

# Historical and Literary Background

The World of the Old Testament—chronology, peoples, and places. Overview of the writings of the Old Testament; Introduction to *Torah*; Documentary Hypothesis and other theories of composition; Exegesis and Exegetical Method.

## BASIC INTRODUCTORY OLD TESTAMENT CHRONOLOGY

[Paleolithic (hunters and gatherers)]

NEOLITHIC (cultivation of cereals, domestication of animals)	8500–4300 B.C.
Adam and creation	3924 B.C. (traditional Jewish date, “Year of the World”)
CHALCOLITHIC	4300–3300 B.C.
EARLY BRONZE	3300–2300 B.C.
Noah and the flood	2268 B.C.
MIDDLE BRONZE	2300–1500 B.C.
Abraham	1976–1801 B.C. (traditional Jewish date; Christian date usually 2000–1825 <sup>2</sup> )
Joseph	1725–1615 B.C.
LATE BRONZE	1500–1000 B.C.
Moses and the Exodus	1476 B.C.
IRON AGE	1200–332 B.C.
Saul king	1095 B.C.
David king	1063–1015 B.C.
<i>Rome Founded</i>	753 B.C.
END OF NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL	711 B.C.
END OF SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF JUDAH	586 B.C.



## Locations of Note

- Modern Iraq, anciently **Mesopotamia** which is Greek for “between the rivers”, specifically the **Euphrates** and **Tigris**
- **Babylonia** – Nebuchadnezzar, conqueror of Judah
- **Assyria** – Destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel
- Haran – Abraham, nearby Ur, likely modern Tel Urfa
- **Aram** and Aramaeans – *Aramaic, language of New Testament Holy Land*
- **Egypt** – Joseph and Moses
- **Sinai** – Wonderings in the Wilderness
- **Canaan** – Promised land

## Physical Features of the Land of Canaan

- Most important feature: **Water!**
  - Main sources:
    - Sea of Kinnereth (NT Sea of Galilee)
    - Rain in the hillsides seeps into springs and wells – the biggest sources of water for Canaan
- **Coastal plain**
  - Along the Mediterranean Sea
  - Contained the Way of the Sea – the most important trade route from Syria to Egypt, usually controlled by wealthy merchants
- **Hill country of Ephraim and Judah**
- **Judean Wilderness**
  - Harsh desert wilderness, little rain
- **Shephelah**
  - Relatively fertile plain area, good for flocks and agriculture
  - The “breadbasket” of Canaan

The map illustrates the geographical layout of the Land of Canaan. On the west, the Mediterranean Sea (labeled 'THE GREAT SEA') borders the Coastal Plain. The Shephelah is a fertile plain area south of the Coastal Plain. The Hill-Country of Ephraim and Judah are inland regions. The Judean Wilderness is a harsh desert area to the south. The Negev is a large desert region in the south. To the north, Galilee is a region with the Sea of Kinnereth (Sea of Galilee) and the Jordan River. The Gilead region is east of the Jordan River. Trans-Jordan is the area east of the Jordan River. Key features include the Lebanon Mountains, Sharon Plain, and the Kings Highway. The Dead Sea is located south of the Jordan River. Major cities like Arabah and Mount Seir are also marked.

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## The Hebrew Bible

- What we call the Old Testament is more properly **the Hebrew Bible**
  - The word “*testament*” also means “*covenant*”
  - Old Covenant as a name is only to distinguish from the New Covenant in Christ, our New Testament
  - *In LDS theology we know it was not the first Covenant – Adam had the full and everlasting covenant*
- Also called the **Tanakh**
  - *Torah* – The Law
  - *Nevi'im* – The Prophets
  - *Ketuvim* – The Writings

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# Tanakh

- **Torah** – also called the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
  - Deuteronomy
    - The “2<sup>nd</sup> law” Establishes principles which are later demonstrated through recorded history
- **Nevi'im** – The Prophets, though there are prophets in the Ketuvim, these are distinguished
  - Includes the Deuteronomistic history among these – Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings
- **Ketuvim** – Though this includes prophets, they are distinguished as after Babylon
  - The history of the Chroniclers, much of Deuteronomistic history rehearsed again

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# Jewish Division of the Bible

The Law	The Prophets	The Writings
Genesis	<i>Former Prophets</i>	Psalms
Exodus	Joshua	Proverbs
Leviticus	1-2 Samuel	Job
Numbers	1-2 Kings	Song of Songs (Solomon)
Deuteronomy	Judges	Ruth
	<i>Latter Prophets</i>	Lamentations
	Isaiah	Ecclesiastes
	Jeremiah	Esther
	Ezekiel	Daniel
	Hosea	Ezra
	Joel	Nehemiah
	Amos	1-2 Chronicles
	Obadiah	
	Jonah	
	Micah	
	Nahum	
	Habakkuk	
	Zephaniah	
	Haggai	
	Zechariah	
	Malachi	

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## English Division of the Bible

The Prologue	Historical Core	The Writings	The Prophets
Genesis	Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy Joshua Judges Ruth 1-2 Samuel 1-2 Kings 1-2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah	Esther Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon Lamentations	<i>Major Prophets</i> Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel  <i>Minor Prophets</i> Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

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## Compositional Issues for Genesis—Deuteronomy

- **The first of 5 books traditionally ascribed to Moses**
  - Known as **Torah** or **“The Law”** in Hebrew, these books are also called **the Pentateuch** or **“Five Scrolls”** in Greek
  - *No where in the surviving Torah is there a claim of Mosaic authorship, but the idea appears very early in extra canonical books (first in Jubilees), and it was a strong tradition in early Judaism and Christianity*
    - This position remains important for conservative communities today
    - *The LDS book of Moses makes it clear that at least a creation account together with an early primordial history was given to Moses as a revelation*
- **Different sections of the Pentateuch evidence particular styles and themes, as well as distinctive diction (word choice)**
  - The issue of distinctive diction is best illustrated by the different names for God (such as *Elohim* and *YHWH*) used in different parts of the text (see next slide)
  - As is so often the case, scholarship has made important observations about the text. It then proceeds to produce theories to explain them—***we are not bound to accept these theories, but understands them helps us understand the text better!***

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## Details on the Names of God

- **Elohim**: Plural of the Hebrew *EI*, which means “God,” it could be translated “gods”
  - Although a plural noun, it almost always appears with a singular verb, leading to the grammatical explanation that it is a “plural of plentitude” or “plural of majesty” → *Elohim* = “the” God
    - Cf. this with the Book of Abraham in the Kirtland Era and then Navuoo-era ritual developments
  - *Elohim* seemed to be the preferred name for Deity used by **writers from the northern kingdom as well as priestly writers**
- **YHWH**: Four consonants written without vowels so that original pronunciation is uncertain
  - Related to the Hebrew verb meaning “to be” and “to cause to be”
  - **YHWH** seems to have been preferred by **writers in Judah and Jerusalem**
  - Jewish tradition forbade its pronunciation, so when aloud, it was always replaced with *adonai* or “Lord”
    - English translations usually follow this tradition by translating YHWH with **LORD** (in small caps)
    - Combining the consonants of YHWH with the vowels of *adonai* gives YaHoWah → **Jehovah**
- **LORD God**: To weave different accounts or strands together, later editors seems to have combined the titles **YHWH Elohim**

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## Documentary Hypothesis

- The *Documentary Hypothesis*, formulated in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century by a scholar named Julius Wellhausen, claims that **the Pentateuch is a redaction of different accounts of the Books of Moses**, compiled centuries after Moses
- Proposed sources (or, better, stylistic or editorial strands)
  - **E**: texts that use the name **Elohim** for Deity
  - **J**: texts that use the name **YHWH** for Deity
  - **P**: texts that reveal a priestly focus on **order, separation, numbers, ritual, and covenants**
  - **D**: texts that focus on a particular form of the law (**D**euteronomy) and the results of its acceptance or rejection
  - **R**: connecting or harmonizing passages introduced by a **final redactor** or editor about the time of Ezra c. 459 B.C. after the return from exile
  - **M!** *Latter-day saints can accept that there were different editions or versions that were later re-woven together without rejecting that there were original texts that were produced by Moses*

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## Suggestions on the Proposed Sources

- **“J”** represents source documents —or— and edition of Moses’ original writings produced in **Judah, c. 950 BC**
- **“E”** represents a version from the **Northern Kingdom**, brought to Judah with those fleeing the Assyrian destruction of Israel, **c. 850 BC**
  - The Book of Mormon notes a version of the Hebrew scriptures, the Brass Plates, associated with individuals from the northern tribe of Manasseh (e.g., Laban and Lehi)
- **“P”** represents portions of the text particularly **associated with the ritual and legal concerns of the priesthood**; may have originated **as early as the reign of Hezekiah (c. 715–687 B.C.)** or as late as the Babylonian exile, after 586 B.C.
- **“D”** seems to be the foundation of a court history that began **about the time of the reforms of Josiah c. 622 B.C.** but continued to develop in the exile after the fall of Judah
  - Some scholars think that the reforms of Josiah eviscerated ancient Israelite religion and betray a change in an understanding of God, while others think it was a necessary simplification in the face of continued idolatry
  - Some basic features of the Deuteronomistic Code (blessings and cursings of the land dependant upon the people’s faithfulness) have parallels in God’s covenants with Lehi, who was a younger contemporary of Josiah; Jesus also frequently quoted Deuteronomy

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## “Interpreting” the New (and Old) Testament

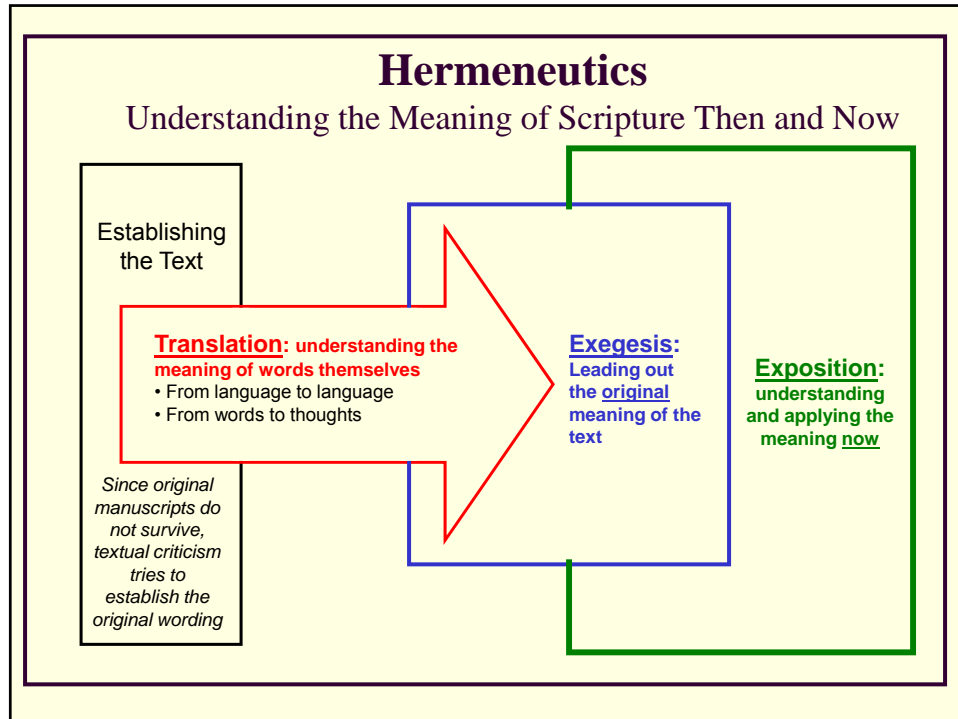
Huntsman, “Teaching through Exegesis: Helping Students Ask Questions of the Text” (packet, 187–197)

- **Hermeneutics: how to interpret and understand texts**
  - From a Greek word meaning “translate” or “interpret”
  - Includes transmission, translation, and understanding both original and current meanings of the text
- **Exegesis: to understand better the original meaning . . .**
  - From the Greek “to lead out” or explain
    - **Definition: “the careful historical, literary, and theological analysis of a text” (Gorman, 8)**
    - A close reading and careful examination of a passage, section, or book to understand its meaning in its original context
      - as opposed to “reading into” the text what we think it means—*eisegesis!*
    - “Them, there, then . . .”
- **Exposition:** application of the meaning to contemporary believers
  - “Us, here, now . . .”
    - **What does it mean to us as readers?**
    - 1 Nephi 19:23, “likening” scripture to ourselves
      - Done more properly *after* exegesis!

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## Ask Exegetical Questions

For more detail, see "Teaching through Exegesis: Helping Students Ask Questions of the Text" online

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- **Historical Questions**
  - When and where was this text written? Who was its audience? What cultural and historical factors affect our understanding of it?
- **Literary Questions**
  - What is the text's major themes and purposes? How do they affect our understanding of its content? What kind of writing is it (what is its genre)? How is the book structured and how does what come before and after a passage affect our understanding of it?
- **Theological Questions**
  - What principles or doctrines does this passage illustrate or teach?
    - What does this passage teach us about God's dealing with his people? With the concept of covenants? With the themes of deliverance and salvation (thus looking forward to the Savior and his mission)?

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## Proceeding to Exposition . . .

- Once we know what it meant “**to them, there, then,**” we are prepared to consider what it means “**to us, here, now**”
- How do other scriptures (particularly restoration scripture) and modern revelation help us understand the passage’s theological implications?
- *How do we apply it to ourselves?*

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## Next Class: Creation and Fall

- Topics
  - Overview and Structure of Genesis
    - First and Second Creation Accounts—Priestly and Yawehistic?
    - Sample Exegetical Questions for the First Account
  - The Temptation
  - The Judgements
  - An LDS Allegory of the Fall
- Readings
  - Genesis 1:1–3:24 (cf. Moses 2:1–5:12, 6:48–68; Abraham 4–5; 2 Nephi 2:14–29)
  - Rasmussen, 1–2 (packet, 7–8)
  - Jackson, “Genesis and the Early Experiences of Mankind,” SS3 25–28 (packet, 28–30)

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