

# METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

By

W. H. Griffith Thomas, B.D.

Copyright @ 1903

edited for 3BSB by Baptist Bible Believer in the spirit of the Colportage ministry of a century ago

*~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

AFTER obtaining a view of the Bible as a whole, and of its two great divisions, it is necessary to descend to detailed study of the books that compose the Testaments.

The Bible, as we have seen, is not only a book; it is a library, a collection of sixty-six books, each originally separate from the rest.

It is obvious that we cannot deal with every book, but can only indicate by specimen illustrations how this method of study may be attempted.

The first point is to gain as full a knowledge as possible of the contents of the book, to make sure that we know the leading names and events and the main substance. Then from the contents we can proceed to consider the teaching, its purpose, place, and power.

We will take a few of the more important books of the Old Testament and see what can be done by this method.

#### GENESIS

First of all, we must read it through and get a general idea. It is advisable to do this, if possible, at one sitting, and to note the impression of unity created. The Bible suffers much from our partial and fragmentary use of it.

As we read on through Genesis we cannot help noticing a frequently recurring phrase: "**These are the generations,**" or "**the book of the generations.**" This occurs ten times. (We do not give the references, because we wish to incite to personal study and search).

As we discover these we are made conscious that our book of Genesis is mainly a compilation of family records, these being the chief sources of the writer's information.

The records, however, have a deep meaning in thus being used. We have no biography or history proper, but biographical and historical incidents utilized under Divine guidance for a spiritual purpose.

This purpose emerges as we read on and study.

We see that chap. 1:1 is really a key to the book.

It is a book of origins, of the genesis of things - the origin of creation, man, the Sabbath, marriage, sin, grace, races, the chosen people.

And the family records are utilized to illustrate GOD's plan in redeeming mankind through one people, one tribe, one family.

But as we read and study further we are impressed with the method of the book. To appreciate this, let us put ourselves at Abraham's side and look backward and forward.

On the one hand we trace him in his ancestors back to Adam; on the other we trace him in his descendants on to Egypt. The book is true to its manifest design to give us the *geneses* or beginnings of things. Even the apparent turns and new starts of the book, its divergences and re-tracings, are in accord with its structural principle.

Its proportions show the same design.

Out of fifty chapters, thirty-nine are devoted to Abraham and his family, while only eleven are given to the rest of the great facts from Creation to the time of Abraham's father.

Everything in it seems to be governed by the one great law and principle of "beginnings," origins, *geneses*, in the development of GOD's purposes of redemptive love and grace.

We must then proceed to study these ten sections, to master the facts associated with them, and to note the growth of the history as it starts with Adam, spreads: out into the race, contracts again into Abraham, only to develop again into Israel in Egypt ready for the Exodus recorded in the second book of the Old Testament.

We have dwelt longer on Genesis than we can on others, because of its importance as the first book of Revelation, and in some respects the key to the whole Bible.

## **EXODUS**

This can best be studied and mastered by means of the following brief outline:-

- (1) History: Egypt to Sinai. Chapters 1-18.
- (2) General laws and solemn entrance into covenant. Chapters 19-24.
- (3) Directions for the tabernacle and worship. Chapters 25 to 50.

## **LEVITICUS**

Consider this as follows, and read it in the light of the Epistle to the Hebrews:-

- (1) The offerings. Chapters 1-7.
- (2) The priesthood. Chapters 8-10.
- (3) Cleanness and uncleanness. Chapters 11-16.
- (4) Laws of holiness. Chapters 17-22.
- (5) The feasts. Chapter 23.
- (6) General laws. Chapters 24-27.

## **DEUTERONOMY**

This book ("the Second Law") is of great interest and importance, and will yield profitable study under the guidance of this outline:-

- (1) Recital of GOD's goodness. Chapters 1-4.
- (2) Review of the law for the new generation at close of the forty years. Chapters 5-26.
- (3) Renewal of the covenant with GOD. Chapters 27-30.
- (4) Closing scenes in the life of Moses. Chapters 31-34.

## **SAMUEL**

Our present books of Samuel were originally one book, without a break, and when regarded as such they afford an excellent illustration of the purpose and method of Bible history, which is not to write history in full, but to write it with a definite object, and to include only what is necessary for the accomplishment of that end.

Look at the books before us, and notice how David is the predominant character, everything else leading up to him. Samuel and Saul are brought before us necessarily as stages of the transition from the theocracy to the monarchy. But we see how slight is the record concerning them as compared with the fullness about David.

Here is an outline from Professor Kirkpatrick's volume on Samuel in the *Cambridge Bible for Schools*, which shows the course of the book and the plan of its contents:-

- (1) Close of the Theocracy. I Samuel 1-7.
- (2) Foundation of Monarchy. Chapters 8-31.
- (3) David's reign over Judah only. II Samuel 1-4.
- (4) David's reign over all Israel. Chapters 5-24.

This outline, with its symmetrical threefold sub-division in each case, clearly reveals the Davidic purpose of the whole, for David appears as early as chap. 16 of I Samuel. David was GOD's choice, and would have been the first king but for the people's self-will.

## **KINGS AND CHRONICLES**

Here we have another instance of the religious purpose of the Biblical history.

The larger space devoted to several monarchs shows the importance of these reigns from the point of view of religion and GOD's Kingdom. There are six monarchs, whose reigns are like pivots on which the religious history turns. These should be discovered and their precise importance considered.

On the other hand, it is full of significance that reigns which, to a secular historian, would have seemed of the greatest importance, are very summarily disposed of. The most striking instance of this is in the long and prosperous reign of Jeroboam the Second, which is dismissed in two or three verses. (II Kings 14).

It isn't so easy to analyze these books. Perhaps the contents are best studied under the names of the kings recorded, using Chronicles as supplementary to Kings. Both Kings and Chronicles are records of history from the religious standpoint, though the precise aspect in each is different.

- Kings is essentially prophetic, the work of a prophet (perhaps Jeremiah).
- Chronicles is priestly, or Levitical, the work of a priest or Levite (perhaps Ezra).

Chronicles goes over much the same ground as Kings, but with the one object of showing to those who had returned from captivity the former glory of the Temple, and the present necessity of it and its worship for their national life.

## **THE BOOK OF JOB**

There seems to be a partiality in the Old Testament for a fivefold treatment of several books, following, perhaps, the well-known fivefold division of the Law ("*Pentateuch*" or five volumes).

Consider the following instance of it:-

1. Chapters 1-3. Introduction.
2. Chapters 4-31. Job and his three friends.
3. Chapters 32-37. Job and Elihu.
4. Chapters 38-41. Interposition of GOD.
5. Chapter 42. Conclusion.

Guided by this outline, the book should be read at one sitting, so as to obtain a clear view of the thought as a whole.

We ought to be able to think our way through this book generally, and thereby to make out its theme and the treatment of it.

What is the theme? Is it not the great problem of suffering in relation to the people of GOD, how and whence it comes, why permitted, and what message it brings from GOD?

In the light of this we can see the various standpoints - Satan's, Job's, the friends', Elihu's, and GOD's - with the blessed conclusion of the whole matter. Each standpoint is clearly marked, and makes its own definite contribution to the whole.

If this book is mastered and read together with other portions of Scripture, such as Psalms 37 and 73 and Hebrews 12, much light will be cast on some of the gravest problems of life.

**THE PSALMS** - The great book of "the praises of Israel."

They are man's inspired response to GOD's Divine revelation, and are almost as acceptable to-day in their entirety as when they were first uttered, because, underlying all circumstances and changes, the relation of the believer to his GOD is ever much the same. Here again we have a clearly defined fivefold division. The close of each is marked by a doxology, until at length the last psalm is all doxology.

1. Book 1. Psalms 1-41.
2. Book 2. Psalms 42-72.
3. Book 3. Psalms 78-89.
4. Book 4. Psalms 90-105.
5. Book 5. Psalms 106-150.

A careful study will yield the following among other results.

(1) The differences of use in the Divine names, Jehovah and Elohim (LORD and GOD). The former is found predominantly in the first book and the last two, while the latter title is mainly used in the central books.

(2) The repetition of particular psalms in different books (Psalms 14 and 53) seems to indicate that the books were gradually compiled for use in the Temple worship. See also Psalm 18 and II Samuel 22. Dr. C. H. Waller's conjecture that Books 1 and 2 were used in David's reign at Zion and Gihon respectively, until both places were united in Solomon's Temple, is interesting and ingenious, and may be approximately true.

(3) The first word, "**Blessed**," is a sort of keynote of the whole collection, only with a significant ascending scale. In the earlier psalms it is "**Blessed is the man**," - the believer in GOD. In the latter psalms, and especially towards the close, it is "**Blessed be God**" - GOD in the believer.

(4) The titles will reveal authorship for the most part and also groups of psalms of a particular character.

(5) Sometimes there are, as it were, twin psalms (as Psalms 112 and 113), being connected by subject matter, either in comparison, or continuation, or contrast. There are many instances of this.

In the study of the Psalms we should seek to become acquainted with them generally and intellectually as well as spiritually in detached texts and portions. They will yield untold spiritual profit to all who will yield mind and heart to them.

## **PROVERBS**

A very valuable contrast and corrective to that undue attention to the Psalms which we are sometimes tempted to give. The Psalms emphasize devotion, the Proverbs duty; and one is the complement of the other. The Proverbs are a tonic to the spiritual life, and full of practical power for everyday duty. Here again we seem to have a fivefold division.

1. Chapters 1-11. This section does not include any proverbs strictly so called.
2. Chapters 10-24. The main section of the book, with three subdivisions.

- (a) 10:1-22:16.
- (b) 22:7-24:22.
- (c) 24:23-34.

3. Chapters 25-29.
4. Chapter 30.
5. Chapter 31.

## **ISAIAH**

Among the prophets there is none greater than Isaiah, and his book is worthy of the closest study.

Its fullness of reference to our Lord has led to Isaiah being called the Evangelical prophet, the prophet of the evangel, the Gospel of Salvation by sacrifice.

The contents are mainly threefold in structure, though capable of extensive subdivision.

1. Chapters 1-35. Prophecies; chiefly of the Assyrian period.

In this there are smaller groups of prophecies to be studied separately, e.g. chapters 1-5; chapter 6; chapters 7-12; chapters 13-23; chapters 24-27; chapters 28-33; chapters 34 and 35.

2. Chapters 36-39. Historical section.

Two chapters look backward to the first section referring to Assyria, and two look forward to the second referring to Babylon.

Dr. Bullinger, in his ingenious but not wholly convincing little pamphlet on "*Isaiah - its Structure and Scope*," suggests that these chapters may be summarized thus:-

- (a) Message from the King of Assyria: Hezekiah spreads it before the Lord: Isaiah sent with reply. Chapters 36 and 37.

(b) Message from the King of Terrors (Death): Hezekiah spreads it before the Lord: Isaiah sent with reply. Chapter 38.

(c) Message from the King of Babylon: Hezekiah does not spread it before the Lord: Isaiah sent with reply. Chapter 39.

3. Chapters 40-6. Prophecies: chiefly of the Babylonian period.

In this section of twenty-seven chapters there are three clear divisions of nine chapters each, marked by the same thought at the end of each nine, about the fate of the wicked (see last verses of chapters 48, 57, 66).

(a) 39-48. The deliverance coming.

(b) 49-57. The Deliverer.

(c) 58-66. The results.

It is worthy of note that in this section we have some of the clearest detailed predictions of our Lord and His work, and also some of the thoughts which are found so richly expanded in the writings of Paul. And it is worthwhile (even as a help to memory) to realize that in this section we have twenty-seven chapters in our English Bible, the center of them being that mountain-peak - the fifty-third where CHRIST is all!

## **LAMENTATIONS**

Note here a striking illustration of the Jewish literary methods.

In the first place, the verses are limited to the number of the Hebrew alphabet - twenty-two - in each chapter excepting chapter 3, where we have sixty-six, or three times twenty-two. Then each verse of each chapter commences with a letter (in order) of the alphabet, e.g. verse 1 with Aleph, and so on. In chapter 3 each Hebrew letter has three verses, e.g. 1-3, Aleph. Psalm 119 is another illustration of this form of composition, each section of eight verses and each verse of the section commencing with the letters of the alphabet.

## **AMOS**

This important prophecy illustrates what are called the "minor prophets," and may be studied as follows:-

1. First Address: Threatening. Chapters 1 and 2.
2. Second Address: Destruction. Chapters 3 and 4.
3. Third Address: Lamentation. Chapters 5 and 6.
4. Series of Visions. Chapters 7-9:10.
5. Promise of Restoration. Chapter 9:11-15.

These are only a few samples of the books of the Old Testament. One word suggests what should alone satisfy every earnest Christian with reference to them. That is, Mastery. The more fully they are mastered, the clearer will be their messages of truth and grace and power.

It is a good plan to have some one book on hand for prolonged study, carrying a small copy of the text about with us for reading at odd moments, and then utilizing spare time for definite study.

A month or three months spent on Genesis, or Joshua, or Samuel, or Isaiah, would be fruitful beyond measure in every way.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

\*\*\*