

# Mukhanyo Theological College

KwaMhlanga, South Africa



## Study Guide

for

## Panoramic Overview of the Old Testament I

DOT 111

**Malwande Mdonga**

This curriculum is part of the Mukhanyo Distance Programme offered by Mukhanyo Theological College (MTC) based in KwaMhlanga, South Africa, focusing on reformed theological education for pastors and ministry leaders. For further information please visit our website at [www.mukhanyo.co.za](http://www.mukhanyo.co.za).

## FOREWORD: A MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Dear student,

We greet you in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour and King! We thank our God for your desire to study His Word in order to grow in Christian knowledge, spiritual wisdom, and Christ-like goodness.

You will learn many important truths in this programme of study at Mukhanyo Theological College. As you continue your studies, please keep in mind the following four instructions for your own personal benefit:

1. **Study the Word.** The Bible, God's inspired Word, is your infallible guide for all matters in life. It is your main textbook for this module and for the entire programme of study at Mukhanyo. Be sure to consult this guide at all times. Meditate on this Word day and night, "for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8).
2. **Trust in Christ alone.** Academic knowledge about God and His Word is never enough by itself. We must learn to live by faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ means to learn more and more to trust Him in everything. Faith alone in Christ means that we must not trust other things in the place of Christ: nothing except the blood of Christ can save us from our sinfulness and make us right with God.
3. **Walk in the Spirit.** Faith in Christ is demonstrated by godly character and a spiritual walk of life. The person with a godly character is the person who most consistently acts like Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:3-11). The person with a spiritual walk is the person who is empowered by the Spirit of Christ and displays the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Do not allow your academic studies to keep you from maturing in your personal goodness and walking spiritually closer to Christ each day.
4. **Pray for grace and wisdom.** Your studies will not be blessed to the fullest extent unless you receive spiritual graces and wisdom from God. God has promised to give these graces. Our duty, while we faithfully study His Word, is to ask Him to give us these spiritual blessings. At all times remember that "the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6).

Please also pray with us as we at Mukhanyo work to become a brighter light in our communities. We desire the light of Jesus Christ will shine through us to witness more clearly the truth and love of God to all people.

May the Lord bless you richly as you study His Word! My prayer is that you all will "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity" (2 Peter 3:18).

Sincerely,



Dr Brian A deVries, Principal

## WELCOME TO THE STUDENT

A hearty word of welcome! This course is called Panoramic Overview of the Old Testament. In this course, we will explore the Old Testament by studying the topics relevant to understand the content and the importance of the Old Testament then proceed to the study of each book. We trust this course will be very useful to you as you prepare for ministry in the church.

## LECTURER AND STUDENTS

Your lecturer is Mr. Malwande Mdonga. You may contact him at anytime through the Distance Coordinator +27 13 947 2179. As a student you are expected to do all the assignments and to write several short tests. Participation during all classes is very important, so lack of preparation for class discussions will reduce your grade.

## COURSE OUTCOMES

After completing this module, the student should have an overview of the Old Testament from Genesis to Nehemiah.

## STUDY MATERIAL

The textbook for this course is a Course Reader compiled by Mr. Malwande Mdonga and containing notes from many sources including The Guide: The Bible Book by Book by Roger Ellsworth, 2002. You will be given notes and articles throughout the module. You are expected to read the entire textbook and all literature handed out in class. You will be tested on all of this material in addition to insights from class discussions and assignments.

### Prescribed resource for this module is:

© Ellsworth, R., The Guide: The Bible Book by Book, 2002

### Other helpful resources include:

- © Edwards, B.H., Nothing but the Truth, 2006 (ed)
- © Young, E. J., Introduction to Old Testament
- © Hill and Walton, Survey of the Old Testament
- © Study Bibles

## COURSE EVALUATION

Students are evaluated based on participation in class discussions, class attendance, class tests and weekly or major assignments. To qualify for the exam you may not be absent for more than three lectures and you must have over 40% on class tests, assignments and participation. Here is the formula:

	<b>Weight</b>
4 Class tests	25%
Semester Assignment	10%
Participation in Class & Assignments	15%
Exam	50%
<b>Semester Mark</b>	<b>100%</b>

## COURSE UNIT PLANNER – PANORAMIC OVERVIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT I

Study Unit	Lecture #	Date to be Held	Tests	Lecture Theme & Content	Additional Work
1	1			Introduction to Old Testament	Complete Assignment
2	2			Genesis	Complete Assignment
3	3			Exodus	Complete Assignment and Prepare for Test 1
4	4		Test 1	Leviticus	
5	5			Numbers	
6	6			Deuteronomy	Complete Semester Assignment and Prepare for Test 2
7	7		Test 2	Joshua	Semester Assignment Submission
8	8			Judges and Ruth	Complete Assignment
9	9a			1 Samuel	
10	9b			2 Samuel	
11	10			1 & 2 Kings	
12	11			1 & 2 Chronicles	Prepare for Test 3
13	12		Test 3	Ezra & Nehemiah	Prepare for Test 4
14	13		Test 4	Revision	Prepare for Exam
15				Exam	

# Lecture 1 – Introduction to the Old Testament

## Lecture Outcomes

- Define the word “Testament”
- Understand and apply the relationship between the New and the Old Testament
- Explain what it means to say; “the Bible is a library of books but yet a book
- Discuss the origin of the English word “Bible” and where it comes from
- To discuss the canon of the Old Testament (OT)
- State the number and the divisions into which the Old Testament can be divided
- The importance of the Old Testament
- How to understand the Bible
- To see and discuss the message and purpose of each book
- To see God’s redemptive plan throughout the history of the Old Testament
- Understand the authority of the Bible
- To approach the Old Testament with reverence, devotions, and obedience

## Introduction

E.J. Young says, the word “Introduction” is derived from the Latin = *introducere* (to lead in, introduce) and denotes the action bringing or leading in. It also connotes initiation into the knowledge of a subject and particularly has reference to the material which paves the way for the study of some subject.

In its widest sense the term ‘Introduction to Old Testament’ refers to the studies and disciplines which are preliminary to the study of the contents of the Old Testament.

However, the word has come to be employed in a far more restricted sense. It may be regarded as a technical term and such is borrowed from Germany where in comparatively recent times it was introduced as a designation of certain studies which are preparatory and preliminary to the interpretation on the Bible.

It is therefore, in this sense that the word is employed. Introduction to Old Testament is that science and discipline which treats certain subjects that are preliminary to the study and interpretation of the contents of the Old Testament (Bible) e.g. canonization, what language, background, context, etc.

## What is the Bible?

- The word Bible is from the Greek word *Biblia*. *Biblia* literally means "books".
- The origin of the word Bible can be traced to the city of Byblos located on the Phoenician (Lebanon) coast, 20-miles north of modern Beirut. Byblos is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world, from this city Papyrus was exported throughout the Aegean world; Papyrus came to be known as (byblos, byblinos), because it was exported from the city. Hence, the Bible came to be the “Papyrus” book. Papyrus was produced from the reed plants, which grew along the Nile River. These sheets of Papyrus were then stitched together from the scroll; the scroll was then rolled and unrolled until the specific area of text was reached. Later, it was discovered that the sheets of papyrus could be stacked on top of each other and stitched down the middle and folded, forming the early versions of the modern-daybook, called a codex. According to Paul D. Wegner, one of the earliest uses of the term occurs in Daniel 9:2 in the Septuagint.
- God’s word; it does not contain the word of God
- God’s collected verbal revelation
- The Bible is the handbook of Christianity. If we want to know what Christians believe, and if Christians want to know how they should live, it is to the Bible we must turn, and in every area of life it is assumed that a manual must be free from error if it is to be useful.
- The Bible stands alone among books not only by the reason of its clarity, longevity and its popularity, but because of the opposition it has attracted to itself. Although in history – even while it was still being written

– its enemies have tried to destroy it. It has been banned, burned and people have been imprisoned for reading it.

- The answer to the question lies in the fact that the Bible makes great claims for itself. It claims to be the Word of the only true God, therefore to carry the authority of God with its every sentence and line. Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work”.
- 2 Peter 1:19-21 - “And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.
- For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”.
  - The Bible is one book, one history, one story
  - The Bible is one book, and you cannot take it in single texts and expect to comprehend the magnificence of divine revelation. You must see it in its completeness. God has taken pains to give a progressive revelation and we should take pains to read it from beginning to end. Don't suppose reading little scraps can ever be compensation for doing deep and consecutive work on the Bible itself.
  - The word of God is alive and every part is necessary to the perfection of the whole.

## It's Scope

Old Testament introduction is often subdivided into two areas: **general** and **special** introduction.

General introduction treats topics that cover the whole testament, issues such as **text** and **canon**. ('canon'= Greek word for a reed, which was used as a rule or measuring line. It refers to the collection of the authoritative books of the bible.)

Special introduction handles individual books. Our introduction, therefore, will focus on special introduction and will proceed book by book. The order adopted will be that recognised by readers of the Bible in English. This is different from a number of introductions that follow the order of the Hebrew Bible in the Masoretic tradition.

In dealing with the books one by one; these topics like literary genre and style of the book are essential keys to its proper interpretation. In addition while a book of the Bible may have been produced separately from the rest of the canon, its meaning now resides in the context of the other books of the Old Testament and, for Christians, the New Testament. Accordingly, we will reflect at some length on the theological message of the book within its broader canonical context. In conclusion; these three general topics will constitute the discussion in each chapter: historical background, and literal analysis, and theological message and purpose.

## What Is the Old Testament?

The Old Testament is a collection of selected writings composed and edited by members of the Hebrew-Jewish community between the twelfth century B.C. and the beginning of the Christian era. It includes such diverse materials as prophetic oracles, teachings of wise men, instructions of priests and ancient records of the royal courts. For the most part the literature was written in Hebrew, but a few passages were written in Aramaic, a language which came into common usage among the Jews during the post-Exilic era (after the sixth century B.C.). The Aramaic portions include Dan. 2:4b-7:28; Ezra 4:8-6:18, 7:12-26; Jer. 10:11; and one phrase in Gen. 31:47 "Jegar-sahadutha," translated "Heap of Witness."

The term "Old Testament," or more properly "Old Covenant," is a Christian designation, reflecting the belief of the early Christian Church that the "new covenant" mentioned in Jer. 31:31-34 was fulfilled in Jesus and that the Christian scriptures set forth the "new covenant," just as the Jewish scriptures set forth the "old covenant" (II Cor. 3:6-18; Heb. 9:1-4). Jewish scholars prefer the term "Tanak," a word formed by combining the initial letters of the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible: Torah (Law), Nebhiim (Prophets), and Kethubhim (Writings).

The Bible, as we know it today, is the end product of a long process of writing, editing and selecting of literature primarily concerned with Jewish religious concepts, and, as such, it has a long literary history. It cannot be assumed that a group of men composed writings echoing what they thought God was dictating. The Bible reflects historical situations, human events, men's reactions to these happenings, and the belief that God was also involved in events. The literary history of the Bible, according to some people, can be said to have begun in the time of Solomon when two men, or groups of men, produced what was to become the nucleus of the Old Testament. One concentrated on the story of David, drawing, no doubt, from court records and other sources, to produce a rather matter-of-fact and intimate account of David's rise to power, the weaknesses and strengths of the man and his family, and the successful coup by which his son, Solomon, who gained the throne. The other writer or writers looked into the oral and written traditions of the past to enrich the understanding of the present.

Stories of patriarchal ancestors, songs and folk-tales of the tribes, explanations concerning the origin of the world, and accounts of the action of God in the affairs of men, were gathered and woven into a saga explaining how the nation Israel came to be, and how God, who had acted in the past on behalf of his chosen people, was acting in the present and could be counted upon to act in the future. The theologized tradition or "sacred history," as it has been called, was probably utilized in the festivals and cultic rites of the temple.

But the writing did not stop in the tenth century. New events and new monarchs required the extension of national history, and a developing theology saw new facets of the relationship believed to exist between God and the nation. Some materials were undoubtedly discarded over the years, for the Bible reflects selectivity of materials, as we shall see. Study of the sacred literature and new historical events developed new insights and resulted in the addition of new materials. These are an extension of the creation narrative, detailed genealogies to account for various nations, and new traditions about the patriarchs to explain how history had developed. Even David's story was reinterpreted as David became, more and more, the prototype of the ideal king and, ultimately, of the Messiah. Other literary forms were added: sermon-like utterances of the prophets, teachings from the schools of the wise men, devotional hymns of the temple, parables, and material related to the nation's understanding of itself and its divine purpose. Over and over again, however, it is made clear that the writers believed that traditions of what God had done for his people in the past symbolized what he could be counted upon to do in the future. Thus, a people in captivity to the Babylonians could see that as God once delivered others from the Egyptians, he would do the same for those presently enslaved. The literature had, therefore, a dynamic rather than a static quality; being more than a record of the past, it constituted a narrative of the activity of God on behalf of his people.

In its present form, the Old Testament opens with religious traditions concerning the origin of the world and of mankind. In broad literary strokes, the transition is made to the beginnings of the Hebrew people with the adventures of the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as they dwelt in the land of Canaan. Because of famine, the Hebrews migrated to Egypt where Joseph attained a high office and his descendants were treated well. Change in Egyptian leaders altered their attitude to the newcomers, and the Hebrews were pressed into virtual slavery. Led by Moses, they escaped into the wilderness. After Moses' death, under the leadership of Joshua, a successful invasion of Canaan gave them control of the land, a mastery maintained with great difficulty and many wars. Ultimately, internal and external pressure became so great that a single leader, a king, became a necessity. Under Saul, David, and Solomon, Canaan was united into a single empire.

When Solomon died, the Hebrew kingdom split into northern (Israel or Ephraim) and southern (Judah) sections, and during the next few centuries the great prophetic figures (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, etc.) proclaimed their messages. Israel fell to the Assyrians in 721 B.C. and was absorbed by the Assyrian empire, never again to become a nation. In 586 B.C. Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians and Judeans (Jews) were taken into exile in Babylon, where they managed to maintain their identity.

Release came with the conquest of Babylon by the Persians under Cyrus the Great in 539 B.C. The exiled Judeans were permitted to return to their homeland, re-establish themselves, and rebuild Jerusalem. Two leaders in the restoration movement, which reached its peak about the middle of the fifth century, were Ezra and Nehemiah. For two centuries, or until the coming of the Greeks under Alexander the Great in 333 B.C., Judah was ruled as a Persian province and the Jews enjoyed comparative freedom in matters of religion and social conduct. The introduction of Greek culture brought drastic changes.

When Alexander died in 323 B.C., his kingdom was divided among his generals and Judah was eventually controlled by the Seleucids of Syria. From this time onward, Greek social and cultural patterns made inroads into Jewish life, causing anguish and suffering to those who opposed change. Unable to endure the situation any longer the Jews

rebelled and won freedom. For a short time, under Maccabean leadership, Judah enjoyed the status of an independent nation, only to come under the control of the Roman empire. Here we leave the Old Testament period and enter the Christian era. However, as we shall see, there is far more than history or the interpretation of historical events within the literature of the Old Testament.

## **What is the “Covenant”?**

We are so used to the word “covenant”, because we often hear it in connection with the Lord’s Supper. Its synonym is the word “testament” (In the New Testament diatheke is used some thirty times in a way which makes it plain that its translation must be “covenant.” In Gal. 3:15 and Heb. 9:15-17 it is held by many that the sense of covenant must be set aside in favour of will or testament.) This is common in the New Testament, occurring over thirty times in our English Bibles. Not only does the word “covenant” occur frequently, but the concept is of great significance for understanding the Bible. It provides the markers which distinguish the various periods of biblical history and revelation.

In the Old Testament, ‘covenant’ is used of formal relationships between people, such as the one between David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3). However, the term is used most frequently to describe the relationship between God and men. In quite a few cases there is a ceremony in which God and the people entering into the covenant relationship give assent to the demands of the covenant, or pledge performance of certain duties. Thus we have a passage such as Genesis 15, which provides an illustration of a covenant where the people pledge their obedience to the Lord’s demands.

Like many other biblical words and ideas, that of covenant is one which was well-known to people in the ancient Near East. Archaeology has been of great help in providing tablets from various countries which detail how kings made covenants or treaties with conquered peoples. These treaties date as early as 2300 BC down to 700 BC. In particular, treaties made by the Hittites in the period just before the Israelites came out of their bondage in Egypt show many similarities to those in the Old Testament, for example:

- An introduction explaining who the king is
- An historical survey explaining the background of the treaty
- Demands which the kings made upon his subjects
- Provision of a copy to be placed in the temple of the people and for the regular reading of it
- Calling witnesses to bear testimony to the fact that the treaty had been made
- Curses or blessings which would follow, depending upon obedience or disobedience.

Several Old Testament covenants show very strong resemblances to this pattern. This is so when we look at the covenant made with Abraham (Gen. 12, 15, 17), or the covenant at Sinai (Exodus 20-24), or the renewal of that covenant forty years later just before the children of Israel marched into the land of Canaan (Deut.). What happened was that God chose to give his teaching to Israel in a form with which they were already quite familiar. By using ideas from the secular realm and applying them in the spiritual realm, God was helping the people to grasp more easily the significance of their relationship with himself. He was the great king who had redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt to become his devoted servants.

Now, the idea of ‘covenant’ in the New Testament appears in Luke 1, in the songs of Mary and of Zechariah. Both sing of how Jesus’ coming fulfils the covenant made so long before with Abraham, the word appears in Galatians, and most frequently in the epistle to the Hebrews. The nature of a covenant clearly remains the same in both the Old and the New Testaments—the focus is on the wonderful grace of a sovereign God who comes to meet sinners in their need and enters into this relationship with them. As with the Old Testament, the New Testament speaks of how God stooped to help those who were helpless, and how he brought into being a new covenant through the blood of Jesus.

### **“Covenant” defined**

If we give a definition of it, it will help us understand the term better. We have to look at the way the Bible uses the idea and then state it clearly in a few words. Because, it is an idea connected with a relationship that God establishes; He normally gave promises in connection with a covenant, and the people had to pledge themselves to obey His commands.

Thus we can say that a **“covenant is a bond between God and man, given by a sovereign God as an expression of his grace, and in this formal way he expresses the relationship which exists between them”**. In essence a covenant is an agreement, but an agreement of a solemn and binding force. To be in a covenant relationship with God is a great blessing, for God promises, **‘I will be your God and you shall be my people.’**

The people of the Old Testament were very familiar with the covenant idea. In the psalms and in the writings of the prophets the idea comes to the fore in many ways. From beginning to end the Old Testament reveals an understanding of God’s steadfast covenant mercies. Furthermore, all the literature of the Old Testament speaks of the covenant, and the idea is used to point forward to the coming of a new covenant when Jesus comes as Messiah (Jer. 31:31-34, Heb. 8:8-12, Isa. 42:6, Isa. 49:8, Isa. 55:3, Isa. 59:21, Isa. 61:8, Jer. 31:31, Jer. 31:33, Jer. 32:40, Jer. 50:5, Ezek. 16:60, Ezek. 16:62, Ezek. 20:37, Ezek. 34:25, Ezek. 37:26, Hos. 2:18)

## **Importance of the Old Testament**

Study of the Old Testament is always important for Christians. The foundational truths of the Bible are set out in the Old Testament, and in many cases are pre-supposed by the New Testament writers. Without knowledge of the Old Testament, we cannot adequately explain much of the New Testament. While this applies particularly to books like the Epistle to the Hebrews, yet it also applies very widely to words and concepts which are rooted in the Old Testament.

Again, for us to understand the Old Testament we cannot be selective in our reading of its pages. The total flow of the history and thought must be in our minds if we are to understand it for ourselves. Knowledge of isolated stories does not give us the broad perspective which we need and can lead to wrong teaching.

So, as our understanding of the Old Testament increases, it should also increase our understanding of the New Testament. Moreover, our increasing biblical knowledge should stimulate us to go and tell the message of the Bible to others. Biblical study should result in the desire to bring others to share both our knowledge and our commitment to the Lord.

## **A Brief History of the Old Testament**

The Old Testament records the beginning of God’s divine, progressive revelation of Who He is and what is required for man to be in a right relationship with his Creator.

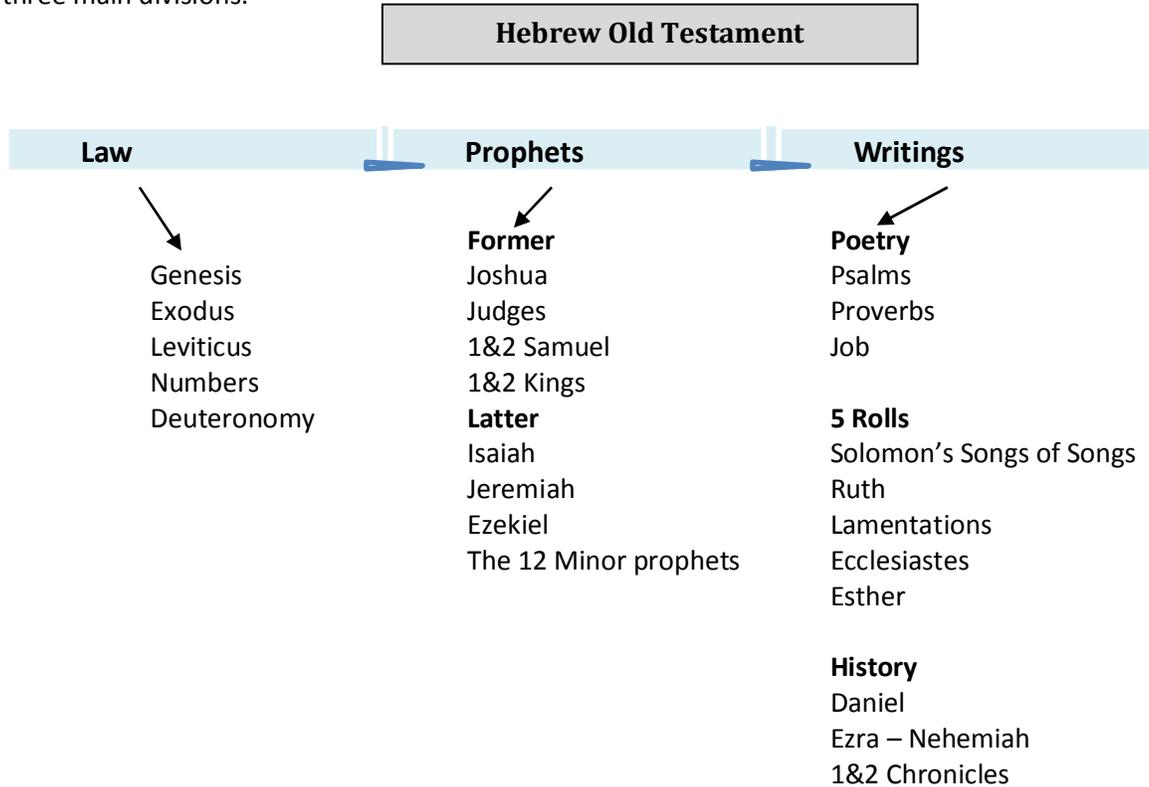
Some facts about the Old Testament will help us understand it better:

- It was written over a period of 1600 years.
- Written by about 30 different human authors
- They never contradicted each other; they taught the same theme of the Bible
- Contains 39 books
- Written primarily in Hebrew with short portions in Aramaic
- The original scriptures were carefully and particularly copied by hand by Hebrew scribes and passed along from generation to generation.
- By the time of Christ, the Old Testament was complete as one book containing the books we have today
- The first important translation of the Hebrew Old Testament was the Greek Septuagint (LXX) which was completed around 250 BC.
- The second important translation was the Latin Vulgate (383-405 AD) which became the official Bible of Christians for about 1000 years. (The Vulgate is an early Fifth Century version of the Bible in Latin, and largely the result of the labours of Jerome, who was commissioned by Pope Damasus I in 382 to make a revision of old Latin translations.)
- The first English version was made around 1384 by John Wycliffe, followed over 200 years later by the 1611 King James Authorized Version which was the forerunner of most of our modern translations.
- Read page 273 of Edwards, B.H., Nothing but the Truth, 2006(ed)

- The Dead Sea scrolls found at Qumran in 1947 conclusively confirmed the accuracy and unity of the Old Testament as we have it today.
- The Old Testament has been miraculously preserved by God for well over 3000 years.

## The arrangement of the Old Testament

The Hebrew Old Testament was arranged a little different from our Bible today, but contained the same books although they were counted as 24 instead of 39 because certain books were combined. They were arranged under three main divisions:

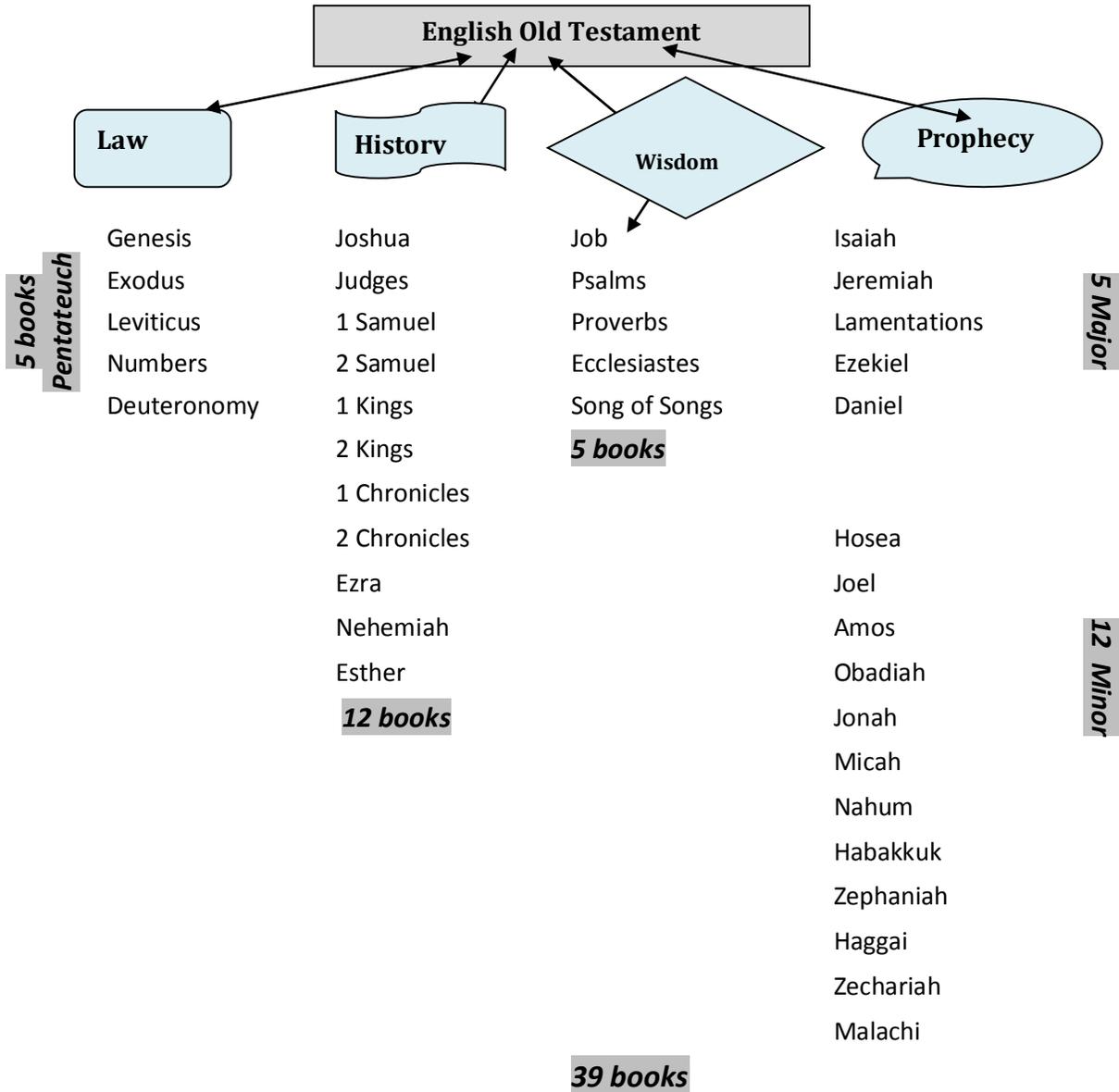


The law is sometimes referred to as "Moses".

Writings are sometimes referred to as "Psalms".

Occasionally, the Old Testament is called "Moses and The Prophets".

## The English arrangement of 39 books



### Assignment:

1. Read Chapter 1 – Genesis of Edwards, B.H., Nothing but the Truth, 2006 (ed)
2. Who is the writer?
3. What is the message and purpose of the book?