

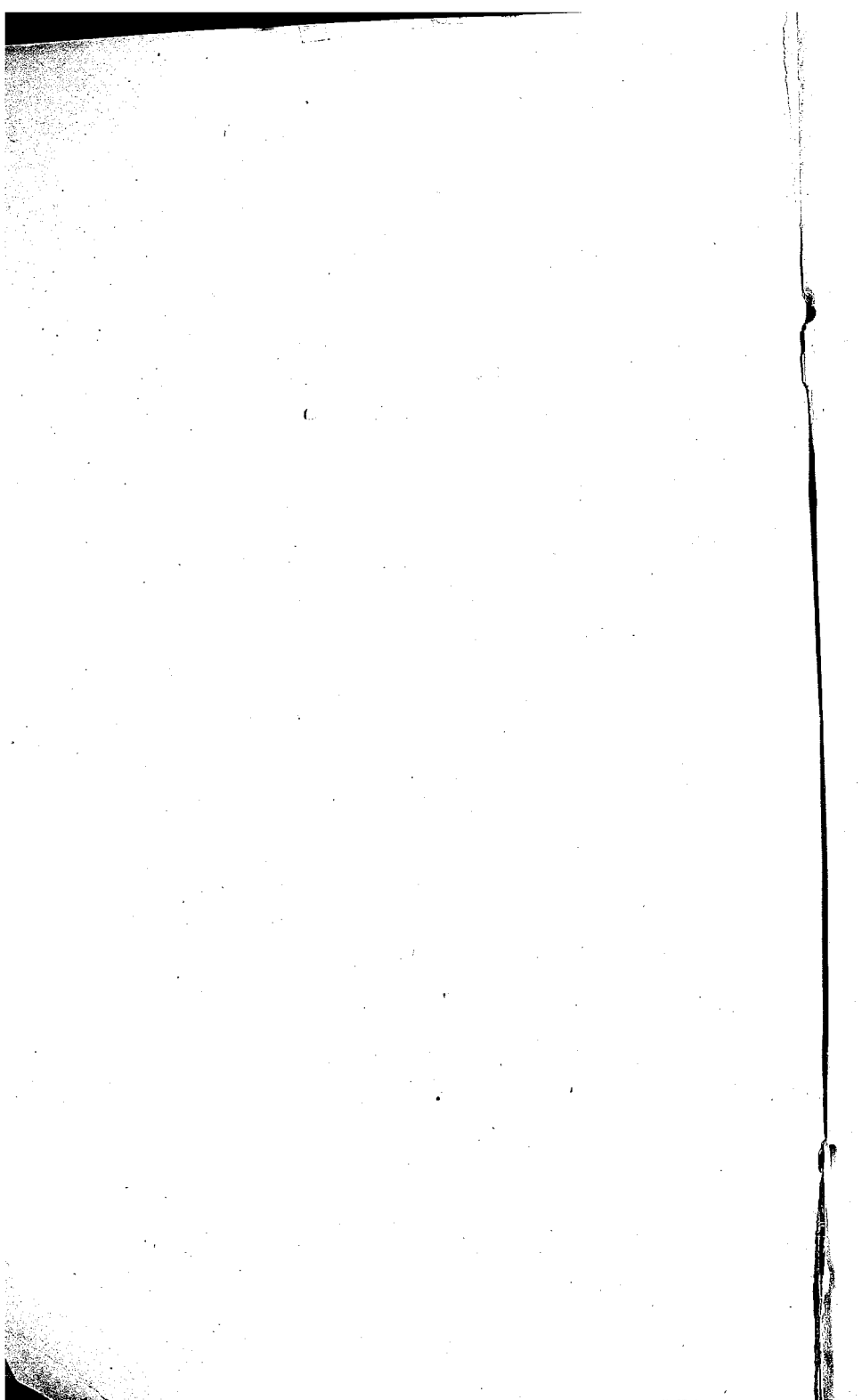
THE RAYS OF HOPE

(An Introduction to the Old Testament)

Rev. Dr. Kallarakkal Abraham George

DIVYA BODHANAM SERIES
GROWING IN THE WISDOM OF GOD

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DIVYABODHANAM SERIES: No. 3

THE RAYS OF HOPE

(An Introduction to the Old Testament)

Rev. D r. KALLARAKKAL ABRAHAM GEORGE

(Professor, Orthodox Seminary)



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February, 1987

THE RAYS OF HOPE

(An Introduction to the Old Testament)

A translation of the Malayalam Book "Prathyasa Kiranangal"

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FOREWORD

Him we declare to you, teaching every person in all wisdom, so that we may present every human person perfect and mature in Christ. St. Paul. Colossians 1:28.

Trusting in the grace of God, we launch this English series : "Divyabodhanam-Growing in the Wisdom of God." This English adaptation of the Divyabodhanam series in Malayalam is meant for our lay people outside Kerala who are unable to use the Malayalam series.

This first series can only be on an experimental level. After the books have been used for some time, we hope to revise them in the light of users' comments. So please write to us quite frankly about how the series can be improved.

In our Orthodox tradition, we give only secondary importance to intellectual teaching. The most important thing is to participate regularly in the sacramental life of the Church, in worship and prayer. We grow in divine Wisdom as we separate ourselves from evil and grow more God-like.

The sacramental mysteries of the Church, like Baptism, Mooron (Holy Chrism) and Holy Qurbana are the means by which Christ wants us to grow in Him. Equally important is our life of selfless love and service to our fellow human beings. This study series can help you to grow closer to Christ, through worship prayer and the sacramental Mysteries and through a life of loving and compassionate service.

As you prayerfully study these lessons, and thereby know Christ more deeply, the Holy Spirit of God will guide you into all truth and into the great mystery of God's love and wisdom.

May the blessing of God abide upon you as you embark on these studies and continue to grow in Divine Wisdom. May your life become a light amidst the darkness of evil, illuminated by the life-giving light of Christ.

New Delhi, 3. 7. 86.
Feast of St. Thomas.

Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios
President, Divyabodhanam

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We are immensely grateful to the Almighty God who enabled us to bring out this English version of "Divyabodhanam - Growing in the wisdom of God" Series. We put all our trust in Him alone, who provides His unceasing mercies to this programme.

We record our homage to H. H. Baselius Mar Thoma Mathews I, the Catholicos of the East who has been always gracious to us with whole-hearted encouragements for this programme. We cannot forget the leadership given by our President Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios, Principal, Orthodox Seminary, Kottayam, who is mainly responsible for all the financial commitments to publish these books in this series.

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For Divyabodhanam Central Committee

Feast of 'Epiphany'
January, 6th, 1987

Fr. C. C. Cherian
(Co-ordinator and Registrar)

INTRODUCTION

Most modern readers of the Bible do not pay serious attention to the Old Testament. This attitude reminds one of the Old Chinese proverb that the reading of the Old Testament is very much like eating crab: The outer shell of which is deceptively big and the actual edible content so small, and therefore not worth the time and energy spent.

The 20th century reader finds it hard to fully comprehend the many ideas and expressions which one comes across in the Old Testament. This is because we are quite unfamiliar with the historical background, customs, traditions, values, philosophy of life and other salient characteristics of the Israelite society of the Old Testament period. A study of these factors is therefore essential for understanding the Old Testament.

We may perhaps wonder why the Old Testament should be used as a prelude to the study of the great and divine design for salvation found in the New Testament. Why can't we use a sacred text other than the Old Testament? For example, if Indians find the Jewish culture, traditions, values, philosophy of life etc. found in the Old Testament, alien, why can't we use Sacred Texts of our country which are naturally in tune with Indian values, culture and traditions? To answer such questions, we have to study in detail, the thought behind the Old Testament and the origin and formation of the different books in the Old Testament to establish their importance with respect to the Church and worship especially in Indian context.

I submit this book on the Old Testament with the hope that this humble endeavour will help in the study of the great and glorious redemptive work of God as revealed in the Old Testament, and fulfilled in the fullness of time to which the New Testament bears witness.

Kottayam
15 - 1 - 1987.

Dr. K. A. George

CONTENTS

Foreward	
Acknowledgements	
Introduction	

UNIT 1

Lesson

1. The relevance of the study of the Old Testament	9
2. The division and contents of the Old Testament	13
3. The Old Testament canon	18
4. The text of the Old Testament and the translations	21
5. The Geography of Palestine	25
6. The Old Testament and archaeological studies	29

UNIT II

Lesson

1. The Pentateuch	33
2. The study of the Pentateuch in the 20th Century	35
3. The origin and growth of the Pentateuch	38
4. The Hebrew history	41
5. The History of Deuteronomy	44
6. The History of the Chronicles	47

UNIT III

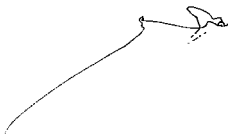
Lesson

1. The great religion and culture	50
2. The chief division in the Jewish....	53
3. The Dead Sea Scrolls	57
4. Apocrypha	60
5. The Apocalyptic Books	65
6. The Importance of the Apocalyptic Literature	68

UNIT IV

Lesson

- | | |
|---|----|
| 1. The Old Testament and the study of other religious Texts | 71 |
| 2. The Old Testament and Christian Worship | 74 |
| 3. The Old Testament and the ethics | 77 |
| 4. The Old Testament and Theology | 80 |
| 5. The Old Testament and Interpretation | 83 |
| 6. The Old Testament and the Indian Scene | 86 |



UNIT 1

LESSON 1

THE RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Fulfilment of the prophecies

The Old Testament -the scripture of our Lord

Comparative study of the two Testaments

*The Old Testament background and the Theological concepts
in the New Testament*

*Certain questions in the Old Testament and their answers in
the New Testament*

The Old Testament and History

The glorification of moral values

The inseparable link between the two Testaments

When we examine the central theme of the Old Testament, we find that God creates man as the very crown of creation with the intense desire to dwell in eternal friendship and companionship with him. Even though man, after some time, sins and moves away from His love, God in His kindness and compassion takes the initiative to bring man back into grace and love. The Old Testament is, from beginning to end, the descriptive narration of this great love that goes in search of the fallen man and continues to work till he is brought back. In other words, the gist of the Old Testament is the covenant of love which God extends to man, and in order to work out the realisation of this covenant, God uses as instruments, a whole people known as the Israelites, choosing especially leaders of commitment from among them, known as Fathers, Prophets and Wisemen.

a. Fulfilment of the prophecies

The study of the Old Testament is most rewarding especially because it helps us to see that the Incarnation itself, along with the many incidents in the life of Jesus, was the fulfilment of the solemn prophetic pronouncements in the books of the Old Testament.

b. The Old Testament -Scripture of our Lord

The Scripture used by our Lord Jesus consisted chiefly of the Books of Moses, the Books of the Prophets and the Psalms. He quotes three verses from them in critical moments. For the early Christians, too the Old Testament was the chief source of Scripture. The study of the Old Testament stood them in good stead, especially with respect to the form of worship and the growth and enrichment of their spirituality.

c. Comparative study of the two Testaments

Such a study enables us to grasp the origin and formation of theological and moral concepts in the Bible. e. g. a comparison throws light on understanding the significance of parables in the Old and the New Testaments such as the "Old man" and the "new man"; "the Old Law" and the "new law"; 'deliverance from political supremacy of enemies and 'deliverance from the yoke of satan'.

d. The Old Testament throws light upon the theological concepts in the New Testament

We see that a number of theological concepts in the New Testament evolve from their parallels in the Old Testament, modified over the years, transformed and charged with rich meanings. These concepts in the New Testament cannot be fully understood, and appreciated without a glimpse of their background in the Old Testament. e. g. in order to grasp fully the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the superb perfection of the sacrifice on the cross, we have to study Hebraic sacrifices and their importance described in the book of Leviticus. Other examples found in the New Testament are the Messiah, salvation, the Kingdom of God, etc.

e. Certain questions posed in the Old Testament are answered in the New Testament

Certain problems and doubts perplexed and puzzled the God-fearing in the Old Testament and they were not satisfactorily answered. e. g. questions like - Why does the wicked prosper? Why does the God of justice allow evil to triumph in the world? Why does the innocent and the blameless fall victim to unmerited suffering? Why do the righteous fall prey to violence and injustice? We grope in the Old Testament for answers to such questions. But such problems confronting man are clearly solved in the life of Jesus, in His earthly ministry, on the cross and in the Resurrection. Therefore we can see that the Old Testament and the New Testament complement each other.

f. The Old Testament and History

The Old Testament writers view the world of their time, and the many events that occurred in that period through a particular angle. This inspires the readers to assess and evaluate the world and the different historical events in a new light today. The Old Testament historians reckon history, not as the coming together of casual events but as divinely designed chain of incidents. There is the ever present working of destructive elements which conspire to upset God's plan. Nevertheless, God continues his work of transforming creation and sanctifying the whole world. The different series of events in history are important in this respect and they prove that God's strength is unlimited. This view of history helps us to see that God is close to us in love yesterday, today and for ever.

g. The glorification of moral values

Many Jews who were groping in despair and confusion, as well as Gentiles (Greeks and heathens) were attracted to the monotheistic Jewish faith and the study of the Jewish Scriptures mainly because of the celebration of moral values in the Old Testament. Similarly Martyrs of the early church who sacrificed their lives to fight an uncompromising battle with evil and who attracted many contemporaries received their inspiration from the study and meditation of the Old Testament Scriptures. Even today after thousands of years, the Old Testament still offers divine inspiration to so many lives.

h. The inseparable link between the two Testaments

It is the same God who speaks through both of them and hence the two Testaments are inseparable. St. Augustine says, "The New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament" In the New Testament the Old Testament becomes illuminated."

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the need for the study of the Old Testament.
2. Find out questions from the Old Testament which are in the New Testament.
3. What is the importance given by the Church to the Old Testament?

LESSON 2

THE DIVISION AND CONTENTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

a. Torah - (Law)

1. *Titles to each book*
2. *the contents of the books*

b. Nebi'im (Prophets)

1. *Former prophets*
2. *Later prophets*
3. *The role of the prophets*

c. Ketubim (Writings)

1. *The order in the English - Malayalam translations*
2. *The division of verses, chapters etc.*

The Hebrew Scripture consists of three important sections as shown in the chart below:

THE HEBREW OLD TESTAMENT

A. TORAH (Law) 1. Genesis, 2. Exodus, 3. Leviticus, 4. Numbers... 5. Deuteronomy.

B. NEBI'IM (Prophets)

1. Former Prophets: 1. Joshua, 2. Judges, 3. Samuel I & II, 4. Kings I & II.

2. Later Prophets:

a. Major Prophets: 1. Isaiah, 2. Jeremiah, 3. Ezekiel

b. Minor Prophets: (The book of the 12) 1. Hosea, 2. Joel, 3. Amos, 4. Obediah, 5. Jonah, 6. Micah, 7. Nahum,

8. Habakuk, 9. Zephaniah, 10. Haggai, 11. Zechariah,

12. Malachi.

C. KETUBIM (Writings)

1. Psalms, 2. Job, 3. Proverbs, 4. Ruth, 5. Song of Solomon,
6. Ecclesiastes, 7. Lamentations, 8. Esther 9. Daniel, 10. Ezrah,
11. Nehemiah, 12. Chronicles I, 13. Chronicles II

A. TORAH (LAW)

The five books of Moses known otherwise as **The Pentateuch** from 'Penta' - five and 'teuchos' - Scrolls are the books of the 'law' and they are given in the following order in the Hebrew Scripture and in the translations.

The Pentateuch	English translation
(meaning)	
1. Bereshith (In the beginning)	— Genesis
2. We Ele Shermoth (These are the names)	— Exodus
3. Wayira (He called again)	— Leviticus
4. Bemidbar (In the desert)	— Numbers
5. Elleh Haddebarim (These are the words)	— Deuteronomy.

1. **Titles to each books:** As can be seen above, in the Hebrew text of The Torah, the names of books are given according to the first-words in the first chapter of each of them.

But the titles used in the English and Malayalam translations are those of these Greek and Latin counterparts where the titles were based on the contents in each of the books.

The contents of the books

1. **Genesis :** We read in Genesis about the creation of the world, of man the crown of creation, of sin, fall from virtues, the selection of the Isralites and the tribe history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob etc. The first 11 chapters refer to things before the times of recorded history, while the remaining chapters contain many historical references in the life of Israel as a people.

2. **Exodus :** The narration of the history that starts from the 12th chapter of Genesis runs into the next book titled Exodus. The

first 15 chapters narrate the trials of the Israelite slaves in Egypt and their final escape by God's providence. Chapters 16-40 deal with God's visitations, the Sinai covenant, the fall of the Israelites into sin, the building of the Tabernacle etc.

3. Levites : This book deals with different types of sacrifices and the corresponding rules and regulations for their conduct. Because the priests came from the tribe of Levi and because these sacrifices were offered by the priests, this book came to be titled Leviticus.

4. Numbers : This book speaks about the strength of the Israelites in numbers. It also deals with the narration of the journey to Canaan.

5. Deuteronomy : In the first Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, known as the septuagint, book was misunderstood as 'Law given a second time' and hence this title meaning 'Second law'. In this book we learn about the commandments from God as well as the code of laws from Moses to the people. It also includes the farewell speech of Moses, the "Song of Moses" and details regarding his death.

B. NEBIM (Prophets) This section is subdivided into two **Former Prophets and Later Prophets:**

I. FORMER PROPHETS

These are historical books found in the following order - Joshua, Judges, 2 books of Samuel and 2 books of Kings.

1. Joshua : After Moses, Joshua led the Israelites. This book deals with the conquest and allotment of the promised Land as well as with the formation of the tribes and the Covenant instituted at Shechem under the leadership of Joshua.

2. Judges : This book tells us the story of the Israelites from the death of Joshua to the birth of Samuel, during which time they sinned repeatedly, incurring God's wrath and punishments. But God in His great compassion raised up from among them deliverers to guide and "judge" them when the people repented, hence this title.

3. The First Book of Samuel : This book begins with the birth of Samuel, the last of the Judges, and ends with the death of Saul, the first of the great Kings. We read hard through Samuel, Kingship was established in Israel which was then united. We also learn that Saul was rejected in favour of David because of his disobedience to Samuel's interpretation of God's will.

4. The Second Book of Samuel : This book speaks about David's praiseworthy efforts for the integration of the different tribes that made up Israel, his services in Hebron and his efforts to build up Jerusalem as the centre of Yahweh worship as well as of political administration.

5. The First Book of Kings : This narrates the story of David's test days the glorious reign of his son, Solomon, construction of the Temple of Jerusalem, the quarrels among the tribes and the subsequent division of the nation into two, viz. Israel in the north and Judea in the South; The rule of King Ahab and doing and praiseworthy role of Elijah to safeguard the fear of God in the Northern Kingdom.

6. The Second book of Kings : This completes the story of the work of Elijah, narrates the life and work of the prophet Elisha, includes the revolution of Jehu, the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, the just and righteous rule of King Hezekiah, the reformation of Josiah and finally the captivity of Judah and the ruin of Jerusalem that culminated in the Babylonian Exile of 587 BC.

II. LATTER PROPHETS: Here we find the three great or Major Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel as well as the 12 Minor Prophets from Hosea to Malakhi.

3. The role of the prophets : The prophets were zealous men of God, burning with the spirit of God. They moved about, professing God's Word, foretelling things to come in the near and distant future, and explaining the meaning of contemporary events to the people.

c. KETUBIM

The order of the books in the translations : Both the septuagint (the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew old Testament) and the Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Old Testament) did not

copy as such, the order of the **writings** in the original Hebrew Old Testament. The English and the Malayalam translations of the Bible follow the order given in the Septuagint and the Vulgate.

The Division into Chapters and Verses : When our Lord Jesus quotes from the Scriptures, He only mentions the names of the books, for example the Law of Moses or the Books of the Prophets or the Psalms. The division into chapters was done in A. D. 1330 and the division into verses a century prior to that.

QUESTIONS

1. Which are the main divisions in the Hebrew Canon of Scriptures? Name the different books in each section.
2. How does the order of books in the English-Malayalam versions differ from that of the Hebrew Canon? Why is this so?
3. What is the insight we draw from Luke 24:27 about the Old Testament books?

LESSON 3

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The meaning and need of the Canon

The recognition of the Canon

The Law obtained during the reign of King Josiah

The Law brought by Ezra after exile

The Samaritan Pentateuch

The evidence of the septuagint

The studies of Ben Sira

The witness of the New Testament

The Council of Jamnia

The distinguishing features of the septuagint

a. The meaning and need of the Canon

The word 'canon' means measuring rod. The collection of books which were accepted as the basis of faith by the Jews, and which were recognized by the Christian Churches is known as the Old Testament canon. When Apocalyptic books gained much popularity just before Christ and in the first century A. D., the real need was felt to distinguish and mark out those specific books which were to be included in the Holy Scriptures. The Christians started using the Septuagint which contained books not included in the Hebrew-Scriptures. So the Jews felt the need to finalise the books to be included in the Hebrew canon of Scriptures. They had to decide upon the relative importance and value of every book.

b. The Recognition of the Canon

Scholars believe that the three major sections of the Old Testament were included in it at three different stages. The first among

them to get recognition was the Torah and the Pentateuch, 5 books believed to be written by Moses.

c. The Law obtained during the reign of King Josiah

During the reign of Josiah, when the Temple of Jerusalem was being rebuilt, Hilkiah the High Priest, came across a book of the law. 'Shaphan, the scribe read it to the King. In the light of its guidance a rite for purification was performed. The scholars of the Old Testament believe that the nucleus of the book was the same as the code of laws described in chapter 12-26 of Deuteronomy.

d. The Law brought by Ezra after the exile

When Ezra came to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, he brought with him the book of God's law. We may guess from the books Ezra and Nehemiah that in their life time, the compilation of the Torah as we see it today was almost complete.

e. The Pentateuch of the Samaritans

After the Babylonian captivity, there began a dispute between the Samaritans and the Israelites about the rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem. When the Samaritans offered their help, the Israelites mocked them and refused the offer of help, saying that the Samaritans were a racially mixed group and therefore not a pure tribe. The enraged Samaritans decided to hinder the rebuilding but in vain. Defeated, they built a similar temple for worship upon mount Gerizim. As for the canon, they accepted only the Torah as their Scripture. Hence it is clear that at the time of the discord between the Samaritans and the Israelites, the Torah was the only recorded canonical scripture. Scholars date it back to the 5th century B. C.

f. The evidence of the Septuagint

In the 3rd century BC, for the sake of the Jews who left Palestine for good and settled in Alexandria, the Torah was translated into Greek. Later, Greek translation of the Books of the Prophets and the Writings were added to it, and thus the septuagint was compiled.

g. The studies of Ben Sira

The grandson of Ben Sira has mentioned in 132 B. C. that his grandfather used to spend time, studying the Torah, the Prophets and the other books. Therefore we conclude that by the time of Ben Sira (190 B. C.) all the three major sections of the Old Testament has attained relative acceptance.

h. The witness of the New Testament

Because Jesus quoted from the Pentateuch, the prophets and the Psalms, we can conclude that by the time of Jesus these three sections had attained a fixed and rigid form.

i. The Council of Jamnia

In A. D. 90, a group of Rabbis under the leadership of Johanneu Ben Zakkai met in Jamnia, 12 miles south of Jaffa, to decide upon the final selection of the books to be included in their canon; and accordingly they arrived at an agreement.

j. The distinguishing feature of the Septuagint

There are 15 books more, in addition to the 39 books from Genesis to Malachi, in the Septuagint. Those are known as the Tobit-Maccabees group of books. The early Christians preferred the Septuagint to the Hebrew canon and often quoted from them to prove that the Lord Jesus was the true Messiah.

QUESTION

1. Define the Canon.
2. Explain the need for the canon.
3. Trace the different stages in the formation of the canon.
4. What is the importance of the Jamnia Council?
5. What are the differences between the Hebrew Old Testament and the septuagint?

LESSON 4

THE TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE TRANSLATIONS

The Hebrew Language

The Hebrew Old Testament and the manuscripts

The Scribes and the errors

The scribes and the differences in the text

The material used for writing

Chief translations

1. *The Septuagint*
2. *The Peshitta*
3. *The Peshitta and the Hebrew Bible*
4. *The Vulgate*
5. *Targums*

The advantage of the different translations

The translations and the possibilities of changes

Except for a few chapters in Ezra and Daniel, which were written in Aramic, the Old Testament was written almost entirely in Hebrew.

a. The Hebrew Language

The Hebrew Language belongs to the Semitic group of languages. Like Arabic and Syriac, it is written from right to left.

b. The Hebrew Old Testament and the manuscripts

The first Hebrew Bible was printed in A. D. 1488 at Soncino in N. Italy. Till that time it used to be copied by expert scribes, with great care and exactitude, with the full awareness that they were laying their hands on the Holy Scriptures. They even

counted the number of words in each line before copying, as to so achieve perfection. But inspite of all this care and accuracy, errors crept into the scripts.

c. The Scribes and the Errors

Most of these can be called 'human errors.' Either a letter was wrong, or a word duplicated, and occasionally, written once when it should have been twice. Sometimes the manuscript from which the scribe was copying was already wrong, or could not be read clearly, or was misunderstood. There were even times when entire lines were overlooked and left out.

d. The scribes and the differences in the Text

There are examples where the scribes made slight modifications for certain words because they could not make out the word in the original. Also, there are examples where the scribe deliberately brought in alterations simply because the passage in the original was not quite in tune with his way of thinking. Yet, no errors crept in, that altered the basic truth or distorted the message and therefore, we can see the work of the Holy Spirit in this great work.

e. The materials used.

The soft skin of the sheep (Vellum) and the paper-like material (papyrus) made from the reeds on the banks of the Nile were used for copying out the text. For occasions of reading in worship, very soft, superior variety of sheepskin was used.

f. Important translations

1.) **The Septuagint (LXX) :** This is the earliest translation of the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament into Greek. The word Septuaginta is the Latin for 'Seventy.' We learn the following facts about its origin from the letter of Aristes, a Jew living in Alexandria in the 3rd century B. C., written to his brother philocrates. King Ptolemy Philadelphus II came to know about the precious and superb Laws of Jews and he desired to prepare its translation into Greek, to be kept in the Royal Library where Demetrius of Phalerum was in charge. The king himself sent

letters to Eliazer, the High Priest of Jerusalem. Accordingly, 72 Scholars, representing in equal numbers the twelve tribes, were commissioned to do the translation. Each scholar was lodged in a separate room in buildings on the island named pharos near Alexandria. On the completion of their work, it was found that each man's work was in full agreement with the original and it satisfied the King who sent them back with rich rewards.

During those days, the Jews of the diaspora settled in and around Alexandria were much in need of the Greek translation of their Holy Scriptures. At first, only the Pentateuch was translated; the prophets and the writings were added to it later.

2. The Peshitta : This word means 'simple' or 'ordinary.' There are different views with respect to its origin. It is probable that this translation into Syriac was made for the royal family of the Jews dwelling in Adiabene that lies to the north of the river Tigris.

3. The Peshitta compared to the Hebrew Original : It is obvious that there is almost word for word translation hence the Peshitta is considered the nearest to this original. However, some traces of Christian traditions can be found in it, seem so, it is acknowledged as a very ancient translation and is the recognised scripture for the Syrian Church.

4. The Vulgate : In the 4th century A. D. as commissioned by Pope Damasus I (A. D. 366-384) a renowned scholar named Jerome stayed in a church near the birth place of Jesus in Bethlehem and translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Latin. He sought help from Jewish scholars and also compared his with the other available translations. His translation called the 'Vulgate' completed between 390-405 A. D. There were a few other Latin translations extant at that time, but Jerome's was the most systematic and authentic. This translation called the **Vulgate** was declared the official text of the Roman Catholic Church, by the council of Trent in 1546.

5. Targums : This word means a free translation of the Hebrew Old Testament and in these, instead of word-by-word translation,

paraphrases are used. The official Targum of the pentateuch is known as Targum onkelos and that of the prophets Targum Jonathan.

g. The advantages of the translations :

The question may be raised, "of what use are translations when the originals itself are available"? The answers to this question are given below-

1. Understanding the difficult words in the original manuscripts is easy when they are compared with the corresponding words in the early translations.
 2. The early translations help us to find the missing words in the original Hebrew manuscripts.
- h. The translations into different languages and the possibility of changes in the meanings**

It is obvious that none of these could be exact correct, word-by-word translations. In the effort to communicate the meaning, sometimes, a particular passage in the translation may turn out to be annotatory. Moreover, a living language is subject to change and growth over the years. New words are formed, and some words acquire new meanings and importance, in addition to the old meanings. Therefore it is desirable that the translations are studied with respect to the originals so that the difference in meanings curtailed to the barest minimum.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the ancient translations of the Hebrew Old Testament?
2. What are the uses of the different translations?

LESSON 5

THE GEOGRAPHY OF PALESTINE

Sea coast

1. *The plain of Acco*
2. *The plain of Sharon*
3. *The philistine plain*

The mountain area

1. *Galilee*
2. *The Samaria mountain ranges*
3. *Judah*

The Jordan Valley

Transjordan

Because the geographical features exert a great influence upon the inhabitants, a sound knowledge of the geography of the lands described in the Old Testament will help us to better understand the Israelites as a people.

The total area of Palestine of the Old Testament is 9600 sq. km. The Israelites refer to their nation as extending from Dan in the north to Ber Sheba in the south, which covers 240 km. From Acco in the coast to Galilee in the East the width is 45 km. The country is broader towards the south, at the extreme south, the width is, 88km. from Gaza to the Dead Sea. Palestine has four major land divisions.

a. The Sea-coast

Palestine didn't have a good harbour on its mediterranean coast. Phoenicia its neighbour, had two very good ports, Tyre and Sidon. Because Phoenecia was mostly uncultivable land, its people lived by sea, and Acco was under their control. The chief sea trade-centre of Palestine was Gaza, but because it was a little inland it could not compete for trade by the sea.

The coastal land is made up of three plains-

1. **The plain of Acco :** Situated north of mount Carmel.
2. **The plain of Sharon. :** This is situated between mount Carmel and Joppa. Though there was very good supply of water in Sharon, some parts of it were marshy and because of the marshy land and the dark forests of Sharon, its population was very scanty.
3. **The Philistine plain :** At the time of the writing out of the Biblical books, the Philistine plain was the most important and the most developed, of all places in the coastal regions. The land was very good for vegetation because of the abundant supply of water, but it was not under the control of the Israelites and therefore we find them living mostly in the hilly regions of Palestine, further inland.

b. The mountain area

The hills start in South Syria and the ranges spread through Palestine and reach southern Judah where they become smaller. The hilly region has three separate divisions :-

1. **Galilee :** The northern side of Galilee is 400 ft. above sea-level. There are few hills in the south and the climate is moderate. The northern side of Galilee is very good for cultivation. In the south the mountain ranges are separated by the very wide Jezreel valley and a few of the chief cities are built in this valley; eg. Megiddo which controlled all the traffic from Sharon to Jezreel.

The river Kishon, west of Jerzeel, passes through Acco on its way to the Mediterranean. This river used to overflow during the rainy season, viz. March-April.

2. **The Hills of Samaria :** In the north the hills are very high. Among them the Gilboa and Balhazor ranges are very high. Two others which are prominent are Ebal and Gerizim. The position of these two mountains are important to war tactics. The pass between them is of strategic importance because of the north-south flow of the traffic. Later the Samaritans chose Mt. Gerizim to be their centre for worship instead of Jerusalem.

3. Judah : Here the hills are not so high as they are in Samaria and the hills near Jerusalem are only 2500-2600 ft high. The western side of the middle part of these ranges is easily cultivable because of the abundant availability of water. On the eastern side we find the thick woods and forest of Judah which were once thickly populated, and the region called Shephela (low-land) was well-known not just for its vineyards, olive orchards and farms, but also for cities with the famous fortresses like Debir and Librah. The region south of Judah mountains was called the Negeb.

c. The Jordan Valley

The Jordan Valley runs through Syria and divides the Lebanon mountain ranges. It continues to run through Palestine and down to Africa under the name Araba.

The river Jordan starts from the west of mount Hermon. It flows down to Lake Huleb, (where it is still 7 feet above the sea-level). From there it falls headlong into the Sea of Galilee which is 695 feet below Sea-level. This is also known as Lake Gennasseret.

The shores of the sea of Galilee are highly best suited for cultivation and is known as the Gennassereth plains. The northwest of these plains is of moderate climate and is therefore good for fruits, corn and vegetables. Lake Gannassaret is surrounded by mountain ranges. Strong and unpredictable winds from these encircling mountain often produce sudden storms and violent tides in the lake. The eastern side of the lake is a plateau lying at a high altitude. Kinneret, Gennasseret and Tiberius are other names for the sea of Galilee. After its fall into the Sea of Galilee, the river Jordan flows towards the Dead Sea. The water of Jordan is quite clean and calm when it starts from the Sea of Galilee, but as it flows southwards to the Dead Sea, it gets muddy. The valleys north and south of the river Jordan were used for cultivation.

The Dead Sea is 1285 ft lower than the Mediterranean sea. The water cannot flow out and is therefore stagnant. The salt content in its water is 25 percent. During the Old Testament times, it was also known as the Salt Sea or the Araba Sea.

d. Transjordan

The land that lies to the east of river Jordan is divided into 5 sections by four rivers running across it, Yarmuk (which is the northmost), Jabbok, Arnon and Sered. The region that lies to the north of Yarmuk is Bashan. Its soil was extremely rich and fertile for cultivation.

The two sections of land that lie to the north and south of the second river Jabbok are together known as Gilead. This place was thickly populated, chiefly because of the easy availability of the water from Jabbok. Before it falls into Jordan, it traces a semicircular curve around Ammon.

The fourth section is that which lies south to Ammon. This place, is called Moab. Edom is situated south to Moab. Edom's location was important chiefly because it controlled the traffic flowing from the deserts to Gaza, the coast, and Egypt. Secondly, its soil was rich in copper and iron deposits.

We see that the diverse climate and geographical features had a very decisive role in shaping the history of Palestine.

QUESTIONS

1. Draw the map of Palestine and mark the four important land divisions as described in this lesson..
2. Explain how far the geographical features helped in moulding the life-style of the people of Israel in Old Testament times.

LESSON 6

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Agricultural Research

The O. T. archaeologists and limitations

The O. T and Archaeological research

Habrie

The 'Mari' 'Nusi' tablets

The stile of Mer Nephtha

The Ras Shamra

The Moabite Stone

The silom Inscriptions

The significance of archaeological studies

a. Archaeological research

This recently developed discipline deals with the antiquity of things material remains of the past civilizations etc., and scientific approach and analysis are its chief characteristics. The archaeologists, for example, examine the different layers of the soil one by one and study the style, pattern the making of the vessels, pottery, inscriptions on tablets, weapons, ornaments, etc. found there. Such studies throw much light upon the culture, traditions, religion etc. of the people of these times. A new technique known as radio-carbon or carbon-14 is used by the archaeologist, to calculate the age.

b. The Old Testament archaeologists and limitations

The raw materials for the archaeologists to work upon i. e. the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation are very scanty with regard to the dates, names and places. It must also be remembered that the Bible is a divinely inspired holy book, which we believe

was guided by the Holy spirit to divinely inspired men chosen to record their revelations. Therefore the Bible cannot be taken merely as a collection of diverse documents.

The leading archaeologists who focussed attention on the Bible are Flinders Petrie, W. F. Albright, R. Devan and Miller Burrows. Besides these, various international organizations, the research wings from different nations, and many interested research scholars are conducting archaeological studies in and around Palestine.

c. The Old Testament and archaeological research

1. **Habiru** : The documents known as "Tel El Amarna" refer to a group of nomadic people called 'Habiru', or 'Apiru'. Scholars believe that Habiru stands for 'Hebrews.' Therefore this archaeological evidence helps us to calculate roughly the appearance of the Hebrews as a people in recorded history.
2. **'Mari' and 'Nusi' Tablets** : Researches conducted in Ur of the Chaldeans have brought out tablets which throw light upon the culture and traditions of the society during the time of Abraham. For example, the practice of adopting the son of a slave girl by the master, in the absence of a son by his wife, the adopted son fulfilling all the filial duties in return, are mentioned in those inscriptions. Also the tablets mention the customs and the life-style of the people during the times of the Patriarchs.
3. **The stela of pharaoh Merneptah** : This evidence, belonging to B. C. 1220, refers to the Egyptian captivity of the Hebrews.

"Israel lies desolate. Its seed is no more
Hurru has become a widow.
All the lands in their entirety are at peace.
Everyone who was a nomad has been curbed
by King Merneptah."

This hieroglyphic text shows the tortures suffered by the people of Israel in Egypt, during the reign of the Pharaoh Ramesses (B. C. 1290-1224) and their deliverance during the reign of his successor Pharaoh Merneptah (BC 1224-1216).

4. The Raz Shamra evidence : These tablets obtained from Northern Syria in 1929 were very helpful in locating the ancient cananite town named Ugarit, as well as in learning about the specialities of the cananite religion at that time.

In these documents there are references to El, Baal and Asherah, the chief gods of the people of Canaan. When the Israelites reached the promised land of Canaan, they accepted many of the customs, traditions, practices and even religious observances of the natives of Canaan. In course of time this led to the uncompromising chastisements from the God-sent prophets and hence the significance of these documents.

5. The Moabite Stone : The Moabite stone found in 1868 from the Trans-Jordan is now kept in the Louvre Museum in Paris. The motif and inscriptions on it celebrate the triumph of the Moabite King Mesha of the 9th century BC, over the neighbouring country Israel. The inscription runs like this "I am Mesha, son

of Chemosh.... King of Moab, the Dibonite. My father was King over Moab thirty years and I became King after my father Omri, King of Israel, he oppressed Moab many days, for Chemosh was angry with his land. And his son succeeded him and he too said 'I will oppress Moab.'

The Israelite King Omri had defeated Moab and kept it under his control for so many years. Chemosh, the Moabite god was so displeased at this. His son or grandson followed him and declared that he would, in coming years, win back Moab, and that Israel would be then destroyed totally.

We get parallel pictures of the rulers of Israel and Judah in the Books of Kings. But we note that a particular King's reign is condemned or praised according to the convictions of the author of Kings. For example, Omri, was a politically shrewd and powerful King of Israel as we learn from the Moabite stone, but because he was not God-fearing, the author of Kings held him in no esteem at all and devotes only¹ six verses to him. Moreover, the Moabite stone is important from the linguistic point of view as it gives a good idea of the alphabets of those days.

¹ Kings 16:23—28

6. The Siloam Inscriptions : This famous inscription kept in the archaeological museum in Istambul tells us about the laborious efforts made by King Hezekiah, to dig a tunnel 1700ft long so that water could be channelled from the Gihon stream that is outside the city wall to the Siloam pool, inside. These inscriptions were originally made on the rock walls by the labourers.

d. The significance of Archaeological studies

Archaeological studies like these give a deep insight into the Old Testament and help us to view it from different angles, i.e. historical geographical, cultural, philosophical and theological. They also help us to leave a good margin for special differences in the studies of meanings which arise out of the passage of many centuries, and concentrated on the gift of the thought-content of the Old Testament.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of archaeological studies with respect to the Old Testament ?
2. Give an account of some of the findings of archaeological research on the Old Testament.

UNIT 2
LESSON 1

THE PENTATEUCH

Moses and the Pentateuch

History of Research on the Pentateuch

Jean Astruc - Literary Criticism of the Pentateuch

Richard Simon

a. Moses and the Pentateuch

The Jews regard the Pentateuch (the Torah) or the Books of Moses the most important in the Hebrew Scripture. Tradition attributes the authorship of the Torah to Moses, of the Psalms to David and of the Proverbs to Solomon. In the Old Testament we read about God conversing with Moses and Moses writing down what God spoke. The system of recording through alphabetical writing was considerably developed during the days of Moses. Educated in royal style in the palace of the Pharaoh, Moses must have mastered reading and writing. Still, Old Testament scholars wonder whether the whole of the Pentateuch was written by Moses or whether certain parts, for example 'the narration of the death of Moses, were added to the original text later. And during those days in the distant past, ideas such as authorship, copyright etc. were unheard of.

b. History of Research on the Pentateuch

It was Ibn Ezra, the Jewish Rabbi of the 11th century A. D., who posed the question whether the entire Torah was written by Moses and whether it was completed during the days of Moses. This was because of the references¹ in the Torah to some known historical events, which took place certainly after the death of Moses. For example² the statement that the Canaanites had been dwelling there, hints at the occupation of Canaan by the Israelites. Also Canaan is referred to as the land of the Hebrews.

¹ Exodus 17:4, Exodus 24:4, Numbers 33:2, Deut 34:5

² Genesis 12:6 and 13:7

c. Jean Astruc - Literary Criticism of the Pentateuch

Jean Astruc, a French Physician of the 18th century (1753) pointed out a few examples from Genesis which suggested the probability of the inclusion of passages from some other sources. So he dived deep into the detailed study of the Pentateuch and discovered that in Genesis, there were two names used repeatedly to refer to God, namely 'God' and 'Jahweh' and he also proved that those two terms could be two main sources by Moses.

d. Richard Simon

In the 18th century, the Old Testament Scholar R. Simon (1638-1712) had taken up the study of the authorship of the Pentateuch quite seriously. He noticed inconsistencies and discrepancies throughout the Pentateuch not only with respect to the names used to refer to God, but also with respect to the varying literary styles of the composition, the repetition of the description, the delineation of the working of the Spirit of God, and to the description of the many incidents even to the point of contradiction.

The 19th century researches arrived at four chief documents of prime significance known as the JEDP. 'J' or the Jahwist use 'Jahweh' for the name of God and E or the Elohist use 'Elohim' for the other. The former, the most ancient of all the four, belonged to 850 B. C. and the latter, to 750 B. C. The document 'D' or Deuteronomy dealt only with the text of Deuteronomy and 'P' or the Priestly referred to the priestly source. D belonged to 650 B. C. and P was believed to be the latest. The code of laws in D has relevance only with respect to the text of Deuteronomy. P laws are formed with the full awareness of the laws in D. The laws of J and E belong to the oldest period and the narration is very brief whereas D and P are more elaborate. The 'laws in Exodus are the result of the blending of J and E. The scholars who concentrated attention on this area are K. Graf and Julius Wellhausen. They were alike to convince the other Old Testament scholars too of the validity and chronology of the JEDP order.

QUESTIONS

1. Name the scholars who probed into the problems of the Pentateuch. Elucidate their findings.
2. How would you explain J. E. D. P. to a common man?

LESSON 2

THE STUDY OF THE PENTATEUCH IN THE 20th CENTURY

Form Critical Study

Life Situations

Traditio - Historical Method

Is the critical - analytical study of the O.T. necessary

The different schools of study - An assessment

a. Form Critical Study

Hermann Gunkel, the 20th century Old Testament scholar from Germany is the father of the Form Critical Study.

When we examine the literature of the Bible we notice certain striking characteristics in the composition besides formal distinctions such as verse and prose. For example, there is marvellous harmony between the manner of expression and the matter expressed, or in other words, the form and the content. We can see that the Hymns of praise, the prophecy and the Laws etcetera, are all expressed in distinct forms, each best suited to contain and communicate its message. We may guess that the Old Testament writers adhered to the formalistic demands of the various modes of creative writing. Conventional forms and categories were used appropriate to the occasion.

b. Life Situations

Scholars started studying almost all parts of the Old Testament and saw that they were completed and attained fixed form even before they were committed to writing. This led them to examine the role and importance of worship in this respect. For example, the 'life-situation of a certain event in the beginning, the changed setting in life-style after so many years and the newly

acquired measuring revealed a lot of truths to the scholars and gave them new insights. That the creed (confession of faith) in Deuteronomy (26:5-10) was very central to the writing of the Pentateuch was an important discovery arrived at, thanks to the form-critical study.

c. Traditio-Historical Method

Engnell and Widengren, the scholars from Scandinavia are the spokesmen of the Traditio-historical method. They pointed out the flaws of historical critical analytical studies. They brought to light the significant role played by oral tradition in preserving and collecting different traditions. They argued that it was the diverse traditions and not the diverse documents that were the true reason for the contradictory and dissimilar accounts and descriptive patterns in the Pentateuch. They also stated that the form-critical study of the Pentateuch didn't take into account the psychology as well as the religious and social specialities of Semites. Thus the Scandinavian scholars proved that the methods for learning and analysis adopted by the modern are characteristic of the modern times and that they are not sufficient aids to comprehend the Old Testament, compiled centuries back. The celebrated scholar Birkeland cited the practice of the Arabs in learning by heart the Quran in order to prove the importance of oral tradition.

d. Is the critical—analytical study of the O. T. necessary?

Some ask whether it is proper to subject a composition inspired by the Holy Spirit to critical and analytical scrutiny like any other secular literature. We may see that the Old Testament is a divinely inspired composition, that the writers were not just mechanically taking down what the Holy Spirit inspired. On the other hand, their personality, personal beliefs and views of life were all involved in the writing of the book. Therefore analytical scrutiny of the holy book, with respect to form, historical background etc are highly useful.

e. The different schools of study - An assessment

From the light thrown by the different schools of study, we arrive at the following conclusions.

1. The Pentateuch is a written record. Therefore there is no harm in attempting at a critical analysis of this composition from the literary angle.

2. The Scandinavian scholars, championing the importance of oral tradition warn against the trend of stretching literary criticism to an end-point, practising word-by word analysis.

3. The critical study helps us to see the influence exerted by different traditions upon the society before the materials were committed to writing. It also shows how these different compositions got modified in the context of worship.

The celebrated German scholar Arthur Weiser points out that each of these three schools of approach has its own distinct merits and they must be understood to complement and not to contradict one another.

Questions

Explain the different approaches adopted by scholars in the study of the Pentateuch.

LESSON 3

THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE PENTATEUCH

*The creed (Confession of faith) central to the
Pentateuch*

Laws based on conditions

Laws strictly obligatory

Account on the Passover

Moses and the Pentateuch

Songs in the Pentateuch

The formation of the Pentateuch

(a) The creed (confession of faith) - Central to the Pentateuch

The German scholar Gerhard Von Rad perceives the recital of the creed (Deuteronomy 26:5-9) central to the Pentateuch. The passage is a prayer, the proclamation of a creed and also, thanksgiving, offered to Jahweh by an Israelite in response to the great love and care the Israelites had been receiving from Jahweh.

The Israelite comes with the first fruit to the temple of God, where His presence dwells. He calls to his remembrance the many blessings from God as well as the manifold scenes of intervention and deliverance by God from the captivity in Egypt and the sojourn in the wilderness before the arrival in Canaan.

The chief events in the story of the liberation from Egypt became the basis for the creed of faith, and along with that the detailed account of the patriarchs got circulated among the people by way of oral traditions. When gathered for worship, the priests thought it their duty to collect and chant those accounts. In course of time, when those narrations were handed down from generation to

generation through oral tradition they acquired some definite form. Moreover, the code of law too became well-known and popular through such recitals.

We can see different types of statutes also in these narrations*

b. Laws according to some conditions

These laws (Exo:21:18) begin with the conditional word 'if.' These refer mainly to punishments for different types of crimes. We find that similar laws were in force in the group and societies in the neighbourhood of the Israelites. These statutes saved the society from tension, disorder and lawlessness .

c. Laws strictly obligatory

There is no conditional word 'if' in these laws (Exo. 20:2) On the other hand, they command strictly to do or not to do certain things. The best examples of these are the ten commandments. Scholars believe that such laws were characteristic exclusively of the Israelites.

d. Account of the Passover

We find detailed instructions on the celebration of the Passover, the great event being of singular importance in the drama of the liberations of the Israelites from captivity.

e. Songs in the Pentateuch

The revenge song of 'Lameh'¹ the blessing of Jacob.² The Song of Moses,³ the song on the well,⁴ the Prophecy of Balaam⁵ and the song and the blessing of Moses⁶ are outstanding examples.

f. Moses and the Pentateuch

If we consider the growth of the Pentateuch to be gradual, it is interesting to find out the contributions of Moses to the Pentateuch. Clean-cut expressions like 'Jahweh commanded' and 'Moses wrote' give evidence to the portions written by Moses.

But the account of the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10) and the expression, ⁷Moses was very meek above all the men which

¹ Genesis 4:23—24, ² Genesis 49, ³ Exodus 15:1—8,

⁴ Numbers 21:17—18, ⁵ Numbers 23:24, ⁶ Deuteronomy 32,33,

⁷ Numbers 12:3

were upon the face of the earth' (Numbers 12:3) can be argued to be later additions to the main text. As to the differences in the literary style and diction, we may say that a writer may stick to it consistently, throughout his writings or many reject it later in favour of an altered style or diction which would suit his intention and fancy better.

But here and there in the Pentateuch there are contradictory or inconsistent accounts and descriptions of the same event, which support the theory that Moses had written only parts of the Pentateuch. Examples cited are the inconsistent descriptions of the ¹creation, ²repetitive descriptions ³the references concerning canaanites and a few other ⁴contradictory statements.

g. The formation of the Pentateuch

The Torah or the Pentateuch attained its present form and shape very gradually. The history of the patriarchs was added to the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Also, the stay and the oppression in Egypt, the sojourn in the desert, the journey to the promised Land etc were added to it one after the other. In between, the laws and status were placed. So we can conclude with certainty that the Torah, with its central stress on the story of redemption was given its present form and shape by some directly inspired writer who lived during the day of the captivity.

QUESTIONS

1. Examine the traditional belief that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch.
2. Examine the different stages of growth of the Pentateuch.

¹Genesis 1:1—2:4a and Genesis 2:4b—2:25

²Genesis 12:13 and Genesis 20:2

³Genesis 12:6 and Genesis 13:7

⁴Genesis 6:20 and Genesis 7:2

LESSON 4

THE HEBREW HISTORY

The special features of the Hebrew History

The Choice and evaluation of the topics

*The story of Redemption central to the history
of the Israelites*

The yardstick used by the Hebrew historian

History is not just remembrance

The Hebrew history—a witness to the divine revelation

Prime importance to the glorification of God

God is the cause of everything

The prophets and History

a. The special features of the Hebrew History

To the Hebrew historian, the history of the world or the history of the Israelites is not just the objective recording in chronological order, of leading events and dates. To him history is not just the coming together of casual incidents, but is the arena of action for God the creator. So he believes that all the events taking place in the world and especially in Israel are aimed at leading the peoples towards the focal event which is the act of redemption of the man. The stories of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and also the story of the chosen people or the Israelites are presented in this light.

b. The choice and evaluation of the topics

When we examine any history, we can see that the choice of the topics and their evaluation by the historian are of paramount significance. Firstly, the historian will choose and present only those events and dates which suit to his purposes. Secondly, the Hebrew historian evaluates each event by measuring its significance with respect to the delineation of the focal event, i. e. the story of Redemption of Man.

c. The story of Redemption - central to the history of the Israelites

The central point in the Israelite history is the story of Redemption. God chose the Israelites for a special purpose and therefore the important milestones in their lives are of great importance on the Hebrew historian. The choice of the Israelites, deliverance from Egypt, the sojourn in the desert, the Zion Covenant and the gift of the Promised Land are all example.

d. The yardsticks used by the Hebrew-historian

Mere material achievement or glory of persons never attracted the attention of the Hebrew-historian. On the other hand, leaders and Kings who practised and taught the fear of the Lord and showed great zeal for his worship were, for the Hebrew historian significant to be recorded in the history. An example is the story of the irreligious, King Omri, who is just casually mentioned by the Hebrew historian although his material and temporal achievements were so important, as to secure him mention in the 'Moabite Tablet.'

e. History is not just remembrance

While going through the story of redemption presented by the Hebrew historian the readers feel that they are also partakers in the drama narrated. The trials through which the protagonists in the narration have gone are felt so real and so near. Thus the readers are privileged to get the experience of the presentness of the past, as well as the faith that God continues to work through the great figures in history, when they go through the pages of the Hebrew history in the Old Testament.

f. The witness of God's revelations

The Hebrew history witnesses the regular and steady progress and continuation of God's revelations. To work out his plans God chose leaders in different times. If a particular leader proved irresponsible, God would entrust his duties with some other worthy man. The expulsion of Saul in favour of David is an example. Even a heathen, Cyrus¹ was chosen to fulfil God's purpose.

1. Isaiah 45: 1

g. The Glory of God

The prime concern of the Hebrew historian is the celebration of God's glory. Achievements won without the fear of God fetched no recognition or praise from him. Also the Hebrew historian used to present everyone, even the protagonists and the Patriarchs with all their human follies. An example is the account ²of King 'David's illicit affair with Beth Sheba.

h. God — the real cause for everything

The faith that God is the real cause for everything accounts for the unique distinction of the Hebrew historian from the ordinary historians. For example, if the secular historian records that Abraham happened to leave Ur of Chaldaens for good, his Hebrew counterpart would write that God brought Abraham out of the Ur of Chaldaens. If the former records that a group of slaves fled from Egypt, the latter would write that God miraculously delivered them from slavery. In this way, the Hebrew writer establishes that God who conducted the Israelite fathers would continue His style of functioning and conduct His children even today.

i. The prophets and History

The prophets functioned very often as the mouthpiece of God. They explained to the people the relative importance of contemporary events. Sometimes, instead of words of comfort, they declared fiery words of warning and messages of judgement. They reminded often the Israelites to shed away their pride in being the chosen race, but to adorn themselves with humility and repentance. They explained to the people through speeches and through symbolic performances the importance of God's plans. The prophets believed that History is the arena for God's actions and that He keeps His words and promises ever.

QUESTIONS

1. How far can the statement be true that "The Hebrew historian viewed events from a theological angle."
2. Examine the place of the prophets in Israelite history.

². 2 Samuel 11: 2—5

LESSON 5

THE HISTORY OF DEUTERONOMY

The basis and extent

The canaanite religion

The motto of the Deuteronomic historian

Criticism by the Deuteronomic historian

The chief yardsticks for judging the King's actions

The Historian and the different traditions

The message of the Deuteronomic historian

a. The Basis and Extent

The books Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2, Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings are recorded according to the laws given in chapters 12 to 26 in Deuteronomy and hence they are known as Deuteronomic History. These in Deuteronomy, known as 'laws' ¹may be better understood as celebrated exhortations in the form of speeches. In Judges we find the Israelites falling into many temptations and moving away from God, consequently inviting chastisements from Him. For example we find God giving them over to their enemies, under torture from whom they repent and return to the fear of God.

b. The Canaanite Religion

The Ras Shamra documents tell us a lot about the Canaanite religion. The Israelites embraced a good number of their interesting practices. For example, they started paying respects to the canaanite god Baal and his spouse, goddess Ashthart, whose joy and mutual love, was decisive for good climate and good rain, according to the Canaanites. They also believed that they could please god Baal and goddess Ashthart, to grant them good climate and rain and rich harvest by indulging in free sex. Therefore, the Laws strictly forbid the Israelites to follow such practices as they would create moral chaos.

c. The motto of the Deuteronomic historian

The motto of the Deuteronomic historian is "one God, one people, one worship." To him the centre for the only one worship is the Temple of Jerusalem. He disapproves worship in other holy places. He is all against practices and customs which are not in tune with worshipping God "wholeheart, whole mind and whole spirit."

d. The criticism by the Deuteronomic historian

After the division of the country into Judah and Israel, King Jerobeam encouraged worship at altars in Dan and Bethel in order to divert the attention of the people in the north from the city of Jerusalem in the south. The Deuteronomic historian would displease God. Later the expression also came into vogue,¹ "Jerobeam path."

e. The chief yardsticks for judging the King's actions

The following were the yardsticks:-

1. Were Kings worshippers of the true and the only God?
2. Was Jerusalem their chosen centre for worship?

The historian believes that the political downfall of the country was caused by the King's moving away from God.

f. The Historian and the different traditions

Deuteronomic historian had been collecting and arranging according to some principles the many documents which he got. When we examine from the point of view of literary style, we notice a tradition of reasoning out the 'why and how' of things. For example, we are helped to find out ²why twelve stones were laid in Jordan. Or, we are helped to probe into ³the significance of the destroyed wall of Jericho; or, the reason why the house of Rahab, the harlot was guarded against danger,⁴ or again the explanation, why mere manual labour and servitude became the lot of the Gibeonites.⁵ The narration is in such a fashion as to arrive at answers to such questions.

1. 2 Kings 13: 11
2. Joshua 4: 9
3. Joshua 6: 26

4. Joshua 6: 25
5. Joshua 9: 27

g. The message of the Deuteronomic historian

The Deuteronomic historian argues that the political victory of the Israelites is not due to the strength of the army but because of the kindness and miraculous strength of God. So he claims the credit of the victory to God. As the prophets do, he too, look back into the past history and glorifies God. He exhorts the people to put their trust in God so that He would conduct them to the possession of Canaan too. He repeats that God's covenant¹ applies not just to the lives of the dead father, but also to the lives of the people who act in the living present.

QUESTIONS

1. Examine the special characteristics of the historian of Deuteronomy
2. Which is the favourite yardstick of the historian of Deuteronomy to evaluate the different incidents and historical events?
3. Study chapters 12—26 of Deuteronomy, and bring out the main points briefly.

1 Deuteronomy 5 : 3

LESSON 6

THE HISTORY OF THE CHRONICLER

The approach of the Chronicler

Events deliberately omitted

The Chronicler and the descriptions

The disappointing response from Judah

The Message of the Chronicler

1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah are together called the history of the Chronicles. The subject is the history till the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. The last verses of 2 Chronicles and the first of Ezra are very similar and this bears witness to the writing of these books of history, one in continuation to the other.

a. The approach of the Chronicler

This composition was done during the time of the Babylonian Captivity. We find parallel descriptions in the histories of 1st Deuteronomist and Chronicles. For example, the first part of Chronicles is just the repetition of the events in Samuel and Kings. The Chronicler gives glory to David, not for his political achievements, but for moulding Israel as a worshipping community. Jerusalem was made the centre for political administration as well as the centre for worship according to a divine design.

b. Events omitted deliberately

The Chronicler left out without recording, certain events which he thought unimportant. Examples are David's exile, the revolt of Absalom and the Beth-Sheba affair. At the same time, some descriptions not given in the history of Deuteronomist have been added to the Chronicles. For example in 2 Kings, chapter 21, Manasseh is not referred to as a good king. But the Chronicler says ¹that Manasseh repented while a captive in Babylon, and that God responded to this change of heart. So also when

1. 2 Kings 2 : 11 and 2 Chronicles 33 : 11 - 13

it is given in Deuteronomy² that God wanted David to take the census of all Israel, the Chronicler says that Satan forced David to do likewise.

c. The Chronicler and the Descriptions

There are many names of the tribes in Chronicles. Some of these names are based on descriptions in Genesis and the others on the basis of the existing traditions. For example the purpose for giving the names of Adam, Seth and Enoch is to remind us of God's care for the chosen people from the very beginning. Because of the disobedience of man, God's purpose for all men was given up in favour of the choice of a small group, the Israelites. Attention was focussed on a still smaller group among the Israelites, namely the people of Judah. The Chronicler records the history of Judah from David to Ezra. During the days of David, Israel was³ one people. But disobedience, disloyalty and revolt shattered that oneness. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained in the southern province of Judah. The Chronicler praises the efforts made by the Kings Josiah and Hezekiah to bring about integration among the quarrelling factions in the society. Even though their success was only partial the writer perceives God's design in it and believes that He would workout His great plan of the redemption of Man through the small group, i. e. the people of Judah.

d. The Disappointing Response from Judah

But Judah too acted very disappointingly. David's Kingdom was weakened and the people were sent to Babylonian captivity. Still, God's compassion was with them. The torment of the captivity purged them, and during the time of the Persians they came back to their country, batch after batch. On coming back, they attempted at rebuilding the temple of Jerusalem, but they were faced with impediments like poverty, misery and troubles from the enemies. By God's grace the temple of Jerusalem was rebuilt, and later the walls of the city too, thanks to the encouragement from

2. 2 Samuel 24 : 1 and 1 Chronicles 21 : 1

3. 1 Chronicles 11 : 1—3

Nehemiah. The Jewish community could adopt a new life-style under Nehemiah's leadership. All this proved the realization of God's will and promise in the midst of man's temporal failures and defects.

e. The Message of the Chronicler

The Chronicler's focus of interest is not the past, but the present. His chief goal is to fortify the faith of the contemporary Israelites on the guidelines of the faith and promise given to the great Israelite fathers. Also, he shows keen interest to observe the many traditions of worship characteristic of the temple of Jerusalem. Credit goes to him for his zeal in upholding the faith of the people in the midst of trials and also in labouring to keep ever alive the beauty and grandeur of worship.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the distinguishing features of the history of Chronicles?
2. What is the chief message of the Chronicler?

UNIT 3

LESSON 1

THE GREEK RELIGION AND CULTURE

Alexander the great
The Scattered Jews
The policy of the Greeks
Ptolemies in Egypt
The Seleucids in Palestine
Antiochus IV
The open fight
The influence of the Greeks
The Sad consequences
The achievements

a. Alexander the Great

The Greek emperor Alexander the great conquered Israel in 4th century B. C. It was Alexander's policy to spread Greek culture in the regions conquered and annexed to his empire.

b. The Scattered Jews

Even before the days of Alexander, the Jews had started settling in different places in the middle East. When the Assyrians and the Babylonians conquered Israel, they saw to it that the Jews were pushed out of their own country and got scattered over remote areas. Some of the Jews returned to their home land whenever Israel got Political supremacy. But the others continued to stay in their new settlements in alien lands, well guarding their religious traditions. Thus plenty of Jewish families got settled in Egypt, Antioch and other towns in Syria. But the flow of the Jewish families away from their homeland was so very unprecedented during the days of Alexander.

c. The Policy of the Greeks

It was Alexander's mission to build up a world empire based on the Greek language, tradition and culture. He laboured with

this end in view and these efforts continued with greater momentum by the seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemies in Egypt. Alexander sent Greek merchants to the conquered territories. The Greeks as a whole believed in religious tolerance and therefore the scattered Jews enjoyed freedom in religious matters in their new settlements. Cities like Alexandria were built up on the model of the cities in Greece, allowing considerable political and economic freedom to the new settlers in different cities.

d. Ptolemies in Egypt

After the death of Alexander, Ptolemies came to power in Egypt, and Palestine was brought under their rule. The Jews had a peaceful time during these days. They had to pay some taxes to the Greek authorities. During the reign of Ptolemy II, the Torah was translated into Greek. This paved the way for gradual but tremendous influence of the Greeks upon the Jews. Moreover, the Jews in Egypt accepted Greek as their language.

e. The Seleucids in Palestine

Palestine came under the power of the Seleucids during the reign of Antiochus III (B. C. 223-187). A section of Jews warmly welcomed the reign and paid respects to Antiochus III. Immensely pleased, Antiochus allowed them to return to their own homeland. Also, he granted them exemption from the burden of the payment of taxes for three years.

f. Antiochus IV

But the period of peace was shattered by the arrival of Antiochus IV, who did not hesitate to rob the riches from the Jewish temples of worship. He asked the Jews to worship zeus, the Greek God and to perceive the King as the **Artar** (representative) of Zeus. This was a period of diverse views and some shrewd Jews, seized the opportunity to get powerful positions like high-priest's office and to guard their vested interests. For example, Joshua, known otherwise as Jaison' bribed Antiochus to turn aside Oniyas from the office of high priesthood.

g. Open Fight

The pious and God-fearing Jews were disturbed by the mean tricks practised by the interested parties to win the office of high priesthood. Consequently, there was a big rift between the supporters of the Greeks and the others. The King decided to annihilate

those who did not yield to him. He instructed the Jews to worship in the Greek style. Educational institutions and playfield were constructed in the Greek style. This prepared the ground for a fight.

h. The influence of the Greeks

The Greeks worked out carefully, various devices political, cultural and religious to drive their influence deep into the life-style of the Jews. There were well organised efforts to bring the East and the West under the influence of the Greek culture. Mixed marriages were encouraged. The Greek soldiers married girls from the places where they had been posted for duty. The Greek language became the language of the elite. Administration of the towns got modelled on Greek style. Many of the Jews started using Greek names even.

i. The Sad Consequences

As a result of this embracing of an alien culture, the precious and holy Laws of the Jews started to disappear. The Jewish culture and religion started to suffer much as a result of the encroaching of the Greek culture. Even religious observances grew weak. Even while worship was going on, the youth spent time in games, sports and artistic performances, and that too according to the Greek custom in rude appearances. Also they started forgetting the Hebrew languages.

j. The Achievements

A number of literary works were produced using the Greek models. Jewish scholars like Philo tried hard to bring about a harmonious blending of the Old Testament Scripture and the Greek philosophy.

QUESTIONS

1. Examine the Greek influence in the various fields of the times of the Jews.
2. Examine merits of the Greek influence on the Jews, and also find out the sad consequences.

LESSON 2

THE CHIEF DIVISIONS IN THE JEWISH RELIGION

Chasidim

Pharisees

The Sadducees

The Esseenes

The Zealots

The members of the Qumran covenant

During the period between the times of the two Testaments; the Old and the New, many religious ideologies came to be moulded among the Jews and this led to the formation of many religious sects or groups. They all tried to safeguard the special characteristics of the Jewish religion, but in their zeal they found themselves forming various groups which seemed to bear contradictory features. An evaluation of a few of them would be very helpful for grasping the characteristics of the Jewish society.

a. Chasidim

This group was formed by the Jews who were utmost faithful to the philosophy, culture, traditions and religion of the Jewish society and therefore they hated those of the Greeks. They could not stand the provocations from Antiochus IV. But they were not much interested in winning political freedom. When Jason tried to capture through foul means the highpriesthood, pushing Oniyas III out of office, the Chasidim appeared boldly on the scene. They believed that the privilege to confer upon or withdraw from a person the office of the highpriest rested only with God. They felt that their silent protest and non-co-operation was not sufficiently strong and that they should support the Maccabaens in their decision to fight against Antiochus IV. They roamed round the places in the company of the Maccabaens, destroyed the temples of the heathen gods in the Jewish habitations and circumcised the Jewish boys. But in course of time when the Maccabaens gave

greater stress on political freedom, they parted company. The pharisees and the Esseenes must have been formed from this sect.

b. The Pharisees

The word means 'separated.' They were, people who voluntarily 'separated themselves' from the worldly minded, just to study in detail and to teach and explain the Torah. They kept themselves away from the heathen and entertained no social intercourse with them, vowing to safeguard the precious traditions and desiring deeply to lead holy lives.

The pharisees gave importance to the recorded code of laws as well as principles and traditions which came down to them by oral tradition. The Synagogue was their chief centre of activity. During the days of Herod, their strength was 6000. A large number of them were the common people and therefore they attracted special attention from the people. They believed that if the Jews led their lives in accordance with the Torah got through Moses and also the traditions handed down to them through oral tradition, then after their death, their souls would be alive in the world to come and would get united to their resurrected bodies.

The glaring error in the Pharisees was this that they explained the Laws letter by letter, but missed lamentably their meaning.

c. The Sadducees

They were the spiritual heirs to the priestly community in Jerusalem. When compared with the Pharisees they were rich and highly placed in the society. To them the Greek culture and traditions were no taboo and hence they embraced them with no hesitation. They became a well-organised group during BC 135-105. Pompey who came to power in 63 B. C. and Herod who came to power in 37 B. C. tortured them. By 70 A. D. their power and influence waned off.

The prime motive force behind the activities of the Sadducees was their great expectations for a free Jewish land. Like the Pharisees, they also honoured the Torah very much. They made great efforts to live in accordance with the Torah and also to offer the sacrifices in the temple of Jerusalem with an eye for perfection

and exactitude. But unlike the Pharsiees, they didn't consider tradition and regulations which reached down to them through oral tradition necessary for the basis of their faith. Also they rejected belief in resurrection the reward after death, punishment, thoughts on the end of the era and also, the teachings about the angels.

d. The Esseenes

We find accounts about the Esseenes in the writings of Philo and Josephus.

During the days of Philo, there were about 4000 Esseenes in Syria and Palestine. The historian Pliny refers to the Esseenes who lived west of the Dead Sea. The very name suggests the deep yearning for holy lives. They worshipped Jahweh, but did not offer sacrifices. They considered their possessions common and did not want to enjoy private property. They had deep concern and care for the down trodden. Josephus records that this sect originated about B. C. 144.

Worship before sun rise, prayer of praise just before and after food, baptism of spiritual significance and the fellowship in the holy food are some of the chief distinguishing features of the Esseenes. They broke away from the non-Esseenes. They spent time in prayer, in the study of the Old Testament and also in farming, anticipating all the while the advent of the Messiah and believed that it would take place soon. They considered themselves the people of the new covenant.'

e. The Zealots

These were a group of extremists who came forward for the political freedom of the country. Josephus records that this group was organized by A. D. 6 when Judah of Galilee led a revolt against the Jews. Pfeiffer believes that these people were the followers of the Maccabaens. They agreed that only God was the King and that the Jews should not yield to foreign supremacy. They observed strictly the Sabbath. They wanted the heathens also to practise the ritual of circumcision. Paying the tax to the emperor was to them as grievous as worshipping idols. This group came to an end as a result of the Masade Fort event.

f. The society of the Qumran Covenant

This sect was formed during the days of John Hircanus (134-104 B. C.) and flourished till the downfall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70.

A group of people belonging to the Chasidim sect fled to the deserts under the leadership of **'The Teacher of Righteousness'**. This leader trained them how to study and explain to others the Holy Scriptures. This group originated from the Esseene sect, but later adopted diverse dogmas. We learn about their chief teaching from the Dead Sea Scrolls and similar books.

All these different sects are marked by the prime importance they gave to the Torah and also the unwavering respects they paid to God. In their defiance against the foreign rulers all of them except the Sadducees adopted more or less the same attitude (This has been mentioned in the study of the New Testament too).

QUESTIONS

1. Which are all the diverse religious groups among the Jews?
2. Explain the distinguishing characteristics of these sects.
3. Do these groups among the Jews bear resemblances to any of the groups among Christians?

LESSON 3

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

The History of the Discovery

Scientific Research

The 'Scroll's Scholars

The Scrolls subjected to study and research

The Qumran community

The Qumran covenant and the Christian Church

The scrolls got by accident from the shores of the Dead Sea in 1947 marked the beginning of a new chapter in the study of the Bible. In addition to theologians and Biblical scholars, scientists all over the world were fascinated by this fortunate discovery. Thanks to this sensational discovery, great light was thrown upon the study of the 2000 year old manuscripts and the original text of the holy scriptures, the alphabets used, the leather scrolls, the manuscripts on papyrus, the linen cloth used to cover the scrolls and the jar inside which the scrolls were kept.

a. The History of the Discovery

A shepherd named Muhammad adh- Dhib roamed round in search of his lost sheep and finally arrived at a cave. Because it was all dark inside, out of curiosity he threw a stone with good force into it. He heard something rattling into pieces. He concluded that there was rich treasure hidden inside and therefore entered the cave in the company of his cousin. And they saw inside the cave jars made of clay in which leather scrolls well covered in linen had been kept. The shepherd sold them to a merchant in Bethlehem dealing with archaeological goods. Through many middle men, they finally reached the hand of Metropolitan Mar Athanasius Jesu Samuel, a bishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

b. Scientific Research

In 1951, a few years after 'the discovery of the Scrolls, archaeologists Pere de Vaux and L. Harding came and stayed for sometime at Kirbeth Qumran from where the scrolls were got and conducted researches. They could detect a main building 118 feet long and 94 feet wide, inside which were kept benches and big earthen jars.

c. The Scholars of the 'Dead—Sea Scrolls'

The most eminent among them are E. L. Sukenik, Y. Yadin, Miller Burrows, Brownly, Trever, R. de Vaux and L. Harding. Some of these scholars copied out and translated the manuscripts and helped in the publication of various books related to it.

d. The Scrolls subjected to study and research

1. Two scrolls of Isaiah, got from the first cave deserve special notice. The first of the two scrolls contains the entire Isaiah. The second contains only one third of Isaiah's writings. These scrolls have very great affinity with the original text in Hebrew.

A few texts coming under the groups called Apocrypha and Pseud Epigrapha, which are not included among the books of the Hebrew Bible have also been discovered. The chief among them are:

2. **Habakuk's commentary** : These interpretations speak about how the prophecy of Habakuk came to be fully realised in the history of the Qumran community.

3. **The Manual of discipline** : This gives the code of behaviour related to the discipline and worship in the Qumran community. Also regulation for the novices joining the community are also given.

4. **The war between the children of light and the children of darkness** : The children of light believed that they were witnessing the end of an epoch and that the angels too would aid them by joining their war against the children of darkness. The war would be lasting for forty years. (There would not be war in the seventh year). The children of light would win three times in the war and the children of darkness also three times. The seventh time, the mighty arm of God would defeat Bilael and his powers.

5. The psalm of thanksgiving : This meditates upon the goodness of God and gives thanks to Him.

e. The origin of the Qumran Community

A group of people, disappointed and hurt by the injustice inside the temple of Jerusalem decided to retreat to the deserts and live 'the true Israel'. They adopted the title, 'the members of the new covenant.' They got together, offered hymns of thanksgiving, studied the scriptures and also did hard manual labour to earn their livelihood. The priests among them had status in the society according to a rigid hierarchical pattern. The members had regard for democratic principles. Each member had the right to vote and to take part in discussions, giving due respect to the elders and in agreement with the set behavioural pattern. A man had to experience a hard uphill climb of tests and trials before found fit for permanent membership in the community.

f. The Qumran Covenant and the Christian Church

There is close affinity between the teachings of this community and those of Christianity. Scholars hold that John the Baptist was trained in this community. These people waited and waited anticipating the arrival of the Messiah. F. M. Cross points out that it is not the hope that the Messiah would come, but the assurance that He has come to rule the Kingdom through Christ and that the Messiah would come again. That has fetched for Christianity its unique distinction.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the Dead-Sea Scrolls?
2. Which are all the chief manuscripts got from the Qumran regions?

LESSON 4

APOCRYPHA

Definition

The Apocrypha and the Churches

The Roman Catholic Church

The Syrian Orthodox Church

The Protestant Churches and Apocrypha

The term 'Apocrypha'

The Church Fathers and Apocrypha

The books in Apocrypha

The predominant thoughts in Apocrypha

Conclusion

a. Definition

The word comes from its counterpart in Greek which means 'hidden' or 'unrevealed'. During the two centuries before Christ, as far as Jewish literature was concerned, a number of books were written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. They mirrored that age with its special features, and ideologies. During this period, a few books other than those constituting the Hebrew scriptures got included in the septuagint.

b. Apocrypha and the Churches

The Churches disagree upon the book to be included under the title 'Apocrypha' and also their canonical status. Some writers refer to the books in the Hebrew Old Testament as the **Genesis - Malakhi** group and those in Apocrypha as the **Tobit - Maccabees** group.

c. The Roman Catholic Church

It was the Council of Trent in 1546 that decided that the Roman Catholic Church should regard the **Tobit - Maccabees** set with the same importance they gave to the **Genesis - Malachi** set.

But 1 and 2 Esdras and the prayer of Manasseh are not included in the canonical list in the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, but they are given at the end as Appendix.

d. The Syrian Orthodox Church

The text in Syriac known as 'Peshitta' is the official Bible of the Syrian Church. In the ancient manuscript of this Bible, known as codex Ambrosianus the Tobit - Maccabees set also was included along with the Genesis - Malachi set. In the Canon of Bar-Hebraeus the Tobit-Maccabees group was also included among the books of the Old Testament. In the lectionary of the Syrian Church, the readings from the Tobit-Maccabees books were also included.

In the Syriac Old Testament, published by the Pesheeta Institute in Holland, the Apocrypha is also included, following the pattern in Codex Ambrosianus.

e. The Protestant Churches and Apocrypha

Most of the Protestant Churches accept only the Genesis Malachi group. Some of them accept the Tobit-Maccabees group just for meditations and not for learning the faith.

f. The term 'Apocrypha'

The term 'Apocrypha' was given as the title for the Tobit-Maccabees set in order to suggest that they should be kept away from the ordinary folk because they contained thoughts and accounts which were not quite in tune with the Hebrew Scriptures; and also because they should be allowed to reach the hands of only the wise equipped with the sensibility for discretion and discrimination. We learn from 2 Esdras that Ezra wrote 94 books according to the divine directions. And God asked him to publish the first twentyfour for the use of all categories of readers, the good and the wicked alike. But the remaining 70 books were to be kept aside, only for the wise (2 Esdras 14:44 - 46).

g. The Church Fathers and Apocrypha

Church Fathers used to quote from Apocrypha. Mar Aphrem and Mar Aphraates had given in their books quotations from

Apocrypha. Origen and Mar Cyril of Jerusalem had often used the term 'Apocrypha' in their writings.

h. The Books in Apocrypha

1. The First Esdras : We find here description and delineations similar to those in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. Also, arguments and counter arguments by the three youths in the palace of the Persians, the reconstruction of the temple of God, the code of laws dictated by Ezra are all included.

2. The Second Esdras : Here we find the judgement for the Sinning Jews and also the seven visions seen by Ezra.

3. Tobit : During the reign of King Shabmanezer, Tobit and Tobias were enslaved and taken to Nineveh, where they were tortured for the sake of their faith. The book describes how they escaped torture and how Tobit regained his eyesight.

4. The book of Judith : This book is written in Hebrew. We read how Judith saved the Jews from Holo Fernes, notorious for his weakness for wine and women.

5. The additon to David : The prayers of Alsariah and the three youths, and the glorification of God who saved them from the burning flames are included here.

6. Susanna :

The book of Susanna narrates how in Babylon, Daniel saved a Jewish lady named Susanna from a difficult-to- escape trap laid to by some prominent citizen to destory her.

7. Bel and Dragon : Here we find the mockery of idol-worship. Daniel was against the worship of Baal and was therefore thrown into the den of lions. He lay there for six days and the seventh day God delivered him.

8. The Addition to Esther : In the Greek book we find the following descriptions:-

1. The dream of Mordeccai. 2. The King's order to destory all Jews. 3. The prayers of Esther and Mordeccai. 4. Esther in the presence of the King. 5. The order of the King and the call to the Jews to defend themselves and 6. The dream of Mordeccai

9. The Prayer of Manesseh : (After Manesseh's repentance)

10. **Baruch** : This is a prayer of comfort and consolation on the model of chapter 9 in the book of Daniel.

11. **The letter from Jeremiah** : This is to comfort the people under Babylonian captivity.

12. **Ecclesiasticus** : (Bara Sera) This contains the wisdom and moral code given by Jesus Ben Sira

13. **The Wisdom of Solomon** : This highlights the importance of truth and the faith of the Jews.

14. **The first book of the Maccabees** : This is the narration of historical events during the period from the day before the revolt of the Maccabians to the death of Simon (175-134 B. C.).

15. **The Second book of the Maccabees** : Ideas like the permanence of the soul, resurrection, the loyalty to the judgements, the intercession of the saints, the prayer for the dead - all these are given here.

i. The Main thoughts in Apocrypha

The main thoughts about God in these books are quite in harmony with those in the Hebrew Old Testament. God reveals Himself through manifold ways, for example, through ¹Nature, through ²wisdom and through ³the angels (2 Esdras 5:31). Also we find ideas like ⁴the one God ⁵God the creator ⁶The Song of the Youth, ⁷God the father, God the Everlasting, God the Lord of History, God the omnipotent and God the righteous. In some of the passages we find the ⁸blending of Judgements, and Wisdom. ⁹Some passages stress the need for maintaining loyalty to the Torah.

J. The study of Apocrypha helps to grasp the different thoughts, ideologies and spiritual conflicts in the religion and culture of the Jews during the three centuries from 200 B C. Also this is important as a connecting link between the Old Testament period and the New Testament period. We can grasp better, by going through

1. Ecclesiastes 42:15 2. Wisdom 10:1 3. 2Esdras 5:31
 4. Ecclesiastes 36:5 5. Ecclesiastes 42:23 6. Song of youth 35-68
 7. Tubed 13:4 8. 1. Baruk 3:9—4:4 9. Esdras 7:20

Apocrypha, the importance of the names and also the pieces of advice and precepts developed in the New Testament. These facts therefore attract scholars to the study of Apocrypha, in spite of the attitudes adopted officially by the denominations of the Church they belong to.

QUESTIONS

1. Which are the books in Apocrypha?
2. Explain the importance of the books in Apocrypha.

LESSON 5

THE APOCALYPTIC BOOKS

Origin

The Apocalyptic literature in the Old Testament

The Apocalyptic texts and the books of prophecy

Distinguishing features of the Apocalyptic books

Unknown writer

This epoch is under Satan's power

The heavenly mysteries for the wise

Number and the revelations

The hope about the Messiah

The Resurrection of the dead.

a. The Origin

The Old and New Testaments contain certain texts known as 'Apocalyptic.' During the Old Testament period, when the voice of the prophets ceased, the apocalyptic words became instrumental in conveying to the people the guidance from God.

b. The Apocalyptic literature in the Old Testament

This included The book of David, Isaiah (Chapters 24-27), Zachariah (chapters 12-14) and Ezekiel (chapters 38-39). The Books of Enoch and Esdras written during the interim between the Old Testament and the New Testament period also belong to this group.

c. The Apocalyptic texts and the books of prophecy

When the prophets' voice stopped, God's guidance reached the people of the Old Testament period through the apocalyptic writings. Hence some scholars call these books the Child of the prophetic books. But the approach and presentation in these two types of books are quite different.

1. When the prophets gaze and peep into the future with their feet firm in the present, the apocalyptic writers hold that

the Future will enter the present with great power and will quicken the inauguration of a new era through God's miraculous working.

2. Often the prophecies present the Messiah as God's ambassador on earth, attempting at the integration and unification of the Israelites and Israel in order to establish an empire. But the Messiah in the apocalyptic books is a person of super human power who had been dwelling in God's presence from the very beginning and who enters the arena with God's glory and power.

3. The apocalyptic writer believed that the contemporary age was totally under the power of satan and that change for the better was possible only through the miraculous intervention of God. The prophets believed that the world was not totally given over to Satan, and that if man would co-operate with the ways of God, there would be great change. The message of the apocalyptic writer points out a corrective to man's pride that the world's rottenness could be got aright through his ingenuity.

4. Visions are very important in both these writings.

d. Distinguishing features of the Apocalyptic Books

1. **Unknown Writer :** The writer does not reveal his identity, may be because of the adverse circumstances at the time of the composition of the book. But in order to win recognition for the book, it was connected to the names of the patriarchs or the known prophets and writers.

2. The apocalyptic writers believed that their epoch was under the power of Satan. Therefore the faithful and the committed would always meet with torture and stress. Shortly a new epoch would emerge, not as a casual event in the normal course of things, but as a result of God's miraculous intervention.

3. **The Celestial mysteries for the wise :** God reveals the mysteries of Heaven to the wise, on select occasions, by means of visions. These revelations are quite above the comprehensions of ordinary folk and therefore interpretations, explanations and descriptions are needed to drive them home to the people with ordinary powers for the perception of spiritual realities.

Visions have paramount importance in the revelations, as they have in the prophecies. When on rare occasions, their deep consciousness was lifted towards the sublime, far beyond the limits of ordinary sense perceptions, the seers lost their consciousness for a while. Those were moments when they caught a passing or glimpse of the celestial mysteries, through the corner of their inward eyes.

4. Numbers and the revelations : The numbers, figures and creatures bear hidden meanings. The writer knows that explanation and analysis are necessary to help the readers to understand the meaning.

5. The Hope about the Messiah : The hope in the great and powerful Messiah arriving with God's glory and grandeur is a very striking feature of the apocalyptic writings.

6. The Resurrection of the Dead : What would be their lot when the just and the good die? Do they attain any form of existence? Which is the motive force for the upright, in order to bear trial and to court martyrdom when alive? Similar questions converge to the answers 'the resurrection. and the 'eternal life.' The comfort that the life after death is not a mere shadow, and that resurrection and eternal life await the righteous when they die after going through the trials in this world, offered a new concept of hope for the life after death. We may see that the books in the New Testament carry the continuation and further development of this concept of hope.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the prime ideas in the Apocalyptic literature.
2. In what all ways do the Apocalyptic texts differ from the books of prophecy ?

LESSON 6

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

The interim period between the Old and the New Testaments.

*Contemporary problems and the apocalyptic writers
Comfort in distress*

The Revelations and Pessimism

Faith in God in the light of experience

Unlike the books of prophecy, the apocalyptic texts, attract very meagre interest from scholars. For, the study of these texts is hard on account of the difficult symbols and ideas presented in them. But scholars point out that our Lord viewed with serious regard both the prophecies and the revelations. Therefore, in order to grasp the teachings on the Kingdom of God and the son of Man, and also the precious thoughts in the New Testament, we have to learn carefully the apocalyptic literature.

a. The interim period between the Old and the New Testament

The apocalyptic texts mirror a certain type of questions which characterised the interim period between the Old and the New Testaments. The God-fearing and righteous Jew who had been leading lives according to the Torah had been anticipating all the while the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the Earth. The long long waiting for its realisation became tiresome and they received mere mockery from others. They feared whether their faith in God was waning off. A sense of defeat made them wonder whether God was deceiving them or whether giving up the chosen people. Their confusion was worse confounded when they were faced with such baffling questions as, "why does unmerited suffering come upon the righteous"? or "why does God allow evil to flourish in the world."?

b. The contemporary problems and the apocalyptic writers

After being inside this mess and confusion for sometime, the apocalyptic writers arrived at the following conclusions

The apocalyptic writers were fully exposed to the dark night of the soul depicted above. They came to the conclusion that the contemporary age was singularly packed with evil, lost beyond mending or transformation. So they were sure of the end of the epoch to take place quite soon. They even detected here and there a few symptoms of the imminent end. And they knew that a complete change for the better would be possible only with a very miraculous intervention of God. (This presentation of the Kingdom of God was quite alien to the idea of the Kingdom of God given by the prophets in their books of prophecy - Lesson 5 C.)

c. Comfort in Distress

Message of the apocalyptic texts brought fresh energy and life during a dark age of storm and stress experienced by the righteous and Torah-abiding Jews. In the description of the war between good and evil, the readers are not mere passive onlookers, but are carried over to join the side of Good and to share the joy eventually. This realisation that they were no party to Evil, on the other hand, that they were championing the cause of Good could instil courage and confidence and consolation into the righteous, who had sunk into the abysses of despair. This confidence gave them greater stamina to face obstacles. That suffering and selfless sacrifices are the price to be paid for the sake of Good proves that the apocalyptic writings are relevant even today!

d. The Revelations and Pessimism

The apocalyptic writers were very pessimistic about the contemporary age. But they entertained very positive and optimistic views about the age, which they believed, was to roll in shrotyly. They believed that the contemporary age was totally given over to the power of Evil and that Evil could generate Evil and no Good. They were very hopeful and certain that even though the righteous might be dejected because they felt that God was not helping them, that dejection would pass off because God would soon establish His power.

e. Faith in God in the light of experience

The faith of the apocalyptic writers was neither the result of a unique blending of reason and intellect nor the product of philosophical speculations, but rather, it was shaped out in the mould of experience.

They experienced that the unseen world was not purely imaginary, but that it was one where God would establish His power. Just as suffering was a **reality** in the contemporary age of evil. Glory and bliss would be a real truth in the world to come. These witness believed that just like God's angel walked beside the three righteous youth thrown into the burning flames, to assure them of the presence of God, Gods presence would aid them when they pass through the burning flames of life. This unwavering faith in God equipped them with the power to face trials and tribulations.

f. The message of Resurrection

The idea of resurrection is not one launched abruptly. A careful scrutiny of the Old Testament will help us to this idea scattered here and there as in the phrases the "rising up of the righteous", or "the rising up of every one." Those who dwell in real fear of God and righteousness are not at all away from the experience of the Kingdom of God. Whether on earth or whether in heaven, where they be, they dwell in God's company. Hence these ideas on the apocalyptic texts of the Old Testament introduce us to the ideas of resurrection life after death and Judgement stated in the New Testament.

QUESTIONS

1. Examine the relevance of the apocalyptic writings.
2. Examine the co-relation between the thought content in the apocalyptic writings and that in Christianity.

UNIT 4

LESSON 1

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE STUDY OF OTHER RELIGIOUS TEXTS

The negative approach

The religious literature of the Middle East

The Sacred texts of the Canaanite Religions

Religions to mirror the character of God

In the Indian Context

The need for the study of other religious Texts

The superb glory of the Old Testament

a. The negative approach

Christian scholars held till the beginning of the 20th century that the Bible was the only holy book and that they did not need to pursue the holy books of other religions. Recently, there has been an obvious change to this negative approach; the modern theologians do want to perceive the precious witness of God's revelations and intentions in the other religious texts of other religions too.

b. The Religious Literature of the Middle East

The religious literature got from the Middle East helps us a lot to understand the many thoughts in the Old Testament as well as the background of certain conflicting concepts. To cite an example, the belief that those who mix up their own faith and style of worship with those of other religions will have to forego many of the basic distinctive features of their own religions was prevalent throughout the Middle East during the days of the prophet Elijah.

c. The Sacred texts of the canaanite religions

Archaeological studies have made easy the study of the religious literature of the Middle East. All these religions including that of the Isralites showed striking similarities and parables with respect to the styles of worship, conduct of the sacrifices and to the role and importance of the priests. The religion of the Isralites showed this unique distinction that it stressed the cleanliness of the heart as the prime requisite in order to offer sacrifices to the Lord. It was given clearly in the Old Testament that the person who offers the sacrifices must dwell away from injustice and live in a healthy companionship with God.

d. Religions to mirror the character of God.

The Religion of the Isralites demanded of its followers to live a life of justice and fairness, quite in harmony with God's character. He is the 'Just' God and His justice bears the mark of love more than the rigours of strict laws.

e. On the Indian context

The religious texts of Hinduism and Islam stand at a disadvantage when compared with the Old Testament in the sense that their study is not aided and enriched by historical, systematic scientific and critical studies. Therefore, efforts were not taken to discern the original texts and to study the different sections in the light of the background of their composition. This hinder a good comparative study of these great texts and the Old Testament.

f. The need for the study of other religious texts

This epoch understands and therefore stresses the need for open-hearted dialogues on the many religions. This suggests the readiness to take efforts to study deeply the precious texts of other religions, and to understand, with the help of the new insights, God's revelations through manifold means.

g. The superb glory of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is unique in bearing testimony to the revelations of God's will and designs through history. The very same power of God manifests itself today and leads us to realise the glorification of God's character revealed in Jesus.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the need to study the sacred texts of the various religions.
2. Describe the unique distinctions of the Old Testament.

LESSON 2

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

The Holy Qurbana and the Bible

The reading of the O. T. and the worship

The Holy Qurbana is a Sacrifice

The Holy Qurbana and symbolic acts

The Holy Qurbana and spiritual Joy

The Holy Qurbana, as it is celebrated by the Syrian Orthodox Church today, has grown, over the years, to its present form and state of perfection, out of the solemn blending of the Jewish worship in the synagogues and the Act of the Last Supper, instituted by our Lord. It reflects the history of many centuries. It gives great importance to the proclamation of the Word of God. The many prayers, Prumiyon, Sedra, Ethro, Slooso and hymns used round the year in the Holy Qurbana proclaim very clearly, or sometimes suggest indirectly the many ideas in the Bible.

a. The Holy Qurbana and the Bible

The redemptive acts of Jesus are referred to in the Holy Qurbana on the basis of the Bible.

The various parts, suggestive of the traditions designed and given to man by God as well as those which stand for the redemptive acts are all woven together seamlessly into a beautiful and perfect whole in the Holy Qurbana. The realisation that God is all in all and everything for us makes the Church give supreme importance to praise and glorification in the worship.

b. The Reading of the Old Testament and worship

For all the different parts of worship in the Syrian Orthodox Church, there are readings from the Old Testament. For example, at the time of the ¹preparation of the Holy Qurbana

(i. e. Thooyobo) readings are given from the Psalms and Isaiah. In the ²Middle towards the ³End also, just after the receiving of the Holy Communion, verses from the Psalms are quoted.

c. The Holy Qurbana is a Sacrifice

The Church teaches us that the Holy Qurbana is a sacrifice because it implies praising God and receiving from God, forgiveness for the sins. Many of the phrases used to qualify the nature of the Holy Qurbana are closely connected with the Old Testament sacrifices. We learn that the Holy Qurbana is a bloodless sacrifice, a spiritual sacrifice an accepted sacrifice and a sacrifice with life in it and also a great memorial. There are references in the Holy Qurbana to the sacrifices during the Old Testament times. These references help us to understand how the prophets viewed the sacrifices, how they were assessed in the Psalms, the attitude of Jesus towards the sacrifices and how they were criticised objectively in the New Testament.

d. Our Lord and the Symbolic acts

In the Holy Mass, the kiss of peace is important. (Jesus points out that reconciliation and forgiveness are the pre-requisites for offering a sacrifice). We read about the symbolic acts in 'the Books of the Prophets' also. When Jesus took the bread and blessed it and said to the disciples, "This is my body," it was both a Symbolic act and an effective symbolic act. The one not only represents the other, but acts as the means leading to the reality it represents! The completion of the symbolic act of the blessing and the breaking and the giving of the bread by our Lord, referred to earlier, is realised in the crucifixion. When Jesus said, "This⁵ is my blood of the new testament" "the blood of the testament" pointed to the Sinai Covenant. "The New Testament points the ⁶'new covenant' mentioned in the

2. Psalms 103:10, 25:7, 143:2

3. Psalms 23:1, 26:2, 29:3

4. Isaiah 20:2, Jeremiah 19:10 and 28:10 Ezekiel 4:3

5. St. Mathew 26:26 St. Mark 14:12 and 22 St. Luke 22:19

6. St. Mathew 26:28

prophecy of Jeremiah.⁷ The new covenant was framed for the realisation of the goal of the Sinai covenant.

e. The Holy Qurbana and Spiritual Joy

Joy was the chief distinguishing mark of the worship of the Israelites before captivity. Occasions of coming together before the Lord were occasions, primarily of joy and thanksgiving. Later, after the captivity, when the number of different types of sacrifices increased, attention was carried away by the technicalities and, sadly, the essence of them all, that is real spiritual Joy was lost. The Christian worship succeeds in finding out again or in bringing back to its former importance JOY, real spiritual joy which is the heart and soul of worship.

QUESTIONS

Explain the statement - "The Holy Qurbana is Blessing, Peace, Sacrifice and Praise."

2. Examine the influence of the Old Testament texts and the Old Testament concepts in the Holy Qurbana.

7. Jer. 31:31

LESSON 3

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE ETHICS

The need for ethics.

The basis of the Old Testament ethics

The ten commandments

The prophets and the moral principles

The prophets of the 8th century B. C.

The sacrifices and the moral code

The attitude towards the down trodden in the society

Cruelty towards the captives

The attitude towards the people of other religions

The high moral standards

The one and the same yardstick for all.

a. The need for ethics

Each religion has its own code of justice. The custodians of the moral code in each religion are supposed to interpret, explain and assess the moral validity of the many events and problems occurring now and then in the society. There are a good many examples for this in the Old Testament.

b. The Basis of the Old Testament ethics

"Ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves and ye shall be holy; for I am holy" - this is the basis of the moral code of the Old Testament. The duty of the chosen people is to live a life quite in harmony with the character of God. And it was God's responsibility to protect His people who were bound to Him by love and to save them from enemies, from famine etcetera. God wants His people to live their lives, giving priority to Justice, truth and holiness. This is more important than living lives in strict obedience to the Laws. God gave His people a pattern of worship that would help them to lead holy lives.

c. The Ten Commandments

These are to be understood in the light of what is explained above. The first four commandments refer to man's relations with God and the remaining Six refer to his relations with man. Man's relations with man are based on his relation with God. The tenth commandment expects us to pay more heed to the true sense of all the commandments.

d. The prophets and the moral principles

Many a time when the chosen people went astray and when their anointed King turned ungodly, and when the priests forgot their zeal and commitment, there appeared on the arena, men of great spiritual powers who called a spade a spade and revealed God's will.

e. The prophets of the 8th century B. C.

Amos condemned in very forceful language the rich people and the crafty merchants and warned them of the judgement awaiting the unjust. The prophet Micha's words represent the attitude in general of the prophets of the 8th century B. C.—"O man, what is good.....but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy god?"

f. The Sacrifices and the moral code

Amos and Isaiah pointed out clearly² that sacrifices are not ways or means for the unjust to please God. For a sacrifice to be accepted, the man who offers it should make smooth his relations with God and must move in righteousness. In essence, the true sacrifice is the outward expression of the praise and thanks which spring in and overflows from a contrite heart, on securing forgiveness for the sins from God.

g. The attitude towards the downtrodden in the society

The Old Testament³ commands the people to show compassion for the handicapped. The orphans, the widows and the poor.

2. Amos 5:21-22

3. Leviticus 19:14
Leviticus 23:22
Deuteronomy 10:18-19
Deuteronomy 15:11-18

The Israhites themselves were once, poor and helpless, unprotected and slaves. God 'gave them land and riches. Hence, care and infinite concern for the poor and the suffering would be proper thanksgiving to God.

h. Cruelty towards the captives

The Israelites aimed at the total annihilation of the tribes whom they caught captives and hence they worked out very cruel atrocities. But they justified their stand, for they believed that they were fighting holy wars for God and that by destroying their enemies, they were wiping out God's enemies. The warriors were to practise penitential rites before going for war; and the spoils of war were to be offered to God. Achan's indiscipline was alleged to be the cause for defeat at Ai and hence the Israelites killed Achan and his family,

i. Injustice towards people of other religions

Granting concessions to debtors in the jubilee year was very popular practice in Israel. The Israelites could be exempted from paying the interest for the debts.⁵ But these and similar privileges were not meant for the heathens. Also The Law forbade the Israelites to eat dead animals, ⁶but they could sell them to heathens!

j. High Moral Standards

When the neighbours believed in total destruction of the enemies or the trouble-makers, the Israelites practised the law. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." They did not want to return to the opponents more harm than they received from them

k. The one and the same yardstick for all

Great credit goes to the moral code of the Israelites because it gives due punishment to all culprits disregarding their status or wealth. All were equal before God's law. The neighbouring society and nations had a different set of laws. For example some

4. Deuteronomy 7:8
Deuteronomy 26:5

5. Deut. 15:3,23:20
6. Deut. 14:1

such tribes gave hard punishments for the poor man when he offended people high up in the society. Conversely, they gave mild punishments for the rich and those in high stations in life when they offended the poor people.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the basis of the moral code of the Israelites?
2. What are the salient features of this moral code?
3. In which all respects does the moral code of the Christians deviate from that of the Israelites?

LESSON 4

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THEOLOGY

The Day of Jahweh

The Prophets and the day of Jahweh

The Captivity and the Kingdom of the Messiah

After the captivity

Is the supremacy of God real?

Even though the phrase 'Kingdom of God' is unseen in the Old Testament, the idea of the 'Eternal reign of God' is very prominent in the Old Testament. Many of the Old Testament books refer to the material Kingdom ruled over by God and its riches which He would be granting to the upright as their portion and inheritance.

a. The Day of Jahweh

The vision of the day of Jahweh is the first step for the visualising of 'the Kingdom of God! It is linked with the idea of the unification of the whole of Israel, which would lead towards victory over all its enemies. The many sacrifices and religious rites were to prepare the Israelites for this final victory of the Day of Jahweh.

b. The prophets and the Day of Jahweh

The prophets of the 8th century B C, namely, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah gave a new meaning to the idea of 'The Day of Jahweh! They taught that the 'Day of Jahweh' would be the day of Judgement for the Israelites and the heathens. And because Israel was recipient of special favours and concessions, the punishment also would be comparatively more hard.

c. The captivity and the Kingdom of the Messiah

The Babylon captivity and its consequences shattered the expectations of the Israelites about a material Kingdom, but it opened their inward eyes. Their dream of the royal reign of Jahweh began to assume spiritual meanings. The prophet Isaiah taught the people that God would be using the big powers of the

1. Exod. 15:8

2. Amos 3:2

world, even outside Israel for the realisation of His purposes. This new understanding made the Israelites see that the activities of the Persians were the result of the work of God. Cyrus was referred³ to as the 'shepherd' and the 'anointed.' Gradually this broadminded thinking led to the truth that God's authority not only upon the many races and tribes, but also upon the forces on Nature and that His Kingdom was eternal (Pslms 145:13).

d. After the captivity

During the period after the captivity, there were incidents contradictory to the teachings of the prophets that the authority of Jahweh was eternal and universal. During the days of the captivity people started to anticipate the establishment of the authority of God in the future. This kind of dreaming about the end of an tribulant epoch is faintly seen in the books of the prophets, but it is given vivid expression in the apocalyptic literature.⁴

e. Is the supremacy of God real?

The presence of evil in the world made the people arrive gradually at a new understanding of the Kingdom of God!

1. The existence of a domain that accepts God's supremacy
2. The domain of Satan, ever fighting against God.

But Satan's victories would be only temporary. God would, in the end, overpower Satan and his forces. In the Book of Daniel, the author⁵ refers to different types of empires and then the last and final empire to be established by God. Even in the New Testament there are references⁶ to people who lived looking forward to the establishments of the Kingdom of God. (This is dealt with in the study of the New Testament).

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the concepts related to 'The Kingdom of God'
2. Explain the change of meaning in the understanding of 'the Kingdom of God.'

3. Isaiah 2:2-4

4. Isaiah 24-27

Zachariah 9-14

5. Daniel 7:14

6. Luke 2:25,38

Luke 14:15

Luke 17:20

Luke 19:11

LESSON 5

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND INTERPRETATIONS

The need for interpretations

Interpretations and the background

Individuals and the freedom for interpretations

The preparation before interpreting

The modern problems :

1. *letter by letter interpretations*
2. *Allegorical interpretations*
3. *Prophecy - Fulfilling*
4. *Typology*

The Relevance of Interpretations

a. The need for interpretations

In the 'Acts'¹ we read about the Ethiopian presenting the dire need for guidance and interpretations, while referring to a passage from the book of Isaiah which he had been reading.

b. Interpretations and the background

The following insights are important with respect to the interpretations of the Bible.

1. In which context was the passage written? What is its meaning in that particular context?
2. What is the nature of the passage and ideas in the Old Testament later quoted in the New Testament?
3. What is the approach adopted by the Church towards the understanding and interpreting of these passages?

c. Individuals and the freedom for interpretations

There is high probability for danger and grave errors if unbridled freedom is given to individuals for interpretations, as

1. Acts 8:31

we learn from the history of the Western Churches. Individuals can use the Bible, with no restriction at all, for reading and meditations. But if they are given opportunities to interpret the holy Text as they like, it would undermine the solidarity of the Church.

d. The preparations before interpreting

1. The background of the formation of each book, the relation of different parts to the content of the book, characteristics, if any, from the literary point of view, the motive force behind the compilation or formation of the texts as we see them now, the special features of the oral method, the influence of worship upon the compilation of the many texts - all these are to be borne in mind before venturing to interpret.

2. The study of Linguistics : Meticulous care is to be taken to find out the meanings of words, the relative importance of the words to the sentence as a whole, the relation the words bear to one another within the framework of the sentence etcetera. Difficulties in the study of the original text could be solved by the study of the Hebrew translation and also by the comparative study of the few other translations in the different languages. Also Bible dictionaries and annotations can come to our aid.

e. Modern Problems

After a thorough study of the above mentioned facts, when we try to relate them with the contemporary problems, difficulties regarding the nature of the interpretations crop up.

1. **Letter by letter interpretations :** This helps us to understand a good number of situations and to persuade us to translate them into our lines. Abraham's obedience to the words of God, his readiness to go through hard ordeals are all examples. But Jacob is not a good model to imitate when he snatches off the elder brother's rights through tricks.

2. **Allegorical interpretations :** This type of interpretations were greatly in vogue once. John Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress' is a fine example. The interpreters see below the surface-level meanings, deeper layers of spiritual meanings. For example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, beneath the surface story, the interpreters bring home to us so many meanings - 1. Who is the Levite,

2. Who is the priest? 3. Who is the Good Samaritan? It was this type of interpretations, which secured for 'Song of Songs' a place among the holy books in the Bible. But these types of interpretations have to be done with great care and resourcefulness.

3. Prophecy - fulfilling : Distinct passages from the books of prophecy, referring to the Lord's birth, crucifixion, glorification etcetera help us to understand them better. But we may not succeed to find prophetic utterances with respect to all the incidents in the Lord's life about which we learn in the New Testament. The study of these prophecies help us to see how the Lord accommodated Himself in the tradition of the prophets in order to fulfil His ministry.

4. Typology : We find parables between phrases and events in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. For example, Melchisedek, the priest is shown to be a parallel to Christ, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Also Adam, representing death and sin is a contrast to Christ representing life and righteousness.

f. The Relevance of Interpretations

The Holy book contains the truth which describe and define the nature of the covenant God made with man. When we study the contemporary problems and events and co-relate them with the meaning and importance of various passages in the Old Testament, the explanations and the interpretations must be made in the light of God's love manifested through Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the various modes of interpretations of the Bible.
2. How can we relate the Old Testament and contemporary problems?

LESSON 6

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE INDIAN SCENE

God the Providence

Man, the image of God

Worship and the different religions

Religious texts and Individual reading

The individual and the society

The sacrifice from the Individual for the good of the society

The fight between good and evil

Some conservatives argue that Christianity is alien to the Indian territory and that it has not been able to send its roots deep down the Indian Soil. But we may see that various religions flourished in India all through these religious tolerance, shown by the Indians. We have to work further to explore areas of accord among the various religions and to ignore those of discord.

a. God the Providence

Christianity teaches that God is the creator, the Providence and the great protector of all life. The human beings have responsibility to maintain healthy relations with God and also with the rest of the created world. The prime teachings in Christianity are - (1) Serve God with your whole heart, whole mind and whole spirit (2) Love your neighbour as you love yourself. These are two precepts precious to all the other religions in India.

b. Man, the image of God

Man is the crown of creation and he must reflect God's glory and greatness. He can, live in live fellowship with God. More or less the same ideas and thoughts we can find in the holy texts of Hinduism too. Disagreement arises regarding the nature of the relationship between man and God, and the nature of man's state after his death..

c. The various religions and worship

There are some methods and practices which help man to keep alive his fellowship with his creator. Herein lies the need and importance of worship; both the Hindus and Muslims accept this great truth. All the religions in India give great importance to the reading of the holy texts during worship. The Hindus attach more importance to the individual's private worship than common worship in a congregation.

d. The religious texts and the private reading by the individual

The power, joy and consolation that a person gets from the reading, study and meditations of the holy texts is a great truth known to people of all the diverse religions.

e. The individual and the society

The inseparable relation between the society and the individual, the place of the individual in the society, the influence of the individual's action upon the society and viceversa - these are thoughts very common in the Old Testament and these are very easily grasped by the Indian societies. This is because the Indians have been, from ancient days viewing the merits and demerits of the inseparable link between the individual and the society. This belief continues to be in sway in India, even today despite the many changes in the society because of the changes in the life-style of the people on account of the industrial, scientific and technological advancement.

f. The sacrifice from the individual for the good of the Society

The Old Testament thought that the individual's sacrifices and suffering can be instrumental in bringing benefit and blessing to the whole society is quite in agreement with the Indian Thought and Philosophy. Besides, the idea that a person will get as reward Good or Evil according to the good or evil actions he had done, is very prominent in the Old Testament and also in the many holy Texts of India.

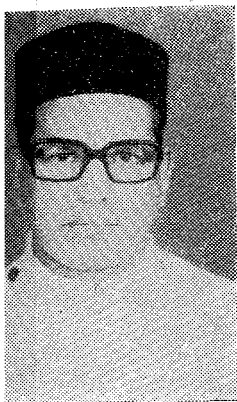
g. The fight between good and evil

This is one of the recurring thoughts in the Old Testament; and the book assures that the final victory would be for good. The great religious texts of India too witness the Avatars of the gods to destroy Evil and to promote Good.

QUESTIONS

1. Examine the thoughts which are similar or which bear Kinship to one another both in the Old Testament and in the texts of Hinduism.
2. Examine the unique distinctions of the Old Testament.

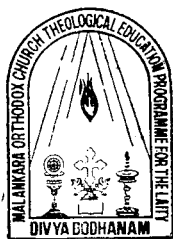
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SOPHIA

THE RAYS OF HOPE

REV. DR. KALLARAKKAL