

Learn to Read the Bible Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

Session 3



SESSION 3

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Section 1

A review of the first two sessions

- We looked at the importance of studying the Bible.
- We saw that questions about Bible teaching are answered by looking in the Bible.
- Listening for “Bible echoes” is a very good way of reading the Bible effectively.
- We saw that Genesis is the foundation of the rest of the Bible. We saw that it contains the start of God’s plan, which can include us.
- We also saw that the Old Testament is the foundation of the New Testament.

Can we also remind you that, if you have any problems, your tutor will try to help you if you wish? Bible study is much more rewarding if we can discuss it with other people .

God’s covenants

The contents page of the Bible shows how the Bible is divided up into two parts – the Old and New Testaments.

The word “testament” means a covenant, an agreement, a promise, or a contract between two parties.

The teaching of the Bible is based upon covenants or agreements. These contain promises that God made with men and women in times past.

These agreements, or covenants, between God and mankind form the basis of God’s plan and tell us what God intends to do. Many of us enter into agreements or contracts of various kinds, for example contracts of employment and loan agreements. These contracts always spell out the following:

1. What is being agreed to
2. The benefits both parties can expect
3. The responsibilities of both sides
4. The consequences of breaking the agreement.

God's agreements are the same. He has spelled out clearly what is involved, the responsibilities of both Himself and us. Sometimes these agreements have conditions attached, at other times they do not.

One of the earliest covenants was made following the great flood which destroyed all land-based life except that in the ark with Noah.



Read Genesis 9 v 8 to 17

We notice that this is an unconditional agreement – more of a promise. God is assuring us that He will never again destroy all land-based life with a flood.

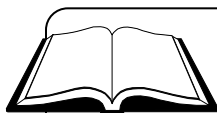
The next covenant marks the start of God's plan to remedy the effects of our rebellion against Him.



Read Genesis 15 v 18 to 21

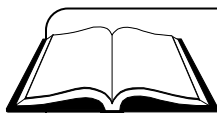
Again notice that it is unconditional. God is going to give a specific land to Abraham's descendants (or "seed" in the Authorised Version).

This agreement is then expanded.



Read Genesis 17 v 1 to 9

This is the agreement setting out the special relationship between God and the Jews which continues throughout the rest of the Bible. God renewed this agreement with the new nation of Israel when they came out of Egypt.



Read Exodus 24 v 1 to 8

Notice that this covenant is conditional on the people obeying God's commands.

This covenant was based on the forgiveness of sins through the Law of Moses and the sacrifice of animals.

There was one special day of sacrifice called “the day of atonement” when the whole nation of Israel had its sins forgiven. This was the day when sin was “atoned” or “covered”. This principle of forgiveness through the sacrifice of animals is clearly spelled out in the regulations given for that special day.



Read Leviticus 16 v 27 to 30

When an animal was sacrificed the person who offered the sacrifice was in effect saying that God was right to condemn rebellion against Him, and that the animal represented what should happen to the person offering the sacrifice. These animals were important and valuable to the people, so making such a sacrifice was not a mere formality.

This first phase of God’s covenant is sometimes referred to as the Old Covenant or Testament. This is why the first two thirds of the Bible is called the “Old Testament”.

The second phase, sometimes called the “New Testament”, has to do with the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

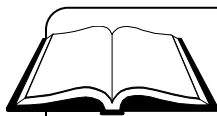
Just before he died, Jesus made it clear that he was establishing a new covenant.



Read Matthew 26 v 26 to 28

Note again that blood is shed to establish the covenant, and that the covenant is concerned with forgiveness of our sin or rebellion.

The apostle Peter shows clearly in one of his speeches that the work of Jesus is closely connected with the covenants made to the nation of Israel.



Read Acts 3 v 19 to 26

We can see some of the aspects of an agreement here:

God’s responsibilities: blessing and forgiveness to those who “repent” and are “converted” (v 26)

Our responsibilities: “repentance” and “conversion” (v 19)

We shall look at the meaning of these words later on in the course.

Summary

- God has made clear agreements with men and women.
- The terms and conditions are clearly laid out in the Bible.
- The Bible has an “Old” and a “New” Testament. Both of these testaments or covenants are concerned with the forgiveness of our rebellion against God.
- The Old Testament concerned the forgiveness offered to the nation of Israel through the sacrifice of animals.
- The New Testament concerns the forgiveness offered to all people through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

OPTIONAL ASSIGNMENT 3

God’s covenants in relation to Israel and us

It is interesting and informative to follow through the Bible the covenants and promises that God has made.

Promise	to Abraham:	Genesis 12 v 1 to 3; 13 v 14 to 17
	to Isaac:	Genesis 26 v 2 to 4
	to Jacob:	Genesis 28 v 13 to 15
	to Abraham’s descendants (the Jews):	Genesis 17 v 7 to 9
	to David (Israel’s second king):	2 Samuel 7 v 12 to 16
New Testament references:		Luke 1 v 31 and 32
		Luke 13 v 28
		Acts 2 v 29 to 32 and 38 to 42
		Acts 3 v 19 to 26
		Galatians 3 v 26 to 29

Look at these references and the surrounding verses and write down what they tell us about God’s covenants in relation to both Israel and us.

Section 2

The role of prophecy

Prophecy is often too narrowly defined. It actually has a twofold purpose:

- forth telling – which means speaking out, and
- foretelling – which means speaking of future events.

When we speak of forth telling, we include a whole group of prophets and prophecies that do not deal with the future at all. These are those, like Moses, who on many occasions mainly delivered the law or judgements of God. They did not speak of the future at all in some circumstances.

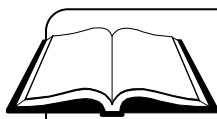
Prophecy of the future – its relevance to us

Prophecy serves to confirm the certainty of God's plan.

It is extremely helpful to have prophecy in Scripture which is known to have been written well before the predicted events and which came true with accuracy beyond doubt.

Prophecy is not for the purpose of satisfying idle curiosity about future events, but to assist believers to act in faith, and put total trust in God and His Word.

The Bible makes it quite clear where we should look for the best example of prophecy to kindle or strengthen our faith in God and His Word.



Read Isaiah 43 v 1 to 10

The whole chapter, but these verses in particular, makes it quite clear that the nation of Israel is God's prime witness of His existence and purpose.

We now want to look at how remarkable the predictions of the Bible are in relation to the nation of Israel, also called the Jews or God's people. We shall have to look briefly at the history of the nation of Israel.

The unusual Jewish history

Whatever we may think about the Jews, we cannot deny that they exist, and that they have a very long and a very strange history.

In the days of Jesus Christ there was a thriving Jewish nation in the land of Israel. Hundreds of years earlier the nation had been independent, but before Jesus was born it became a part of the Roman Empire.

The Jews did not take kindly to being ruled by foreigners. For many years the country seethed with discontent and rebellion.

Between AD 66 and AD 135 the Jews fought three fierce wars of independence. But each time they were defeated, and by AD 135 the Romans had had enough trouble. They were determined to stop these revolts once and for all.



The Romans destroyed Jerusalem and plundered the Temple in AD 70. The scene is pictured on the triumphal Arch of Titus in Rome. The seven-branched candlestick was taken from the Temple.

With typical Roman thoroughness they utterly destroyed Jerusalem and ploughed up its site. Then they erased its name from their maps, and scattered all the inhabitants of Judea (the main part of the land of Israel) around the Roman Empire.

And that, thought the Romans, was that.

But they were wrong. For century after century the Jews survived as a nation without a country. Wherever they went they were hated, treated as an inferior race, and made to live in ghettos. For seventeen centuries, on and off, the exiled Jews were persecuted, massacred, or made to flee for their lives from one country to another. Yet somehow they survived it all.

Then, at the end of the nineteenth century, nearly eighteen hundred years after their ancestors were exiled from it, a few Jews began to trickle back to their homeland. Within the twentieth century the Jewish population of the land of Israel rose from a few thousand to several million. By 1948 the Jews there felt sufficiently powerful to proclaim their independence. The following year the sovereign State of Israel was admitted to membership of the United Nations.

History written in advance

With this brief summary of Jewish history in mind, look at what the Old Testament said would happen to the Jews. As you read the following passages, ask yourself: “Are these prophecies vaguely worded, or are they clear and plain? And have they been fulfilled, or not?”

1. The Jews would be scattered all over the world, hated, persecuted, and driven from country to country.



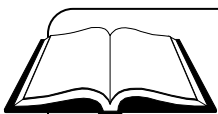
Read Deuteronomy 28 v 37
and 64 to 66

2. Meanwhile, their land, once so fruitful, would lie desolate.



Read Leviticus 26 v 33 and 34

3. They would survive all these troubles, and would actually outlive their persecutors.



Read Jeremiah 30 v 11
Hosea 3 v 4 and 5

4. Eventually, while still disobeying God, they would go back to their own land again.



Read Ezekiel 11 v 17; 36 v 22 to 24
Jeremiah 30 v 7 to 10

These seven extracts, taken from five different books, are typical of all Old Testament teaching about the future of Israel. Everyone, believer and unbeliever alike, agrees that the Old Testament was written before the time of Christ. Consequently, it is absolutely certain that these prophecies about the Jews were written hundreds of years before they were fulfilled.

The prophecies about the exile of the Jews were not fulfilled until the second century after Christ. The prophecies about their wanderings were fulfilled continuously from the second to the nineteenth centuries. And the prophecies about the return of the Jews to their homeland were not fulfilled until the twentieth century.

Summary

- The prophets had two main roles:
 - a) to give God's message
 - b) to give predictions about the future.
- Predictions about the future are useful for confirming our faith.
- There are many predictions about the nation of Israel.

Permission to reproduce extracts from *God's Truth* by Alan Hayward is gratefully acknowledged.

OPTIONAL ASSIGNMENT 4

The marvels of prophecy

The object of this assignment is to encourage you to consider a little more deeply the prophecies you have already looked at and show you some more remarkable prophecies.

Look again at the “History written in advance” section and write exactly what is predicted in the references we mentioned.

Some people say that predictions like these were clever guesses. But if you think about it, you will realise that this cannot be the case. If people want to predict the future, they use past experience of similar things. When these predictions were made there was no other nation that had a similar history, so there was no reason to suggest that these things might happen to the Israelites. In fact, all down the ages no other nation has had a similar history.

There are predictions about other nations contemporary with the prophets.

Have a look at Ezekiel 25. This chapter predicts the end of four of Israel’s neighbours.

Isaiah 13 v 19 and 20 and Jeremiah 51 v 36 and 37 predict the end of the superpower of the day, Babylon. Not only that, they predict that Babylon would never be lived in again.

Add details of these prophecies about the nations of Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia and Babylon to your list of those about Israel. From what we have said, and if you look in the relevant history books, you will see that every detail has happened as predicted.

There are many more equally remarkable prophecies. Ask your tutor and we can show you some of them.

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