



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## Old Testament Survey

### Lesson 43 – Looking Forward to the Messiah

In most English Bibles, the books of the Old Testament are arranged in this order:

1. first, the five books of Moses and the books of history (Genesis through Esther);
2. then the poetical books (Job through Song of Solomon);
3. finally, the books of the prophets: the four so-called “major” prophets and the twelve “minor” prophets.

It is very helpful to memorize the books of the Old Testament in order, so that you can easily find a passage when reading the Bible.

Some English Bibles (particularly those from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches) print the apocryphal books as part of the Old Testament. We do not include these apocryphal books in our Bibles for two main reasons:

- These books were not accepted by the Jews as a part of their Bible.
- These books were not part of the Bible that Jesus used, and so there are no quotations from the apocryphal books in the New Testament.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: **“What advantage then has the Jew? ...Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God”** (Romans 3:1-2). Since the Jews were given the oracles of God – God’s own words – we know that the Jewish Bible is God’s Word. The books accepted by Jews and by Jesus as God’s word are the same books that we have in our Old Testament.

The books in the Hebrew Old Testament are arranged in a different sequence than in our English Bibles, however. The usual order of the books in the Hebrew Old Testament is: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (**the Law of Moses**); Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (**the Prophets**); Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles (**the Psalms**).

The Old Testament used by Jesus had the above order. Jesus referred to this order when He said to His disciples: **“All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me”** (Luke 24:44). These were the three divisions of the entire Old Testament, as listed above. When Jesus said: **“The Scripture cannot be broken”** (John 10:35), He had all above books in mind.

In Matthew 23:35, Jesus said to the rebellious Jews: **“On you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”** The account of Abel is found in the first book of the Hebrew Old Testament (the book of Genesis), and the account of Zechariah is found in the last book of the Hebrew Old Testament (the book of 2 Chronicles). Jesus’ statement showed that He accepted the whole Hebrew Old Testament (from Genesis to 2 Chronicles).

## The Correct Understanding of the Old Testament

We do not understand the Old Testament correctly if we do not understand that the entire Old Testament is looking forward to the fulfillment of God's promise of the Savior. This Savior would not be just the Savior of the Jewish people, but the Savior of the whole world. This promise of the Savior was first announced to 100% of the world population in the Garden of Eden. This promise was intended for the entire human race. Chapters 1-11 of Genesis present the outline of the history of all mankind.

Beginning in Chapter 12, the history given in Genesis centers on one nation only: Abraham and his descendants. Nevertheless, the promise given to Abraham of a special descendant spoke of a blessing for **all** the families of the earth. In choosing Abraham, God was not abandoning the rest of mankind, but He was planning a blessing to come from the one family that would be a blessing for **all** families. Not all descendants of Abraham are chosen as God's special people, however. The story of Ishmael is very brief, whereas the account of Isaac is much longer. This shows that that Jacob (Israel) is God's choice, even though Isaac preferred Esau (Edom) over Jacob.

All of Jacob's twelve sons and their families share in the promise of the Messiah. They all belong to God's special people. Nevertheless, it is only **Judah** that received the special promise that the Messiah will come from his family. When the children of Israel asked for a king to rule over them, God at first provided them with the kind of king they desired. He gave them Saul from the tribe of Benjamin. But when Saul proved to be unworthy, God gave them His own choice for a king: David of Bethlehem from the tribe of **Judah**.

God gave one of the most important promises of the coming Messiah to David after he became king. God told David that his dynasty would last forever through the coming of the Son of David, who would be the everlasting King. From that time on, the Old Testament history and the writings of the prophets concentrate on the family of David and on the promises given to him. After the death of David's son Solomon, most of the tribes separate themselves from the dynasty of David and from the sacrificial worship of the Lord in the Temple at Jerusalem that the Lord Himself prescribed. Although individuals from these separate tribes remained faithful to the Lord and trusted the promises of the Messiah, the vast majority were unfaithful and they were carried off into captivity, never to return.

The descendants of David remained in royal authority in Jerusalem for many years, until their disobedience and rebellion finally moved God to send them into captivity in Babylon. But it was precisely at this time that God sent prophets to assure His faithful people (the remnant) that He had not forgotten them. These prophets proclaimed the glories of the Messianic age to come. God would indeed send the Son of David, the suffering Servant of God who would be glorified and rule as eternal King. We find these Messianic prophecies especially in the Psalms and in the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Micah.

By God's design the Babylonian captivity lasted 70 years. After the 70 years some of the Israelites returned to the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to await the fulfillment of the Messianic promises. God gave visions of the future to Daniel in particular, included the fact that the Messiah would come within a certain period of time. The last prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi added further details about the coming Messiah and the blessings He would bring. These details gave hope during in the dark days that were yet to come.

With one voice the entire Old Testament proclaims the message: "**Behold, He is coming**" (Malachi 3:1).