



Module 1

Exploring Faith

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Welcome!

Welcome to module one. In this workbook you will find a book list, assignment titles, your preparation work for each session followed by the session outline. If you find some of the preparation work challenging or you don't understand it – take heart – it is certain others will feel the same. The weekly sessions are where we help each other learn and make sense of what we are reading.

This course is a journey for our minds but, more crucially, an inner journey of the heart. The fact that you are here is evidence that God is at work in you. As we travel, we need to develop habits that help us reflect on what God is revealing to us, growing in us and leading us into. The prayer of **Examen** is a great way to do this and draws on Ignatius 'Spiritual Exercises'. Ignatius uses the terms:

Consolation – whatever helps us connect with God, creating a sense of joy, gratefulness, value.

Desolation - whatever disconnects us and leaves us feeling sad, isolated, troubled.

The **Examen** is a prayer of reflection, a way of observing without judgement, of recognising the place of God within life. An online version can be found at sacredspace.ie. But we offer a simple form here:

At the end of the day find a few moments to reflect and ask yourself 3 questions:

1. **Where have I seen a glimpse of glory?** – in the ordinary stuff of life where have you noticed something of God and give thanks for it.
2. **What has troubled me?** – think about your feelings, reactions, energy levels and then offer these things to God.
3. **What one thing do I hope for tomorrow?** – keep it simple and realistic!

Then spend a few moments aware of the loving presence of God around you.

The **examen** as a community discipline is explored in '*Sleeping with Bread*' by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn. The title of the book came from the following story.

During the bombing raids of World War II, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. The fortunate ones were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and care. But many of these children who had lost so much could not sleep at night. They feared waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them. Finally, someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace. All through the night the bread reminded them, "Today I ate, and I will eat again tomorrow".

Our aims for Module One

- To offer an outline of OT history through key events and themes
- To introduce the key OT themes of Exodus, exile and covenant
- To explore the literature of the Psalms, the prophets and the wisdom literature
- To make connections between the OT and today, applying learning to contemporary discipleship, ministry and worship
- To reflect on our own spiritual journey and develop our habits for ongoing growth in faith

Outcomes from this module

Knowledge and understanding

At the end of the module participants will be expected to demonstrate:

- knowledge of the content and how the OT was put together
- knowledge of the key events in the history of Israel
- an understanding of the OT theological themes of Exodus, covenant and exile.
- a basic knowledge of the different types of literature in the OT.

Evaluative and other skills

At the end of the module participants will be able to:

- place individual texts and characters of the OT within their historical context
- apply the resources of the OT to today's context and their own growth in discipleship, ministry and worship
- show empathy and respect for the Hebrew Scriptures

The nature of this module calls for personal reflection and self-awareness. You may find it helpful to share your thoughts/reflections with a spiritual director or soul friend, your mentor, or a close and trusted friend who can give you honest reflections and feedback.

Everyday Calling

At the beginning of module two there is the annual diocesan vocations day called – Everyday Calling. There will be opportunities to explore vocation in its broadest sense but also specific ministries authorised by the church. You will get an invitation to the event but your tutors will let you know the date so you can put it in your diary.

Module One: Book list

Some of these books are in the group book box others you can request.

Discipleship

- Bonhoeffer D, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM, 1999)
Cottrell S & Croft S, *Travelling Well* (CHP 2000)
Linn, S, D & M, *Sleeping with Bread* (Paulist Press 1995)
Mourant J, *Listening to your life* (Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2016)
Pritchard J, *Beginning Again on the Christian Journey* (SPCK 2005)
Rohr R, *Immortal Diamond* (London, SPCK, 2013)
Silf M, *Landmarks: An Ignatian Journey* (London: DLT, 1998)
Snow M *Anglican Discipleship* (Cambridge: Grove Books LTD 2021)
Yancey P, *Reaching for the Invisible God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000)

Theology

- Ackroyd R & Major D, *Shaping the Tools: Study Skills in Theology* (London: DLT, 2000)
Ford DF, *The Future of Christian Theology* (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011)
Green L, *Let's Do Theology*, (London: Mowbray, 1990)
McGrath A, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2007)

Bible study

- Bourquin Y, Marguerat D *How to Read Bible Stories* (London: SCM, 1998)
Evans R *Using the Bible: Studying the Text* (London: DLT, 2000)
Fee G, Stuart D *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* 2nd edn. (London: SU, 1994)
Strange W, *The Authority of the Bible* (London: DLT, 2000)
Travis S *Starting with the Bible* (Oxford: Lion, 1994)
Winter D, Faulkner A *Come on in – a practical guide to getting started with the Bible* (London: BRF, 1997)

Studying the Old Testament

- Anderson B *The Living World of the Old Testament* (London: Longman, 1988)
Bimson, Kane, Paterson, Wiseman ed *New Bible Atlas* (Leicester, IVP 2005)
Charpentier E *How to Read the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1981)
Drane J *Introducing the Old Testament* (Oxford: Lion, 1987/2000)
Gooder, P *The Pentateuch A Story of Beginnings* (London T&T Clark 2000)
Lawrence P *The Lion Atlas of Bible History* (Oxford, Lion Hudson, 2006)
O'Tuama P, Jordan G *Borders and Belonging: The Book of Ruth* (Canterbury Press 2021)
Payne D *Bible Timeline* (Oxford, Lion, Candle Books 2002, 2004)
Rogerson J (ed.) *Beginning Old Testament Study* (London: SPCK, 1998)
Rogerson J, Davies P *The Old Testament World* (T&T Clark, 2005)

Module One: Assignments

These are the **optional** assignments for module one of which you choose one only. The total amount of words should be 2,000 (+ or – 10%). However, you might want to present your assignment in another way – such as a film clip or as a picture.

Module Journal

To compile a journal,

- Keep a diary and jot down any thoughts, feelings, insights, confusion or anxiety that arise during your preparation for each session.
- Then write down what happened during the session – did it clarify things or cause greater confusion?
- You might want to reflect on the group – how members work together, what effect the group dynamics have on you and your learning.
- You could include any of the reflective tools you have used.
- Have you read any books that have made you think in new ways?

For the assignment:

- Summarise your journal
- Identify your key learning from the module
- Reflect on the impact this has had on your faith.
- What might God be growing or revealing in you?
- Where might this be leading you?

Psalm 137

Read Psalm 137. In the light of your reflection answer the following questions:

- In what circumstances was this psalm written?
- Place yourself “in the shoes of” the compiler of the psalm and justify the inclusion of verses 7-9.
- Can Christians use the final verse of the psalm when it is read or sung in worship? Give some arguments for and against and then make your own conclusion.

Allow up to half the words for (a) and (b) together and the other half for (c).

Creation Stories in Genesis

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-25 – two different versions of the creation story.

- Why might these two versions be included in the scriptures?
- How do you interpret them?
- What do others say?
- What are the implications of this for the use of these two texts in the church today?

Read the Book of Jonah.

- What are the key themes?
- How do you feel about Jonah's response to his calling?
- Can you identify with it?
- What does the Book of Jonah mean for us today?

Module One Exploring Faith

Course Introduction

Aims:

- To introduce the course
- To consider the formation and functioning of groups and how learning takes place in this context
- To look at the skills needed for study on this course

Opening Prayer

5 mins

Dwelling in the Word – Psalm 84:5-7

Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

⁶As they pass through the Valley of Baka,
they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.^[a]

⁷They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion.

Introduction to the course

1. Course outline
2. Preparation between sessions
3. Role of tutors
4. Structure of sessions
5. Pathways

Group Learning and Study Skills

60 mins

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 1 Opening up the Bible Preparation

Spend some time looking through your Bible. Notice any book or books in the Old and New Testaments that are familiar to you and any that are not.

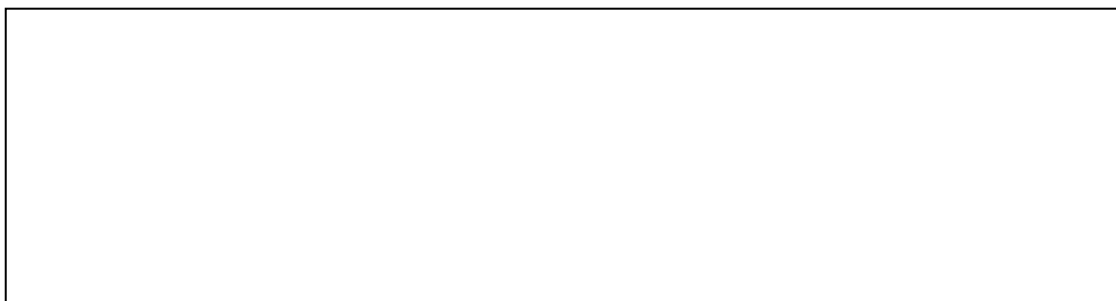
1. What does the Bible mean to you?



2. Do you have a favourite story from the Bible?



3. How is the Bible used in worship in your church?



4. Watch The Bible Project video:

Go to the Bible Project website click on:

⇒ How to read the Bible and go to

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/category/how-to-read-bible-introduction>



The **Old Testament** contains roughly the same material as you would find in a Hebrew Bible, as used by Jewish People today, though in the Hebrew Bible the books are arranged in a different order. The Deuterocanonical books, also called the '**Apocrypha**', include Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch and 1 & 2 Maccabees and additional passages in Daniel and Esther. The exact passages vary between different traditions.

The **Old Testament** took **more than 1000 years** to come together in its current form. It is arranged into four sections:

1. Pentateuch (1st five books): Genesis – Deuteronomy
2. History: Joshua – Esther
3. Poetry & Wisdom: Job, Psalms – Song of Solomon
4. Prophets: Isaiah – Malachi

Many of the texts that we now find in the Bible evolved over this long period of time, both as oral tradition and then as literature that was edited, revised and collected. Some scholars suggest that the oldest text to be written at or near the actual event is Judges 5 – the *Song of Deborah* – perhaps written by an eye-witness somewhere near 1125 BCE. Parts of the book of Daniel are probably the most recent dating from about 160 BCE.

History in the Bible

History in the Bible is not a straightforward matter. If we understand the work of an historian, in the modern sense, to be based on primary sources which trace the network of cause and effect between events, then there is much less 'history' in the Bible than we might have thought.

Some of the Old Testament comes from a time before much writing was practised and it is therefore very difficult to find other primary sources to corroborate the ancient ("pre-historical") events described in the Bible. This does not mean they are untrue - just that the historical proof is not available. However, once we come to the period of the exile there are plenty of other sources for this and that is why we can be sure of the dates quoted for these events. In the New Testament, it would seem that, we are more obviously in a time of recorded history, but there are still problems. For example, the writers of the gospels and Acts were concerned with something more important than history in the sense that we may understand it, while the letters are mostly part of a correspondence of which much is missing. Whilst grounded in real times and in real events the writers' purpose, is generally, one of theology rather than that of academic historians.

Should this affect how we view the material we find in the Bible?

Are we right or wrong to approach this literature as history?

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 1 Opening up the Bible

Aims: To discover in broad terms the contents of the Bible

To consider the different types of writing

To explore different ways of understanding the Bible

Welcome and introductions

15 mins

Each member of the group introduces themselves, says where they are from and why they have decided to join the Journey in Faith Course.

How we work together as a group

20 mins

In order for us to be effective as a group it is good to agree on how we will work together. This could include:

- Times of meeting and punctuality
- Communication over absences
- Confidentiality
- Listening without interrupting
- Ways of asking questions of others or challenging in an appropriate way.

Write down what you have agreed as a group contract so that it can be referred to as a record of what has been agreed.

Opening prayer

5 mins

Reflection on the preparation

15 mins

- What did you learn?
- What surprised you?
- Did anything confuse you?

BREAK

Opening up the Bible

20 mins

We will be exploring Bible in greater detail over the next three modules but we begin by looking at when and how this remarkable book came to be written, the history and the geography of Biblical events. The word *Bible* comes from the Greek word for a book. It is useful for us to view the bible as a library of all sorts of books rather than one volume. Different books were written at different times by different people. Some of them the result of a long editing process, others may have

reached their current state in part by accident – some bits may have been lost, or fragments may have been placed all together.

In most libraries book are categorised so that we can find the sort of book we want. They will be divided into different types of book: history, cooking, science, biography, romance, science-fiction etc. In the Bible we find books which belong to a variety of different genres, we also find that many of the passages within them have their own genres.

Here are some examples:

- Myths and legends
- Stories
- Genealogies/lists
- History
- Laws
- Songs and poetry
- Prophecy
- Visions
- Wisdom
- Letter

Group Task

- Look through the contents page of your Bibles list as many as you can under the categories given above.
- Do you have any that don't fit, any you are not sure about?
- Share with the whole group how you found this task

The Bible Timeline

15 mins

Group Task

Look at the Old Testament timeline (at the back of this Module Handbook)

What do you notice? - the people, places and stories

Share your findings with the rest of the group

Closing prayer**5 mins**

Module One: Exploring Faith

Session 2 What is Faith? Preparation

Your faith story

Using the **Journey of Life** page (found in the Pathways Handbook), find some time to prayerfully reflect on your life – its ups and downs, key people and places, events, hopes and dreams. Jot down some of these key elements. When you have finished look over what you have put down and think about your faith journey and how that fits in – you might want to think about where God has felt particularly present or active.

- What do you notice?
- What have you learnt?

Faith in the Bible

Read the following Bible passage and think about some of the questions below.

Hebrews 11:1 - 12:3

Questions

- Describe in your own words what the writer means by 'faith' in this passage.
- Can you find *one* word to sum this up?
- How would you describe the way this writer understands the relationship of faith and action?



Bring something to Session 3 that speaks to you of your relationship with God. (E.g. a reading, an object, a picture, music etc.)



The Greek word for faith (*pistis*) has the same root as the verb 'to believe' (*pisteuo*). The first thing Jesus does at the beginning of his ministry is to invite people to have faith (believe) in his good news (Mark 1:15).

Faith is also one of the central ideas of Paul's theology, and much of his letter to the Romans is devoted to exploring the meaning of faith. Indeed, there is at least one reference to faith in every New Testament book, except for 2 John and 3 John.

So central is the idea of faith to Christianity that the Greek word *pistos*, became the standard term for describing the followers of Jesus. Christians were (and are) simply 'believers', people with faith.

Faith means a number of different things. Sometimes faith means a response to Jesus which enables a person to be healed; sometimes it means accepting Jesus' message; sometimes it describes confidence in the face of death; sometimes it means having the strength to overcome temptation. These examples obviously have something in common – but they also refer to very different circumstances and responses.

If we follow the word 'faith' through the whole of the New Testament we find even more meanings. Perhaps most bewildering of all is the way in which Paul and James refer to the same incident in the life of Abraham – one to prove that he was saved by faith, the other to prove that he wasn't! (See Romans 3:19-4:25 and James 2:14-26 – the context of the readers of the letters is of course important here)

Ways of thinking about faith?

Faith as relationship

Faith is found in many human relationships and activities. In this sense, faith means depending on the trustworthiness of someone, or something outside ourselves, such as between passengers and the pilot on an airliner.

Christian faith is a relationship of trust in God even when we don't fully understand what this means. Relationships grow over time and require commitment on both sides to enrich and deepen that relationship.

Faith as response

At the heart of Christianity lies an experience of inner change, described by Paul in 2 Cor. 5:17 as, '*a new creation; the old has gone: the new has come*'. This new

creation is brought about when we respond to the message of Jesus. It is not a message simply containing information but demands a response.

That response involves:

- Trust in the content of the message (thinking)
- Commitment to the one from whom the message comes (being)
- Action in response to the message (doing)

Faith as trust

One common misunderstanding of faith is that it is essentially about believing *something* - it could include belief in the historic creeds, or the divine inspiration of the Bible, or the infallibility of the Pope.

Faith is not simply about believing something, but about trusting someone. However important beliefs in something may be, they can never be at the heart of the matter for Christians.

Faith as decision

For some Christians, the most important thing about faith is 'being right with God' (or 'justification'). This is often seen as the result of an act of faith—a decision, made at a particular moment, but with lasting consequences. People sometimes call it 'conversion', or 'being born again'.

For many people, the moment at which they decide to start trusting God is indeed important. But knowing that trust is at the heart of faith helps us to see that the importance of that decision lies not so much in the act of making it, as in the new relationship of trust to which it leads. The moment of decision passes; the relationship of trust continues.

Faith and doubt

One of the great mysteries of faith is its relationship to doubt. A trust which goes on trusting someone, despite having reasons to doubt or mistrust, is much richer and deeper than a trust which has never had to wrestle with such uncertainty.

Doubt makes us feel weak and vulnerable but our faith grows and our experience of God is enriched by times when we face difficult circumstances or aspects of our faith we felt sure of are challenged. The Bible describes people wrestling with God (Jacob) and having their faith stretched almost to breaking-point (like Job).

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 2 What is Faith?

Aims: to develop a broad understanding of faith

to reflect on own faith journey and how that might continue to grow

Opening prayers and remembering names 10 mins

Reflection on the preparation 10 mins

Relationship with God 20 mins

Introduce whatever you have brought this week to express your relationship with God and tell each other what this item means to you.

Bible study and discussion on Faith 30 mins

Group task

- Use your preparation work to discuss your answers to the questions on the Hebrews passage.
- In your group try to come up with your own definition for **What is Faith?**

Each group shares their definition

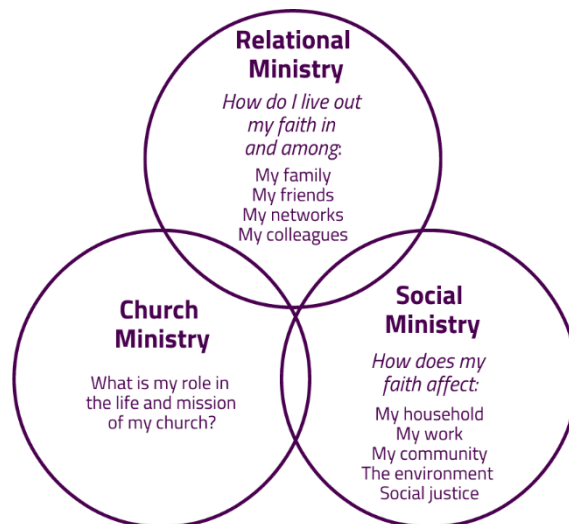
BREAK

Faith and the whole of life 20 mins

We are called to live out our faith in the whole of our lives.

- Look at the diagram below and think about what your faith means in these different spheres of life.
- If faith is a life-long journey what habits do you need to have in place to nourish and sustain that journey?

Take some 10 minutes to individually to reflect on these questions.



Have a conversation in twos or threes on what might have emerged for you.

Closing prayer

10 mins

This prayer time gives you space to tell God what your symbol means to you. Your tutors may provide some liturgy or music to create the environment to do this.

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 3 OT Characters in Their Historical Context Preparation

Spend some time reflecting on your learning so far, particularly what you have learnt about the content of the Bible and using the Bible:

What has surprised you?

Overview of the Bible

You might want to look at the following video to remind you of the story of the Bible

The Story of the Bible Intro Video | BibleProject

The geographical and historical context of the Old Testament

The Bible events take place in the ancient Near-East in an area known as the *Fertile Crescent*, which stretches between Mesopotamia (the area between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates) and Egypt. Mesopotamia was the seat of important empires such as the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Persians. Egypt was also the seat of a succession of empires.



Between these two power blocks sits the Holy Land, stretched out between the Mediterranean and the River Jordan that flows from Lake Galilee into the Dead Sea. It is no surprise that this area spent most of the time under the influence either of Egypt or the Mesopotamian empires.

The biggest change to this situation came with Alexander the Great, who defeated the Persians in 333 BCE, and took control of all this area in the following years. After Alexander, Greek culture prevailed in the region up to and including the Roman period. This region has a number of geographical advantages which has caused it to become known as the *Cradle of Civilization*.

Two sets of river systems, the Nile in Egypt and the Tigris and Euphrates, enclosing Mesopotamia, provide both water and fertile soil.

These two areas are linked along the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean, where the fertile land is hemmed in by mountains and deserts and the river Jordan irrigates its own valley. Looking from a greater distance we can also see that the Fertile Crescent links three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. Both flora and fauna, and human beings were able to travel through this area and to settle here. The development of agriculture in this region allowed a settled existence. This meant that cities and then significant empires developed in this area.

Empires required complex political and social organisation and it is likely this need led to the innovation of writing. Technological advancement included the ability to build in wood, stone and brick; but historical eras are particularly marked out by developments in metal working. In this region the move from Bronze Age to the Iron Age took place around 1200 BCE.

There are four periods or phases in OT history to know about:

1. The creation of the nation of Israel in the Land

In the 11th and 12th centuries BCE we see the move of God's people from being a nomadic people to settlement in "The Land". The key figures were the Patriarchs; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob etc. The next important figures were Moses and the Judges. They trace their identity as a nation to their inherited connection to Abraham's line through Isaac and their identity

as the people of God through the covenant of circumcision, the Exodus events and the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19: 4-6).

2. The Kingdom Age

From around 1000 BCE to 586 BCE a series of kings presided over the largest and most settled kingdom in the history of the Jewish people. Key early kings were Saul, David and Solomon. This was understood as “the golden age”.

After the death of Solomon, the fault lines in what David had set up broke open and in 922 BCE the Kingdom was divided into Israel (ten tribes) and Judah (two tribes, Judah and Benjamin). The Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BCE and they removed some of the inhabitants and settled others from elsewhere in the empire. This led to an ethnically mixed population and syncretistic (two faiths mixed) version of Judaism based in Samaria – resulting in the Samaritans of Jesus’ day. It is the language of the Assyrians – Aramaic – that became the main language of the region and was indeed Jesus’ mother-tongue.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah which held onto David’s Temple in Jerusalem, though much weakened, was finally destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE.

3. The Exile of Judah in Babylon

The Babylonians, unlike the Assyrians, had a policy of taking the elite of their conquered nations back to Babylon, in time they were allowed to live in peace there. The poor were left in the land and supervised to extract whatever profit there might be.

The Exile for Judah was a highly significant event and when it is believed much of the Old Testament was compiled; setting down the oral tradition of the people of Israel and enabling them to remain unified around their shared story.

The Exile lasted from 586 – 538 BCE when the Persians removed the Babylonians from power in the region and then allowed some of the exiles to return and begin the rebuilding of Jerusalem in 538 BCE.

4. The Post –Exilic Period

Ezra and Nehemiah oversaw the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Temple was restored. In this period an emphasis was increasingly placed on the Law and its interpretation. It was felt that this might avoid a repeat of the disaster of the Exile. The Scribes and Pharisees then grew in power.

The Jews were able to internally govern themselves for some of this period but they were always subject to foreign domination. The region came under the influence of the Greek

Empire and by New Testament times was part of the Roman Empire. They managed a brief period of autonomy in the 200s with the Maccabean revolt.

Pick one of the Old Testament characters named above. See what you can find out about them and what significance they might have for us today.



You might want to read Appendix 1 which give a bit more detail on the history of the ancient Near East and how the Old Testament was compiled.

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 3: OT Characters in Their Historical Context

Aim: To locate familiar OT characters in their historical context
To explore the concept of a development in theological understanding through the OT

Opening Worship

15 mins

Lectio Divina is an ancient way of reading the bible, it means 'holy reading'. It allows the words to be savoured, to be absorbed and to speak to us.

Find Isaiah 35 while a tutor leads the group through the steps.

Step 1 Reading

- Slowly read the passage
- Ponder each word and savour each phrase
- Imagine the sights, smells and sounds contained within the passage
- Is there a particular word, phrase or thought that rises to the surface?

Step 2 Reflecting

- Ponder this word, phrase or thought for a while
- What might it be saying to you?

Step 3 Responding

- In prayer express to God your response to the passage – this could be thanksgiving, lament, praise or questioning.

Step 4 Resting

- Spend some time in silence, takes some deep breaths to still your mind
- Sit in openness to the blessing of God- as the silent communion between a mother and her sleeping infant where communication passes beyond words.

Reflection on the preparation

10 mins

Introductory Exercise

20 mins

As a whole group write a list of 15 characters in the Old Testament.

Create a simple timeline using the four periods or phases in Old Testament history explained in the preparation work. As a group, try to work out where each of the characters fits on the timeline.

BREAK

Stories of some Old Testament characters

30 mins

Group Task

Each group will be given one of the characters below to look at

- Using the information given and any other knowledge you bring write a brief biography of them along the following lines:
 - They belonged in ? period of Israelite history
 - They appear in the books of?
 - We discovered ? about them
 - They have ? to say to us today.
- Conclude by completing the following sentence which will be used in the closing act of worship:
'We thank God for X, for their...'

ABRAHAM

A 'patriarch' who is acknowledged by all "peoples of the book" (i.e. Jews, Christians & Muslims) who each claim him as the 'Father' of their faith. All three faiths refer to Abraham as the "friend" of God. The stories about Abraham occupy chapters 12-25 of Genesis.

Bible passage: Genesis 12:1-9.

Key questions:

- This chapter has been called the key to the book of Genesis. What could make it this significant?
- How many specific promises are included in the words God speaks to Abram in verses 2 and 3? Is one of them more important than the others?
- From what you see in these verses, would you say that God wants to be considered *primarily* as the God of his people Israel (the descendants of Abraham), or as the God of the whole earth?
- Look at how this passage is seen from the perspective of New Testament faith in Hebrews 11:8- 10. What did Abraham have most in common with us today?

JOSHUA

The book of Joshua is a testimony to the grace and power of God, (Yahweh), whom ancient Israel acknowledged to be the sovereign Lord of all. The book tells us the story of the Israelites who, under Joshua's leadership and with the benefit of divine intervention, crossed the Jordan River to take control of the land of Canaan. The land was God's gift, as promised to the ancestors, to be held in return for the promise of service to the divine Lord.

Bible passage: Joshua 1:1-9

Key questions:

- What lessons do you think Israel has learned from forty years in the wilderness?
- What does this passage say about good leadership?
- The name "Jesus" is the Greek form of the name "Joshua". In what ways in this passage do you see that Joshua was like Jesus Christ?
- Joshua led through the transition from the age of the Exodus to the age of the Nation. Think about the time we live in – in what ways are we having to live through a similar transition and what can we learn

DAVID

The second (and some would say the greatest) king of Israel. He was called from looking after his father's sheep to be king of God's people.

Bible passage: 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

Key questions:

- What experiences can you recall that helped you learn to look beyond outward appearance?
- What characteristics might have been key in David's calling as king?
- If you have a modern bible translation with you that includes the Apocrypha and other writings you might find Psalm 151 which was discovered among the psalms in the Dead Sea Scrolls. What does it have to tell us about David?
- Stories about David occupy us right through to the end of the Second Book of Samuel. In what ways was he Israel's greatest king? In what ways was he one of Israel's weakest kings?

ESTHER

Esther was a young Jewish Girl living in the city of Susa, capital of the Persian Empire, in the reign of King Xerxes. The King rejects his wife, Queen Vashti, when she does not obey him. A search is then made for a replacement Queen and Esther is selected. Meanwhile, the

King's senior minister plans to kill the Jewish population when Mordecai, Esther's close relative, refuses to bow down to him. Mordecai approaches Esther to find a way to save her people.

Today the story of Esther is celebrated in the Jewish festival of Purim.

Bible passage: Esther 4

Key Questions:

- What do you notice in Esther's response?
- What qualities does she show?
- How does the story of Esther fit within the story of the Jewish people and what is its consequence?
- Why might this story be an important one to tell today?

ISAIAH

Generally speaking, the prophecies of the prophet of this name are collected in the first 39 chapters of the book of that name. Chapters later in that book contain prophecies of unknown origin, but the majority of them are ascribed to someone scholars refer to "deutero-Isaiah" (i.e. "second Isaiah") who lived after the return from Exile.

Bible passage: Isaiah 6:1-8.

Key questions:

- What do you make of Isaiah's call to ministry?
- From Isaiah's words in this chapter, what are the most important things he understands about God's personality and character?
- What dramatic change had occurred within Isaiah from verse 5 to verse 8?
- How have you experienced hearing from God?

Plenary

20 mins

Get each group to report back to the group with their potted biography.

Discuss what insights we have gained about

- Who God is
- What it means to live as the People of God

Final Act of Worship

10 mins

Each group reads out the closing part of their 'task',
i.e. – **"We thank God for Abraham, for his . . ."**

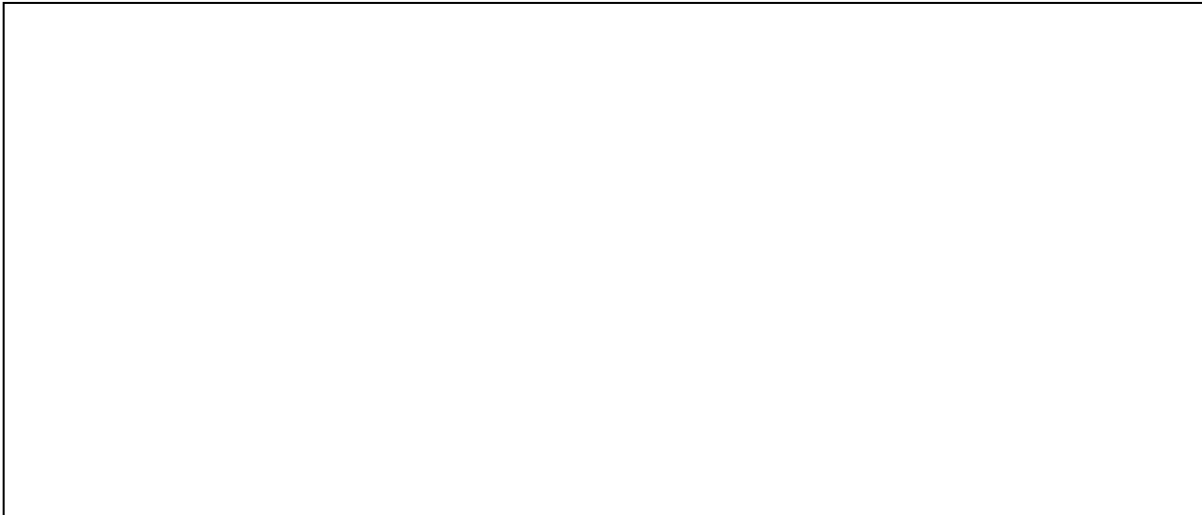
*Leave a brief silence after each allowing for individuals to add their own thoughts or prayers,
either silently or aloud.*

Module One Exploring Faith

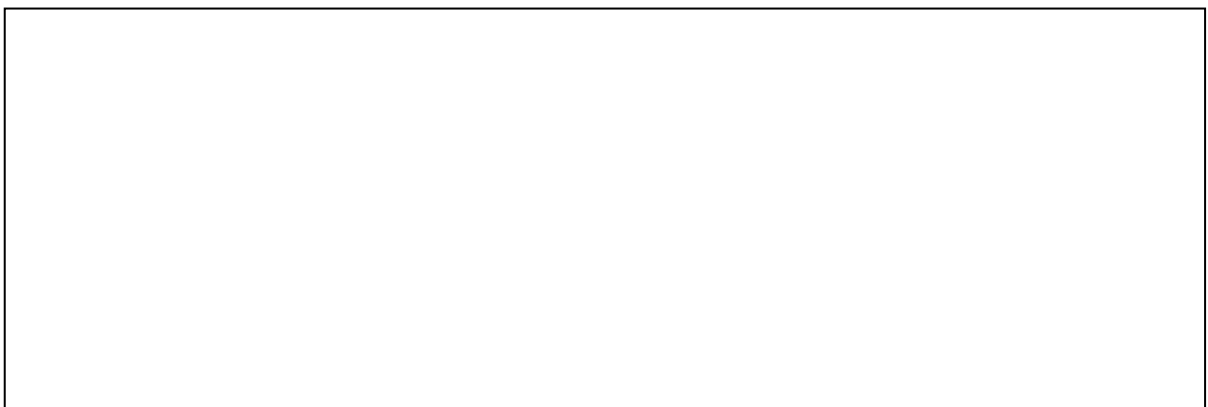
Session 4 Exodus and Exile. Preparation

Two of the most important events in Old Testament history are the **Exodus** and the **Exile**. Both these events involve journeys from one place to another. However, the Exodus is a journey from slavery to freedom in the Promised Land; the Exile is a journey from freedom and self-rule to captivity.

Reflect on what you know about these two events as well as any similarities and differences.



Read **Exodus 13:17-14:31** straight through in one sitting in any version of your choice. What do you notice?



Read **Psalms 137**. Having read it through once, ask yourself the following question: “what’s the most homesick you can ever recall feeling?”

Now read the Psalm through again and answer the following questions:

- How would you describe the mood of verses 1-6?
- Identify key words or phrases.
- What do you think were the chief motives behind the words in verses 8-9?
- What help does this psalm offer for dealing with deep suffering in our lives?



Find out something of the significance of the following to the Israelites:

- The Land
- The King
- The Temple

What might be the implication in our own time?

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 4 Exodus and Exile.

Aims:

- To clarify the Exodus tradition in the Old Testament, the impact of the Exile experience and to explore their message for today's world.

Opening Worship

10 mins

This prayer is an adaptation of one used at the beginning of the Passover ceremony:

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation.

You chose us, your people, for your service.

In love you give us holidays for joy and festivals for gladness.

You gave your Jewish People the feast of unleavened bread,

The season of freedom and the time to meet together.

We celebrate their liberation from Egypt

And our liberation from slavery to sin.

So may we be at one with God's children everywhere.

As we recall each event in the Jewish People's ancient struggle,

And as we celebrate their emergence from slavery to freedom,

We pray that all of us may keep alive in our hearts the love of liberty.

May we dedicate ourselves to the abolition of all forms of tyranny and injustice,

As we acknowledge you, our Creator, our Father, our Liberator. Amen

Reflection on the preparation

10 mins

EXODUS

20 mins

Group Task

Each group should prepare a 5 minute presentation – use your imaginations!

Group 1

- Retell the Exodus story from the perspective of an Israelite slave.

Group 2

- Retell the Exodus story from the perspective of Moses

Group 3

- Retell the Exodus story from the perspective of an Egyptian official.

Plenary 1

20 mins

Share your presentations

Briefly discuss the implications of this story today.

BREAK

EXILE

30 mins

Group Task

Discuss the following:

The people lost the Land, their King and the Temple at the Exile.

- **The Land.** What was the significance of the Land to the people of Israel and how did this arise?

What would it mean to lose the Land in the Exile?

- **The King.** Israel had asked for a King to be like the other nations. The Kings of Israel and later Judah were considered to be God's representative and the one through whom God's blessing was mediated.

Read Psalms 42-43 in light of this statement. What would it mean to lose the King?

- **The Temple.** The temple in Jerusalem was where God dwelt and every Israelite came for the three great festivals each year.

Read Psalm 122 and try to imagine how an Israelite in Exile would feel reciting that Psalm and being cut off from the Temple.

Plenary 2

20 mins

One theory is that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the OT) is an amalgamation of texts from a number of other sources. One known as the "Priestly tradition" and is thought to have been written during the Babylonian Exile. This means that parts of the text of the story of the Exodus were actually written during the later Exile. The Jews in Exile would have been familiar with the Exodus story from their liturgy, worship and oral history.

- What are the main elements in the Exodus story that would encourage the Jews in Exile?
- What are the main elements in the Exodus story that are important for people today?

Closing worship

5 mins

Say the following verse together and then spend two or three minutes in silence pondering on what you have done in this session.

By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 5 Covenant and Law Preparation

Write a brief definition of the following two terms – you might find information from the Bible Project (Overview of the Old Testament) useful or look them up on the internet.

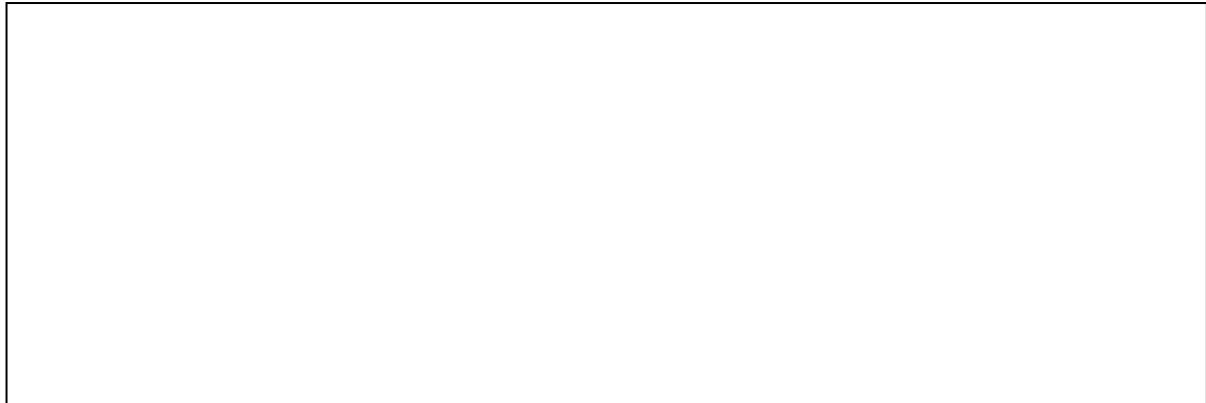
Torah / Pentateuch

Covenant

Israel has always considered the departure from Egypt as a special moment in its history. It can be argued that “the people of God” existed with Abraham but only in promise. The Exodus and in particular the giving of the Covenant on Mount Sinai is really the birth of the nation.

When the Jewish people wanted to understand the meaning of other events (like the crossing of the Jordan) or various rites in their religion, and when they wanted to explain the very existence of themselves as a people, it was to the Exodus and the Covenant that they turned.

Read Exodus 19:1-6. What strikes you about this passage?



The Covenant as an initiative of God's grace in salvation (just as in the creation) – the saving of His people comes first before their need to keep the Law. So we could say that:

The nation of Israel does not keep the Law in order to become the people of God, but because they are already the people of God.

Although the concept of law plays a huge part in the Hebrew Bible and the life of ancient Israel, there is, interestingly, no Hebrew term equivalent to the English word "law". The Hebrew word most often translated as law is "torah" which expresses more the moral and social teaching that distinguishes God's people. Other legal terms used in the Old Testament are usually translated as 'statute', 'ordinance', 'commandment' and 'word'.

It was once felt that biblical Israel's legal and moral traditions were unique in the ancient world. However, archaeologists and scholars have now identified other legal traditions in ancient Middle Eastern cultures.

So, what is distinctive about Israel's legal traditions?

1. The issue of authority – in other ancient kingdoms the source of law was the king. In the OT the source of law was conceived of as God. Both secular and religious laws were given a divine origin. The King was to lead the people in living out the law. Breaking a law, therefore, was not only a social offence but an infringement of the will of God (and hence a "sin").

2. The value of human life - A modern Jewish scholar, Moshe Greenberg, has commented that "in Israelite law the sanctity of the individual formed in the image of God was primary". (Metzger and Coogan eds. 2001:276) (Genesis 9:6)

The Ten Commandments

Also known by the Greek term *decatalogue*, appear in two places in the OT:

- Before looking them up, jot down the ones that you can remember

- Now refresh your memory by reading Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21.



The Ten Commandments form an example of one of the two basic types of Israelite law which appear mostly as a direct command: “you shall...” or “you shall not...” (the technical term is ‘apodictic’ law).

The other form of law is referred to as ‘casuistic’ law and is formulated in the pattern of “If... then...” and arose from the sphere of case law. You can find an example in Exodus 21:1-14.

- If you have time, look up details about the Methodist Church of Great Britain annual Covenant Service
- For further details about the background and meaning of the Covenant in OT theology see Drane pages 53-56 and Rogerson pages 99-102.
- You might want to think about references to the Law in the New Testament and what that means for Christians today.

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 5 Covenant and Law

Aims

- To understand the concepts of covenant and law in the OT and explore their relevance for today.

Worship

10 mins

Use the following prayer and leave some time to reflect on it.

*You are the God who is simple, direct, clear with us and for us.
You have committed yourself to us.
You have said yes to us in creation,
yes to us in our birth,
yes to us in our baptism,
yes to us in our awakening this day.
But we are of another kind,
more accustomed to “perhaps, maybe, we’ll see,”
left in wonderment and ambiguity.
We live our lives not back to your yes,
but out of our endless “perhaps.”
So we pray for your mercy this day that we may live yes back to you,
yes with our time,
yes with our money,
yes with our strength and with our weakness,
yes to our neighbour,
yes and no longer “perhaps.”
In the name of your enfleshed yes to us,
even Jesus who is our yes into your future. Amen.*

From Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth, Walter Brueggemann (Adapted)

Reflection on the preparation

15 mins

What did you learn, what did you find interesting, puzzling or enlightening?

Group Task

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10 and discuss just two or three of the following questions.

- a) How different are the “Old” and “New” covenants?
- b) What importance has the “Old” covenant for Christians today – especially the commandments?
- c) What do Christians regard as the “foundation event” of our faith?
- d) What similarities are there between the Exodus event and the Christian “foundation event(s)”?

Whole group discussion

20 mins

Briefly summarise a couple of points from your group’s discussion

Reflect on Jesus’ comments on the Torah. How do you interpret these?

Luke 18. 18-22 Matt 5. 17-20

Matt 22. 34-40

John 13. 34-35

BREAK

Plenary

20 mins

What is the importance of the Ten Commandments? Consider the following:

- Their place at the heart of Israel’s covenant relationship with God
- The particular importance of the Commandments about idolatry and Sabbath observance are without precedent in the ancient Near East. How are they still valid today?
- Their importance today. Is there any point learning them and memorising them?

Closing Worship

15 mins

Try writing your own “covenant with God” prayer.

Finish with the Methodist covenant prayer:

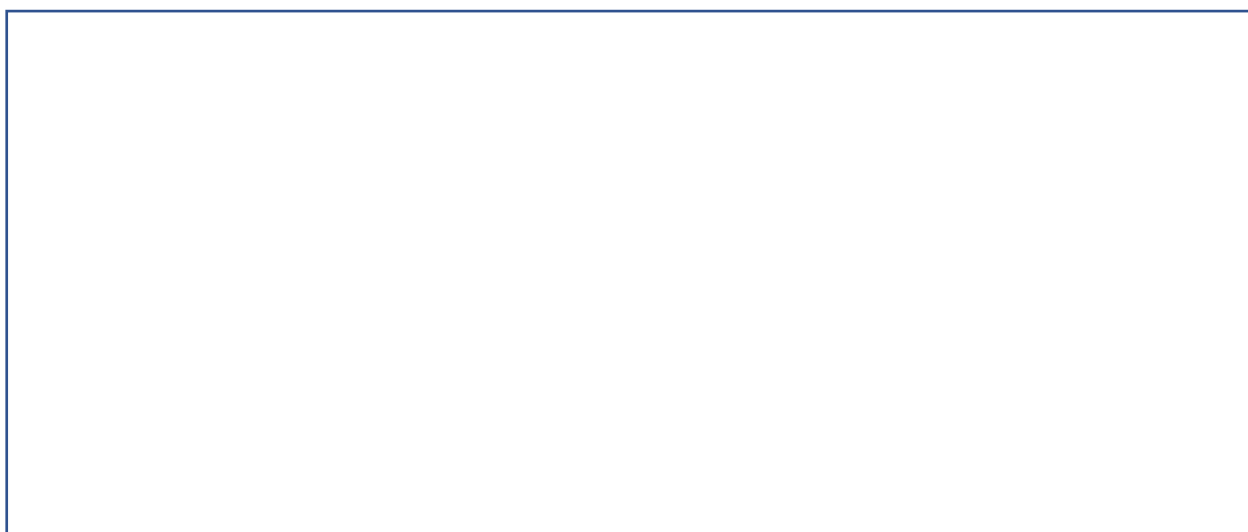
*'I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you,
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.'*

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 6 Wisdom Preparation

The study of natural sciences, philosophy and, what we might consider superstition and alchemy, was highly valued in ancient cultures. Bodies of written work, or wisdom literature, were produced by a number of these civilisations. Similarly, ancient Israel had its own collection of wisdom literature which are found in the books of Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament and the book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus in the Apocrypha. It is likely that the wisdom literature of neighbouring kingdoms would have influenced one another. Indeed, wise men from the east (possibly Persia) appear in the Nativity story, they may have been very familiar with the writings of the Hebrew scriptures.

What does wisdom mean for you and how does it relate to or differ from intelligence, knowledge, insight or understanding?



Everyday Wisdom

We all have a philosophy of life which offers us some answers to big questions and provides the framework of values and ethics to live by. So it was in ancient Israel – the “wise” Israelite tried to live a good life and discovered what enhanced it. Popular wisdom was often expressed in the form of proverbs alongside folk wisdom passed down through the family.

What modern day proverbs, or folk wisdom that has been passed down to you?

Professional Wisdom

Many cultures in Old Testament times had a scholarly class of 'wise men' and those who possessed political acumen and organisations abilities. In the Hebrew scriptures men and women who possess particular intellectual, physical or artistic skills are also considered 'wise' in cases where their abilities are given by God.

The King was the wise man *par excellence* who was deemed to share in the divine wisdom. A classic example is Solomon (1 Kings 3). The kings surrounded themselves with wise councillors and having wisdom would determine whose advice you might listen to.

Wisdom Literature

If you are able, look at the Bible Project clip on Wisdom.

<https://bibleproject.com>



Egypt and Mesopotamia had a well-developed system of court officials. In the biblical narrative, the first example we have of such a civil servant is Joseph in Pharaoh's court in Egypt.

Read Genesis 41. What do you think Joseph's wisdom consisted of?



If you have time, find out a bit more about the background to the OT books mentioned above.

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 6 Wisdom

Aim:

To understand more about the Wisdom literature and writings in the OT.

Opening prayer

5 mins

Give us, O God, the wisdom that enables us to take risks, to follow intuitions and to travel in unexpected company to that place where ultimate wisdom lies revealed, as revealed by Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Reflection on the preparation

15 mins

What did you learn, what did you find interesting, puzzling or enlightening?

Wisdom in scripture

20 mins

Group Task

Group 1

Read Proverbs 9 – Old Testament

Group 2

Read Wisdom 7:21-30 – The Apocrypha

Consider the following:

- What does the passage say about Wisdom?
- What qualities does Wisdom have?
- What is the relationship between Wisdom and God?
- Read Genesis 1:26-27 where God creates humanity in His image. What might this mean in relation to Wisdom?

Proverbs 9

Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars.² She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table.³ She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town,⁴ 'You that are simple, turn in here!' To those without sense she says,⁵ 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.⁶ Lay aside immaturity,^[a] and live, and walk in the way of insight.'

⁷ Whoever corrects a scoffer wins abuse; whoever rebukes the wicked gets hurt.⁸ A scoffer who is rebuked will only hate you; the wise, when rebuked, will love you.⁹ Give instruction^[b] to the wise, and they will become wiser still; teach the righteous and they will gain in learning.¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.¹¹ For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life.¹² If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

¹³ The foolish woman is loud; she is ignorant and knows nothing.¹⁴ She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the high places of the town,¹⁵ calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way,¹⁶ 'You who are simple, turn in here!' And to those without sense she says, ¹⁷ 'Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.'¹⁸ But they do not know that the dead^[c] are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

Wisdom 7:21-30

21 I learned both what is secret and what is manifest, **22** for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me. For in her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, **23** beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent and pure and most subtle. **24** For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. **25** For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. **26** For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. **27** Though she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; **28** for God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom. **29** For she is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, **30** for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

Whole group

20 mins

Feed-back your responses to the passages. Some questions to consider:

- What has surprised you about this picture of Wisdom?
- What further questions do you have?
- What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Wisdom of God?
- How does this connect with the wisdom we find in life's experiences?

BREAK

Contemporary applications of wisdom

15 mins

In 10 minutes of quiet, individually read the following and ponder.

The activist Shane Claibourne learned from Mother Teresa how to put his faith into practise. He established a community called The Simple Way in inner city Philadelphia. In 2013 he made thirteen New Year resolutions. What do you make of them?

1. Do for one person what I wish that I could do for everyone but can't.
2. Practice resurrection - make ugly things beautiful and look for God in the unlikely places.
3. Interrupt death - do something to interrupt the patterns of violence, bullying, war, capital punishment and other mean and ugly things.
4. Give more money away than I keep.
5. Write letters and notes to people, letting them know I am thankful for them. Write a note asking for forgiveness from someone I need to ask to forgive me.
6. Do something really nice – that no one sees or knows about.
7. Compliment someone I have a hard time complimenting... and mean it.
8. Pause before every potential crisis and ask: "Will this matter in 5 years?"
9. Get outdoors often - enjoy things like fireflies and shooting stars. Take someone to the beach or the mountains for their first time. Get my hands into the garden... so when I type on the computer I can see dirt under my fingernails.
10. Learn a skill – like welding – and use it for something redemptive, like turning a machine gun into a farm tool.

11. Rather than emphasizing the best of myself and finding the worst in others – let me work on the worst in myself and look for the best in others.
12. Be aware – and beware — of blessings. Do something to abstain or delay gratification and do something to indulge in a gift of God. Do something to end inequality and move the world toward God’s dream for every person to have “this day our daily bread”.
13. Believe in miracles. And live in a way that might necessitate one.

Closing Worship

20 mins

Here is a well-known prayer for wisdom written by Reinhold Niebuhr:

Grant me, O Lord, the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Take 10 minutes to write your own wisdom prayer.

Together we hold 5 minutes silence so we can offer our own prayers to God

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 7 Psalms Preparation

The Book of Psalms is a collection of poems, prayers, songs given enormous significance by Jews, Christians and Muslims. They have been used in public worship and private devotion for millennia and continually enrich the spiritual life of the faithful.

‘In season and out of season, generation after generation, faithful women and men turn to the Psalms as a most helpful resource for conversation with God about the things that matter most’ Walter Brueggemann¹

- What do the Psalms mean for you?

- How have you experienced the use of Psalms in worship?

¹ Brueggemann W (2002) Spirituality of the Psalms (Augsburg Fortress)

You might want to listen to these clips on YouTube of two different ways of worshipping with a familiar Psalm

[Plainsong Chant - YouTube](#)

[The Lord's My Shepherd - Stuart Townend - YouTube](#)

Categories of Psalms

The Psalms have been categorised in many different ways such as their literary form, their themes, historical context. One helpful way of thinking about them is using the groupings of Walter Brueggemann².

Psalms of Orientation

Reflect those times when life is settled in a season of well-being. They express themes of joy, coherence and surety in the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Psalms of Disorientation

These Psalms deal with seasons of alienation and suffering. They express the raw emotions of fear, resentments and anger, grief and doubt in the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Psalms of Reorientation

Following a period of disorientation life can return to a place of equilibrium but reflecting change from the experience. This change may be within, it may be an experience of grace, a significant deepening of our knowledge of God or a reframing of our current reality.

This framework takes into account the continuing relevance and on-going power of these ancient writings to sustain and bless God's people.

Reflection on Psalm 27

- ⇒ Read – read the text slowly savouring each phrase
- ⇒ Reflect – notice where your attention is drawn, a particular word, phrase or thought that arises
- ⇒ Respond – ponder what this might mean for you
- ⇒ Rest- spend some time in the presence of God resting with your thought and allowing it to sink deeply into your being.

² Brueggemann W (2002) Spirituality of the Psalms (Augsburg Fortress)



Further typologies of Psalms

Hermann Gunkel

1. The hymn or congregational hymn of praise. These celebrate the greatness and the goodness of Yahweh – Psalms 145-150

2. The individual Psalm of thanksgiving. A worshipper who has experienced some deliverance describes the former distress, an appeal to God, and God's response, and makes an act of thanksgiving – Psalms 30, 92, 116, 118, 138.

3. The communal lament. These were appropriate in times of distress affecting the whole community and would be used on days of fasting or penitence. The plight of the community is described, God's past mercies are recalled and He is implored to help his people – Psalms 44, 74, 79, 80, 83.

4. Individual lament. This is the most frequent type (which is interesting when you compare this with the subject for today's hymns and songs!). The constant element is a description of the worshipper's affliction. A common feature is the assurance that God will hear the appeal. They are sometimes accompanied by a vow of some kind.
Psalms 3, 5, 6, 7, 13, 22, 31, 42, 43, 51, 64, 69, 71, 120, 130, 140, 141, 142, 143

5. Royal Psalms. These refer either to kings of Judah and Israel or to Yahweh as King – Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 101, 110, 132

"Thematic" Approach to the Psalms

A helpful approach to a study of the Psalms – certainly for ministers and worship leaders.

1. The Psalms of Ascent (sometimes called 'Songs of Degrees'). [120-134, with the probable exception of 132]

- This group of psalms were possibly sung during the ascent to Jerusalem for the three pilgrim feasts. These were:
 - Passover (Unleavened Bread)
 - Pentecost (Weeks)
 - Tabernacles (Ingathering)
- The spirituality of these psalms takes up that of Ezekiel and the Priestly History – centred on the presence of God in his Temple. However, they also accord with the Deuteronomic

code in expressing the presence of God in everyday life. They express the spirituality of “God’s poor” – simple people far removed from the political and religious quarrels of the religious professionals – people like Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna and Mary. Perhaps they were the sort of people Jesus spoke of in the Beatitudes as seemingly “the poor in spirit.”

2. Praise to God the Creator and Saviour

- These were the “hymns” in Gunkel’s categories. They represent two main religious ideas:
- *God the Liberator*. Israel’s first religious experience was of liberation (the Exodus) [113, 114], Note: 113-118 are a group known as the “Hallel” psalms, and were probably sung in the liturgy of the three great festivals.
- *God the Creator*. God can intervene in history because he is Lord of it. [e.g. 8, 104]

3. Praise to the God who is near

- Israel also believed in a God who is near, who dwells among his people: in Jerusalem and in his Temple, the place where people go on pilgrimage. He also dwells with his people – wherever they are. Three main ideas:
 - ‘Immanuel’ – *God with us*. [e.g. 139]
 - *God present in his Temple* [e.g. 84]
 - *God present through his Law* [e.g. 119]

4. ‘Royal’ Psalms

- The common theme here is a celebration of the kingdom:
 - (i) of God;
 - (ii) of the earthly king.
- ‘*The Lord is King*’ [93, 96, 97, 98, 99] 47 is similar, with vv. 7-10 celebrating the entry of the Ark into Jerusalem.
- *The earthly king*. [2, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110] Some of these psalms are very old. After the Exile they became bearers of a new hope that one day God will send his Messiah-king to establish his kingdom.

5. Prayers of Petition and Thanksgiving

- These take up one-third of the Psalter and can be either individual or corporate. They are usually made up of 4 parts:
 - Invocation of God and cry for help
 - An account of the situation
 - Reasons for being heard
 - Conclusion

- One well-known example is Psalm 22. vv. 1-27 = individual prayer; vv. 28-32 = added when taken into the psalter. Another example: 51.

6. Prayers for the Living

- This category are often referred to as 'Wisdom' psalms. Main themes:
- *Praise of the righteous.* [e.g. 1, 26, 112]
- *The cult of the Law.* We have already noted Psalm 119. See also Psalm 19.
- *The problem of retribution.* [10, 49, 73, 81, 94, 138, 13]

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 7 Psalms

Aim:

To explore the Psalms and to consider how Psalms may be used in worship, personal devotion and pastoral care.

Opening Worship

5 mins

The Lord is my strength and my song:

He has become my salvation

The Lord is my strength and my song:

He has become my salvation

I shall not die, but live,

and declare the works of the Lord.

He has become my salvation

Glory to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit

The Lord is my strength and my song:

He has become my salvation. (from Psalm 118)

Reflection on the preparation

15

What did you learn, what did you find interesting, puzzling or enlightening?

Introductory Exercise

15

What Psalms have been significant to you and why?

Psalms in pastoral care

40

As has been noted, the Psalms offer something across the depth of human experience, especially in times of disorientation. The Church of England has produced a liturgy for mental health and wellbeing that draws heavily from the Psalms. They have been grouped under the following themes:

Primary Theme	Well-being Themes	Psalms
1. Noticed and valued	Loneliness: feelings of rejection or betrayal	31:1-5, 70, 102, 121, 143
2. Cared-for and waiting	Depression: bereavement, detachment	16, 23, 38, 62:1-2&5-6, 90, 130
3. Listened-to and heard	Confusion: struggling, overwhelmed	18, 34:1-22, 40, 55, 57
4. Accepted and forgiven	Isolation: uncertainty, detached from reality	22, 51:1-9, 119:50-58, 139:1-18, 145: 13-19
5. Honest and understood	Stress: recovering from trauma	38: 9-18, 46, 62, 71:4-12, 126, 139:1-18
6. Beloved and defended	Self-esteem and self-care	4:4-8, 27:1-14, 91, 97:1-12, 118:26-29
7. Lament	Feeling separated from God	6:1-7, 10, 13:1-3, 22, 38:1-11, 42, 69:1-3&13-17, 77:1-10

Group Task

Each group can take a couple of the themes and look up some of the Psalms suggested.

→ What might they offer?

BREAK

Write your own Psalm

30 mins

Group Task

Working in pairs, pick an event from the recent news, or an event that is common to all humanity (e.g. birth, death etc) and try to write a Psalm.

Begin by working out what type of Psalm you think is most appropriate, then think about what you want to go into your Psalm, before you try to construct some verses!

Final act of worship

10 mins

Share some of the Psalms you have written.

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 8 The Prophets Preparation

Without consulting any external sources have a think and complete the following definition:

A prophet is ...

The prophetic movement in ancient Israel was very diverse and covered a period of 700-800 years. Men and women called to speak the words of God. Their messages were given in a variety of ways from words, dreams, visions, stories and actions as well as images from everyday life.

The themes of the prophets are also very varied but consistent themes emerge such as:

1. Call back to right worship and right living – challenging idolatry and injustice
2. Interpreting the times
3. Direct guidance
4. Reminders of God's grace in the past and pointing to God's grace to come.

The biblical prophets fall into two broad groups:

1. The Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings). The early prophets are prominent in the narratives of these books where we are told more of what they did than what they said.

2. The Latter Prophets (from the 8th Century BCE onwards). These appear in books named after the prophets which contain some narrative but are also made up of oracles. The latter prophets were divided into two further categories:
 - (a) The Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel)
 - (b) The Minor Prophets (twelve of them)

Some other features of the Prophets

Behaviour

Some prophets behaved in a rather bizarre way. The Hebrew verb “to prophesy” also means “to rave”, “to act like a madman.” - look at 1 Samuel 10. Some prophecy required musical accompaniment, this may have been limited to the earliest prophets, or false prophets, or to a ‘lunatic fringe.’ But Elisha once needed musical accompaniment (2 Kings 3:15). It might just be that some of the later prophets were also “ravers” who needed such accompaniment, but the people who wrote about them simply took it for granted that that was how prophetic oracles were received.

Context

Some prophets worked in groups and lived as communities. For example: Elisha and ‘the sons of the prophets’; Isaiah and his ‘disciples’. Others were lone figures, such as Elijah (except from his time with Elisha at the end of his career), Amos and Jeremiah.

Some prophets were attached to sanctuaries or later the Temple. Samuel served his apprenticeship at Shiloh and Isaiah *may* have been ‘on the staff’ of the Jerusalem Temple (see Isaiah 6).

Others were attached to the royal court. Ahab and Jezebel had several hundred court prophets (although they were, of course, “prophets of Baal”). Earlier we have the example of Nathan the prophet in the court of King David. Some scholars believe that Isaiah of Jerusalem may also have played a role as a ‘court prophet.’

Intercessors

As well as those who speak the divine word, prophets act as two-way communicators between God and humanity. Intercession was a key role in prophetic activity. For example, Moses’ intercession in Exodus 32:30-34 after the incident of the golden calf and 1 Samuel 12:23 – “Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you.”

Vocation and calling

Prophecy is an open profession - anyone can be a prophet. (Compare this with the Old Testament idea of priesthood which was limited to certain families, and to perfectly healthy male members at that). Sometimes the prophetic vocation *may* have run in families. We

often read the phrase “the sons of the prophets”, but the Hebrew word for “sons” does not necessarily mean a literal son but could mean a disciple. Note what Amos said about himself in Amos 7:14 - “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees.” The prophet’s authority rests chiefly on his or her call from God.

Questions

- Who might be the prophets of our current age?
- How might we recognise them?



We have accounts of the call of a number of Old Testament prophets.

Look some of these up:

- Ezekiel 1-3
- Isaiah 6:1
- Jeremiah 1
- 1 Samuel 3.

What do they have in common?

Module One Exploring Faith

Session 8 The Prophets

Aim:

To further understand the role of the prophet in ancient Israel

To understand the purposes of the prophetic writings especially Amos

To assess the relevance of OT prophecy for Christian ministry today

Opening Worship

5 mins

⁴Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

⁵"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;

I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

⁶Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

⁷But the LORD said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

⁸Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the LORD."

⁹Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth.

¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."

[Jeremiah 1:4-10]

Reflection on the preparation

10 mins

What did you learn, what did you find interesting, puzzling or enlightening?

Group Task

Look at the outline of Amos given below. Read as much of it as possible paying particular attention to those marked *

What does Amos have to say about:

- The nature of God's character and priorities

1:1-2 An introduction to the whole book which dates it to the reigns of two kings: Uzziah, of Judah (783-743 BCE) and Jeroboam, of Israel (786-747 BCE).

1:3-2:16 A set of seven similar prophecies against foreign nations followed by one against Israel. Read one of them to determine the reason for the condemnation. The phrase "*for three transgressions and for four*" (1:3 etc.) is probably a way of referring to an indefinite but finally decisive number of violations. The phrase "*I will not revoke the punishment*" literally means "*I will not cause it to return*", (1:3b, etc.) probably meaning that God will not interfere to stop the effects of the transgressions.

3:1-6:14 Oracles against Israel.

*3:3-8 What is the purpose of these rhetorical questions? Why do think v. 7 was included by the editor?

3:9-15 contains sayings concerning Samaria (capital of Israel). Note how God's judgement concerns two types of building: the sanctuaries: the sanctuaries and the houses of the wealthy. Why do think this is?

4:1-3 A prophecy of punishment against the wealthy women of Samaria, ridiculed as '*cows of Bashan*.' Why are these women accounted guilty?

*4:4-5 are key verses. Amos uses ironic calls to worship or parodies of pilgrim songs to assert that "worship" and "transgression" have become synonymous.

4:6-13 A series of disasters have not caused the people to turn to God, so now they will have to meet that God directly.

5:1-3 The prophet calls for the people to hear a lamentation or funeral song.

5:4-7 A call to seek the Lord as a path to life. It is God who made the constellations (5:8). Not only does he control natural forces but he also acts in history (5:9).

***5:10-13** A key passage for understanding Amos' social teaching.

5:14-15. Further calls to seek the Lord.

5:16-17. Mourning songs announce the death of Israel.

***5:18-20** concern "*the day of the Lord*". What was this? Why was it "*darkness*" and not light?

***5:21-27** Festivals and sacrifices are condemned. Even sacred music is considered “*noise*”. Take special note of v. 24. Amos often speaks of justice and righteousness in the same breath. Try and come up with a definition of each. V. 25 poses a fascinating question. Amos asserts that sacrifices and offerings were not given during the wandering in the wilderness which appears to contradict the account in the Pentateuch. Can you think of a reason for this?

6:1-7 Indictments of a self-indulgent society concluding with an announcement of judgement.

6:8-14 a collection of varied material on the theme of the Lord’s judgement on the city.

7:1-9:4 Five ‘vision reports’.

In the first two Amos intercedes on behalf of the people and the Lord relents. In the last three he does not do so and the sentence remains. Note the image of the “*plumb line*” in 8:8.

***7:10-17** Conflict between prophet and priest. Note v. 14. What has this section to say about Amos’ call to prophesy?

9:5-6. A third hymn-like passage in the book (see also 4:13 and 5:8-9).

9:7-8 The Lord has concern for other nations as well!

9:9-10 Judgement is announced using the imagery of a sieve.

9:11-15 This section probably dates from the time of the Babylonian exile. Have these verses been added here to give a sort of “happy ending” to a book that is almost totally about judgement?

BREAK

Plenary

10 mins

Jean-Pierre Prévost³ paints a portrait of “The God of Amos” under the following headings:

- A God who roars (1:2, 3:8)
- A God who has reasons for losing patience (4:6-11, 6:11, 8:2)
- A God who suffers over the fate of the poor (8:4-6)
- A God who remains free to forgive (5:6, 14-15, 24; 7:3, 5-6, 23; 9:11-15)
- A God of sovereign freedom and power (4:13, 5:8, 9:6)
- A God who shows the way of life (5:4, 6, 14-15; 8:11-12)
- A God who takes in hand the future of his people (9:11-15)

Discuss the new insights you have had into the book of Amos and prophecy in general.

³ Provost J-P How to Read the Prophets (London, SCM Press Ltd., 1996, pp 36ff)

Character and Calling

15 mins

If anyone got the chance to look at the Digging Deeper section of the preparation:

- What did you learn about the calling of the prophets?

Otherwise, have a look at them now- Ezekiel 1-3, Isaiah 6:1, Jeremiah 1, 1 Samuel 3

- What characteristics do these prophets share?

Look ahead: Preparation for Session 9: 'An evening for Advent'

40 mins.

Next week is the final session of module 1. To mark this session we would like you to create a 10 minute presentation on the theme of **Advent Voices**.

We would like you to do this in small groups. You have the remaining part of this evening, and the beginning part of next week to prepare.

Traditionally, Advent marks the beginning of the Christian Church year: The four Sundays of Advent look back to the *first* coming of Jesus as saviour and allow us to prepare ourselves for celebrating his incarnation at Christmas. The season also enables us to look towards Jesus' *second* coming in glory so that we may prepare ourselves for *that*.

Advent is a time of expectancy and waiting, a time to focus on God, a time of hope and joy. It is also a time of self-examination and a time to prepare every aspect of our being to meet God. Advent has echoes of Lent and in former times this season was kept in Lenten style, albeit with less strictness.

If the Christmas-related texts were removed from our Bibles, we would lose the birth narratives from 3 gospels but if we had all the *Advent*-related material cut out, we would lose a very significant amount of the Old Testament and even more of the New.

The Old Testament scriptures speak again and again, with longing and expectation, of God breaking into world history, of the desperate human need for this and of the urgent human need to prepare for it. And the New Testament continues this theme as, post-Resurrection, we are urged to prepare for God's coming again in glory, to judge the living and the dead.

Each choose one or more of these passages and spend a few minutes reading and reflecting on them:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah 64:1-9

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Matt 24:36-44

Mark 13:24-37

Lk 21:25-36

Group task

Prepare a 5 minute Advent presentation called '**Advent Voices**' for next week to help us all prepare for Advent

Try to use different styles and the gifts from within the group – you could use a combination of words, art, music, poetry, stories.

You will get 30 minutes at the beginning of next week to complete your preparations.

Module One: Exploring Faith

Session 9 Advent Voices

Session 9 is an evening of presentations based upon the theme '**Advent Voices**'.

Opening Prayers 5 mins

Final Preparation for the Presentation 30 mins

Advent Presentations 40 mins

Concluding Reflections 25 mins

Consider the content of each presentation, and the way the group worked together.

As a group, highlight and discuss the following:

What was the main theme of each presentation?

In what ways did the group work well?

In what ways could the presentation be developed?

Ask yourselves, in the preparation, and presentation, was any voice left unheard – and if so, what can be done about this next time?

Closing Prayer 5 mins

Give thanks for the journey of the group through the course so far.

Prayer for the ongoing journey towards Christmas.

May you all have a peaceful, happy and God-filled Advent and joyful Christmas.

Appendix 1

Empires of the Ancient Near East

From the third millennium a series of dynasties ruled over Egypt. The Old Kingdom with its famous Pyramids covered the period 2700-2200 BCE, about the time that the first cities were built in Mesopotamia. The New Kingdom (1550–1070 BCE) is associated with the Valley of the Kings. From around that time significant empires began to develop to the North. The map on the next page shows the areas of three great empires that influenced the region during the period of the Old Testament. Assyria grew from around 1100 BCE. For a period the Assyrian Empire included Egypt, but it finally fell to the Babylonians in 612 BCE. In its turn the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persians in 539 BCE. At various times Persia also ruled over Egypt. The Persian Empire expanded towards the West, and threatened the Greek states. At the famous battle of Marathon in 490 BCE the Athenians defeated the Persians. In 333 BCE Alexander the Great defeated the Persian king Darius III and went on to conquer the whole region. From then until the rise of the Roman Empire the region was ruled by descendents of his generals, Greek culture thrived and Greek was the common language across the whole Eastern Mediterranean. This persisted through the Roman period.

The table below summarises some of this information.

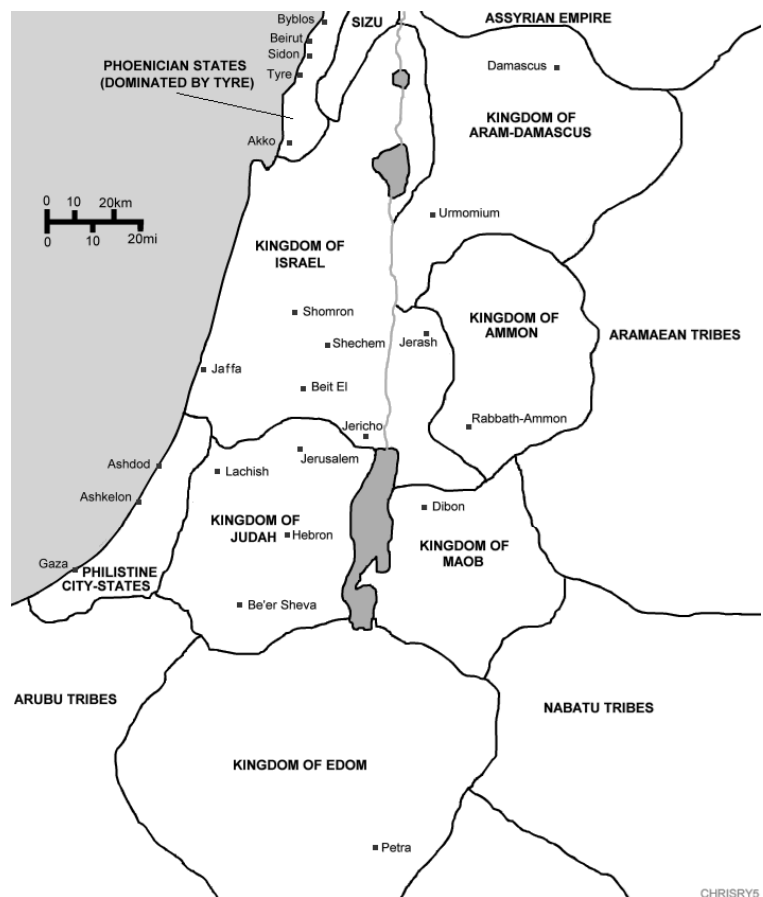
Historical Periods	Iron Age II								
Writing	Classical Hebrew			Greek Alphabet					
Greece/Rome				Olympics 776	Marathon 490	Golden Age	Alexander 333-323	Hellenistic era	Rome
Mesopotamia	Assyria (Capital Nineveh)			Babylon (Nineveh captured 621)	Persia (Cyrus captures Babylon 539)				
Israel	David-Solomon	Kings of Israel		Fall of Samaria 721					
Judah		Kings of Judah		Exile 597/586 - 537			Alexander Ptolemies/Seleucids		
	1000	900	800	700	600	500	400	300	200

In between these two imperial centres a number of smaller nations and city states existed. Sometimes they achieved a degree of independence. More often they fell under the sway of one of the empires, either as vassal states or as provinces ruled by governors sent from the imperial capital.

At some point around the twelfth century BCE a series of tribes moved into the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, where they slowly displaced the Canaanite inhabitants.

At some point there were two kingdoms: Israel in the North and Judah in the South. The Bible suggests that they were first united under kings David and Solomon, but the only evidence that we have for these kings comes from the Bible. There are no independent accounts, nor much archaeological evidence.

In 721 BCE the Northern Kingdom, with its capital at Samaria, fell to the Assyrians (1 Kings 17.5f). The kingdom of Judah based in Jerusalem was increasingly nervous. One hundred years later the Babylonians defeated the Assyrians. In a series of increasingly desperate moves, which you can read about in the later chapters of 2 Kings, the kings of Judah tried to make alliances in order to keep their independence. They were finally conquered by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BCE. He tried to maintain Judah as a vassal state for ten years. Finally in 586 BCE his frustration with Zedekiah led him to destroy Jerusalem and its Temple.



The Babylonian policy was to remove the most important people when they conquered a nation. Three verses in the last chapter of Jeremiah summarize the events of this period:

This is the number of the people whom Nebuchadnezzar took into exile: in the seventh year, three thousand twenty-three Judeans; in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar he took into exile from Jerusalem eight hundred thirty-two persons; in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took into exile of the Judeans seven hundred forty-five persons; all the persons were four thousand six hundred.

(Jeremiah 52:28-30)

We will see later how significant this Exile in Babylon was for the development of Jewish religion and the Old Testament.

In 537 BCE the Persian king Cyrus captured Babylon. The Persian approach to ruling an empire was different to the Babylonian one and the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem in 539 BCE. You can read an account of this in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

After the Persians and Alexander, the land was ruled in turn by Ptolemies from Egypt and Seleucid kings from Antioch. A brief period of independence from 167 BCE led finally to incorporation in the Roman Empire.

Appendix 2

The Sources of the Pentateuch

Until about five hundred years ago, most people thought that the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers & Deuteronomy) were all written by Moses (or at least as far as the death of Moses recorded in the last chapter of Deuteronomy). From about 1700 onwards scholars started to suggest that these books were put together from separate earlier traditions, either by Moses or by other editors centuries after Moses.

The following factors supported these suggestions:

- The repetition of stories, or parts of stories, in slightly different forms (e.g. two creation stories in Genesis, two accounts of the animals going into the ark)
- Differences in vocabulary and style, in particular different names for God
- Inconsistent/contradictory statements or attitudes

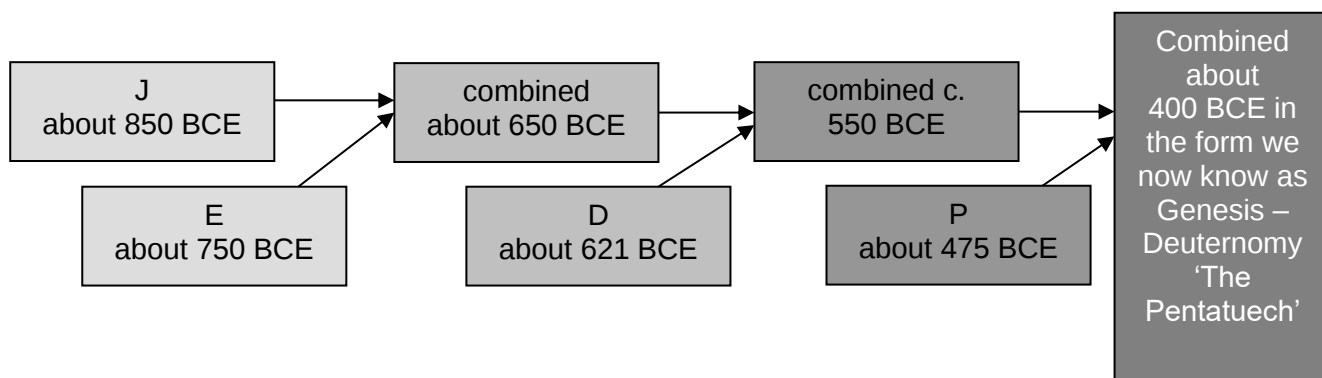
Scholars found different ways to divide the texts into four separate sources.

The J tradition: so-called because it uses the word YHWH for God, which in the past was translated as Jehovah. This tradition originated in royal circles in Jerusalem.

- The E tradition: so-called because it calls God Elohim. It derives from the northern kingdom (after the kingdom had split into two). This tradition was strongly influenced by prophets like Elijah and Hosea.
- The D tradition: or Deuteronomistic since it is contained, above all, in Deuteronomy.
- The P tradition, the Priestly tradition, is found in various places in the Pentateuch. Leviticus mostly comes from this tradition.

There is ongoing debate among scholars as to how old these traditions are, the extent to which they were ever represented by completed documents, and the manner in which they came together.

The classic explanation was that presented by Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918), particularly in *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Prolegomena to the History of Israel) which was published in its final version in 1882. Wellhausen suggested the following arrangement:



This way of looking at the Pentateuch influenced most Old Testament scholarship for the next one hundred years. Many scholars worked hard to decide, verse by verse, which parts of the Pentateuch came from which source, and also discussed the number of sources and the dates in the chart above. From the 1940s onwards, more and more scholars grew tired of, and/or questioned the validity of this approach, and more attention is now given to the messages and meanings of the texts as a whole. Most scholars would agree that different traditions, represented by JEDP, are present in the Pentateuch, but the exact process by which material from the different sources came together is probably more complex than Wellhausen's theory but that process may not be so significant as the end result.

Traditions in the Old Testament

Now that you are becoming more familiar with the Old Testament you may well have noticed that the Pentateuch is not the only place where there is more than one tradition present. For instance the 1 Chronicles 10 – 2 Chronicles 36 contains a history of Israel from the death of Saul to the Exile which parallels what can be found in 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings. Here is evidence that the same traditions that influenced the Pentateuch are also to be found elsewhere in the Old Testament.

This should not be a surprise. The Old Testament represents the combined experience of two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, as well as different approaches to the worship of God. In Exile, when the Temple had been destroyed and the monarchy abolished, an alternative to a centralised religion developed in the form of Synagogue worship. From then, until the Romans finally destroyed the Temple in 70 CE, there were at least two parties. Even in New Testament times you can see different Jewish traditions exemplified by the Sadducees and Pharisees. (The literary tradition of a third group, the Essenes, lay hidden until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.)

In the tradition of P

The first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles contain lists and genealogies from Adam up to the people who returned to Jerusalem from the Exile. The long lists give a clue that this work is

related to P. You will also find lists in material that comes from the P tradition, particularly in Numbers.

Looking at the content of Chronicles, there is a concern with the people who returned from Babylon, which is also the concern of Ezra and Nehemiah. We can see this in the lists at the start. At the end of 2 Chronicles is the decree of Cyrus which allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. This is repeated verbatim in the next book Ezra (2 Chronicles 36.23; Ezra 1.2 3a). Here we find a variety of books that all have a similar imprint: with the interests of the Jewish Priesthood central to their concerns. Some people see Ezra himself as the key author. Whether or not this is the case, he certainly represents a strong tradition.

The Deuteronomistic History

The work that Chronicles parallels is often described as the Deuteronomistic History. This can be seen as a continuation of the work of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is presented as Moses' account of Israel's wanderings up to the point of his own death. The story is continued in Joshua, Judges and the Books of Samuel and Kings. (In Christian Bibles Ruth is inserted in this order, but Hebrew Bibles put this book among the *Writings*. Certainly Ruth is not in the style of the Deuteronomistic Historian.)

Within Deuteronomy is a series of laws: the Deuteronomic Code (Deuteronomy 12-26). To a significant degree the Deuteronomistic History reflects on how faithful successive generations were to this code (compare Deut 12.2f with 2 Kings 18.3f or the exploits of numerous bad kings).

The contrast between these two historical accounts is an easy way for us to see differences between the traditions, and thus identify them; but other works in the Old Testament could also be associated with these or other traditions. As you read, you may sometimes be able to detect the different priorities of the writers. This helps us to remind us that the Old Testament arose out of the ongoing life of a community in which there were different views and approaches. Through this process has emerged the wide range of literature that we now think of as the Old Testament.