

Old Testament Themes

Reading the Old Testament is not like reading any ordinary book. Yes, we need to read the words and sentences. But more than a literal reading of the text, we need to read it with Faith. This means we reflect on the underlying message of the text: the message of truth God is wishing to communicate to us. Here are some main themes found in the Bible. Keep these in mind as you study particular stories or events in the Old Testament.

- God created a good world.
- God has blessed human life.
- Humanity has a tendency to sin.
- God is a God of mercy.
- God keeps promises.
- The covenant binds God to Israel.
- The Law expresses Israel's bond to God.
- Worship is praise and thanksgiving.
- Religious life is life in community.
- God directs all of human history.

As the introduction to the *New American Bible* explains, these themes can be applied to our own lives today in the following ways:

- All things in our life must flow from Faith.
- Our prayer and our daily life must be one.
- We must respect God's holiness.
- We must imitate God's holiness.
- Holiness must be translated into compassion.
- Life is a journey that requires trust in God.
- We are people of the land. (We must take the environment seriously.)
- Faith is a family affair.
- Prayer must fill our lives.

Comparing Translations of Psalm 13

New Revised Standard Version

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
² How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

³ Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
⁴ and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

⁵ But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
⁶ I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Revised English Bible

¹ How LONG, LORD, will you leave me forgotten,
how long hide your face from me?
² How long must I suffer anguish in my soul,
grief in my heart day after day?
How long will my enemy lord it over me?

³ Look now, LORD my God, and answer me.
Give light to my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of
death,
⁴ lest my enemy say, 'I have overthrown him,'
and my adversaries rejoice at my downfall.
⁵ As for me, I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart will rejoice when I am brought to safety.
⁶ I shall sing to the LORD, for he has granted all my
desire.

New American Bible

² How long, LORD? Will you utterly forget me?
How long will you hide your face from me?
³ How long must I carry sorrow in my soul,
grief in my heart day after day?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?

II
⁴ Look upon me, answer me, LORD, my God!
Give light to my eyes lest I sleep in death,
⁵ Lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed,"
lest my foes rejoice at my downfall.

III
⁶ I trust in your faithfulness.
Grant my heart joy in your help.
That I may sing of the LORD,
"How good our God has been to me!"

New Jerusalem Bible

¹ How long, Yahweh, will you forget me? For ever?
How long will you turn away your face from me?
² How long must I nurse rebellion in my soul,
sorrow in my heart day and night?
How long is the enemy to domineer over me?
³ Look down, answer me, Yahweh my God!
Give light to my eyes or I shall fall into the sleep
of death.

⁴ Or my foe will boast, 'I have overpowered him,'
and my enemy have the joy of seeing me stumble.
⁵ As for me, I trust in your faithful love, Yahweh.
Let my heart delight in your saving help,
let me sing to Yahweh for his generosity to me,
let me sing to the name of Yahweh the Most High!

New Jerusalem Bible

How much longer will you
forget me, LORD?
Forever?
How much longer will you hide
yourself from me?
² How long must I endure trouble?
How long will sorrow fill my
heart day and night?
How long will my enemies
triumph over me?

³ Look at me, O LORD my God, and
answer me.
Restore my strength; don't let
me die.
⁴ Don't let my enemies say, "We
have defeated him."
Don't let them gloat over my
downfall.

⁵ I rely on your constant love;
I will be glad, because you will
rescue me.
⁶ I will sing to you, O LORD,
because you have been good to
me.

Name _____ Date _____

Handout 1C

Organization of the Hebrew Bible

The Law (Torah, Pentateuch)

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

The Prophets

Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings

Latter Prophets: Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel

The Book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets: Amos,

Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Haggai,

Zechariah, Jonah, Joel, Obadiah, Malachi)

The Writings

Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs,

Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel,

Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles

Methods of Critical Reading

Studying the Bible includes critical methods of research that connect Biblical texts to historic events, understand past customs, and explain literary styles no longer in use today. Specific types of critical reading include the following:

- **Exegesis.** The scholarly explanation of a Bible passage. The word *exegesis* means “to bring out or explain.” Exegesis tries to discover what a text meant in its original time and place of composition.
- **Hermeneutics.** The scholarly explanation of a Bible passage that is primarily concerned with what the text means for people today.
- **Source Criticism.** This type of study focuses on the source of each passage. Scholars have identified four sources, or oral traditions, for the Old Testament. By identifying the source of the passage, scholars can determine the message of a particular story or event.
- **Form Criticism.** The study that examines the special form of a poem, law, hymn, or narrative and then tries to determine the cultural-historical situation from which it came.