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CERTIFICATE COURSE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

THE BOOK OF BOOKS:

Welcome to this course of study of the first 39 books that make up the “Book of books.” Although we refer to the Bible as a “book,” it is, of course, composed of many individual books of different types – law, history, poetry, prophecy, etc. – gathered into the collections Christians call the Old and New Testaments. Together, these collected books of the Bible have probably had a greater impact on the world than most other books combined – the Bible is truly the “Book of books” in terms of its significance as well as being a book made up of many smaller books. But while all Christians are aware of the Bible’s overall importance, many do not spend much time reading and studying the Old Testament and do not fully realize just how important the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible) was in the development of the New Testament – and still is for our understanding of the Christian Scriptures.

The books of the Hebrew Bible were, after all, the only Bible possessed and used by Jesus and the earliest Christians. And even when the Christian Scriptures began to come into existence, the Hebrew Bible was foundational to almost everything written in them. The fact is, the Old Testament represents a full 75% of the overall Bible used by Christians, but the importance of the oldest part of our Bible is qualitative as well as quantitative. We cannot deeply understand the New Testament without understanding the Old (Romans 15:4; etc.). That is one of the primary reasons for this course: to provide a deeper understanding of key parts of the first three-quarters of the overall Bible – and, indirectly, of the New Testament as well.

COURSE APPROACH AND GOALS:

The material in this course is presented for the most part from a Protestant perspective, but the approach is non-denominational and non-dogmatic. This means that where Christians of different backgrounds view sections of Scripture differently, the major viewpoints are summarized, and an attempt is made to give a fair evaluation of the different views. This approach provides vital background for those wishing to pursue teaching of the word of God as well as for our ability as individual Christians to communicate properly with other believers.

A major thrust of this course – and of all Cornerstone courses – is to teach the importance of the underlying *message* of the biblical accounts over and above individual or sectarian viewpoints about their details.

Many in-depth Bible courses consist of either analytic studies of the individual books of the Old or New Testament, or, alternately, they are synthetic – bringing together scattered scriptures relative to selected themes or doctrines. The problem with these approaches is that on the one hand, book-by-book studies can usually only give surface treatment to many important topics because of the sheer volume of material they must cover, and on the other hand, narrow thematic and doctrinal studies frequently miss the richness of the context in which the individual scriptures are found.

The present course takes a totally different approach by looking closely at key events recorded in the flow of the biblical text. This is actually the way the Bible presents its material to us – in terms of God’s actions in the history of the world and within the lives of the people through whom he has worked.

When we understand this, we begin to see that the fundamental unit of scriptural understanding is the *event* rather than a single book of the Bible or an isolated doctrine. Study focused on the whole book of Exodus, for example, is going to miss a great deal of important detail regarding the Ten Commandments. On the other hand, study of the isolated doctrine of law is going to miss a great deal regarding the setting and significance of the giving and application of the Commandments. It is in the study of biblical events that we see the Bible’s message most clearly and completely.

Based on this underlying philosophy, this course looks closely at the most important events recorded in the Old Testament – and the people associated with them. Beginning with creation and ending with the events that were preparatory to the coming of the Messiah in the New Testament era, the course does not cover everything in the Old Testament (an impossible task for any single course), but it offers an overview of its key events resulting in insights not gained by other methods of study.

The specific goals of this course are for the student to learn to focus on the most important events of the Old Testament, to learn to analyze them effectively, and to learn additional background information that will help in better understanding the Bible at a much deeper level than reading the text alone can provide. This is not to minimize in any way the value of simply reading the Bible – but to stress that the more relevant knowledge we can bring to our study of the Bible, the more understanding we will gain from it.

STUDENT APPROACH AND GOALS:

You may take this course at any pace you wish. There are no deadlines, but we recommend that you set a goal to cover at least one lesson unit each week. It is also a good idea to try to set aside a specific time each day to work on the course if you can, in order to establish a pattern of study as a habit.

More important than our *scheduling* for effective study and learning is our *attitude* toward the material in this course. Study of the Bible involves much more than simply learning facts. The simple meaning of the words in the Bible can be understood by anyone – whatever their attitude and approach may be. But the significance and fullness of the meaning of those words are only attainable by those who are humble enough to let the Bible truly speak to them (Matthew 11:25), and who approach its message prayerfully (Psalm 119:18). As a result, be sure to pray for the understanding that only God can give (Luke 24:45) whenever you approach the word of God. Your study will be incomparably richer with that approach.

Whether you are taking this course because you cannot attend formal Bible school or seminary classes, or to supplement them, or to enrich your own personal study and understanding of the Bible, we hope that you find the course challenging and helpful.

COURSE TEXTBOOKS:

1) *The Bible*. You may use any translation of the Bible for the readings assigned in this course, though for detailed study we recommend a more literal (word-for-word) translation such as the ESV (English Standard Version), rather than a paraphrased (idea-for-idea) version such as the Living Bible. The NIV (New International Version) is a good balance and is quoted in this course unless otherwise noted. If you do not have a Bible, you can select one from those available for free download from our website **FreeChristianEBooks.org**. Of the Bibles offered on that site, we recommend the BSB (Berean Study Bible) for use with this course, as it is quite literal yet very clear.

2) *Discovering the Bible* by R. Herbert (a free download from the Cornerstone website).

3) *Lessons from Old Testament Leaders* by R. Herbert (a free download from the Cornerstone website).

You will also need a notebook or blank sheets of paper to complete the course assignments.

Further Readings. Other books by various authors may be recommended as optional readings at times throughout the course, but all are available for free download from the FreeChristianEBooks.org website.

EXAMINATION AND CERTIFICATION

For those who wish to receive certification for completing the course, a basic test can be completed on the course website at CornerstoneCourses.org. Students passing the test can request a certificate of completion which will be delivered online in PDF format that can be printed or viewed on any computer.

COURSE OUTLINE:

Unit. Topic – Biblical Text

1. Introduction to the Course
2. Background
3. The Creation
4. The Story of the Fall
5. The Flood Story
6. Babel and the Nations
7. Abraham
8. Patriarchs and Promises
9. Joseph
10. Moses
11. The Exodus
12. The Ten Commandments

Unit. Topic – Biblical Text

13. Covenant and Tabernacle
14. The Promised Land
15. The Judges
16. Samuel and Saul
17. David
18. Solomon
19. Israel and Judah
20. The Prophets
21. Downfall and Exile
22. Return and Rebuild
23. Between the Testaments
24. Course Completion Unit

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