

**HISTORICAL BOOKS
OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**
Sample Lesson



1 Kings 17:2-16



This sample lesson is from the Level 3 course **Historical Books of the Old Testament**.

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Introduction

Our Open Learning courses are designed to help you learn by means of:



Home Study

Each course is made up of **five Blocks** and each Block has **eight lessons**. If you have about $\frac{3}{4}$ hr to spare (very roughly), you can complete one lesson. These lessons require you to read and interact with the course material as well as with your Bible.

Each lesson is **programmed** to help you check your progress as you work through. To get the maximum benefit it is important that you use the course in the way it was intended:

1. Read section 1 (often referred to by the technical term 'frame' 1).
2. Make the response required, if there is one.
3. Check that your answer corresponds with the feedback given in the 'feedback' section at the end. (Wherever feedback is given, it is marked with a raven).
4. Proceed to section 2.



Note that the **course** is programmed—**you** are **not** being programmed! The aim of programming is that:

1. you can check frequently that you have understood the material presented;
2. you are stimulated to active and critical thinking;
3. you reinforce what you learn and are better able to remember it.

Sometimes, discussion frames are given. These are clearly indicated by a heading 'For Discussion' and box. Here you should answer the question in your own words and come to the group meeting prepared to discuss the question as indicated.

At the end of each lesson, we encourage you to spend some time in reflection on how what you have learnt applies to you in the situation where God has placed you.

Group Meeting

Regular group meetings take place (normally fortnightly) where you will have the opportunity to discuss points of interest that have arisen and think through with others how your learning may be applied. At the end of each block of home study, you will also normally be given a five-minute quiz.

The group meetings give the opportunity for you to clarify ideas and to share your own thoughts and to listen to the ideas of others. The process of learning from the Bible in a group is an essential part of the programme. It is here that you are able to think through areas of application and to pray and support each other in your studies.

Practical Application

Built into our courses are questions that encourage you to apply the message of the Bible to daily life. You are also encouraged to think through how your studies relate to your own discipleship and the mission and ministry of the local church.

Block 1 Lesson 3

Joshua 9-12: Form Criticism



Preparing for this lesson:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take a moment to pray that God will help you as you study Joshua.• Remember to keep a notebook handy to note down any questions or issues for discussion.
Objectives	At the end of this lesson you will be able to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. answer questions on Jos 9-12;2. explain briefly the methods of form criticism



1. The first task for today is to read through **Joshua 9 - 12**. As before we suggest you write a very brief summary of the contents of each chapter. Don't worry about the mass of names you will meet today.

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____



2. We shall now try and distract you from what you have just read - by considering another branch of biblical scholarship:

Form Criticism This may be defined as the study of literary 'forms' in the Old Testament and the attempt to determine their 'settings in life' prior to being written down. 'Setting in life' is a technical term used to describe the situation in which a particular type of communication operates. This will become clearer as we go along. Look at the following 'literary form':

Dear David,

Thank you very much indeed for your gift.

I have always wanted an aspidistra. It is beautiful.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

Mike

Obviously this has the **form** of a **letter**. What are the characteristics that tell us this?



3. There are several letters preserved in the Bible. Can you think of any?



4. You may well have thought first of the letters of Paul and perhaps the letters to the seven churches of Asia (Rev 1-2). Here are the beginnings of two less well known letters:

From the king of Assyria to Hezekiah (2 K 19:9-13)

From Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon (Jer 29:3-23)

Have a look at these passages very quickly. They obviously don't begin 'Dear Hezekiah' etc. But have they any special characteristics that would identify them as 'letters'? Concentrate on the beginning and end.



5. The form is not identical but starts with 'Thus says' followed by the name of the sender. Notice that the message is sent in the first person (i.e. 'I say to you') as if the sender was actually speaking directly to the addressee(s).

Does this remind you of any other type of communication in the Old Testament?



6. Let's now have a look at 2K 19:9-13 (a letter) and Jer 45 (a prophetic message). Write in the spaces below whether the features listed belong to characteristics of a letter (l) or a prophetic message (pm) or both (lpm).

- a. Begin with 'Thus says' + name of sender ____
- b. Have a message in the first person ____
- c. Delivered indirectly by a messenger ____
- d. Spoken by a messenger ____
- e. Written down; read by the addressee ____



7. You probably agreed with most of the above answers. In c., remember that the sender is the LORD and the messenger is the prophet. We learn at least two things from this exercise:

- a. The prophet was basically a messenger of the LORD.
- b. The basic form of prophetic messages is almost the same as that of a letter.

Form criticism then is interested in discerning the forms of literary units in the Bible. But it is also interested in the 'setting in life' or 'life situation' in which each form was used. The terminology may be confusing, but the idea is simple: we try to decide on the circumstances in which a particular form of message is delivered. For example, a letter today has this sort of life setting:

The sender writes the message, puts it in an envelope, deposits it in a post box;

Post office officials collect it and, after a somewhat complicated process, deliver it through the letter box of the addressee.

The addressee reads it.

See if you can write down a setting in life for a letter sent in the time of Hezekiah by one king to another.



8. For Discussion



If we can discover the form of a particular section in the Old Testament, and describe how it would have been delivered, then we may well be able to understand its meaning better. You might like to ask yourself what you gain from trying to visualize the situation in 2K 19:9-13. Jot down your ideas below and discuss them in your meeting.

9. There is one more important task for form critics to do. Before we can classify a particular form we must **decide the extent of the self-contained unit**. This is easy when we are discussing something like 2K 19:9-13.


We have a clear **introduction to the letter itself**:

'Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah, saying:...'

Then we have the **introductory formula within the letter**.

The end is confirmed when v14 continues the narrative. It is not always so simple. If you have time and energy sometime have a look at Jer 29:24-32.

We may sum up the three most important tasks as:



10. Incidentally you will find that some books use the German phrase for 'setting in life': *Sitz im Leben*. Use this if you want to, but it is unlikely to enhance your reputation!

Let us look now at a few other Old Testament forms. Underline the characteristic words in the following extracts:

2K 20:1 (a prophetic oracle): 'Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order for you shall die, you shall not recover.'

Am 5:18 (a cry of woe): 'Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!'

Jer 15:10 (a cry of lament): 'Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land.'



11. There are indications in these cases of the **setting in life** of each form:

A prophet (Isaiah) went directly to an individual (Hezekiah) and delivered a short oracle.

A prophet (Amos) calls out woe in some public place.

A prophet in distress (Jeremiah the prophet) pours out his troubles to _____

12. Notice that in all these cases the words were originally spoken, not written. Old Testament form criticism concentrates on trying to find out the situation in life at an oral stage, i.e. **before the words were written down**. I wonder if any of you gave 'his mother' as the answer in the last frame. If so it will be useful in illustrating the next point. Consider the following 'letters' and **see if you can describe their settings in life**. You will see that for some of them there are two types of answer: a fictitious setting in life and the real one.

Example a.

My dear Wormwood,

I note what you say about guiding your patient's reading and taking care that he sees a good deal of his materialist friend. But are you not being a trifle *naif*? It sounds as if you supposed that *argument* was

the way to keep him out of the Enemy's clutches. Do remember you are there to fuddle him. From the way some of you young fiends talk, anyone would suppose it was our job to *teach!*

Your affectionate uncle,

Screwtape

[In case you have not met these names before, Wormwood is a junior devil; Screwtape a senior devil]



- 13. *Optional:*** do these only if you have time and energy to spare.

Example b.

Dear Malcolm,

I am all in favour of your idea that we should go back to your old plan of having a more or less set subject - an *agendum* - for our letters. When we were last separated the correspondence languished for lack of it. Prayer, which you suggest, is a subject that is a good deal in my mind.

I'd meant to follow up what you say about Rose Macaulay's letters, but that must wait till next week.

Yours sincerely

Clive

Example c.

Sir,

I write to complain of your grossly misleading coverage of the Albanian Crisis. The issue is not at all revisionism but humanization.

Yours etc.

H.W. Gladstone

(Hon. Sec., Society for the Prevention of Blood Sports within Marxism)

Example d.

Dear Fellow Anglicans,

The time has come for us to declare our support for the Ecology Party. The General Synod last year declared [etc. etc. etc. and etc.]

Yours in the service of our Lord

D. Pringle-Pattison

Example e.

Dear Sir,

On 26 March I sent you an invoice for £12.95 for some humorous definitions and a comical poem I submitted to 'That's Life.'

I have not received the money and I must tell you that unless I get satisfaction by return of post I will be compelled to put the matter in the hands of my solicitor.

Yours faithfully

Henry Root



- 14.** Sometimes, therefore, a form can be used irregularly or be transferred to another setting in life. The same is true of some biblical forms. E.g.
- a. In 2 Samuel 12 Nathan tells a story. It has the form of a factual account requiring a decision from the king but it is really a parable. (See Jg 9:8-15 or 2 K 14:9 for stories which *can only have been* parables).
 - b. Amos 4:4 has the form of a 'call to worship' such as we find in the Psalms (e.g. Ps 95:1). It is actually ironical and intends to make people realize how ridiculous it is to come to worship in the way that they have been doing.
 - c. Amos 5:2 is described as a lamentation. These were uttered publicly in times of personal or national tragedy. David lamented over Saul and Jonathan, and later over Abner (2 S 1:17ff.; 3:33f.). Amos's lament, however, is uttered **before** the disaster and has the force of a _____
- 15.** Form criticism, then, deals with **forms** and their **settings in life**. And before we can decide on the form of a unit we must define the limits of a unit. So we have the three main tasks of form criticism set out in frame 9.

We have seen that complications may arise when a form is used in a new setting. Very often, however, we can determine the probable original circumstances in which a particular oracle, exhortation, promise etc. was given, and this may illuminate its meaning.

Our knowledge of forms in the Bible and their settings in life must be built up mainly from a careful study of the Bible itself. Often our conclusions can only be tentative.



16. Read the following passage and write down briefly what is wrong with it.

'In form the 'Tragic Tale of Little Red Riding Hood' is a short story. The events described must have taken place more than a century ago since there are no longer any wolves in Britain.'



17. Obviously it is important to decide what sort of story we have if we are to understand its purpose and message. We might classify two different types of story thus:

Form	Purpose	Message
Fairy story	To entertain	Good triumphs over evil? (Is there necessarily a message?)
Factual story	To impart knowledge of an event or events	E.g. learn from this example?



For Discussion

Form criticism then seeks to identify a literary unit, and to specify its form, its original setting in life, so as to understand better its purpose and message. Do you agree that this is worthwhile endeavour? Why or why not?

18. As with literary and historical criticism, the most disagreement arises over the **results** obtained by form critics. In the supplementary material two examples are given of passages over which there has been fierce disagreement. If you have time have a look before the next group meeting.



Review

19. Finally, write down in your own words the three main tasks of form criticism.



Decide _____

Classify _____

Describe _____



20. Now here are the questions on Joshua 9-12:

1. Did you notice anything amusing in the story of the Gibeonites' coming to Joshua? _____
2. What happened to the Gibeonites after the treaty was made?

3. Who was Adonizedek? _____
4. What miraculous event led to Joshua's victory over the five kings?

5. Where did the five kings who fled from Joshua hide?

6. Where did Joshua put them? _____
7. Which city was 'formerly the head of all those kingdoms'?

8. What was unusual in the Israelites' treatment of this city 'that stood on a mound'? _____
9. Where did the Hivites live? _____
10. What is the main message of Joshua 9? _____

Further reading:

Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible vol 1, pp. 416-7.

E.B.Mellor (ed.), *The Making of the Old Testament*, CUP, 1972, pp. 65-70.

Reflecting on this lesson

Note down in your notebook anything from today's lesson:



- that you want to discuss in your group meeting;
- that is significant for your own personal faith;
- that is significant for explaining the Old Testament to others.

Spend some time in prayer asking God to help to put into practice what you have learnt.



Feedback: Form Criticism

block 1 lesson 3

1.3.1	You might have something like : Treaty with Gibeonites by deception : Five kings defeated and killed : Hazor and north defeated : list of defeated kings
1.3.2	You probably pointed to these: It begins with: 'Dear' followed by a name It ends with: a concluding greeting ('with best wishes'), the formula 'Yours sincerely', and the name of the sender
1.3.5	I hope you said: Yes, prophetic messages.
1.3.6	a. lpm : b. lpm : c. lpm (see below) : d. l? + pm : e. l (and sometimes also pm)
1.3.7	You should have something like this: The king writes (or gets a scribe to write) the message. A messenger carries it to the other king (presumably he had to have some form of identification/authorization with him). He (probably) read it aloud and then gave it to the addressee king. (See 2K 19:10, 14)
1.3.9	Decide the extent of a literary unit Classify the form Describe the setting in life
1.3.10	Thus says the LORD : Woe to you : Woe is me
1.3.11	God or the LORD
1.3.12	Fictitious setting in life: letter from a senior to a junior devil; real: found in a book (The Screwtape Letters by C S Lewis, Fontana. It is actually meant to be teaching for Christians about things like temptation, difficulties in the Christian life, etc. You might like to consider why this is an effective form to use).
1.3.12	b. From Letters to Malcolm (by C S Lewis, Fontana). Genuine letters but more like teaching or discussion than personal letters usually are. Published in a book : c. A letter to a newspaper. Intended to communicate with the editor but also (more importantly) with the public by being published : d. Either a circular letter, duplicated (?) and sent to a number of people or an open letter intended to communicate by being published : e Apparently a letter from someone demanding payment of a debt, but the real purpose was to be able to publish The Henry Root Letters ('Letter to the Accounts Dept of the BBC', Futura, p. 31, 1981 (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980).
1.3.13	prophecy
1.3.15	It makes no sense to discuss the historical setting of a 'fairy story'. (You may have thought of other objections)
1.3.19	the extent of the (literary) unit : the form : the setting in life (Sitz-im-Leben)
1.3.20	1. You might have said 'no' quite legitimately, but many have found the Gibeonites' worn-out sandals and mouldy bread ploy amusing (9:3-5). : 2. They were forced to become hewers of wood and drawers of water (9:21). : 3. King of Jerusalem (10:1) : 4. The sun 'stood still' (10:21). : 5. cave (at Makkedah) : 6. on five trees : 7. Hazor (11:10) : 8. It alone was burnt (11:13) : 9. In Gibeon : 10. Your answer. Discuss it in your group meeting.

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