5-7) doesn't seem to be heading anywhere... what does it all 'add up to'?

While, as we have seen, the book of Job addresses the problem of suffering, the book of Ecclesiastes raises the question of life itself! Like Job, the book of Ecclesiastes doesn't reduce the 'problem' of life to a single logical system in which all of life's problems are solved. However it most definitely does provide a recipe for living! It brings us face to face with the reality of our lives. The problems, the groaning pain as well as the joys and pleasures. All of them are laid before us with apparently no explanation – but as we face them and move towards the end of the book Ecclesiastes invites us to examine them through a unique window – the window of 'God, revelation and faith'. By the end of the book we are invited to enter the future (with all its uncertainties, pain and joy) under God, in the light of the truth of revelation and along the path of trust and faith. So, the problems do not disappear but we come to them, living amongst them, bearing the burdens as well as rejoicing in the joys with new eyes, new vision and a new way of walking – with God rather than without him. We live by faith in a messy world that 'doesn't add up'.

One writer explains the purpose of Ecclesiastes this way. He says the book

"...serves as a response to cynical wisdom; it drives its readers to look further because the answers that the "Teacher" of Ecclesiastes gives are so discouraging..."

Learning Activity 16 (CCC)

How can we see this in the final verses of the book? Look at Ecclesiastes 12:13.

This verse exhorts us to fear God and to obey his commandments. Life without God is not worth the pain of experience.

The advice of Ecclesiastes 12:13 (keep God's commandments) points us away from Ecclesiastes to the rest of Scripture, especially the Pentateuch where these commandments are found. Indeed, like most of the wisdom literature of the Bible, it points us to Christ. So let's finish by looking at this...

Wisdom leads to Christ

Though the pursuit of wisdom often leads the searcher to the meaninglessness and futility of life – there are no easy answers to grief and pain – the Bible's narrative leads us to a person in whom the fulfilment and full expression of God's wisdom can be found, that is Jesus Christ.

"He is the reason you have a relationship with Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." I Corinthians 1:30

Depending on the time you have left and how the students have done their homework, you can back up this point with learning activity 18. If not, you can summarize it to them to back up the importance of being united with Christ and to put into practice the word of God.

Learning Activity 17 (MMC)

You hear all about the team in Gaza and the death of Hakim. You know that Sara (Hakim's widow) already overwhelmed by grief, is struggling to make sense of how to understand these sad events in her life. You also hear that she is confused with the different ways that Mustapha, Seif El-Din and Yacub are interpreting and applying different parts of Old Testament wisdom literature.

Write Sara a pastoral letter to encourage her in this time of grief. Try to gently address (correct) some of the ways that Mustapha, Seif El-Din and Yacub have used Old Testament wisdom literature in this situation. Use parts of Proverbs, Job and/or Ecclesiastes to help her in this time, explaining how they point to the ultimate source of wisdom, comfort and consolation in the full expression of God's wisdom, which is found in Jesus Christ.

Going Deeper

Learning Activity 18 (CCCx)

Four questions about wisdom that the New Testament answers:

With you learning group and/or mentor read the passages below and answer the question:

Read I Cor 1:18-31; 2:1-16

(a) Firstly, *what* is the final source of this wisdom?

Re-read I Cor 1:18-31; 2:1-16 and John 1:1-5, 14-18

(b) Secondly, *who* will enable us to fully know this wisdom?

Read 2 Tim 3:15 and re-read I Cor 1:18-31; 2:1-16

(c) Thirdly, *how* can we be freed to know this wisdom?

Read 1 Cor 4:1-9; 4:16-20

(d) Fourthly, *where* will the world be able to clearly see this wisdom?

(a) The source of true wisdom is in God alone.

(b) Jesus Christ reveals to us this wisdom.

(c) The holy scriptures, the revelation of God to man.

(d) The world can see it through our actions, depending on how much we put into practice God's instructions.