



**Certificate
In a Box**

Old Testament

An introduction to the Old Testament

The Youthworks College Certificate in a Box[®] is a resource that provides teaching materials for teaching theological and biblical study at Certificate level.

Teaching Guide

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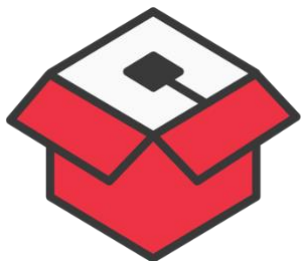
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Contents

Contents	2
Certificate in a Box	4
Recommended Text	5
Unit Overview	6
1 Aims.....	6
2 Learning Outcomes	6
3 Why study the Old Testament	6
Topic 1	8
1 Places	8
2 Times.....	10
Topic 2	11
1 What is a genre?	11
3 What are the different genres we find in the Old Testament?	12
4 Conclusion.....	16
Topic 3	17
1 The Purpose of Genesis 1-11	17
2 Reading Genesis 1	18
3 Genesis 1-2 and the creation of humanity.....	19
4 Genesis 2-5.....	20
5 Genesis 6-9.....	23
6 Babel, a new beginning	25
7 Conclusion.....	26
Topic 4:	27
1 The call of Abraham	27
2 Abraham’s Descendants.....	28
3 Abraham and Us.....	29
4 Conclusion.....	29
Topic 5	31
1 The Exodus	31
2 Sinai.....	33
3 The Tabernacle.....	33
4 Some key themes.....	34
5 Summary and Conclusions	35
Topic 6	37
1 Introducing Leviticus	37
2 Conclusions and Summary	41
Topic 7	43
1 Introducing Deuteronomy.....	43
2 The Content of Deuteronomy	44
3 Key Themes	46
4 Summary and Conclusions	47
Topic 8:	49
1 Israel in the Land	49
2 The Desire for a King	52
3 Success and Failure under Solomon.....	54
4 The rest is history	54
5 Summary and Conclusion.....	55

Topic 9:.....	56
1 What is a prophet?.....	56
2 Former and latter prophets.....	56
3 The Message of the Prophets	58
4 Literary Genres and Forms.....	58
5 Conclusion.....	60
Topic 10:.....	61
1 Psalms	62
2 The Wisdom Literature	64
3 Conclusion.....	66
References.....	67

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Certificate in a Box

Certificate in a Box is a resource from
Youthworks College.

Youthworks College specialises in theological
and biblical education for effective ministry to
children, young people, and families.



The Youthworks College “Certificate in Box” is a resource that provides teaching materials for Certificate level theological and biblical study. It is a resource for Christian schools, churches, and other institutions interested in teaching biblical, ministry, and theology units at Certificate level.

What does it include?

Each unit of study includes a **Teaching Guide** covering all the sub-topics in the unit of study. It provides an **Assessment Guide** with suggested assessments and marking rubrics, and **recommended text books** to accompany the unit of study.

How is it designed to be used?

The unit Teaching Guide provides all the information to teach the course. The information in this Teaching Guide is intended to be **distilled to the students by the teacher in classes**. This allows for the accommodation of the content to suit the timeframe and context in which it is being taught.



The flexibility of the “Certificate in a Box” means teachers utilise their own teaching skills to teach the content in the way that is most appropriate for their context. This allows for teachers to use their own Learning Management System (LMS) for distributing and receiving assessments with their students. The assessments provided in the Assessment Guide can be used as they are or adjusted to meet the teaching context.

Further Teaching Resources:

VISUAL UNIT. Bible graphics, charts, and graphs: <https://visualunit.me>

BIBLE PROJECT. Bible videos, overviews, book summaries: <https://bibleproject.com>

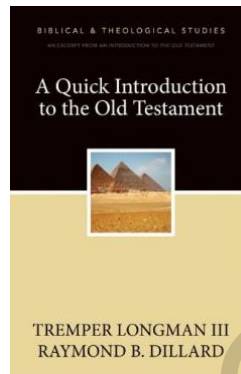
Further material in the Certificate in a Box “Teaching Resources” folder for this unit.

Recommended Text

It is suggested students not only learn the content of the teaching guide, but also read **one** of the recommended text books alongside the teaching they receive in class during this unit.

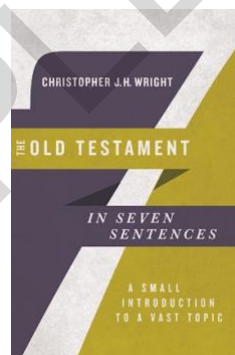
The recommended text books to accompany this unit are:

Longman III, T., & Dillard, R. B. (2012). *A Quick Introduction to the Old Testament: A Zondervan Digital Short*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Academic. **(80 pages)**



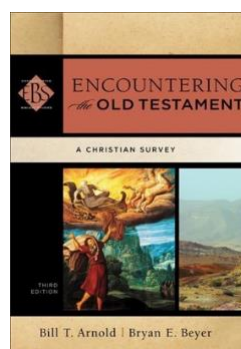
OR

Wright, C. J. H. (2019). *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press. **(184 pages)**



OR

Arnold, B. T., & Beyer, B. E. (2015). *Encountering the Old Testament (Encountering Biblical Studies): A Christian Survey*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic. **(560 pages)**



Unit Overview

1 Aims

The aim of this unit is to give students a broad understanding of the content and main theological themes of the Old Testament, with a specific focus on Genesis 1-11.

In particular, we will be thinking about

- The historical background and sequence of the history represented in the Old Testament
- Some of the key teachings we will find concerning God and his character and plans; and God's people: especially how they should have responded to God; how they did respond and how God deals with this
- The different types of material we find in the Old Testament; the different books and how it all fits together to tell the one story
- The grand story that is told of God's dealings with his creation and his people Israel. Central to this story is the way that it comes to a climax in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of the unit, participants should be able to :

1. Describe the main stages of biblical history
2. Discuss how the various books of the Old Testament relate to the unfolding story of God's plan
3. Describe what the Old Testament teaches about the character God and the proper and actual response of his people
4. Express appreciation for the sovereignty and grace of God in the light of a better understanding of his unfolding plan of salvation

3 Why study the Old Testament

For many believers, the Old Testament can sometimes be a bit of a tedious mystery. It can be tedious because it seems to contain endless historical accounts, long lists of names, confusing and long-winded prophecies and lots of poetry, which people often find difficult to comprehend.

In addition, it can also be mysterious. It is set in times and places that we have trouble imagining and understanding; it contains thoughts and ideas that seem far away from our contemporary world; and it records events that are difficult to understand and evaluate.

The New Testament seems a lot closer to our time; it talks all about Jesus and seems immediately more relevant. Surely if we are new covenant believers then all we need are the new covenant scriptures?

And yet, we know that we ought to read and benefit from the Old Testament because we understand that it is the Word of God. How can we do this better?

The first step is to remind ourselves again why the Old Testament is important for us to study and learn from.

1. The main reason we read the Old Testament as Christian believers is because it was the Bible of the Lord Jesus and the earliest Christian believers.
 - a. Both Jesus and the apostles who wrote the New Testament books had what we know as the Old Testament as their Scriptures. They continually quote from it and refer to it as God's word (Matt 5:17; Luke 24:44; Acts 24:14; 2 Tim 3:15). The teaching of the New Testament is built on the foundation of the teaching of the Old Testament.
 - b. Jesus said that he came to fulfill and not destroy the Law and the Prophets (Matt 5:17-19) and he also said that the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to his person and ministry (John 5:39).
 - c. Paul tells the believers at Rome and Corinth that the teaching of the Old Testament is for them to benefit from (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11). When Paul tells Timothy that all Scripture is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2Tim 3:16) he is talking about the Old Testament Scriptures.
2. We also read the Old Testament because we understand that the same God is active in both the Old and New Testament. There is no difference or conflict. Both the Old and New Testament tell the one story of God's dealing with his creation and people as it unfolds over time and space.

The second step is to try and get a better handle on the background and flow of the Biblical story. We do not need to become experts on the Ancient Near East, biblical languages and culture and so on but we can become a bit better informed and try and understand more clearly what we are reading so it makes more sense to us. We will then be in a better position to see how the Old Testament leads into the New Testament and how also we can apply the teaching of the Old Testament to our own lives.

One of the most helpful 'tools' in this whole process is what is known as 'biblical theology'. This is an approach to reading and understanding the Bible that sees the Bible, the whole Bible, Old and New Testament telling the one long and gradually unfolding story of God's plans for his creation. The story of the Bible moves from God creating the world in Genesis 1 to the new heavens and earth as portrayed in the Book of Revelation. Why and how this story occurs is the story of biblical theology. Understanding how this story unfolds has been the key for many believers in understanding the Old Testament, and therefore learning how to apply and highly value its teaching as Christians Scripture.

3.1 Summary

1. We study the Old Testament because it was the Bible of Jesus and the early church, and we understand that the Old and New Testament together form the one story of God.
2. The better we can understand the unfolding story of the Bible, where everything fits, and the background to what we are reading, the more we will be motivated to study the Old Testament and benefit from its teaching.

Topic 1

Places and Times

In this section we will look briefly at the historical and geographical setting of the Old Testament. This is a bit like setting the stage on which the story of the Old Testament unfolds. All historical events unfold in specific times and places. It will help us to understand the history of the Old Testament if we can see where the events are taking place and when they take place. We will look at what is going on around the land of Israel, who its neighbours are and how and when they interacted.

1 Places

Places are important. It will be helpful to look briefly at some of the broad geographical features that help us to understand aspects of Israelite history. We will begin by looking at the bigger Ancient Near East picture before looking at the geography of the land where most of the action of the Old Testament takes place.

1.1 The big picture

We know the story of the Old Testament takes place in what we now call the Middle East. Most of the action in the Old Testament takes place roughly between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf in an area known as the Fertile Crescent. It is called the Fertile Crescent because of the fertile lands that can be traced stretching from the Nile River in the south, up along the land of Canaan (modern day Israel) and then moving east between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates that empty into the Persian Gulf. Surrounding this 'fertile crescent' is largely desert lands.

Rivers sustain life and around these rivers great civilisations rose and fell. Around the Nile the Egyptians flourished. To the north and west around the Tigris and the Euphrates the civilisations of the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians would be situated. Between these two areas the nation of Israel came to be established in the land of Canaan.

The land of Canaan was geographically very important. It formed a land bridge between the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe. In the Old Testament times it was the bridge between Africa and Asia that was especially important. The land of Canaan was a major transport route for both trade and armies as it provided a way to travel between the Mediterranean Sea and the deserts outside the Fertile Crescent.

1.1.1 The importance of Israel

The land of Canaan was therefore enormously strategic (Sinkinson, 2013, p. 57). If you controlled Canaan, you controlled trade and military routes. So, while Israel might not have been an especially important land throughout much of its history, where it was made it very important and for much of its history it was either negotiating with foreign powers around it or being overtaken by them due its strategic position.

1.2 The Land of Canaan

The land of Canaan was bordered in the south by the desert of Zin (Numbers 34:3); in the north by Lebo Hamath (Numbers 34:5-6) with the land between bordered by the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.

The actual territory inhabited by the nation of Israel at the height of its powers under King Solomon lay within this area and stretched for about 240 km from 'Dan to Beersheba' (1 Kings 4:25). All of this land could be seen by Moses from Mount Nebo (Deut. 34:1-3).

In the north the Jordan river is fed by snow falling on Mt Hermon. The northern region would become the region of Galilee in the New Testament times. In Old Testament times the Sea of Galilee was called the Sea of Kinnereth. It is more a lake than an inland sea (Sinkinson, 2013, p. 60).

On the coast of the Mediterranean are the coastal plains. These plains are quite narrow in the north but broaden out as they move south. They are fertile and flat, making them easy for settlement and for travel. For much of Israel's history a people called the Phoenicians settled in on these plains in the north and the Philistines in the South.

Bordering the plains to the east were the Judean Hills. This was a system of hills and valleys that provided good grazing land, fertile valleys for farming and secure hilltops for secure towns (Sinkinson, 2013, p. 60). The Jezreel Valley in the north was one of the most important of these valleys because it ran east to west and provided a route for the major military powers to come from the northwest, cross over to the flat coastal plain and continue south to Egypt (or vice versa heading north if you were an Egyptian army). The city of Megiddo dominated the Valley of Jezreel and the power that controlled Megiddo virtually controlled the trade and transport route.

As you travel further east the hill country descends into the Jordan Rift Valley. This a valley marking the point where two continents are moving. The system of valleys it is part of actually stretching all the way north to Syria and south to Mozambique. The Jordan River flows from Mt Hermon in the north passing through the Sea of Kinnereth (Galilee) to the Dead Sea in the south. The Jordan is quite shallow in parts and is not as navigable by boat and barge as the other great rivers.

North of the Dead Sea lies the town of Jericho. Located in the area around the Dead Sea is also the site of the Qumran Community, famous for the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The eastern edge of the Dead Sea was possibly the site of the ancient towns of Sodom and Gomorrah (Sinkinson, 2013, p. 62). Below the Dead Sea was the dry desert region known as the Arabah.

To the east beyond the Jordan River Valley the land rose steeply again to a mountain tableland divided into four regions by four river canyons: Bashan, Gilead, Moab and Edom (Arnold & Beyer, 2008, p. 42).

1.2.1 Life in the land

As we think more specifically about the land of Canaan, that became the land where the people of God eventually dwelt we need to understand that it was basically an agricultural society. There would have been two main seasons 'seedtime' and 'harvest' (Gen 8:22). In the harvest time there were successive harvests of crops such as barley and other grains, figs, grapes, and olives. Sheep,

goats and cows were also herded. Farming communities used donkeys and oxen while the military used horses and traders used camels.

There were numerous wild animals in the land. The rock badger, ibex, snakes, scorpions, bears, antelope, lions, and wolves are all mentioned. Dogs are also mentioned but these are also considered dangerous scavengers. There are numerous birds mentioned as well as insects, especially locusts, which could be devastating to grain crops.

Life could be productive but also hard. Like farmers everywhere the Israelites were subject to the weather and looking for regular rains for fruitful harvests. No wonder the ancient peoples were tempted to worship all manner of gods connected with the weather, if this could guarantee food for the family from a prosperous crop. The Israelites knew that Yahweh was the creator and that they were completely reliant upon him for everything.

1.2.2 Imagining life as we read

All this detail might seem irrelevant to mention but the point of this brief outline is to remind us that the events of the Old Testament happened to real people in real places. It is easy at times to let this go as we read the Bible as a religious text for what it can teach us about God and ourselves. But we need to remember that God spoke to and dealt with people at specific times and in specific places and all of this detail helps to remind us of the wonder of that fact. It can also help us to understand what we read better and perhaps resist the temptation to read into the text our own experiences and times.

Try and engage your imagination and senses as you read and understand how God is working with real people in their own place and time (Sinkinson, 2013, p. 68).

2 Times

Not only is the Old Testament narrative set in a place (or places); it is also set at particular times. The Old Testament narrative stretches from eternity, through the creation of the heavens and the earth up until approximately 400 years before the time of Christ. This history intersects with world history at numerous points, especially the history of the nations that existed in the ancient near east. Again, without getting into too much detail it will be helpful to locate the broad dates and movements of this history as it unfolds.

Creation	Genesis 1-11	??
The Patriarchs	Genesis 12-50	c. 2200-1550 BC
Exodus	Exodus-Deuteronomy	c 1446-1240 BC
Conquest and Settlement	Joshua + Judges	c. 1200-1020 BC
United Kingdom	1 Samuel – 2 Kings 11	1020-931 BC
Two Kingdoms	2Kings	931-722 BC
Israel Falls	2 Kings 17	722 BC
Judah Alone	2 Kings 25	722-587 BC
Babylonian Exile		587-539 BC
Return and Restoration	Ezra and Nehemiah	539-333 BC

Topic 2

Types of literature in the Old Testament

1 What is a genre?

The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know what it is—what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used. After that has been discovered the temperance reformer may decide the corkscrew was made for a bad purpose, and the communist may think the same about the Cathedral. But such questions come later. The first thing is to understand the object before you: so long as you think the corkscrew was meant for opening tins or the cathedral for entertaining tourists you can say nothing to the purpose about them. The first thing the reader needs to know about Paradise Lost is what Milton meant it to be

C.S. Lewis (1942), p. 1.

One of the most basic steps in exegesis is recognizing what type of literature we are dealing with: the genre. As Lewis notes above this is a vital step in the interpretation of all texts.

When we communicate, we need common ground in how we communicate. If one person is using Morse code when the other only knows semaphore, then problems eventuate. Genre as one of the 'key conventions' guiding the composition and interpretation of texts. Genre provides a 'kind of "contract" or agreement, often unspoken or written, or even unconscious, between author and a reader, by which the author sets out to write according to a whole set of expectations and conventions and we agree to read or interpret the work using the same conventions (Burrige, 2003, p. 114).

Sometimes these conventions are set out explicitly in the preface to a work of literature but more often than not they are embedded in the way a work is structured and we become familiar with and recognize these features through constant use. So, for example, for many people the words 'once upon a time' signal the genre of fairy tale and help us to interpret what follows. We recognize other genres in our culture such as fiction, non-fiction, newspaper articles, editorials, campaign speeches, letters, advertising copy, jokes, satire, and so on. When we recognize the genre we understand how the particular text is going to communicate to us and read accordingly.

'Genre recognition ... is an important step in the understanding of a text. For most readers it is an intuitive step. Sometimes the intuition may be wrong. That is why a conscious, and careful, classification of the text to its genre is valuable. "Genre criticism", as this is often called, is not classification for its own sake, concerned simply to pigeon hole a text. Its aim is to clarify a text by indicating what are the right and wrong expectations that a reader might have of it. There is a particular likelihood that intuition may lead readers astray when they read something for a culture different from their own. Some genres are quite culture-specific, but may, to the unwary reader, seem to fit a genre from their own different culture. Other genres may occur in several cultures, but, even so, may differ somewhat in each culture'.

Lucas (2002) p. 23.

As Lucas points out some genres can be culture specific and even a feature of a historical period. This makes genre identification especially important when it comes to the Bible. There are many different types of genre included in the Bible. Some are more straightforward than others when it comes to interpretation.

3 What are the different genres we find in the Old Testament?

There are many different genres in the Old Testament. Sometimes the name of a particular book tells us what that genre is (Psalms, Proverbs). Other books can contain a number of different kinds of genres (the book of Genesis contains narrative, blessings, curses, genealogies).

We can think about genre and the Old Testament broadly and then look at five of the main genres we will find in the Old Testament, before listing other genres we can find in the Old Testament.

3.1 The law, the prophets and the writings

The Jewish Bible that Jesus and the New Testament writers used was structured differently to the English Bible we are familiar with.

The same 39 books were there but some were combined (e.g. 1-2 Samuel was a single book). They were also arranged in a different order and in three main divisions or categories: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

In Luke 24:44 Jesus appears to allude to this arrangement when he speaks of the 'Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms'. The Psalms was considered to be the first main book of the Writings and it looks it could be used as a title for the whole of the Writings (De Rouchie, 2017, p. 23).

The Law comprises the first 5 books of what we know as the Old Testament:

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

The Law is also known as the Pentateuch. This section is mainly narrative and tells the story of God's purposes for the world and how they will be worked out through the nation of Israel.

The Prophets contains two sections: the former prophets and the latter prophets.

Former Prophets	Latter Prophets
Joshua	Isaiah
Judges	Jeremiah
1-2 Samuel	Ezekiel
1-2 Kings	The Twelve (Minor Prophets)

The Former Prophets tell the story of Israel. This story is basically a story of failure with the end result being the nations of Israel and Judah being defeated and taken over by foreign nations. The

Latter Prophets is like God's commentary through his appointed spokespersons on this history, explaining what went wrong and how the plans and purposes of God will continue to unfold.

The Writings contain the rest of the books of the Old Testament:

Psalms	Esther
Job	Daniel
Proverbs	Ezra-Nehemiah
Ruth	1-2 Chronicles
Song of Songs	
Ecclesiastes	
Lamentations	

These have been listed in two groups to show their different types of material: historical narrative and then other poetic, prophetic and proverbial material. The Hebrew version of the Old Testament ends with the books of Chronicles, which leaves Israel in exile and looks forward therefore to the New Testament.

The Old Testament is framed by a historical narrative telling the story of God and his dealings with his creation, especially focused through his dealings with the people of Israel. There is a lot of other types of writing within this narrative (law, blessings, curses, songs, parables, riddles, visions) but also God provides commentary on the story line (De Rouchie, 2017, p. 26), through the prophets, as well as other material that helps those living with God's promises to think about living.



A Quick Exercise

Have a look at the order of the books of the Old Testament in your English Bible. What are the differences? What is the last book of the English Bible? How does that look forward to the New Testament?

We are now going to briefly think about the features of some of the main genre types of the Old Testament.

3.1.1 Narrative

Much of the Old Testament comes in the form of historical narrative as God's working in history is recounted. When we read this it looks a lot like what we would recognize as factual historical reporting in a history book: it mentions places, dates, names. As we read this we need to understand also that is a selected history. Over the time span covered so many other events happened, which aren't recorded so what we are reading is not an exhaustive history. This is really like all history writing: it is selective and purposeful. It is trying to tell a story. The story it is trying to tell is God's story, he is the main character throughout the narrative.

This means that as we read this narrative we need to keep some things in mind, especially as we try and understand it:

- God is the hero as well as the author. We are reading His story
- God's story is part of the longer narrative of the Bible that leads to Jesus Christ
- We are meant to learn from God's story and as we read ask what that might be

Keeping these things in mind will help us to read the Old Testament narrative better.

When we read a narrative we need to read it in its context. We ask where the particular story we are reading begins and ends and what comes before and what comes after. We look for the main characters, what is actually taking place, does the author comment at all on what is happening. We do not assume that just because something is reported that God necessarily approves of the actions or wants us to imitate what has been recorded. We want to ask why the author has written this episode and why he has written it this way (DeRouchie, 2017, p. 40).



For Thought

A Helpful Question to help us read and explain Old Testament Narratives

DeRouchie (2017, p. 40) cites the helpful question suggested by Robert Stein (2011, p. 157) to help us to summarise the 'why' of biblical narrative:

'He suggests we attempt to complete the following sentence:

I, the author of X-biblical book, have narrated to you this account of X-scenario because.....'

3.1.2 Prophecy

Who the prophets were and what were they were trying to do?

The popular view of prophets is that they were especially gifted or empowered individuals who were able to tell the future. This not the way prophets are presented in the Old Testament. In fact, as long as we think solely in terms of prophet = foreteller, then we will misunderstand the prophets, of what they were trying to do, of how history works and of God, the Lord of history.

Fee and Stuart refer to the prophets as covenant enforcers. It is a good way to think of them. They were preachers that God sent to remind people of their responsibilities within the covenant made with Abraham and forged at Mount Sinai. They also show how God remains true to that covenant even if his people turn their back on him. He brings blessings on the nation to help in their witness to the world community in periods of faithfulness and obedience, and brings discipline to bear when his people stray away from him and lose sight of their part within his plan of salvation.

Sometimes they were fore-tellers but more often they were forth-tellers.

The prophets' message contained accusations against God's people; instruction to the people as what would please God; warnings about God's punishment for disobedience; and promises of hope and future salvation.



Exercise:

read the following passages and see if you can identify their category:

Passage	Category
Micah 6:8	Promise of hope and future salvation
Hos 4:1-2	Instruction
Zech 8:1-8	Warning about punishment for disobedience
Amos 6:1-7	Accusation against God's people

When we read the prophets it is good to recognize these different types of speech; try and read them as much as we are able in their original historical context, watch out for symbolism, figures of speech and metaphors that the prophets frequently use; and remember that the prophets were looking forward to the day of Jesus Christ.

3.1.3 Law

Some of the writing of the Old Testament comes to us in the form of law. Understanding Old Testament law is in one sense quite simple. They are given as commands to be obeyed and can be read quite straightforwardly.

Having said that, there are some points to keep in mind as we read the Old Testament laws. There are two main types of law recorded in the Old Testament:

- a. apodictic laws that are basic principles and are stated without qualifications or exceptions. The ten commandments are the chief example here.
- b. casuistic laws which apply to specific circumstances. These kinds of laws often apply the apodictic laws. They often use the formula 'if...then (implied)'.

There are different categories of law in the Biblical material. There are laws covering criminal and civil matters; families, religious or ceremonial circumstances, and laws dealing with compassion.

One of the big issues in reading Old Testament laws is their application to today. When we read the Bible as one single unfolding story this becomes easier as we see a shift in the New Testament to the 'law of Christ' with Jesus fulfilling the requirements of the law by his perfect obedience and death on the cross. In doing so he nullifies the Old Testament law so that Christian believers no longer need to be obedient to every law written down in the Old Testament. Christian believers are however obedient to Christ and his rule. This is a controversial area still for many Christian believers.

3.1.4 Psalms

The Psalms are well loved by Christian believers and well used by Jesus and the New Testament writers. When we read the Psalms we need to recognize that they are songs and poetry and will make abundant use of imagery, repetition, parallelism, symbols, similes, metaphors, and other figures of speech and poetical techniques besides.

There are also various sub-genres of psalms that have been identified that it is helpful to recognize: lament, trust, thanksgiving, praise, royal, wisdom, historical, penitential, imprecatory (calling down a curse).

When reading a psalm we should try and identify its historical context if possible (sometimes the superscription of the Psalm, if it has one, will help); look for its flow and the poetical techniques it is using. It will also help to remember that the Psalms, too, look forward to Jesus.

3.1.5 Other Genre Types

We have briefly surveyed four genre types but there are many other genres that we will come across as we read the Old Testament. One major genre we will look at later is the genre of wisdom literature, which also contains within it several sub-genres. We have also mentioned blessings, curses, songs and could also list sermons, treaties, genealogies, covenants and more besides.

4 Conclusion

We have mentioned a long list of possible genres and there is not time to go into a long discussion of all of these but the point is to simply alert us to what we already realise as we read: that there is a variety of genres present as we do not read all the parts of the Old Testament in quite the same way. One important part of what we do is to recognize the genre of what we are reading and 'read by its rules'. That said all of the Old Testament is the word of God to us and as we read we will be attune to what God is saying to us as we read. One of the clues to hearing his voice accurately and helpfully will be to recognize the different genres of material He is using to communicate to us with.