

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.

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Week 9 Discussion

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

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Week 10 Discussion

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

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Week 11 Discussion

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

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Week 12 Discussion

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

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Week 13 Discussion

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

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Week 14 Discussion

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

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