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Old Testament Basics - Lesson 03.

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Lesson Three.

In the last lesson we looked at the story line: the 11 books from Genesis to Nehemiah that tell the Old Testament story. What we left out was a whole bunch of detail, and we're going to add some of that in this lesson. We want to plug in the color books, the books that we said were the still shots that stop the flow and give us some information about detail.

We're going to look at the poetry and wisdom literature and say, "Where does that fit?" When did that occur in the story line?" And then we're going to plug in the Prophets and see when they occurred, because without that historical background it's difficult to really interact and get into the prophetic story, the prophetic message.

The first of the color books we look at is the book of Job. Now, time wise, Job was a contemporary of Abraham. So when you think of Abraham's story in Genesis chapter 12, that's where chronologically you would plug Job in. But Job doesn't move the story forward. In fact, Job is written mostly in poetry. But Job gives us a picture of what life was like during that time. Job was a godly man, a good man. He didn't have the Old Testament law. He lived before that period of time. That's important to understand.

He couldn't go and read the book of Exodus and see what God's law was. He had some kind of a personal relationship with God that was not based on all of the information that we have today, but he still was a good and godly man. He was so good in fact that Satan challenged God and said, "You know, if You didn't give Job so much good stuff, he wouldn't follow You for a minute."

And God said to Satan, "All right, put your hand on it, and I guarantee you Job will stand with Me." So this book of Job is really Job's test. And the beautiful part of the story is how in spite of his friend's accusations that "the only explanation for your pain and your suffering is that you're an evil man, you've done something to disobey God," Job knew better. And so all of these discussions that take us through the book of Job are helping us understand: how does a good and godly person respond when pain hits, when difficulty hits?

So Job is the first of these color books, and he fits in right at the time of Abraham. The second color book is the book of Leviticus. Listen to the name, L-e-v-i-t-i-c-u-s. Levi-ticus almost. It comes at the period of Sinai right during the period of Exodus. Remember, we said the people of Israel stopped at Mount Sinai. They got the Ten Commandments and all of these other laws.

Well all of those other laws, or most of those other laws that regulated Israel's religious life, which was conducted by the tribe of Levi, is contained in this book of Leviticus. So that's where you plug that book in. When you think of Sinai and the Ten Commandments and God giving the law, that's where you plug the book of Leviticus in.

The third color book is the book of Deuteronomy. Once again it doesn't move the story forward, but it brings great insight into a particular period in Israel's time. You put the book of Deuteronomy right between the book of Numbers, which was the end of the time of the wandering in the wilderness, and

the book of Joshua, which is when the second generation of Israel, the children of the people who came out of Egypt, were preparing to go into the land of Canaan, the Promised Land.

And God said to Moses, "I want you to rehearse this law that I gave you at Sinai. I want you to go over the whole thing again with this generation so they understand this is their law, Deutero-nomos, second law, Deuteronomy, it plugs in right there between the end of the book of Numbers and the beginning of the book of Joshua.

The next color book goes all the way down to the end of 2 Kings. The books of 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings tell us the story of the kings as that story moves forward. But then the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles are a commentary from God's perspective on these kings. The books of Samuel and Kings tell us the human view; this is how it looks like historically. The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles say, "But let's look at this from more of a religious, more of a pious look at these kings and see how they were as God viewed them." So the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles fit in right there during that period of the kingdom.

The next color book is the book of Lamentations. Now Lamentations sort of gets kicked around. Sometimes Lamentations appears with the Prophets because it was written by Jeremiah the prophet. Sometimes it's included with the poetry books because it is poetry. But I'm including it with the color books because what it gives us right at the end of the book of 2 Kings.

After the Babylonians had destroyed the beautiful city of Jerusalem, had crushed this wonderful temple that Solomon had built, carried off all the gold and all the silver and, most tragically, all of the people, old Jeremiah the prophet was left behind. They didn't take him to Babylon; he was too old. He couldn't contribute anything. So here he is sitting on the rubble of Jerusalem looking at what used to be the temple, his heart broken because he saw the actual reality of what sin looks like in the human life. To him it was a tragic, awful, awful reality.

And the book of Lamentations comes from the word lament. I've been there. I've looked at my own failure at times and lamented and wept. And that's why this book of Lamentations, I believe, is included: to show the reader that while God is patient and God is gracious, God is also just. And God is also faithful to His Word, and His Word said to the people way back at Sinai, "If you obey Me and follow Me, I will bless you and I will protect you. If you disobey me, you're on your own. If you want to live life your way, you're going to have to accept your consequences." So as you read this beautiful poetic piece called Lamentations, plug it in right there.

The last of the color books is the book of Esther, which is written during the time of Ezra, think Ezra and Esther. While Ezra tells us the story of what life was like back in Jerusalem when the people had come back from their Babylonian captivity, Esther tells us the story of the people who didn't come back to Jerusalem but stayed in the Persian Empire.

And so we get that color of what life was like for people who didn't return. So those are the color books, and we plug them in to give us some insight into the rather rapid treatment we gave last time of the historical accounts, the chronology books.

Now what are left are the Prophets and the poetry and wisdom literature. The poetry and wisdom literature was constructed and put together and compiled primarily by David and Solomon. So think, the book of 2 Samuel and the early part of 1 Kings tell us about David's life and Solomon's life.

So while these poems were written throughout Old Testament history and these Proverbs were gathered from many generations, they were gathered by David and Solomon. So that's why we put the poetry and wisdom literature right at the period of 2 Samuel and the first part of 1 Kings.

Now the Prophets: all 17 of them occurred from the period of the division of the kingdom recorded in the middle of the book of 1 Kings through the end, through the time we talked about in Nehemiah. Two of the prophets prophesied during the exile: Ezekiel and Daniel. Three of the prophets prophesied during the reconstruction period: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. All of the rest of the prophets we plug in during that period from the middle of 1 Kings through the end of 2 Kings.

So to get the historical background of those prophets, that's where you plug them in right there in that divided kingdom era, the exile era, and the reconstruction era. So that is the Old Testament. The 11 chronology books tell the story. We plug in the color books to give us still shots, to give us an expanded view of what was going on during those periods of time. We have Israel's wonderful poetry and wisdom that all occurred, was gathered together, under David and Solomon, so we plug that into the kingdom era. And then we have the Prophets, who also began at the division of the kingdom and go through the end of the Old Testament.

When you put all that together, all of these books, what do you get? What is this about? What it's about is the fact that God created us for Himself. He created us in His image. He created us for an intimate relationship with Himself. Our sin, our rebellion, which is explained in Genesis chapter 3, the fall of man, the first disobedience of God still plagued God's people all the way through the Old Testament and right up to today.

And this Old Testament story says that even though we fail, we serve a God who always says, "Come back, I will forgive you. I will welcome you. I created you not for hostility, but for love and for a relationship." If we don't learn that when we read the Old Testament, we've really missed the point of it all.