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AN ANALYTICAL SURVEY OF OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

This work begins with a background of study which traces the history of Israel as a people from the call of Abraham to their settlement in the Promised Land. It also focuses on the rise of the Israelite monarchy, and the development, collection and canonization of Old Testament Literature. Research methodology is basically library research and the scope covers the beginning of Israelite literature to its final canonization in 100 AD. The purpose of the study is to emphasize the place of authority of Old Testament Literature despite negative opinions of critics. The problem here is the antagonism towards the Old Testament and the denial of its historicity.

The history of the Christian Bible is unique and notable differences exist between it and the Jewish and Roman Catholic Bibles. The methods of historical writing applied to the Bible has passed the test of modern historiography and historicity. Even the testimonies of Jesus and the apostles provide enough internal evidence.

TANAK is an acronym to represent the literary divisions of the Bible, namely, Torah (T); Nebi'im (N); and Kethubi'im (K). The diverse literary types or genres in the TANAK makes the Old Testament Literature stand out on its own. The way the text communicates to the reader is significant as a written work of art. Its problems and criticisms, such as, the historical and literary criticisms, and the pentateuchal and hermeneutical problems are worthy of note.

Finally, it must be noted that the Old Testament is God's plan in accordance with His covenant promises which culminates in the coming of Jesus Christ. It is also necessary to emphasize good interpretation of the Scriptures and the rejection of reductionism or any attempt to make the Bible deteriorate to just ordinary or pure literature. The Old Testament is still relevant to us today for spiritual guidance and there is the clarion call to obey God's commandments that are written in the Old Testament.

## (2) CONCLUSION

The Old Testament or Old Covenant remains an essential part of the Christian Bible because the two covenants form one record of God's progressive and redemptive revelation to humankind.<sup>7</sup> The promise of the "former" covenant finds its fulfillment in what the epistle to the Hebrews called the "superior" covenant (Hebrews 8:6). To study either covenant in isolation might lead to an inaccurate

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 446.

<sup>5</sup> F.F. Bruce Israel and the Nations: From the Exodus to the Fall of the Second Temple (Sydney: Paternoster, 1969), 87.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, 436.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 435

perception of God's self-disclosure and His purposes for creation.<sup>8</sup> The apostle Paul said that Jesus as a child was born at exactly the proper time in human history (Galatians 4:4). God, who is the controller of history arranged the "optimum, historical, political, and theological environment for the coming Jesus Christ and His Church. (cf. Isaiah 14:24-27).<sup>9</sup> ✓ slip

For correct interpretation of Scriptures certain principles have also been suggested by biblical scholars. However, they are to serve as a guide to those who wish to carry out an indepth study of the Bible.

Francisco listed these procedures:

- (1) Something must be known of the historical position of the author. This includes the history of the times, social and religious conditions and personal life and background of the author.<sup>10</sup>
- (2) Identification of the original language in which the author wrote. A knowledge of Hebrew is essential to sound Old Testament exposition.<sup>11</sup>
- (3) Each passage must be studied in the light of the book that contains it, and each book must be examined as it relates to the overall progress of Old Testament revelation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Clyde T. Francisco, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

- (4) The nature of Literature, the type is of major significance, if identified, in the understanding of a passage of the Old Testament.
- (5) Also essential to interpretation of the Old Testament text is its relationship to later fulfillment. One must perceive its relationship to the eternal plan of God.<sup>13</sup>

In modern literary and historical studies, care must be taken to ensure that both texts and artifacts have been rightly interpreted in the attempt to correlate texts and artifacts.<sup>14</sup> According to de vaux:

If the results of archaeology seem to be opposed to the conclusions of text criticism, the reason may perhaps be that not enough archaeological facts are known or that they have not been firmly established; the reason also may be that the text has been wrongly interpreted.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the findings of archaeologists, the Bible does not need them to exist as sacred Scriptures, their role is simply augumentary.

A truly literary approach will want to "do justice" to the literature by acknowledging whatever kinds of truth claims it makes, whether they be purely literary, historical or theological. It will be injustice to ignore the literary utilitarian intent of the Old Testament or the Bible to communicate information, command obedience, call to

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold, The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches. 150.

repentance and to reduce it to the level of pure or autoletic literature.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding the Old Testament's authority, Jesus and the apostles were very positive about that. They honoured it as God's Word, and the faithful record of what God had said through His servants the prophets.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Jesus never expressed any doubts about the truth of Old Testament history. The New Testament's interpretation of the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth will be hard to grasp if there is no substance to the historical claims of the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, Jesus regarded the Old Testament as the authority for truth from God. When the Pharisees put Him to test over the question on divorce he referred them to the Scriptures, that is, to the Old Testament: "Haven't you read", He replied, "that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will be one flesh"?" (Mathew 19:4-5). In a dispute with the Jews over His claim to be the Son of God, Jesus referred them to a passage of Scripture and added, 'and the Scripture cannot be broken' (John 10:35). The Sadducees received the same treatment over the question of the resurrection. He said to them: "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Mark 12:24).

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>18</sup> Graeme Goldorthy, According to Plan: The unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1991), 66.

