# UNIT 2A: OLD TESTAMENT

## Summary

This lecture provides a detailed Orthodox Christian examination of the Old Testament, focusing on worship through the Psalter, wisdom literature, eschatology, and biblical interpretation within the Orthodox tradition.

- **Psalter formation and structure:** The Psalter, the Old Testament hymn book, was mainly formed between King David's reign and the Second Temple's construction, with major collection during the Exile; it is divided into five parts ending with doxologies and contains ten major types of psalms categorized by historical and liturgical context.
- **Meaning and liturgical use of Psalms:** Psalms serve primarily liturgical worship but also express individual experiences and theological themes like creation and salvation; they are adaptable to various settings and remain central to Orthodox liturgy, including the integral use of Psalm 50 in every Divine Liturgy.
- **Wisdom literature purpose:** Wisdom texts reflect Yahweh's ordering of creation and human society, addressing practical godly living amid salvation history; significant during Solomon's reign, they help explain suffering and existential questions and are used liturgically during Great Lent to prepare catechumens.
- **Development of revelation:** Revelation unfolds in three movements: dogmatic statements about God as creator, the covenant with the Fathers, and an eschatological extension of the covenant to all humanity post-kingdom collapse; these movements reflect providential thematic transpositions influenced by historical contexts including Hellenistic culture.
- **Key wisdom books overview:** Proverbs contains wise sayings traditionally attributed to Solomon; Ecclesiastes questions human aspirations with a pessimistic tone; Song of Songs is interpreted as love poetry or mystical allegory; Wisdom of Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon provide late Jewish and Hellenistic-influenced wisdom; Job explores undeserved suffering and human ignorance, seen as a type of Christ's suffering and resurrection.
- **Eschatology and apocalyptic features:** Apocalyptic literature reveals secret, symbolic, and pseudonymous revelations about the End Times, characterized by historical and cosmological dualism, with cosmic battles culminating in divine intervention and salvation; Daniel's prophecies reflect such themes, possibly composed during the Maccabean period.
- **Resurrection and Messiah:** Early references to resurrection appear in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, with the Messiah's coming inaugurating the Kingdom of God and culminating in a global resurrection event portrayed with apocalyptic imagery.
- **Judaism at Christ's time:** Jewish life under Roman rule was marked by oppression, fostering diverse apocalyptic visions and messianic hopes; key Jewish groups included apocalyptic preachers like John the Baptist, Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, and others, setting a complex background for Christ's arrival and early Jewish-Christian relations.
- **Orthodox biblical interpretation template:** Orthodox interpretation involves three levels—exegetical (historical/contextual), allegorical/typological (derived from Tradition), and interpretative (spiritual/ethical application)—exemplified through an in-depth study of Job, emphasizing humility, faith, and the mystery of God beyond human understanding, integrating historical scholarship and patristic commentary.

# 40: Worship, Wisdom and Eschatology

## Worship – The Psalter *(The Psalms are numbered according to the LXX ... see table below)*

### The Formation and Structure of the Psalter

Although the worship of Israel before AD 70 is unintelligible without the Temple sacrifices and cult, it is the psalms that constitute the praises of the people; and these have endured into the life of the Church. The Psalter is the hymn book of the Old Testament and it is sourced in the historical period from the accession of King David to the building of the second Temple, when the collection acquired its most stable and enduring form. The major period of collection was probably during the Exile itself.

The canon of the Psalter is reflected in its structure by an internal division into five parts, each concluding with a doxology (1-42; 43-71; 72-88; 89-105; 106-150)—that is, a fixed expression praising God, from the Greek *doxa* meaning glory and *logos* meaning discourse.[1] In turn there are 10 major types of psalm categorised according to historical and liturgical context, (albeit this is not always easy to discern, since the life setting for each is not always clear). [duplications in parentheses]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Hymns of praise or adoration ...** | 8, 18, 28, 32, 64, 67, 95, 97, 99, 102-104, 110, 112-113, 116, 134-135, 144-150 |
| | *... to which we should include ... Songs of Zion* | 45, 47, 75, 86 |
| | *... and songs of enthronement of Yahweh in the Temple ...* | (95, 97), 46, 92, 96, 98 |
| 2 | **Communal laments in the face of some national disaster** | 43, 57, 73, 78-79, 82, 105, 124, 136 |

[1] In Biblical Judaism the logos has been defined as "the word of God, which itself has creative power and is [one of the means] of God's communication with the human race." However, it should be noted this is not the Logos in the Gospel of St. John which is itself God and incarnate in Jesus Christ.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | Royal Psalms | 2, 17, 19-20, 44, 71, 88, 100, 109, 131 |
| 4 | Individual Laments | 3, 5-7, 12, 16, 21, 24-25, 29, 30, 34, 37-38, 41-42, 50, 53-56, 58, 60, 62, 63, 68-70, 85, 87, 101, 108, 119, 129, 139-142 |
| 5 | Individual Thanksgivings | (17), 29, 31, 33, 40, 65, 91, 115, 117, 137 |
| 6 | Communal Thanksgivings | 66, 123 |
| 7 | Songs of Pilgrimage | 83, 121 |
| 8 | Wisdom Psalms | 1, 36, 48, 72, 111, 126-127, 132 |
| 9 | Liturgies | 14, 23, 79, 98, 135 |
| 10 | Mixed | 88 (hymn, royal psalm, communal lament) |

**NUMBERING OF THE PSALMS**

| Septuagint | Hebrew (KJ) | Septuagint | Hebrew (KJ) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1–8 | 1–8 | 115 | 116 v. 10–19 |
| 9 | 9–10 | 116–145 | 117–146 |
| 10–112 | 11–113 | 146 | 147 v. 1–11 |
| 113 | 114–115 | 147 | 147 v. 12–20 |
| 114 | 116 v. 1–9 | 148–150 | 148–150 |

*Note: The Royal Psalms celebrated the king's role in worship as Yahweh's representative. The Enthronement psalms declared Yahweh's sovereignty over creation and prayed for the fruitfulness of the forthcoming year. These were probably the contexts for the communal renewal of the covenant, whether concerning the original reception of the Ark into Jerusalem under King David or the founding of the Davidic covenant itself.*

## The Meaning and Uses of the Psalter

Certain observations can be made about the psalms as to their origin and usage. First, the Psalter is primarily a liturgical collection of hymns used in the Temple and subsequently in the Church. This is true even for those psalms that have a basis in individual experience (e.g. Psalm 50). Psalms rapidly took their place in the

community's offering, because the cry of the heart to God is common in both those psalms that are primarily liturgical expressions of worship of God and those that are grounded in personal experience. This cry from the heart to God informs both types of psalms. Second, the Psalter was reworked for application to different life settings and purposes. Such is their flexibility in delineating human experience that they have been adapted for diverse uses, whether individual and reflective, communal and liturgical, or ascetical and confessional. Third, the Psalter is theological in that it deals with the themes of creation, salvation and future hope (eschatology). Never, however, do such doctrines become abstract. For example, Psalm 70 begins: "In Thee O lord, have I hoped, let me not be put to shame in the age to come; in Thy righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline Thine ear unto me and save me. The psalms are always worked out in an experiential, personal and communal context.

The Psalms cannot be systematised or rationalised. In *Grace for Grace: The Psalter and the Holy Fathers*, Johanna Manley has pointed out that: "If, to the modern 'sophisticated' reader, some of the connections, types, and allegorical flights of imagery appear strained, we should remember that, after all, we are dealing with prophecy"—the words of the prophet David and prophecies of Christ.[2]
This combination of lack of systemisation and affirmation of prophecy perhaps testifies to their enduring appeal. Certainly, the Psalter is honest. The whole gamut of human emotions and responses is here and not just those are reckoned by some as "presentable" to God! (e.g. Psalms. 43, 87, 108, 136:7-9, 138:19-22). The Psalter is the WHOLE of life before God, "with now't tak'n out."

## The Psalms in the Orthodox Liturgy

[2] Johanna Manley, *Grace for Grace: The Psalter and the Holy Fathers* (Menlo Park, CA: Monastery Books, 1992), p. viii.

Every Divine Liturgy in every Orthodox church begins with a priest or deacon incensing and reciting silently the whole of Psalm 50: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy; and according to the multitude of Thy compassions blot out my transgressions …" Furthermore, as Father George Barois has pointed out, "typology was the main criterion in Psalm selection for various liturgical services," in sharp contrast with the Biblical perspectives of "the sixteenth century Reformers, the Enlightenment and nineteenth- and twenty-century historical criticism."[3] This Orthodox focus on types—on people and ideas having common traits and characteristics—is especially significant in the Psalms, as earlier Greek and Hebrew themes serve as "a mirror not made by hand, reflect[ing] for us the face of our Christ."[4] In respect to types, and more generally in the context of Scripture and tradition, Father Theodore Stylianopoulos is right to conclude that: "Orthodox scholars have much to learn as they also have much to teach."[5]

An extended critique of the Psalms is beyond the scope of this E-Quip lecture. However, two key points should be understood with respect to the extent of inspiration (or lack of it) in the Psalms. First, the short descriptions that precede a majority of the Psalms are simply "short notices which we have no reason to hold for inspired; they play a role similar to that of rubrics in a liturgical book."[6] Therefore, the precise events described in these notices may or may not be the actual motivation for their composition. Second, "the goal of the psalms is to promote an immediate relationship with God."[7] The two key attributes of God, His steadfast long-suffering love (Hebrew *hesed* and Greek *eleos*) and compassion (Hebrew *răhămîm* and Greek *oiktirmos)* as set out in Psalm 102:8 provide "one of

[3] Barois, *Scripture Readings in Orthodox Worship* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1974), p. 17. Cited and expanded by Father Eugen J. Pentiuc, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 221.
[4] George A. Barois, *The Face of Christ in the Old Testament,* especially Chapter XII, "The Mirror of the Psalms" (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1974), p. 133.
[5] Father Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, "Scripture and tradition in the Church," in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 21-34.
[6] Barois, *The Face of Christ in the Old Testament*, p. 135.
[7] Barois, *The Face of Christ in the Old Testament*, p. 136.

the most important theological statements in the entire Old Testament"—as Father Eugen Pentiuc notes, challenging those "who fear the Lord" (verses 11, 13, 17), to be, "those who place God at the centre of their lives."[8] That challenge from Psalm 102 to Jews and Christians of earlier centuries remains a challenge to each of us today.[9] It should never be forgotten that the psalms were "the prayer book of Christ and the apostles"[10] and continue to draw us closer to God Himself and to God's will for each of our lives.

## Wisdom Literature

### Seeking the Practicalities of a Godly and Wise Life in the Light of Salvation History

Israel was not alone in possessing a tradition of wisdom literature in sacred and other texts, which should hardly surprise us. Some scholars (generally, not Orthodox) have traced what they see as dependencies in Israel's wisdom tradition on sources in other lands, notably Egypt and Babylon. This remains conjectural. It could simply be that true wisdom (all of which ultimately comes from God) is independently convergent between these cultures. Having said that, wisdom in Israel has a distinctive character in that it reflects Yahweh's ordering of creation and provision for human society. True, such literature is relatively unconcerned with the God-in-history confessions of Yahwism, but it exists for another and complementary purpose: to work out the practicalities of a Godly (and, therefore, wise) life, and all in the light of salvation history. Perhaps this is why the Orthodox Church uses extracts from two main Old Testament texts—Genesis and Proverbs—for the Pre-Sanctified Liturgies in Great Lent—a time historically when catechumens were prepared for baptism. The texts from Genesis reveal why salvation is necessary, while Proverbs offers the guidance God gives for the redeemed.

8 Father Eugen J. Pentiuc, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, pp. 219-220.
9 As Father Pentiuc reflects: "The faithful attending the Orthos (Matins) service and listening to this psalm are urged to follow this ideal." p. 220
10 Barois, *The Face of Christ in the Old Testament*, p. 136.

Wisdom clearly has a role in shaping a life pleasing to God and enlightening problematic aspects of the human condition, such as suffering (Job) and existential questions (Ecclesiastes). If we ask *when* did wisdom become important in Israelite society, then the answer might reasonably supposed to be in the period of the early monarchy, especially during the kingship of Solomon, who, we may recall, sought the best gift from God, wisdom, (1 Kings [3 Kingdoms] 3: 4/5{M} - 14). Certainly during his reign, Israel had commerce both material and intellectual with many nations; and this may have stimulated the wisdom tradition which later passed into the scribal tradition where it became more overtly theological.

## The Development of Revelation and the Wisdom Literature

Given the different purposes of the various books of the Old Testament, especially the wisdom literature, a comprehensive classification is not possible. However, Father George Barois has suggested that:

> It is possible to distinguish three 'movements' in the development of revelation as a whole, for it is anything but static. The first movement corresponds to dogmatic statements on God the creator and guardian of laws governing the universal order. The second is that of the covenant-relationship of Yahweh with the Fathers, codified in the Books of Moses and freed from legalistic mechanisation by the latter prophets. The third, after the collapse of the kingdoms, opens broad eschatological prospects and an extension of the covenant to all mankind.[11]

He reflects that these three movements are not three phases in an evolutionary process, but rather "providential transpositions of a unique revelational theme historically conditioned," with special attention to be given in the last movement to "the pervasiveness of Hellenistic culture in post-exilic Judaism, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora."[12] In other words, these three themes are often being

[11] Barois, *The Face of Christ in the Old Testament*, p. 146. For further discussion of the wisdom literature, see Chapter 13, "The Books of Divine Wisdom," pp. 145-154.

[12] Barois, *The Face of Christ in the Old Testament*, p. 146.

transposed—that is, changing places in a sequence of events that leads to salvation, both personal and cosmic.

## Taking a Closer Look at the Wisdom Books

The actual wisdom books of the Old Testament are as follows.

(1) **Proverbs:** Although traditionally ascribed in its entirety to Solomon, there is some internal evidence to suppose multiple sources for this collection of wise sayings from Solomon to those writing after the exile, maybe as late as the Persian and Greek periods, but we have no way of knowing for sure. The theological range is from simple and homely sayings concerning a Godly life to developed theologies of wisdom personified as a divine attribute (8:23f.).

(2) **Ecclesiastes:** (Qoheleth – The "Preacher" or "Speaker") This book is also traditionally ascribed to Solomon. It radically calls into question all human faculties and aspirations as vanities preferring to see the resolution of life's problematic and existential questions in God alone. In this, its theology is similar to that of Job, excepting its pessimism!

(3) **Song of Songs:** Is this love poetry, pure and simple, or mystical allegory of God's love for his people? Simple personal affection or ecstatic ascent of the soul to God? In the history of the Church, each of these interpretations has found its place as a possibly inspired interpretations of this text.

(4) **Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus):** This contribution to wisdom literature comes from late Judaism toward the close of the 2nd century B.C. Sirach has a more positive outlook on human life than Ecclesiastes, with a distinctively Jewish and scribal version of the universalism of the wisdom genre.

(5) **Wisdom of Solomon:** Universally recognised as *not* written by Solomon but by an anonymous member of the Jewish community in Alexandria immediately before the birth of Christ, this work shows strong Hellenistic influences presaging Philo's later work. It was used in the early church to instruct converts further in Godly living, much in the manner of Proverbs.

(6) **Job:** In this lecturer's estimation, this is perhaps the most profound book in all of the wisdom literature. The theme is that of undeserved suffering and how life's meaning is to be found in the rejection of shallow moralising and then passing through a confession of human ignorance to God Himself (42:1-6). Rationalising Christians come away from Job puzzled for the problem of Job's undeserved suffering is apparently not resolved. However, the radical "unknowing" of Job suggests an approach to the life changing mystery of God which is apophatic and, therefore, deeply Orthodox. We have to abandon all shallow human notions of the divine and the experience of human life in order to encounter the living God in whom all life's mysteries are resolved. In the Church Job is seen as a type of Christ where suffering precedes "resurrection." The Septuagint version of the book is somewhat shorter than that of the Masoretic text on account of translation difficulties.

## Eschatology – Apocalyptic:

"Eschatology" is the study of the End Times, the Last Things; "Apocalyptic" (literally, revelation, unveiling) is a sub-type and refers to a particular spirituality and literary genre, the theology of which has the following characteristics:

1. **Esotericism:** The Apocalypse is initially a secret revealed to seers (Daniel, John of the Apocalypse [NT: Revelations]) sealed up until the End Time when the community, undergoing its eschatological trials will be assured of God's final victory over every opposing force. It is textual, coded and hidden rather than oral in origin and straightforwardly proclaimed, (cf. prophecy which it essentially replaced in Israel).
2. **Symbolism:** There is usually a mythological bestiary (Daniel 7:1-8); vivid dream or vision imagery (Zechariah chs. 4 to 6) and numerological significances (Daniel 8:14, 9:21ff, 12:11-12).

3. **Pseudonymity:** The practice of pseudonymity—that is, writing under a disguised or pen name, especially in representing the founder of a school of theology or a well-known prophet—is more controversial for the Orthodox because it confronts the antipathy many modern Protestant exegetes have towards precognition—foretelling the future. A pertinent example would be the detailed references in Daniel 11 to the persecutions of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), the Prince-Governor of Palestine in the Seleucid Greek occupation, including the defilement of the Temple and self-idolatry of Antiochus, collectively "the abomination of desolation," (11:31). This is taken as evidence of pseudonymous writings of a later seer putting, as it were, the words in Daniel's mouth; Daniel himself, of course, having lived some 400 years earlier. According to this view, the book of Daniel, at least in part, belongs to the Maccabean period when the Jews, under the leadership of Mattathias and his son Judas Maccabaeus ("the hammer") launched a guerrilla war, liberated Palestine (165 or 164 B.C. - 1 Maccabees 2-3), cleansed and rededicated the Temple (1 Maccabees 4:36ff), and inaugurated the commemorative feast of lights (Hanukah – 1 Maccabees 4:59). However, pseudonymity was a theological and literary device used in antiquity, as we have already seen when considering the authorship of the Wisdom of "Solomon." Moreover, it is thought that pseudonymity was often used as a defence against persecution when the prophetic aspect of contemporary apocalyptic oracles would have provoked the rulers concerned. So we may indeed see in the book of Daniel the conflation of many oracles and visions, some dating from the Exile and some from much later in the Maccabean period but in the same apocalyptic vein.
4. **Historical and Cosmological Dualism:** History is divided into two ages: this age and the age to come. In the juxtaposition of these two ages stand chaos and conflict as God and his servants, both angelic and human, battle against Satan and his minions (1 Enoch 6:36 [pseudepigraphic on Genesis 5:21-24]). Nothing can be done about this age. It is doomed, literally. Only the divine

crisis, wherewithal God wraps up history like a scroll, will usher in the new age. The die is cast; all is foretold. The elect must await the End with fortitude, confidence and constancy. The contrast between the apocalyptic and prophecy could not be more stark. In the prophetic tradition "proper," God judges and saves ***within*** the history of ***this*** world. Only when Israel despaired of this world did it become convinced that only the inexorable divine hand from outside this realm of time and space could both save her and presage a new creation. (Perhaps we in turn live in an apocalyptic age today!).

## The Resurrection, the Messiah and the Kingdom of God

In the "Little Apocalypse" of Isaiah (Chs. 24-27) we encounter the first reference to the resurrection of the righteous from the dead to participate in the glorious new age of the kingdom of God (26:19); and this is paralleled to some limited extent (as it is a metaphor) in the kindling of the dry bones by God's Spirit in Ezekiel 37, a type of the resurrection, generally if not personally. More pertinent to the personal dimension of resurrection is the promise in Daniel 12:2-3 that in the Day of the Lord the sleepers shall awake to everlasting life or everlasting shame. There is a strong messianic dimension to this hope and, as we might expect in the apocalyptic genre, the vision of the coming of the Son of Man (Christ) to the Ancient of Days (the Father) is cast in an earth shattering aspect (Daniel 7:13-14). The Messiah himself and his coming is the catalyst for the inauguration of the Kingdom of God; and its denouement will be the resurrection of the dead—a global event.

## Epilogue: Judaism by the Time of Christ

Although a century of Jewish independence followed the Maccabean Revolt, the nation was to be subsumed in the emergent and mighty Roman Empire. Yet, as the

Jewish storyteller and scholar Chaim Potok has noted in *Wanderings,* for the Jews in Rome—and in Palestine as well, it should be added—"The burden of Roman rule grew intolerable," so that "a chasm between the concept of Israel as the chosen of God and the bitter reality of Roman oppression gave rise to apocalyptic visions, messianic hopes [and] prophecies of sudden salvation from the hand of God."[13] Those who continued to follow their Jewish faith, those who chose to complete their Jewish faith by following Christ, and those Gentiles who came directly to Christ with minimal contact with Judaism each interpreted these apocalyptic visions and messianic hopes differently.

Considering the relationship between Jews and Christians at the time of Christ and throughout the first century A.D., a Christian New Testament scholar, Jack T. Sanders, has reflected on the extensive spectrum and complex relationships among the different groups of Jews with "the zealously righteous Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to the gentiles in Paul's Corinthian congregation who may have attended dinners in pagan temples, e.g. in Serapeia."[14] As Sanders has proposed, instead of focusing on the antipathy between Jews and Christians at the time of Christ:

> We ought to have taken the issue of relationship more seriously all along. However much early Christian and Jewish writers may have slandered one another or hoped for one another's salvation, we need to know, as well as we can, what relationships actually existed. Only when we are clear about that can we say that we truly understand the development of early Christianity and Judaism.[15]

This focus on "the complexity of early Jewish-Christian relations and the multiform social dynamic that drove them"[16] is helpful as an antidote to the poison of anti-Semitism, whether in the first century or the twenty-first.

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[13] Chaim Potok, *Wanderings: Chaim Potok's History of the Jews* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1978), p. 284.
[14] Jack T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants: The First One Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: SCM Press, 1993), p. 29
[15] Sanders, p. xix.
[16] Sanders, p. 258.

In contrast to the conflict between Jewish and Roman perspectives, Greek civilisation survived alongside an indigenous Aramaic language and culture, and, this is reflected in the language of the New Testament as well as in the creation of the Septuagint. Politically, however, Israel was a spent force presided over by sometimes gifted but nonetheless essentially puppet kings. Occasionally there were insurrections; and of course eventually Rome finally resolved the matter with the siege of Jerusalem and Masada in A.D. 70–73 to be followed by the quashing of the Bar Kokhba revolt in A.D. 132–136. Jerusalem then became a pagan city from which Jews (and Christians) were largely excluded until the time of Constantine.

Understanding Judaism at the time of Christ requires an appreciation of the importance of four quite different perspectives—the Jewish apocalyptic, the centrality of the Torah, the limited powers of the Temple hierarchy and the significance of those who inherited the Maccabean tradition of revolt. The first group is represented by such popular preachers and ascetics as the Forerunner St. John the Baptist and the apocalyptic, world-denying, radical sect of the Essenes; the second, by the Pharisees and scribes, the teachers (rabbis) and the strictest interpreters of the Law, (albeit that they accepted the wider canon of the Prophets and the oral traditions of the Mishnah / Talmud); the third, by the conservative resurrection-denying Temple cultic aristocracy of the Sadducees, concerned at all costs to maintain the Temple's worship and the exclusivity of the Pentateuch, even if it meant a close collaboration with the Romans and an accommodation with Hellenism; and the fourth, by the Zealots and the Sicarii who wanted no part in a suffering Messiah and who longed to throw off the Roman yoke. This essentially sets the scene for the coming of the Christ, Jesus; but that is another story!

## Conclusion: Reading the Old Testament Is an Authentic and Living Orthodox Liturgical Tradition

It is essential to remember that during many earlier centuries, "Eastern Orthodox worship functioned as a 'Bible Study' class where those attending church services

could be instructed in and fashioned by God's living word."[17] However, at some time after the seventh century, "Byzantine Orthodoxy removed Old Testament lessons from the Eucharist service (Liturgy).[18] Although there are occasional Old Testament lessons in Vesperal Liturgies and in the services of Holy Week and in Vespers and Royal Hours of great feasts, "apart from the use of certain fixed psalms, there are at present no Old Testament readings in Byzantine Orthodox Eucharistic service."[19] Although there are slightly more Old Testament readings in today's Greek Orthodox Church, liturgical use of the Old Testament is only moderately greater than Byzantine practice.[20]

This paucity of Old Testament readings and general avoidance of the Old Testament in contemporary Byzantine and Greek Orthodox liturgies is in marked contrast to current practice in the Oriental or non-Chalcedonian Orthodox churches—that is the Syriac, Indian Malankara, Armenian, Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox churches, "all of which have retained a lectionary of readings from the Old Testament in their Eucharistic services."[21] Thus the issue of how many Old Testament readings, as well as how much preaching should be linked to the Old Testament, is a matter for individual Orthodox jurisdictions. Change is possible, within a framework of decentralised governance.

The distinguished Orthodox historian and theologian, Jaroslav Pelikan has reflected that "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."[22] Unfortunately, at the present time, most jurisdictions in Orthodox Church governance treat the Old Testament with considerable traditionalism. This diminishes the fullness of Orthodox worship and teaching, because, as Pelikan notes, the "mark of an authentic and living tradition [is] that it points us beyond

[17] Father Eugen J. Pentiuc, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition,* pp. 223-224.
[18] Father Eugen J. Pentiuc, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition,* p. 224.
[19] Father Eugen J. Pentiuc, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition,* p. 225.
[20] Father Eugen J. Pentiuc, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition,* p. 225
[21] Father Eugen J. Pentiuc, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition,* p. 225.
[22] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 65.

itself."[23] It is the hope of those who have prepared and delivered these 10 lectures on the Old Testament that it is now beyond dispute that the Old Testament is part of Orthodox tradition in the best possible sense, both because of its own value and because it points us toward the New Testament and the reign of Christ, both now and forever, in our own lives, in our different communities and cultures, and in the cosmos.

## A Template for the Orthodox Interpretation of Biblical Texts

In accordance with the proposal of Fr. Theodore G. Stylianopoulos that Orthodox Biblical interpretation ought to have a three-level approach, the following template is offered for preachers, teachers, Bible study leaders, catechists and students of the Scriptures generally:[1]

## Job 1:20-22; 40:3-5; 42:1-6—Job's View of His Relationship with the Lord

[23] Pelikan, p. 54.

| Level | Process | In Tradition / Fathers (Theoria) | Applicable Now (Praxis) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Exegetical** | **Historical / Contextual**<br><br>***(using the full range of critical tools)*** | The unknown author of Job was an Israelite, as indicated by the many uses of the covenant name for God, *Yahweh.* The date the book was written could be any time between the reign of Solomon (which began in 970 B.C.) to the exile to Babylon (which began in 597 B.C.).<br><br>Because of translation difficulties the Septuagint is 400 lines shorter than the Masoretic text. *The Orthodox Study Bible (OSB)* notes that the book of Job is "the longest ancient Hebrew poem that has ever known to be composed."<br><br>St. Ambrose of Milan has stressed that Job was "stronger when sick than when well." St. John Chrysostom, like many other Biblical commentators—both Jewish and Christian (Orthodox and non-Orthodox) has focused on the character of Job as indicated by his conversations with his "friends." The exegesis in this template looks closely at Job's actual words to God Himself. | The question of how the justice of God can be reconciled to human suffering is timeless. If it is assumed that God is just, that He is almighty and that no human is completely innocent, then Job's "friends" have a case against him. However, just as God the Father permitted His Son to suffer crucifixion, so God permits the devil to challenge Job, in order to establish firmly that God's righteousness is not for his own personal gain. We too should remember that we are righteous and wish to follow God because He exists, not to seek personal gain but to find Truth. |
| | **Allegorical / Typological**<br><br>***(as derived from Tradition)*** | St. Gregory the Great has suggested that "just as the stars appear one by one in the night sky so in the OT the different virtues are revealed by the different saints: longanimity by Noah, obedience by Abraham, chastity by Isaac, and by Job, patience." (see the website: www.christendom-awake.org/pages/thomas-crean/job.htm ). However, many modern (non-Orthodox) Biblical commentators have argued that Job's cry for vindication in Chapters 29-31 is a sign that Job is not patient, but a rebel who believes that God has no right to punish him. A close reading of the text does not support this approach and ignores both Job's opening and closing responses to the experience of suffering, five passages of which are read during Orthodox Holy Week. St. Gregory the Great also writes | The 4th century Biblical critic St. Hesychius of Jerusalem argues that when Job said in 1:20 "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return," this was "less a sign of mourning than [an attempt] to get rid of what possessions were left with him … leaving the enemy no means by which he could further test him." This insight supports an apophatic interpretation—that the essence of God is ineff-able (that is, cannot be expressed in words) and unknowable—for Job |

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| | | of 42:4, "Hear me, O Lord" that "Speaking to God is not so much what we say with our mouths, but rather 'to long for Him with eager desires'" (OSB note on 42:4). | and for us. We too need to learn with Job that we cannot fully know and fully understand the nature of God (42:3). |
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| **Interpretative** | **Spiritual / Ethical** | A sound chapter-by-chapter study of the book of Job is Father Patrick Reardon's *The Trial of Job* (Conciliar Press, 2005). Father Patrick places particular emphasis on intercessory prayer as a means by which both Job and his friends "are restored to God's favour" (p. 8; Job, Ch. 42). "Job is trapped in his own subjectivity unable to see the world from God's perspective" (Ch. 38-41; Reardon, p. 99). The three short passages cited at the beginning of this template could be called "Job on the Lord." These are the only statements that Job makes directly to the Lord Himself and are worthy of careful reflection and prayer, especially Job's awareness that "nothing is impossible for you [Lord]" (42:2). (This applies to each of our lives, as much as to Job.) | St. Gregory the Great insists that: "God does not reply in private speaking to the hearts of men one by one, but fashions His word in such a manner as to satisfy the inquiries of all men. For . . . there is [no] need to seek a special answer from the voice of God, in our own special sufferings. For there [is] a general reply given to all of us in our special sufferings: there the conduct of those who go before is a model [in His Scriptures] for such as come after." |
| | **Personal / Social** | St. John Chrysostom stresses that whereas the man in Psalm 1 is clearly a Jew whose "will [or "delight" M] is the Law of the Lord," (Psalm 1:2), Job "is only a man—any just man anywhere . . . not a Jew." Yet, "the first chapter of Job describes him, in fact, as the embodiment of the ideals held out in the first psalm" (Reardon, p. 17).<br>For further reflections from the Church Fathers on the book of Job, see Johanna Manley's *Wisdom, Let Us Attend: Job, the Fathers, and the OT (Monastery Books, 1997).* | Both the Psalms and Job begin with the blessing of a single person (See Reardon, p. 17); and this is highly significant for each of us, because both the opening psalm and the entire book of Job focus on the reality that "The Lord knows the way of the righteous" (Psalm 1:6); and it is our task in life to find and follow that path. |
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| **Transformative** | **The Call to Holiness** | The call to holiness requires an acceptance of our own mortality. "The greatest trial of Job will come in the consideration of his own mortality, which is the sad inheritance he has | We too like Job can arrive at "a new state of humility, not from consideration of [our] own sins, but by an |

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| | | received from Adam. Job's faithful service stands in sharp relief against the disobedience of Adam, which brought death into the world" (Reardon, p. 18). | experience of God's overwhelming power and glory" (Reardon, p. 103). |
| | **The Call to Witness** | In *Encountering Scripture: A Scientist Explores the Bible* (SPCK, 2010), John Polkinghorne points out that "instead of dealing with [Job's] plight . . . The Lord simply takes Job on a tour of the wonders of creation, including contemplating the hippopotamus and the crocodile, described in exalted mythical terms (Job, Chapters 38-41). The point seems to be that the Creator values and cares for all creatures in appropriate ways. All of nature is part of the great drama of creation, and is not there just to be a backdrop to the human play" (p. 27). | We too are called not only to transform our own lives—to bring them closer to God's will for each of us, but also to care for (and transform) nature, especially in protecting animals and the environment. How we use the resources of the earth is part of the call we receive from God to witness to the glory of His creation. |

[1] In *"The New Testament, An Orthodox Perspective, Volume 1: Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics," (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997, Ch. 7)*, Fr. Theodore sets out three levels serving a sound Orthodox hermeneutical process. These are: **1. Exegetical** - using all critical, contextual, textual and literary methods to determine "the level of understanding of the biblical text in its historical context of literary form and conceptuality …" (p. 190**). 2. Interpretative** – evaluating means derived from the exegetical stage as applicable contextually to the reader's contemporary issues and concerns (p. 197). **3. Transformative** – experiencing life changing practical applications of insights derived from the previous two stages. In ALL of these three levels, the Orthodox context must be the Church as the locus of divine revelation and inspiration. Here the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth as manifested in the biblical text, the teachings of the Fathers and the liturgical context. In Ch. 4, p. 115f. Fr. Theodore explains the historical and spiritual exegetical approaches which, following the Fathers, must be applied throughout. Classically these have concerned the Antiochian emphasis on the "literal" or historical approach and the Alexandrian emphasis on the allegorical and typological interpretations that reveal the inter-connectedness of all Scripture in Tradition at deeper levels of understanding.

| Job 1:20-22 (Masoretic text) | Job 1:20-22 (Septuagint LXX) |
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| 20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said: | 20 So Job arose, and rent his garments, and shaved the hair of his head, and fell on the earth, and worshipped, 21 and said, I myself came forth naked from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, the |

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| "Naked I came from my mother's womb,<br>And naked shall I return there.<br>The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;<br>Blessed be the name of the LORD."<br><br>22 In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong. | Lord has taken away: as it seemed good to the Lord, so has it come to pass; blessed be the name of the Lord. 22 In all these events that befell him Job sinned not at all before the Lord, and did not impute folly to God. |
| Job 40:3-5 (Masoretic text)<br>3 Then Job answered the LORD and said:<br><br>4 "Behold, I am vile;<br>What shall I answer You?<br>I lay my hand over my mouth.<br>5 Once I have spoken, but I will not answer;<br>Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further." | Job 40:3-5 (Septuagint LXX)<br>3 Then Job answered the LORD and said:<br>4 Then Job answered the Lord and said:<br>Why am I still judged and admonished?<br>Even if I rebuke the Lord, hear such things and am nothing? But what answer will I give to these things? I will put my hand over my mouth. 5 I have spoken once. I will not do a second time. |
| Job 42:1-6 (Masoretic text)<br>1 Then Job answered the Lord and said: 2 "I know that You can do everything,<br>And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.<br>3 You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?'<br>Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,<br>Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.<br>4 Listen, please, and let me speak;<br>You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.' 5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear,<br>But now my eye sees You. 6 Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes."<br><br>*New King James Version **(NKJV).** Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.* | Job 42:1-6 (Septuagint LXX)<br>1 Then Job answered and said to the Lord, 2 I know that thou canst do all things, and nothing is impossible with thee. 3 For who is he that hides counsel from thee? or who keeps back his words, and thinks to hide them from thee? and who will tell me what I knew not, great and wonderful things which I understood not? 4 But hear me, O Lord, that I also may speak: and I will ask thee, and do thou teach me. 5 I have heard the report of thee by the ear before; but now mine eye has seen thee. 6 Wherefore I have counted myself vile, and have fainted: and I esteem myself dust and ashes. |