

Kingdom, Covenants & Canon of the Old Testament

Study Guide

LESSON
FOUR

THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT



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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON AND STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video lesson. If you do not have access to the video, the study guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the lesson and study guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — In the Notes section of the study guide, the lesson has been divided into sections that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the study guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each section and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:28)

II. Canon as Mirror / Thematic (3:11)

We often treat books as mirrors, seeing ourselves as the books reflect our interests and concerns.

“Thematic analysis” emphasizes themes or topics that are important to us.

A. Basis (5:06)

1. Character of Scripture (5:36)

Old Testament passages touch on many different topics, and have implications for multiple issues.

- Prominent themes

- Minor themes

- Extraneous themes

Thematic analysis rightly draws attention to the array of secondary or minor topics that Old Testament passages address.

2. Biblical Examples (9:55)

Biblical writers often drew attention to relatively minor aspects of Old Testament passages.

B. Focus (12:04)

Different thematic approaches may be used with the Old Testament.

1. Doctrines (12:48)

Primarily, thematic analysis has been used for the support of Christian doctrines.

Thematic analysis with this emphasis often provides proof-texts; quick references to specific passages to justify doctrinal positions.

Well-established proof-texts are usually valid and helpful ways of referring to themes in biblical passages, even when these themes are not central to the passages.

2. Examples (15:06)

We look to the Old Testament for characters whom we should imitate or reject.

Searching for examples is a legitimate way to find the authoritative, detailed teaching of the Old Testament.

3. Personal Needs (17:26)

Thematic analysis uses the Old Testament to gain guidance for more personal concerns, questions, struggles and needs.

III. Canon as Window / Historical (18:53)

The Old Testament is an authoritative window to the history of salvation recorded in the Bible.

One of the most central features of the Old Testament Canon is its presentation of the history of God's dealings with his people.

A. Basis (21:22)

1. Character of Scripture (21:56)

The Old Testament is inspired by God. It is "God-breathed."

The Old Testament is highly selective in the history it reports. It omits much more than it mentions.

There have been objections to the historical reliability of the Old Testament.

Followers of Christ should believe in the supernatural world that the Old Testament describes.

The Old Testament sometimes seems to be in tension with other sources of historical information:

- Scientists sometimes misunderstand evidence supporting their claims.
- Apparent incongruities between the biblical record and history sometimes arise from Christians misunderstanding the Old Testament.
- Sometimes both scientific opinion and our interpretation of the Old Testament are in error.

The inspiration of Scripture establishes the historical authority of the Old Testament.

2. **Biblical Examples (32:02)**

In all of the Scriptures, there is not one instance of biblical writers questioning the historical veracity of the Old Testament.

The writer of Chronicles relied on the historicity of the Old Testament in his genealogies.

In Luke's record of Stephen's speech in Acts 7, the Old Testament:

- recorded historical figures
- recorded factual stories
- was the basis for repentance and faith in Christ

B. Focus (34:42)

“Biblical theology” is a broad term that refers to several different historical approaches to the Scriptures.

One of the most influential forms of Biblical theology focuses on two basic steps:

- Creating a “synchronic snapshot,” looking at a period of time in the Old Testament as a unit.
- Performing a “diachronic trace,” looking at the connections between events through time.

1. Synchronic Snapshot (35:56)

Divide the Old Testament into periods of time, and explore what the Scriptures tell us about those periods.

The criteria we use to divide the Old Testament into ages heavily influences the divisions we create.

Geerhardus Vos divided the Old Testament according to the criteria of major shifts in the form and content of divine revelation.

Vos believed that the major changes that took place in the form and content of divine revelation moved history from one age to the next.

Biblical theologians typically focus on the more formative or central events of each period in the Old Testament.

2. Diachronic Trace (42:32)

The diachronic trace focuses on the ways biblical events connect with each other through time, from one period to another.

Comparison of events in each age often reveals vectors, directions or paths that the Old Testament followed.

An example of diachronic tracing is God's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham:

- God established humanity as his vice-regents and instructed them to take dominion over the entire earth.
- In the flood of Noah's day, God maintained his plan to bring his kingdom to earth.
- God gave the Promised Land to Abraham as a beginning point from which to lead all families of the earth toward the blessings of redemption and God-honoring dominion over the entire earth.

- In the exodus and conquest under Moses and Joshua, God established Israel in the Promised Land as her national homeland.
- The security of the land provided by the house of David was a further step toward solidifying and expanding the initial conquest of the land.
- This great hope in the house of David faced a horrible collapse during the time of exile and failed restoration.
- God acted in Christ to reverse the failures of the exile and failed restoration and to bring fulfillment of the dominion of redeemed humanity over the earth.

IV. Canon as Picture / Literary (53:10)

The Old Testament Canon is a collection of literary works, books that were skillfully composed.

- We appreciate the literary artistry in the Old Testament
- We seek to understand how Old Testament writers conveyed their outlooks to their original audiences.

Writers carefully construct their documents to express their own outlooks in an attempt to influence the opinions and lives of their readers.

A. Basis (56:01)

1. Character of Scripture (56:36)

The Old Testament Canon comes to us in books or literary units:

- sophisticated literary qualities
- great deal of literary variety

a. Literary Units

Our Old Testament contains 39 books.

The Old Testament books' names in our Bibles are not original.

The books' sequence in the Old Testament has differed throughout history.

In literary analysis we seek to arrange our theological assessments in ways that parallel the literary units in the Canon.

Literary analysis:

- seeks to minimize re-arrangement
- looks for the literary units and priorities of the Old Testament itself

b. Literary Qualities

Literary analysis is justified by the fact that Old Testament books exhibit sophisticated literary qualities.

The literary sophistication of Old Testament books calls for careful attention to their literary qualities.

Archaeologists have discovered a wide range of written materials from the ancient world of the Old Testament.

The books of the Old Testament are among the most elaborate literary works known from the ancient world.

The literary qualities of Old Testament books enable their communicative power.

c. Literary Variety

We should pursue literary analysis of the Old Testament because of the variety of literature that it contains.

Each genre has its own conventions, its own ways of communicating its influence.

2. Biblical Examples (1:07:12)

Literary analysis is based on the fact that biblical characters and writers sought the guidance of the Old Testament Canon in this way as well.

In Mark 10:4, Jesus focused on literary analysis as he dealt with the topic of divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1.

Literary analysis also appears in Galatians 4:22-24.

B. Focus (1:13:55)

1. Writer (1:14:36)

Focusing on the human writers of the Old Testament presents a danger when we become involved in speculation.

Focusing on biblical writers offers benefits if we are careful and responsible. We can have varying degrees of knowledge about their:

- identities
- broad circumstances
- basic theological motives

An overemphasis on the writer may be called “the intentional fallacy.”

2. Audience (1:19:19)

Responsible literary analysis of the Old Testament also considers the original audience.

Some forms of literary analysis depend too heavily on detailed, uncertain knowledge of the audience. This speculation is a danger.

An overemphasis on the audience may be called “the affective fallacy.”

There are many benefits we can derive from considering the audience because we usually know lots of helpful general information:

- understand if not read ancient Hebrew
- general location
- major events that they had experienced
- some faithful, others unfaithful

3. Document (1:23:01)

The term “document” refers to any portion of the Old Testament that we may have in view, regardless of its size.

The “graphic fallacy” is placing too much emphasis on the document.

As we consider the writers, the audiences and the literary qualities of Old Testament documents, we can discern the main purposes for which the various part of the Old Testament Canon were written.

V. Conclusion (1:32:07)

Application Questions

1. Describe a situation in which you might appropriate thematic analysis to gain guidance and insight for a personal concern.
2. Have you ever found it difficult to believe the historical events of the Bible? Why should Christians believe the supernatural events of the Old Testament?
3. How does understanding the diachronic trace of biblical events enrich your understanding of Scripture?
4. Give an example of how knowing the writer's intentions can help you understand Scripture better.
5. In literary analysis, how can you avoid the fallacies regarding the writer, the audience, and the document?
6. In what ways is the Bible like any other book? In what ways is it different? How should these similarities and differences affect the way you read it?
7. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study? Why?

Glossary

Affective fallacy – Interpretive mistake of focusing too heavily on how a passage of Scripture affected its original audience

Canon – Authoritative standard; the exclusive collection of documents in the Judeo-Christian tradition recognized as Scripture

Covenant – A binding legal agreement made between two people or groups of people, or between God and a person or group of people

Diachronic – Occurring across a period of time

Diachronic trace – Term for the ways biblical events connect with each other through time, from one period to another

Doctrine – A synthesis and explanation of biblical teachings on a theological topic

Document – Any written material (e.g., sentence, verse, chapter, whole book, etc.)

Graphic fallacy – The interpretive mistake of overemphasizing the document itself, to the relative exclusion of contextual considerations like the writer and audience

Historical analysis – An exegetical approach to the Bible that views Scripture as a window to history

Intentional fallacy – The interpretive mistake of relying too heavily on what we think we know about a writer and his intentions, and de-emphasizing the things we learn about the document and audience

Literary analysis – An exegetical approach to the Bible that views Scripture as a literary portrait designed to influence readers in a particular way

Organic inspiration – View of inspiration that asserts that the Holy Spirit used the personalities, experiences, outlooks, and intentions of human authors as he authoritatively and infallibly guided their writing

Septuagint – Greek translation of the Old Testament

Synchronic – Occurring at the same point in time

Thematic analysis – An exegetical approach to the Bible that views Scripture as a mirror that reflects the readers' interests and questions

Vos, Geerhardus – (1862-1949) Theologian and Chair of Biblical Theology at Princeton Seminary for 39 years; sometimes called the father of Reformed Biblical Theology