OLDT 5020: Discussion Posts

Week 2 Discussion

> Briefly talk about the relevance of the Old Testament for Christians today.

The importance of the Old Testament for Christians today is commonly understated. In my experience, many Christians quote the word of the Lord: “I did not come to destroy [the Law or the Prophets] but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17) and then struggle to clearly define what is meant by “fulfill” making it instead, a practical "abolishment." Those who wish to combat the teachings about homosexuality, tattooing, customary impurity, 40/80-day period after birth, etc. simply say “that’s from the OT” as if it is null. But the OT is the inspired Word of God; relevant, applicable and profitable, to modern Christians in more than one way. I will illustrate the below points using Genesis, though any book can be used.

Theology: God reveals Himself in His Creation. He reveals Himself as the Lover of Mankind when He gives opportunities for repentance to Adam, Eve, Cain, Judah, Abraham, Jacob, Esau, the brothers of Joseph, etc. (some who accepted, some who did not). He reveals Himself as Almighty in the Flood of Noah. He reveals Himself as good in the story of Joseph (when the evil action of his brothers is used by God for good). And much more.

Ethics: Besides the actual Law of Moses (including the Ten Commandments, the Statutes, etc.) which provided an ethical foundation that is still applicable for us, the OT is full of ethical examples. St Gregory of Nyssa writes “On the Life of Moses” to explain the verse “be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” We can learn obedience from Noah, hospitality from Abraham, humility from Jacob (who bowed before his brother Esau upon returning from Laban), repentance from Judah, and forgiveness from Joseph.

Messianism: From the “Seed of the woman” in Genesis 3 to the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 to the “Scepter departing from Judah when Shiloh comes” in Genesis 49, Messianism is clear through prophecy, typology, and other foreshadowing.

Liturgy: The whole economy of our salvation starts in Genesis as the father the priest proclaims: “Holy O Lord our God who formed us, created us, and placed us in the Paradise of joy; when we disobeyed Your commandment by the deception of the serpent, we fell from eternal life and were exiled from the Paradise of joy.” (Liturgy of St Basil). Our Liturgical life is tied to our salvation which is tied to the OT.

Week 3 Discussion

>

> In 250-350 words, please summarize the information provided by the video lecture with respect to the two notions “revelation” and “inspiration.”

Revelation is God’s disclosure of Himself through various means. One way is through natural means: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalms 19:1) and “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20). The other way, which is the focus of our material, is the supernatural; of which one example is Inspiration.

The notion of Inspiration is that the Books of the Bible are sacred and canonical, written by the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, authored by God. The word “inspire” itself comes from “the breathing into.” The Scripture are the breath of God.

Regarding the Inspiration of the Old Testament, it is a belief that is supported first and foremost by the apostles who authored the New Testament (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:19-21). It is also supported internally in certain books and passages where the author records God telling him to write (cf. Exodus 17:14, Isaiah 30:8, Jeremiah, Habakkuk), and by the late Old Testament terminology (cf. 1 Maccabees 12:9). It is supported by the early Jewish historians Philo and Josephus in their writings (Philo having adopted the Greek word for “inspire” very early on) and by the Babylonian Talmud. Finally, it is supported by the Church Fathers including St Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St Gregory the Theologian and others.

There are three formulae for inspiration. On the one hand, some supported Dictation – that God dictated the specific words to be written down in the Scripture. On the other hand, some support a more liberal “God, the Author” – that God is the sole author of the Scripture without any human intervention save for the pen to the page. A more balanced view is one first championed by St John Chrysostom – “Condescension.” That the Scriptures are written by human authors who heard the murmurs of the Lord (as Elijah did in 1 Kings 19), interpreted them and wrote them down. They expressed their thoughts and experiences in text, metaphors, images, analogies, and symbols, being guided by the Holy Spirit. It is a synergetic process in which God and man co-author the Scripture.

Week 4 Discussion

> In 250-350 words, how would you describe briefly the relationship between Scripture and Tradition from an Orthodox perspective?

There are three distinct ways of looking at Scripture and Tradition across Christendom: The more Catholic view of "Scripture and Tradition" as two sources of God's Revelation; the Protestant view of "Scripture alone"; and the more traditional, patristic and apostolic view of "Scripture within Tradition" which is representative of the Orthodox perspective.

To me, it seems appropriate to describe the relationship between Scripture and Tradition as a Symbiotic Relationship. The Church Tradition has been formed and informed by the Scripture since

the beginning, And the Scripture breathes life into the Church and Her members to keep the Tradition alive.

The Tradition of the Church includes the Scripture and its Interpretation, the Liturgies and Sacraments; the Iconography, art, music and hymnology; the Councils and Canons; the Patristic tradition and the Ascetic tradition; and other modes of grace. All of these are rooted in the teachings first proclaimed by the Apostles, and later codified by the Church.

We can consider the Scripture and Tradition relationship as a textbook-handout analogy, or as is more relatable to this course, an analogy of our course textbook to the video lectures. The textbook for this course ("The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition") contains quotes, references, academic jargon, arguments and discussions in each chapter. The video lecture is much shorter, serving to explain and outline the material in the relevant chapter. The lecture cannot stand alone, but depends on the textbook.

How much more for the Holy Scripture which is an "untamable" textbook, that can never be exhaustively elucidated from all angles?

Week 5 Discussion

> In 250-350 words, write a brief summary of the biblical history concentrating on Iron Age (i.e., the period of monarchy in Israel—united and then divided).

Biblical History covers everything from pre-history, through the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, the Iron Ages, the Persian and Hellenistic Period, and (with the New Testament), the Roman Period. The history of the Genesis patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and Joseph takes place during the Middle Bronze Age. Continuing into the history of the Exodus event and the Israelite conquest by Joshua takes place during the Late Bronze Age. A majority of the Biblical History of the Old Testament takes place during the Iron Age beginning with the period of the Judges and continuing through the periods of the Unified Kingdom of Israel, and the Divided Kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

In the days before Israel had a king, "everyone did what was right in their own eyes." And as Israel would fall into sin, they would be taken captive or find themselves in battle. Then, the Lord would send them Judges - not in a legal sense, but charismatic individuals who acted as military leaders to deliver Israel from their hardship. When delivered, Israel would return to the Lord - for a time; and after the time, revert to their sinful ways and the cycle would repeat.

In the time of the Prophet Samuel, the people requested of him that God provide them with a king. King Saul was chosen by God (through Samuel) and by the people and was anointed as King. He led the people through battle and conquest, but did not honor the Lord. The Lord chose one to replace him - King David.

King David is described by the Lord as "a man after My own heart." He continued to lead Israel as a Unified Kingdom and established systems for the priests and the government. He desired to build the Temple, but the Lord left this for his son Solomon. King Solomon built the Temple of the Lord, and brought the Unified Kingdom to the height of wealth and glory. He reigned with wisdom until

he was seduced by foreign women and their idols.

After his death, a struggle for the Kingdom ensued; his son Rehoboam, who opted for a more aggressive and oppressive leadership style did not find support, whereas Jeroboam (who was one of Solomon's officials) won the support for the people. The Kingdom was split in two, with the ten northern tribes following Jeroboam and becoming the Kingdom of Israel, and the two southern tribes following Rehoboam and becoming the Kingdom of Judah. Jeroboam, fearing that the people would return to Jerusalem (in Judah) to worship at the Temple, built idols in the Northern Kingdom and compelled the Israelites to worship them. This was the beginning of the tumultuous history of the kings.

All of the Northern Kings "did evil in the sight of the Lord." This culminated in the captivity of the North by Assyria under King Sargon II in the Middle Iron Age. Most of the Southern Kings also "did evil in the sight of the Lord," although some were likened to King David. This culminated in the captivity of the South by Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar in the Middle Iron Age. The Babylonian captivity lasted about 70 years until the Persian empire conquered Babylon and King Cyrus of Persia issued an edict allowing the Jews to return to their homeland (which takes us out of the Iron Age, and into the Persian Period).

Week 6 Discussion

> In 250-350 words, briefly summarize the "Documentary Hypothesis" (Wellhausen) with regard to the making of the Pentateuch.

The Documentary Hypotheses put forth by Wellhausen makes a compelling argument about the authorship and compilation of the Pentateuch. It hypothesizes that the Pentateuch is a document that compiles and edits four other documents, abbreviated as J, E, D and P. Those four sources were authored at various times and places, with various motivations and authors, reflecting various traditions, stories and messages.

J - the Yahwist source - is named after its use of Yahweh for the name of God. This source sees God as walking and talking with humanity, stresses blessings, supports leadership and the person and tribe of Judah. It is also distinguished from the Elohist source by using the name "Sinai" for the mountain on which God speaks to Moses, and "Canaanites" for the natives of the Promised Land. The theory is that the Yahwist source was authored some time during Solomon's reign as king, or shortly after, in an attempt to glorify the monarchy created by David and Solomon.

E - the Elohist source - is named after its use of Elohim for the name of God (at least prior to God revealing His name as Yahweh in Exodus). In the Elohist source, God speaks through dreams and visions rather than "face-to-face." The fear of the Lord is stressed rather than blessings. Northern Israel is stressed as opposed to Judah (e.g. Reuben advocating for Joseph rather than Judah in the J source). It is also distinguished from J by using the terms "Horeb" and "Amorites". The theory is that the Elohist source was authored after the split of the kingdom as a sort of "response to" (or refinement of) the J source.

When the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria, the J and E sources were taken to the south and combined as one for the people living in Judah.

D - the Deuteronomistic source - is named after the book of Deuteronomy, as this document seems to be distinct in style from the rest of the Pentateuch. It was authored by priests, Levites and prophets in an effort to "reform" bad practice and faith in Judah (at the same time as the combined JE Source). This source stresses the importance of following the Law of Moses, and is written in a distinct style with long sermons.

P - the Priestly Source - is named after the supposed authors: priests from exile and post-exile. Those priests, hoping to preserve the various laws, regulations, statutes, commandments and traditions while in exile, assembled what we now call the end of Exodus, the Book of Leviticus, and the beginning of the Book of Numbers. This source contains various genealogies, Proper names of several places, and stresses obedience to God's word.

According to the Hypothesis, it was Ezra the Scribe who assembled and edited these sources into the Torah/Pentateuch. Although many scholars supported this hypothesis at the beginning of the 20th Century, the emergence of a Form Criticism cast shadows of reasonable doubt on several details of the hypothesis.

Week 7 Discussion

> In 250-350 words, choose from the Pentateuch two selected texts, discussed in the video lecture, and briefly summarize them.

Even as early as the Pentateuch, we start to see Messianic Prophecies and Typology in several stories - The Sacrifice of Isaac, the Person of Joseph, Moses the Prophet, the Passover, Yom Kippur, and the Bronze Serpent all come to mind.

In the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22), God puts Abraham's obedience to the test. Abraham does not contest or fight back, but does as God commanded - he takes his only son, Isaac, and two servants, and sets off for a journey of three days to the mountain called Moriah. At the mountain, Abraham is ready to sacrifice Isaac, even raising the knife to slay him, but God prevents him and tells him to sacrifice a ram instead. It is a story about a father who loved his son, and was obedient even to the death of his son. "And as Isaac carried the wood for a burnt offering, so did Christ carry the Cross to Golgotha; and as Isaac came back alive, so too did Christ come back alive on the third day." (Coptic Covenant Thursday Fraction Prayer)

In the Bronze Serpent (Numbers 21), the Israelites complained to and about Moses, and looked back to their time in Egypt and compared it to their time in the wilderness. The Lord sent serpents to bite them and bring upon them death. Moses intercedes for them to God who instructs him to make a serpent of gold and put it on his staff, that whoever looks upon it would not die. Just as the Bronze Serpent brought salvation and healing, so too does the Cross bring healing. The serpents were bringing death, and a serpent brought life. So also did the Lord conquer death by His Death.

Week 8 Discussion

>

> In 250-350 words, briefly talk about the “Historical Books” (i.e., “Deuteronomistic History”) emphasizing on theological themes of this section of the Old Testament.

The books of Deuteronomistic History include Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. They are theorized to have been compiled, edited and completed towards the end of the Babylonian Exile, by editors similar in thought to those of Deuteronomy (thus the name). The main theological themes are: if you obey the Lord God's commandments and Law, He will bless you. If you do not, you will be cursed (e.g. attacked, taken captive, etc.). Fidelity to the Law attracts God's blessing. This theme is spelled out clearly by Moses at the end of Deuteronomy and again by Joshua at the end of Joshua. The purpose of this history is to explain the exile - the exile is not meaningless. It is God's punishment for the people's neglect of the Law.

The Book of Joshua shows a time of obedience and blessing. God's power to defeat all of Israel's enemies. Contrast this with the Book of Judges which shows a troubled time and gives several examples of the theme in a cycle (which begins after the death of Joshua): Israel sins and disobeys God, God punishes them, Israel calls on God, He raises for them a judge, the judge delivers them, they are obedient to God's commandment for the lifetime of that judge. After the judge's death, the cycle repeats. The phrase: "In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in their own eyes" is repeated several times.

This segues into 1 Samuel - Samuel, a judge of Israel who was also a priest and a prophet, anoints for Israel a King to lead them. King Saul rejects God, and is replaced by King David (also anointed by Samuel). 1-2 Samuel give us the narrative of King David - his successes and his failures. God makes a personal covenant with David, God protects David (e.g. against Saul, against Absalom), establishing his Dynasty.

Then in 1-2 Kings, the period of the Kings and the divided kingdom show a general lack of spiritual leadership from the kings (with the exception of King Asa, King Hezekiah and King Josiah). The Northern Kingdom is shown to have had no good kings. The emphasis falls on the prophets to take the message of the Lord and deliver it to the people (e.g. Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, etc.). The Fall of Judah and the Exile is brought about on the people by themselves through their evil kings.

Week 9 Discussion

> In 250-350 words, briefly talk about the eighth century BC prophets and their theology.

The prophets of the 8th Century BC include: Amos & Hosea in the Northern Kingdom of Israel; and Isaiah and Micah in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. They prophesied during the rise of the Assyrian Empire, the Fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to Assyria, and the attempted captivity on Judah by Assyria (thwarted by the prayers of King Hezekiah and the Prophet Isaiah). Being pre-exilic prophets, their messages are centered around "the exile is coming, repent before it is too late!"

The prophet Amos prophesied about Israel's disobedience to the ten commandments; he also makes references to the reality that the Lord cares for ALL nations, not just Israel; that the Lord chastises ALL nations including Israel. "For three transgressions and for four" of Damascus, Gaza,

Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah and Israel.

The prophet Hosea gives his message with symbolism - Israel is a bride to God, and has become a harlot. Her idolatry is unfaithfulness to God. He also emphasizes the importance of knowing God - not through books and law, but a personal relationship with God. "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6)

The prophet Isaiah writes the most out of all the prophets and we also experience his role in the thwarting of Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem. Isaiah's prophecies carry a message of hope for a future King who will obey God's commandments and other such prophecies about the Messiah. Isaiah prophesied mostly in Jerusalem and with the king.

The prophet Micah, in contrast, focuses his prophecy on small villages and towns, rarely mentioning Jerusalem or the Temple. He prophesies a message of judgment against the Northern Kingdom in Samaria, as well as the Southern Kingdom, and gives messages of hope for salvation.

All of the prophets include a message of hope of some sort (usually at the end) - if you turn back to the commandment of God, the Lord will accept your repentance.

Week 10 Discussion

> In 250-350 words, briefly talk about the seventh-sixth century BC prophets and their theology.

Where the 8th Century BC was characterized by the renewed strength of the Assyrian Empire, and their overtaking of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the Kingdom did not last very long after the defeat of Sennacherib by the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The 7th and 6th Centuries BC see a weakened Assyria being overtaken by Babylon and the Medes.

The prophets of the 7th and 6th Centuries BC in the Southern Kingdom of Judah include: Zephaniah, Habbakuk and Jeremiah. The prophet Nahum also prophesied in this time period, though his prophecy was mostly directed to Assyria. During this time period, the evil King Manasseh reigned in Judah, undoing most of what his father (the righteous King Hezekiah) had done. It was a time void of prophecy. Near the end of his reign and the beginning of King Josiah's reign, the prophet Zephaniah enters the scene. When King Josiah institutes his religious reforms, after discovering the Book of the Law in the Temple, the Prophet Habbakuk and the Prophet Jeremiah begin to prophesy. Jeremiah continues to prophesy after Josiah when the later kings attempted to make alliances with Egypt or Babylon, and until the captivity and exile of Judah.

Being pre-exilic prophets, their prophecies focus on the impending captivity. Zephaniah focuses on a central theme: the coming of the Day of the Lord. It is not a new subject for his hearers, as Amos and Isaiah had both prophesied. Zephaniah encourages his audience to repent and seek the Lord, seek righteousness, seek humility. "It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger."

The Prophet Habbakuk takes a different approach to prophecy. He wrestles with difficult concepts that all of humanity wrestles with, and presents his prophecy as a dialogue with God - Why are the wicked allowed to prosper? Why should they even be allowed to oppress those who are good? And when the Lord answers him, he struggles also with that answer. By the end of his prophecy, and his dialogue with God, he has learned to embrace the Lord's promises with faith, and awaits the coming of the Lord.

Finally, the prophet Jeremiah sums up the theological themes of the Latter Prophets in general. God will destroy the Temple because the people sinned against Him. God will bring the people into exile, so do not seek other alliances (e.g. Egypt) against the Babylonians, because God has already decided on this punishment. People should take it seriously - go to exile, live and repent from your sins, that God may have mercy on you and return you to your homeland.

Week 11 Discussion

> In 250-350 words, briefly talk about the post-exilic prophets and their theology.

After the Exile, when the Jews were allowed to return to their land, there were three main prophets who prophesied: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

The Jews who returned were faced with challenges, chief among them, the Samaritans who inhabited what was formerly the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Samaritans opposed the building of the Temple, and the walls of Jerusalem. Along with these struggles, many wanted to build up their own homes and their own fortunes, and neglected the building of the Temple. So came the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

Haggai prophesied that the land is suffering drought, hunger, poverty and failure because people are building their own homes and fortunes and neglecting the Temple. The land needs to be purified by the presence of God in His Temple. Until this is done, there will be no blessing. Haggai emphasizes that Zerubbabel will be anointed by God to rule. Zechariah prophesied at the same time and with a similar message, although he also stressed the role of the High Priest (i.e. Joshua). Zechariah's prophecies are expressed using visions whereas Haggai simply uses oracles.

Later on, came the prophet Malachi who was zealous for and loved the Temple and worship. He rebukes the priests for their sins and their failure to pay tithes. He calls for repentance because the Day of the Lord is coming

During this time also, we have Third Isaiah, Joel and Jonah (to the Ninevites).

Week 12 Discussion

> In 250-350 words, briefly talk about the "Wisdom Books."

The Wisdom Books carry several themes in the Old Testament, and are some of the most applicable themes to everyday life. These include Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs,

Wisdom, Sirach and the Psalms. They can be summarized as:

1. God has a plan and humanity plays a role in that plan. Order is necessary to understand it.
2. Actions have consequences - doing evil results in evil. Doing good results in good.
3. God is revealed in His creation - the order and beauty of creation speak of God through a natural revelation. This is especially prevalent in the Song of Songs.
4. Wisdom can be personified. Usually with the Greek female pronoun (she), one is invited to speak to Her and find Her.
5. Suffering has meaning - it can be a consequence of evil done, or a test of faith. This is especially prevalent in Job.
6. Life is good, creation is good, anything that comes from God is good. (See also Genesis 1)
7. Humans are responsible for the world and have dominion over it (see also Genesis 1-2)
8. The Divine plan is beyond our control, so "the fear of God" and "wisdom" are a higher form of knowledge

Week 13 Discussion

> In 250-350 words, briefly talk about the Septuagint additions (a.k.a. "deuterocanonical books" or anaginoskomena "readable").

The anaginoskomena are books that are considered non-canonical but "readable" by Orthodox Christians (called Deuterocanonical by Catholics). They are called "readable" by St Athanasius in his Festal Letter, and by the Council of Laodicea in 360 AD.

These include: Baruch, Tobit, Judith, 1 Esdras, 1-3 Maccabeees, Prayer of Manasseh, Wisdom and Sirach

These texts are included in the Greek Septuagint, but not in the Hebrew Bible. They are not recognized by Jews as Canonical, nor by Protestants.

Tobit and Judith tell narratives from during the Assyrian Captivity, written in similar styles to Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah. Tobit tells the story of the trip Tobias took, accompanied by the angel Raphael, in which they cast out a demon, took a wife and healed his father, Tobit, from his blindness. Judith tells the story of the hero namesake who conquered general Sisera during a siege of the small town of Bethulia near Jerusalem.

Baruch, written by Jeremiah's secretary, Baruch, was very popular in Alexandria. It seeks to encourage Jews in their fight against the Hellenistic culture and lifestyle.

The Books of Wisdom and Sirach are wisdom books, similar to those of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes and explore all of the facets and situations that require wisdom.

1-2 Maccabees tells the story of the exploits of Mattathias and his sons, the Maccabees and their struggle with the Greek Empire, their revolt, and their victory. It is a necessary historical preface to the New Testament.

3 Maccabees & 1 Esdras, although not considered canonical by the Coptic Orthodox Church, are anaginoskomena in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition.

Week 14 Discussion

> In 250-350 words, choose from the Wisdom Books two selected texts, discussed in the video lecture, and briefly summarize them.

Job 1-2

- God tests Job, similarly to how He tested Abraham in Genesis 22.
- Job is described as being true, blameless, righteous and God-fearing, abstaining from every evil thing. He is wealthy, prosperous, and has many children. He did great works on the earth.
- Satan went before God and accused Job, saying "Does Job worship the Lord for no reason?" - if you take away all of the comforts Job has, then he will not worship You! The Lord permits him to take his children and possessions, but without touching his health.
- Job continues to glorify God even with his wife.
- Again, Satan goes before God and says as long as Job is healthy, he will worship You. The Lord allows him to touch his health, but without taking his life.
- Still, Job "did not sin with h is lips against God" even telling his wife: "If we accepted good things from the Lord's hand, shall we not endure evil things?"
- Job's friends visit him to comfort him, but over the next 40 chapters, will instead imagine themselves to understand the reasons behind his sufferings, and engage in a long dialogue with him speaking what is not right.

Prov 1:20-33

- The Call of Wisdom
- Wisdom is personified here as a woman ("She") calling out with her voice in the open square
- She is calling the scoffers to repentance, and the fools to knowledge
- She is rebuking us for our sins, and for the times when we refused her
- Those who hated knowledge, when they call on her, she will not answer. When they seek her, they will not find her.
- Such is the fruit of their own way, and the filling of their fancies.

Revision #14
Created 2025-02-03 01:24:00 UTC by Fr.Maximus Wahba
Updated 2025-05-08 08:36:39 UTC by Fr.Maximus Wahba