

Introduction to the Bible Week 3: The Law & the Prophets

Introduction

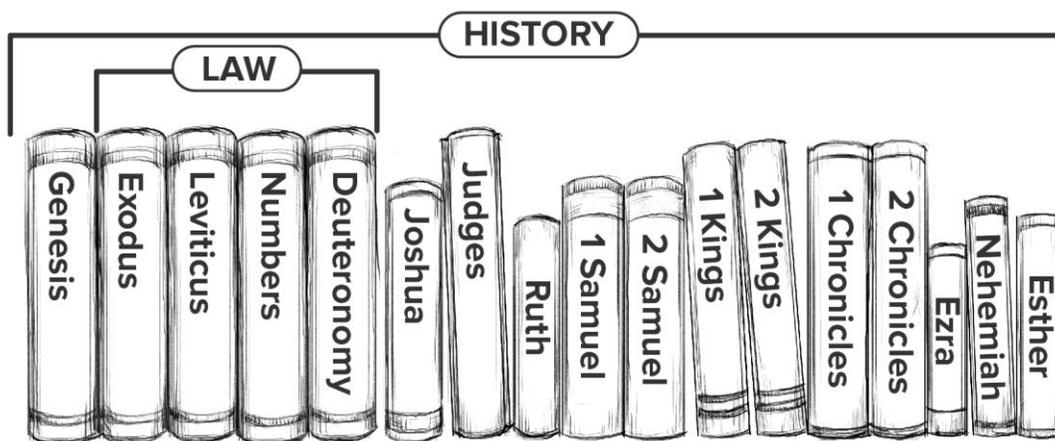
Tonight we will overview two more kinds of Old Testament literature – the Law and the Prophets¹. Before we consider these books in more detail, we should note what two New Testament passages (among many) say about them:

Matt. 5:17 **“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”**

Rom. 3:21 **But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,²² even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction . . .**

The Old Testament Law

BOOKS INCLUDED:



TYPE OF LITERATURE:

- Ancient treaty format
- Civil law code format

¹ NOTE: The New Testament often refers to the “Law and the Prophets” as the Pentateuch (“Law”) and everything else in the Old Testament (“Prophets”).

TIME PERIOD:

HUMAN AUTHORSHIP: God gave the Law to Israel through Moses, who was a prophet (Deut. 18:15). Though critics have denied Mosaic authorship, the evidence for it is strong:

- Internal claims
- 15th century BC treaty structure
- Jesus' statements

KEY THEMES: The Law of Moses contains three kinds of legislation, usually interwoven (e.g., Lev. 19):

- Civil laws:

- Ceremonial laws:

- Moral laws:

WHY THE LAW IS IMPORTANT:

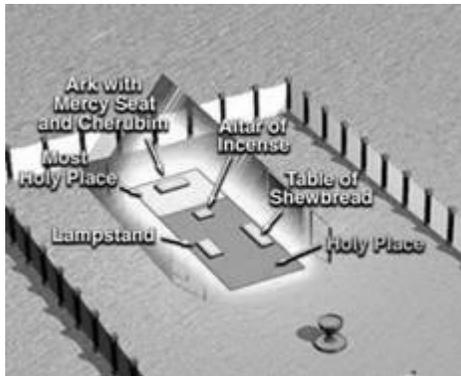
- It was very different from the Abrahamic Covenant in two ways:
 - The Abrahamic Covenant was ultimately about spiritual blessing for all the nations (Gen. 12:3), whereas the Law was primarily about temporal blessing for the nation of Israel (see below).

 - The Abrahamic Covenant was stated as God's promise ("I will"), requiring only simple faith (see Gen. 15:6,7-21). The Law was stated as God's command ("You must"), requiring Israel's obedience to God's statutes (see Ex. 24:3-8; Deut. 28:11-26).

- It communicated the conditions for Israel's use of the "land" portion of the Abrahamic Covenant.
 - God promised to bless Israel in the land contingent to their obedience to His commands (see Deut. 28:1-14).

 - God promised to curse Israel if they disobeyed His commands (see Deut. 28:15-30:20).

- It provided Israel with a distinct culture, which gave them a measure of external protection from assimilation into idolatry and depravity. These laws were temporary (see above), though they were more humane than the surrounding culture.
- Central to the Law's commands were that Israel must worship God only (Ex. 20:3-5a) and that they must worship Him properly (e.g., through God's designated priests, rituals, sacrifices, etc.). The Law's worship system emphasized:
 - God's holiness (Lev. 11:44,45)
 - Israel's sinfulness
 - Substitutionary atonement (e.g., Lev. 16)



Thus, the Law explained Israel's need for God's forgiveness and pointed her to His future ultimate atonement through Jesus' death (Gal. 3:24; 1 Cor. 5:7). After this, the New Covenant was to replace it (Jer. 31:31-34).

- Since the Law was grounded in God's character, it provided Israel and all humanity with a basis for absolute morality.

TIPS FOR READING:

- Don't feel obliged to wade through all of this material this as a new or young Christian.
- The Law prefigures Jesus and His atoning sacrifice.

- Be careful not apply these laws to the Church or to Christians!
 - Civil laws

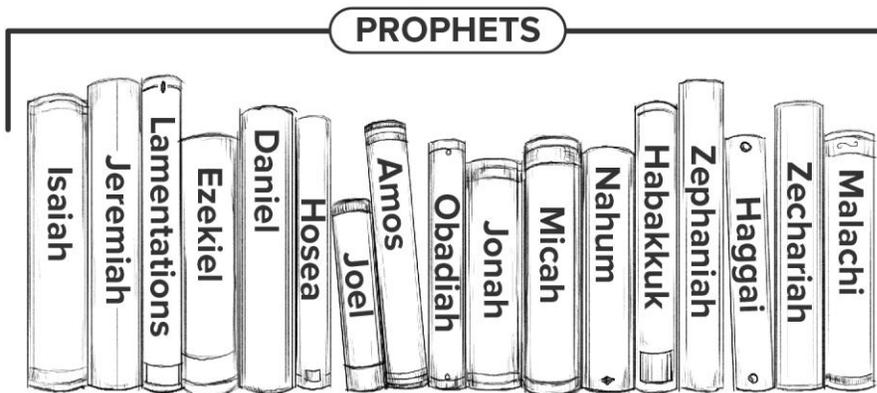
Matt. 22:21 They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”
 - Ceremonial laws

Col. 2:16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— ¹⁷ things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.
 - Moral laws

Rom. 8:4 . . . so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

The Prophets

BOOKS INCLUDED:



TYPE OF LITERATURE:

- “Oracle”
- Vision description and angelic interpretation
- Historical narrative sections

TIME PERIOD:

HUMAN AUTHORSHIP: All prophets were chosen and inspired by God, and they passed the prophetic tests of Deut. 13,18.

WHY THE PROPHETS ARE IMPORTANT:

- They served as a “check” on corruption and/or apostasy in the other two major Old Testament offices – the kings and priests. EXAMPLES:

- Samuel with Hophni & Phineas (1 Sam. 3,4)
- Elijah with King Ahab (1 Kings 17-22)

- They functioned both as “forth-tellers” and “fore-tellers.”

- FORTH-TELLING: Speaking for the God who is Israel’s King, they reminded Israel of its obligation to Him. SPECIAL THEMES:

IDOLATRY: ^{Jer. 2:11} **“Has a nation changed gods when they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory For that which does not profit. ¹² Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be very desolate,” declares the LORD. ¹³ “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns That can hold no water.”**

MATERIALISM & SOCIAL INJUSTICE: ^{Isa. 1:14} **“I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. ¹⁶ Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.**

- FORE-TELLING: Speaking for the God who is sovereign over human history, they made a variety of predictions about future events.

Near-term and future disciplinary judgments on Israel for disobedience to the Law (e.g., Amos 2:4-8)

Near-term and future judgments on other nations (e.g., Ezek. 26 on Tyre)

Future blessings upon Israel (e.g., Isa. 61:1-9) and the nations (e.g., Isa. 66:18-23)

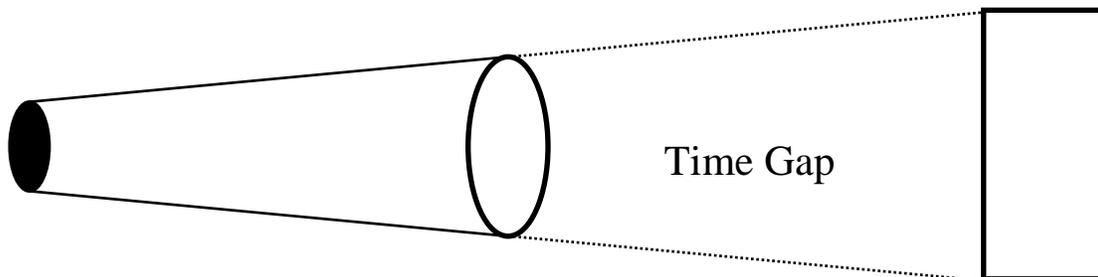
Predictions of the coming Messiah, both as King (e.g., Dan. 7:13,14) and as Suffering Servant (e.g., Is. 52,53; Dan. 9:25,26)

Predictions of the New Covenant (e.g., Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:24-27)

NOTE:

TIPS FOR READING:

- Remember that this material is primarily for Israel, not for the Church or for America. EXAMPLE:
^{2 Chron. 7:14} **If My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.**
- While God still judges nations and cultures for rebellion against Him (see Rom. 1:18-32; Rev. 6-18), we should be careful about interpreting current national catastrophes as God’s judgment.
- The prophets strongly emphasize God’s sovereignty (e.g., Isa. 40-48) and mercy (e.g., Hos. 2:6,7; 6:1-3; 14:1-4). Look for this theme – it will help to deliver you from fear (e.g., Isa. 8:12-14; 41:9b-16) and encourage you when you fail.
- Look for the descriptions of the coming Messianic Kingdom (e.g., Dan. 2:44; 7:13,14; Isa. 60). They provide content for an eternal perspective and build hope.
 - The prophetic visions in Daniel provide the framework for all other biblical predictions about the end of the age, including Matt. 24 and Revelation.²
 - Many predictions of the Messiah and/or God’s kingdom have a “double reference” – they speak of two events widely separated by time (often the Messiah’s first and second comings) as one event. The prophet’s perspective is like when we look at a mountain range and “see” widely separated peaks as one mountain. Only later biblical revelation makes this clear (e.g., Isa. 61:1,2 >> Lk. 4:16-21).



² For a solid treatment of these visions, see John Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*.