

Part Two

The Old Testament is not really a theology textbook.

What it provides is an account and actions of a people, Israel. It does use story, song, poetry, metaphor and puzzles to get us thinking about moral issues and what it means to live as a person with expectations of God and each other which is just what the gospel writer, John tells us Nathaniel is doing that day under the fig tree reading his Torah and prophets.

Christine Hayes goes on to comment that 'one of the greatest challenges for modern readers of the Old testament is to allow the words to mean what they say.

This anthology does not itself claim to be written by God. The bible was prepared assembled, edited , modified, censored, transmitted first orally and then in writing- by humans.

There were many contributors over many centuries and through the individual styles and you can often pick out the convictions of the authors.

The Old Testament books date from around 1000BCE maybe as early as the late bronze age down to the second century BCE. Some of the books contain stories that are much older and have been incorporated into the anthology.

While these biblical writing had a huge impact on three religions, the Jewish community who first compiled these writings in the pre Christian Era saw them as first and foremost a record of the Israelite God's eternal covenant with the Jewish people.

This library of books is in three sections.

1. The TORAH -Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

These books contain the narratives through from creation to the death of Moses.

2. PROPHEETS- In the Hebrew Bible these continue the history from the death of Moses to the destruction of the kingdom of Judah in 586.

Prophets and kings are central characters in these books.

a. Really there are two parts- the former prophets as one part and includes Moses, Elijah, Elisha and Nathan

b. Then the second part which contains three major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. And the twelve minor prophets

3. The Christian old testament includes parts of the third category of Hebrew writings. Poetical books like Job, Psalms,

historical books like Ezra and Nehemiah, the book of Daniel and others like Esther and Jonah.

Overall, the Old Testament represents the memories and interpretations of the historical experience of Israel, from the formation of a community. It's a story that cannot be told separately from the belief that God had called his people in grace , separated them from other nations for special responsibility and commissioned them to be witnesses of, and servants to the One who is Creator of the Universe and Ruler of human history.

The story is based around four covenants and one potential faith shattering experience between god and his people. It is the story of how god's people respond to the events surrounding these promises.

1 God with Noah – I will not destroy all life again

(Genesis 8:20-22)

2 God with Abraham- I will make of you a great nation

(Genesis 12:1-3)

3 God with the people of Israel through Moses and the 10 commandments. The people can face the future confident that God is with them. (Exodus 20:1-21 and Deuteronomy 6:1-25)

4 God establishes the royal dynasty through David -A specific unconditional promise with one line of Kings through David (2 Samuel 7:1-7).

The scriptures of Israel end at the book of Daniel as an incomplete drama. By remembering their sacred past and preserving its traditions, this pilgrim people were able to live in the present with their face set towards a new covenant in the future, the new creation, the kingdom of God.

The heart stopping moments in the story are in the years 722 BCE when 10 tribes are lost to history after the invasion of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria and

then in 586 BCE the Israelite nation collapses after invasion of Judah by the Babylonians when God's sanctuary (temple) in Jerusalem is destroyed and God's people are defeated and taken into exile. This event raises huge questions for God's people about the relationship of God to his people. Much of the Old Testament is written in response to this event as God's people try to understand why it happened and what it means for the future.

According to Pharisaic Judaism who were able to adapt after the fall of the 2nd temple at the end of the Jewish wars in 70 AD. Israel's pilgrimage continues through the Hebrew Bible to the Talmud and continued life of messianic expectancy.

According to early Christian commentary the pilgrimage of the people of God leads through the Old Testament to Jesus, the Christ who came not to destroy, but to fulfil the Torah and the prophets which brings us back to sit with Nathaniel reading under a fig tree as Jesus approaches.