CHAPTER TWO

THE OLD TESTAMENT MESSAGE

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. 62

The message from the Old Testament is distinct and clear. It is that there cannot be any tolerance of the social injustices. A noble-minded soul should voice his protest against the perpetrators of evil. All those who exploit and victimise should be weeded out. The aim, then, is to create a society that functions on just and fair means and ends. There must be equitable justice to all. Men must live together embracing brotherhood. Goodness, Grace, Kindness and Mercy should prevail. In short, there must be the Kingdom of God on earth. It is with this definitive design that the Old Testament projects prophets who cry vengeance against injustices. These prophets are the friends, philosophers and guides to the faithful and the good.

Moreover, quite significantly, the Old Testament communicates to the perceptive reader the nature, power and glory of God. It identifies in clear cut terms God as the Omnipotent and Omniscient and the All Pervasive. Again, the message is that life gains in relevance and significance in accepting the essence and existence of God and striking a father-child relationship with Him.

Yet again, the sharpest message one can come across in any religious book is that God turns into angry Jehovah, vehemently and forcefully punishing the sinner.

62 The Bible, Genesis, 17:7.
The other message which is so very relevant and significant is that God tests the faithful.

The Lord trieth the righteous . . . . 63

This is exemplified in a life of suffering and struggle passed through by Job. After terrible affliction he exclaims:

... When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold . . . . 64

And the Old Testament which carries within it several relevant messages and truths forms the first part of the Holy Bible. And the Bible is a whole library of books, compiled by many authors spread over a long period of time. But the greatness and grandeur of this magnificent book lies in the fact that a unifying thread runs through the whole Bible, making it one single book. The sure sense of the reality of God is that scarlet vein that gives distinction to the growing pattern of its thought.

The Old Testament and New Testament constitute a divine library, one sublime unity, origins in past to issues in future, processes between connecting two eternities . . . . 65

The Bible begins with the depiction of the creation of the universe and ends with the re-creation of the universe. In the beginning it describes the fall of man in a garden where paradise is lost; it concludes in a garden, with paradise re-gained. The Bible's whole concern is with the relationship between God and Man. The broad divisions, the Old Testament and

63 The Bible, Psalm, 11:5.
64 The Bible, The Book of Job, 23:10.
the New Testament, perhaps mark a dividing line in the History of the world as B.C. and A.D., yet it is one book with God as its grand subject and Truth as its great theme. The Bible as a whole is a unified record of the activity of the one true God and man's response to His saving work. The mighty acts of God in Israel are the core of the Old Testament, even as God's mighty acts in Christ constitute the Apostolic preaching and the New Testament. Incidentally, it has been rightly said that the Bible has an hour-glass structure:

The hour glass begins at the broad base of creation and moves in ever narrowing fashion to the human family, a part of creation, to the chosen people, to the Remnant and on to the One in whom the purpose of God is fulfilled. Out from the One, the hour glass moves in ever expanding fashion to the Apostles, to the church as New Israel, to mankind and finally to the broad base of the New Creation.

* And Jesus Christ is the point of Spiritual convergence.

The word "Testament" or "agreement" is a translation of the word diatheke in Greek and berith in Hebrew, meaning covenant, which is a legal term and signifies any binding or undertaking. In Scripture, it is used to describe what God has done. It is not to be interpreted as a kind of mutual contract.

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It is more like a "testament" or will in which the testator has sole and entire discretion in the disposal of His own estate. Indeed, the English word "covenant" and "testament" can be interchanged; and that is why the two halves of the Bible are known as the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament actually means old covenant, referring to the covenant at Sinai and the New covenant is the covenant concluded by Christ in His blood. This covenant idea is the essential binding factor between the Old and New Testaments. The term "covenant" strongly expresses the conviction that God had entered into a special relationship or covenant with the Israelites in the Old Testament and to the mankind at large in the New Testament. It is a covenant that has established bonds of loyalty and responsibility between God and humanity.

An important covenant was made by God with Abraham involving significant promises for Israel's entire future. The Hebrew people were in slavery in Egypt, under many Pharoahs and were oppressed. Finally, God commanded Moses to lead His people to the promised land. At the foot of Mount Sinai, they paused. There a covenant was made with God, who from thence forth was to be called the God of Israel. God who has made His pact with man is a God "who changes not." Again, through the prophet Jeremiah, God renewed His covenant saying:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:
Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they break, although I was an husband unto them,* saith the Lord:
But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put

67 The Bible, Malachi, 3:16.
* This can be cross linked with the main theme in Song of Solomon.
my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. ...  

Thus, the covenant faith of Israel is basic and more significant than the religion that grew from it:

So Israel's faith grew. Rising out of the mire of surrounding polytheism and superstition, it increased and burgeoned until it became a vast and dizzying vista of the ways of God. Through all the changes one conviction did not change and it is the heart of the covenant thinking God works with man, and by and through a holy people, a whole people, whom He has chosen and who have chosen Him. ... 

Moreover, the covenant thinking was dominant in the Jewish mind during the period of Jesus, as it has been dominant ever since; and the Jews call themselves B'nai B'rith meaning "Sons of Covenant". A study of the life of Christ Jesus, His Passion, Death and Resurrection depicts Jesus as the New Moses come to make the New Covenant. God's presence with His people in the Old covenant is fulfilled in an overwhelming manner in the presence of Christ with His believers. Jesus Christ establishes the Church, New Israel, by giving His own life. So, the Old Testament and the New Testament are not separate books. The Old Testament is the covenant made with man about his salvation before Christ came. The New Testament is the agreement God made with man about his salvation after Christ came. In the Old Testament one finds the covenant of law. In the New Testament it is a covenant of grace, which came through Christ. The one led to the other.

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed

68 The Bible, Jeremiah, 31:31-33.
before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.
For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.
Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; . . .
. . . But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up into the faith which should afterwards be revealed.
Wherefore the law was our school master to bring us unto Christ, that we must be justified by faith.
But after that faith is come, we are no longer under the school master . . . .

Ernest Wright observes:

Christ is the key to the central events of the Old Testament, but at the same time, it is the Old Testament which provides the clue to Christ . . . .

Mattam Zecharias also reiterates:

It is through the spectacle of the Old Testament that our eyes must be focused upon the light in Christ; otherwise that light will be blurred and we shall not see it correctly. . . .

Augustine expresses it succinctly:


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70 The Bible, Galatians, 3:17-19, 23-25.
71 Ernest Wright, Quoted by Mattam Zecharias, Opening the Bible - Meeting Christ in Scriptures (Bangalore: Kristu Jothi College, 1988), p.47.
72 Mattam Zecharias, Opening the Bible - Meeting Christ in Scriptures, p.47.
73 Idem.
The Old Testament, therefore, is a great treasure chest and no Christian can fully understand the New Testament revelation of God without an awareness of the contextual relevance of the Old Testament.

The Catholic Bishops of the Second Vatican Council had echoed this belief in the Constitution on Divine Revelation:

The principal purpose to which the plan of the Old Covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming of Christ, the redeemer of all and the messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy. (See Luke 24:44, Jn.5:39, I Pet. 1:10) and to indicate its meaning through various types. (See I Cor. 10:12) . . . 74

For though Christ established the new covenant in his blood, still the books of the Old Testament with all their parts, caught up into the proclamation of the Gospel, acquire and show forth their full meaning in the New Testament... and in turn shed light on it and explain it.... 75

The two testaments, with God as the testator, help one to understand who God is. The Old Testament is clearly the record of the personal dealings of God with men. The relationship between man and God -- a working relationship, not a theory -- is the theme of the Bible.

But neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament contains much in the way of systematic thought about God. They record actions and encounters between men and God. The Bible is the record of the men who met God and who would never for a moment have thought of justifying a belief in His existence by rational proofs.

74 Quoted by Lawrence Boadt, Reading the Old Testament; An Introduction (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p.537.
75 Idem.
The dominant theme in the Old Testament is related to the person of God. Every page of the book defines the essence and existence of God, His Omniscience and Omnipotence. The Old Testament is also the story of the people of Israel. From God's interaction with them, they began to understand God through their experience as a people. The people remembered what God had done for them and they also spoke about what God does for the whole world and all its nations.

From the Hebrew point of view, the existence of God is not debatable. The people had encountered God in their everyday lives. Abraham met God in his own tent and had many personal encounters with Him. He knew God as "The Almighty God," in Hebrew El Shaddai.

El signifies Strong One and Shaddai, the Breasted One. This pictures God as the Strong Nourisher, Strength-Giver, Satisfier and All Bountiful, the Supplier of the needs of His people . . .

He also knew Him as Jehovah Jireh, meaning, the Provider. Jacob called God El Elohi-Israel. God revealed Himself as "I am that I am" to Moses, meaning thereby:

I am the self existent one, the Eternal, the one who always has been and always will be. . .

Joshua had an encounter with God -- Peace Himself and knew Him as Jehovah Shalom meaning God our peace. To king David, "The Lord is
my Shepherd" -- Jehovah Rohi. The titles given to God by Patriarchs, Prophets and the people of Israel are many and all these proclaim and affirm the truth about God -- The Eternal and the Almighty. A formal definition of God runs thus:

God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. . . .

The various attributes of God perhaps are spelt out in this definition, but one cannot argue that it is all-comprehensive.

The first and the most important theological theme found in the Old Testament is that God is One, which one is of three parts -- Trinity. The neighbours of Israel with their polytheism and elaborate rituals and rites believed in several personal gods. In contrast, Israel insisted on a single divine being who ordered and controlled everything out of love for the good of all creation. The creation story in Genesis makes this clear:

And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was good . . . .

The flood in Noah's time and the Tower of Babel story make it clear that no rivals or struggles of other forces could overwhelm God.

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually . . .
And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the

81 The Bible, Psalms, 23:1.
83 The Bible, Genesis, 1:12.
creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them... 

And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man and cattle and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth; and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark... 

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left off to build the city...

The first of the ten commandments given to the people of Israel by Moses also clearly states this:

Thou shalt have no other God before me...

This only God ruled human history and actively guided, protected, cared for and was involved in human affairs. The Old Testament, therefore, identifies repeatedly that God is holy, monarchial, good shepherdly, parental and creative. It always emphasizes the power and glory of God. And the highest point of Old Testament theology is reached in the message to the perceptive reader that he should attach himself to this Lord God with all his spirit and power.

84 The Bible, Genesis, 6:5,7.
85 The Bible, Genesis, 7:23.
86 The Bible, Genesis, 11:4,7,8.
87 The Bible, Exodus, 20:3.
Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou
shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with
all thy soul, and with all thy might.\footnote{88}{The Bible, Deuteronomy, 6:4,5.}

If on one side God is projected as a loving and caring father, on a different
plane the \textit{Old Testament} portrays Jehovah as a fearful God of wrath and
judgement.

\textit{The Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous
God.} \footnote{89}{The Bible, Deuteronomy, 4:24.}

Because of His perfect holiness, he could never compromise with evil. He
always sets Himself implacably against evil. God's covenant demands
obedience on the part of man. And in obedience to God is seen the right
reason. Prophet Samuel pronounces God's rejection of Saul saying:

\textit{...Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken
than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubborness
is an iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the
word of the Lord, He hath rejected thee from being
king.} \footnote{90}{The Bible, I Samuel, 15:22:23.}

The other message of the \textit{Old Testament} is that it projects God as an
embodiment of justice. Understandably, one could look upon Him for
justice. In fact, to the people of the \textit{Old Testament} God had revealed
Himself as the God of Justice. Therefore, the God of righteousness has
every right to demand obedience from His people with whom He had made
the covenant.
God created man in His own image. . . . 91

and so demands that they be like God. He says:

Ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy . . . 92

God is absolutely holy. The holiness of God, the wrath of God and the health of the creation of God are inseparably linked. He demands this holiness in His creation. He cannot tolerate sin, transgression, iniquity. He is a zealous God, so full of wrath when His creation bows down to other gods and graven images or indulges in sinful practices. The prophets through whom God spoke repeatedly reminded the people of God's righteousness, justice and His holiness. Habakkuk testifies God's character in the words:

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look into iniquity . . . 93

This explains the flood in Noah's time that eliminated mankind from the face of the earth.

The prophets stress that God is just and jealous and their focus is on a God who is vengeful.

God is jealous and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth and is furious; the Lord will take revenge on His adversaries and He reserveth wrath for His enemies . . . 94

declares Nahum as he foretells the doom of Nineveh. At the same time, this God of wrath is "slow to anger and great in power"95 say Nahum and

91 The Bible, Genesis, 1:27.
92 The Bible, Leviticus, 11:45.
93 The Bible, Habbakuk, 1:13.
94 The Bible, Nahum, 1:2.
95 The Bible, Nahum 1:3, Jonah 3:9.
Jonah. Simultaneously, "God is love"\(^96\) as well. This attribute of God also is seen in God's dealings with men, and He has revealed His mercy and grace to those who repent and acknowledge His saving grace. Noah, because of his righteousness "found grace in the eyes of the Lord."\(^97\) King David repented for his sin and made a sacrifice of his contrite heart, which God accepted. He knew that God's mercy could be claimed only thus:

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise . . . .\(^98\)

This leads us to the message of the **Old Testament** that God is an embodiment of mercy. He never easily gets angry. But when once his wrath is provoked, He angrily punishes the sinner. But then, He is quick to forgive. Thus, the message is that God pardons the repentant soul that confesses its sin and undergoes penance. Therein one reads the glorious triple path of reunion with God through confession, repentance and penance. Thus, the Israelites had a clear understanding of God's mercy and loving kindness:

\[\ldots \text{The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,}\]
\[\text{Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin . . . .}^{99}\]

God spared Nineveh, when the people sat in ashes and repented their sins, heeding to the voice of Jonah.

Yet the fuller revelation of God's grace is seen only in His sending Jesus, His own Son, where one perceives the greatest love of God for mankind:

\[^{96}\text{The Bible, I John 4:8.}\]
\[^{97}\text{The Bible, Genesis, 6:8.}\]
\[^{98}\text{The Bible, Psalms, 51:17.}\]
\[^{99}\text{The Bible, Exodus, 34:6,7.}\]
God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life...  

The Bible, therefore, presents God as a God of wrath and a God of love all at once. A.W. Tozer exclaims thus:

God will always be Himself and grace is an attribute of His holy being. He can no more hide His grace than the sun can hide its brightness. Man may flee from the sunlight to dark and musty caves of the earth, but he cannot put out the sun. So men may in any dispensation despise the grace of God, but they cannot extinguish it...  

The systematic conception about the being of God is inferred from the recorded actions and encounters between men and God. God Almighty, the creator of the universe, is also a personal God who cares for every one of His creations. He demands from His people a personal response of friendship, loyalty, obedience and communication. Man created in the image and likeness of God is also given moral choice and moral responsibility. A wrong moral choice made had ushered sin into the world and since then man's response is sinful and selfish.

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;...  

But the Bible does not treat sin and evil as something to be changed. Sin, which is a human transgression, is a part of the primeval history. Human transgression, a sinful act or thought threatens the relationship of trust between God and man. The actual sin results in man rising in rebellion

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100 The Bible, John, 3:16.
102 The Bible, Romans, 3:23.
against His creator and man breaking away from God. The root of actual sin is in the selfish will. Yet actual sin itself is something which involves one's whole personality. The Bible refers to this state of sinfulness as the heart of man being wicked. Sin is terrible! What one witnesses around to-day are rebellion and riots, war, violence, poverty and discrimination. These reveal how sin and evil have eaten their way right into the fabric of society.

The Old Testament focus is on the fusion of the actual sin with original sin. It calls for confession, repentance and penance of these sins for gaining reunion with God. Incidentally, the term Original Sin explains how all mankind, descending from Adam sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression. "In Adam all men die."^103

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: . . .^104

Yet another interpretation of "Original Sin" is as follows:

Original in the sense that it cannot be traced to any historical event, but belongs to the entire human race wherever it is or has been found. "For all have sinned" -- the sin is ours, we are responsible . . .^105

The angry Jehovah punished Adam and Eve who disobeyed Him by eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge thus:

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of

\(^{103}\) The Bible, I Corinthians, 15:22.
\(^{104}\) The Bible, Romans, 5:12.
which I commanded-thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dost shalt thou return . . . 106

In this is found the message that in the eyes of God the sinner can never go unpunished. This is a Christian diagnosis and it is a realistic appreciation of the situation.

This explains the maladies of the world. According to David H.C. Read there are two formidable rivals to the Christian diagnosis of the world's ills. they are Marxism and Freudianism; Economic exploitation and Psychological mal-adjustment. Read further observes:

If all our ills are due to psychological mal-adjustment, there must be one group of people [psychiatrists] who are normal and can provide remedies . . . 107

If ills are due to economic exploitation, as the communist dogma proclaims, then the proletariat should be free from them in a communist country. But it is not so.

The Christian doctrine states that the only immaculate being is Christ and all others are sinners. Hence, according to the Christian view, however one does well in the psychological, economic, social, political fields for the betterment of mankind, no permanent solution to human problems can be attained from within the human situation. Succour must come from beyond and above. And this is the message of the Old Testament. Man's

106 The Bible, Genesis, 3:17-19.
deliverance is to be found in the action of God. The root of human suffering is traceable to man's alienation from God; and the only panacea to this state lies in a return to God. That is why the Old Testament proclaims God as the people's deliverer, liberator, saviour, the Messiah. Man's deliverance therefore depends completely on the love of God in thought, word and deed. And this is the glorious Old Testament message of lasting value.

The Hebrew society suffered from the societal ills that are even now rampant in the Kafkan wasteland world -- oppression, exploitation, violence, corruption and immorality. Grieved over the sinful condition of Israel, God warns them through Hosea the prophet thus:

Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.
By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood . . . .

The message is that God never tolerates exploitation, victimisation, corruption and immorality. Any redemption for society and man can come from a realization of God's wrath on sinners and of God's mercy towards the repentant.

Moreover, man in Kafkan wasteland world has become dehumanised because of his excessive fetishism. He has literally turned into a machine and has reduced himself to the level of a cipher. The Old Testament points to the dehumanised person a way out of his agonising existence. It is that only humanism could exalt him by granting him reason and responsibility.

108 The Bible, Hosea, 4:1,2.
This humanistic creed is made explicit in the *Old Testament* and it provides man with personal dignity before the supernatural and the divine. The *Old Testament* books indicate that man gains a stature by exercising his reason and performing his responsibility and realising his worth and leading a life of self respect, dignity and honour. In such an individualism lies his redemption:

Insipite of all dark interludes of seeming frustrations and defeat, human history will still seem a heroic possibility that man can work out with God. Where the flame of the Bible burns, neither cynicism not defeatism can exist . . . 109

The *Old Testament* therefore is an interpretation of history, of life and an invitation to co-operate with God in changing the society and shaping future history.

The *Old Testament* places great emphasis on God's acts of liberation. The Israelites had experienced God as a liberator and spoke of Him as "a God of Salvation." 110 No message comes clearer in the *Old Testament* than the fact that God is the liberator of human beings. Repeatedly one comes across in the *Old Testament* people rejecting their covenant relationship which pushes them to a state of oppression and dehumanization. But again and again one evidences God making every effort to ensure that people live in freedom and kinship.

The *Exodus* projects an act of liberation. In the *Exodus* there is a fair image of Yahweh as the liberator, the one who led Israel out of bondage in Egypt. The Israelites in bondage under the Pharoah of Egypt cried to God that

110 The Bible, Psalm, 68:20.
they be freed. God heard their cry and through Moses liberated them from the clutches of the hard-hearted Egyptians that oppressed the Israelites. God liberates. He is at work in history through the forces and factors of liberation, through people fighting for liberation. The Old Testament message is that God rushes to the aid of one who completely surrenders to His will. The only requirement that is to be met is poornasaranagadhi.

The cry for liberation is universal and liberation takes place on all levels: emancipation of man in the economic, political and social spheres. The Old Testament presents a portrait gallery of mighty men who were leaders and liberators through whom God the Saviour had worked wonders. Joseph, Moses, David -- the great heroes of the Old Testament were saviours in different spheres. Their lives are models to gain proper insight into how God, active in history as liberator, had mightily used these men of action and faith as redeemers. Joseph the dreamer saved Egypt from a dreadful famine with God-given wisdom. Moses performing mighty miracles in the name of the Lord could lead six hundred thousand men besides children from Egypt, the land of captivity, into Canaan, the promised land flowing with milk and honey. Like Moses, David also acknowledged God to be his "strength and my redeemer"\(^{111}\) and affirmed his faith in Him: "The Lord is my light and my salvation."\(^{112}\)

In his Psalms, David praises God who hears the cry of the poor and listens to them and answers their prayers. The relevant Psalm is worth quoting here:

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\text{I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my month.}
\]
\[
\text{My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me and}
\]

\(^{111}\) The Bible, Psalm,19:14.
\(^{112}\) The Bible, Psalm,27:1.
let us exalt his name together.
I sought the Lord and He heard me, and delivered me from
all my fears.
They looked unto him and were lightened: and their faces
were not ashamed.
This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved
him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that
fear him and delivereth them. O taste and see that the
Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.
O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them
that fear him.
The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that
seek the Lord shall not want any good thing . . . . 113

Isaiah pictures God as a suffering servant whose role it is to free the
captives.

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord
hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek;
he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim
liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to
them that are bound; . . . . 114

In Hosea and Jeremiah, God pleads with Israel to return and to change its
heart and be liberated. Queen Esther plays a vital role in liberating the
Jews from the snares of death announced by Haman, she being a tool in
the hands of God, the saviour of the world. There is perhaps no stronger
theme anywhere in the Biblical tradition than this one:

It forms the background for understanding the New Tes-
tament proclamation of Jesus; it is the central motif of the
later themes of Messiah and hope. And it certainly has
vital ramification for our world to-day . . . . 115

113 The Bible, Psalm, 34:1-10.
114 The Bible, Isaiah, 61:1.
115 Lawrence Boadt, Reading the Old Testament, p.546.
It is the love of God in action that makes man's deliverance possible. And this is a glorious universal proclaimed to the world by the Old Testament. The main task of God throughout the Old Testament seems to be liberating man from political oppression or economic exploitation, social evil or racial discrimination, communal violence, injustice and mainly relieving him from the bondage of sin. This love in action which reaches down to the lost where they are, and offers them forgiveness which they cannot earn, is known in the Bible as grace. It is Jesus Christ's saving grace. The Christian belief is that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God delivers one from sin:

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sin . . . .

God has a concern for the community as well as interest in the individual. The act of liberation is extended to the society at large as well as to the individual. The liberation of the soul or the body, are both viewed as the same by God. The message of the Old Testament to our own day is a re-affirmation of the worth of the individual.

Totalitarianism denies the worth of the individual. It makes him a pawn in the huge process of power politics. "Believe, obey, fight" is the dogma of the Fascist and it never allows an individual to think for himself or act for himself. The Old Testament does not depict man as merely a pawn in a nation's politics, but every individual is a child of God and part of the universal human family. Every individual has dignity to maintain, because man is made in the image of God and this should be preserved:

116 The Bible, Matthew, 1:21.
For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;
Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth . . . .

In patriarchal Hebrew society, women had a low status, inferior and subordinate to men. A woman was identified not as a separate individual, but in relation to the men in her family on whom she was always dependant. The man as head and father of the family had supreme authority over its members. He desired male children more than female children, so that his name and fame could be perpetuated. A daughter was under his control until her marriage and in extreme cases he would sell her into slavery to clear a debt. A woman along with children, slaves and cattle, was considered to be a man's major possession. A wife's duty was to bear children, preferably male children and only through this function did she obtain some honour and status in society.

But one has some glimpses of a few exceptional women in the Old Testament who acted on their own initiative and wisdom in a male-centred, male-dominated world. Women of such daring nature had challenged the view that women are inferior to men, by rising up against injustice and their subjugation. These women, governed by a spirit of independence, courage and conviction, have demonstrated the ethos and relevance of feminism in any society. The men and women have to live together with a sense of accommodation and adjustment. There is no question of one being superior to the other. This is a lesson that one gathers from the Old Testament. Those women of valour played a significant role in the Hebrew History and they had been used mightily by God. Esther, goaded by her uncle Mordecai, risked her life and saved the Jews from destruction at the hands of Haman. The trust in the Lord which the women had and the

\[117\] The Bible, I Timothy, 2:3, 4.
power they received from heaven pushed them to the front as women of valour and courage. Shiprah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives dared to disobey Pharoah by letting Hebrew male children live. They believed that it was better to obey God the Almighty than obey the rulers of the earth defying God's command. As a result, their action saved their people and resulted in their future deliverance.

All the books of the Bible were written by men. But certain pieces, mostly songs of praise, authored by women suggest that women had some specific role to play in certain Celtic ceremonies. Miriam led the Israelites in singing when they safely crossed the Red Sea and all their enemies were drowned. Deborah sang the song of victory when Sisera, the enemy captain, was nailed to death by a woman Jael, Heber's wife:

Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent . . . 118

Hannah, the barren woman, begets Samuel, and in her great joy she sings a song of praise and it is a Canticle of Revolution which expresses her hope for various types of liberation from the oppressive structure. Inspired principally by this song of Hannah, Mary exalts God in the Magnificat when Gabriel announces the birth of Christ to her at the Annunciation. Humbling herself in all sincerity as God's handmaid, Mary had a perfect vision of mankind as a whole -- the vision of a new world. This insight filled her with so much joy and hope that she spontaneously broke forth into this beautiful song. A song, which was once a song of hope for Hannah, became for Mary, a song of hope and fulfilment.

It is in this faith in God, surrendering totally to Him in all humility, claiming

118 The Bible, Judges, 5:24.
herself to be His "handmaid" that she experienced the liberating force. True liberty is attained only by this total surrender, poornasaranagadhi, as stated earlier. The Old Testament, therefore, expresses that women considered as mere chattels according to Hebraic culture, could gain liberation when they strike a right relationship with God.

Hagar and Ruth, under different circumstances experience liberation at the hands of God who is no party to the gender-war. He is above the male chauvinism which argues for an inferior status to women. Thus, the Old Testament projects the truth that God is the liberator of the suffering, the denied, the dehumanized, the depraved, the exploited and victimised women.

Redemption was originally not a theological, but a commercial word. One reads in the Old Testament quite often of the redemption of land which had been alienated from the owner's possession or mortgaged. People such as slaves and prisoners were redeemed. To redeem means to purchase somebody's freedom, to recover by payment of a price, something which had been lost. "Redemption" therefore once meant "ransom." The Israelites were given a moral law against slavery:

\[\text{Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to-day . . . .}^{119}\]

\[\text{And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee . . . .}^{120}\]

God also had commanded them to celebrate the "Jubilee year", the fiftieth

\[^{119}\text{The Bible, Deuteronomy, 15:15.}\]
\[^{120}\text{The Bible, Deuteronomy, 15:12.}\]
year when there should be release of all slaves unto their families and possessions.

And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants there of: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. ...  

God, who had redeemed the Israelites from captivity, had proved throughout history to be a redeemer -- 'Go'el' God, merciful of the oppressed slaves and even of the immovable property because of His compassion, had proved Himself to be a redeemer to His people, redeeming them from oppression, sickness, slavery, suffering and above all from sin. Even in his agony Job testified:

For I know my redeemer liveth. ...  

The desperate Psalmist cried unto God:

Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it; deliver me because of mine enemies. ...  

When the Israelites were in captivity in Babylon, the Redeemer was the hope of the people.

Their redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is his name; he shall thoroughly plead their cause that he may give rest to the land and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon. ...  

121 The Bible, Leviticus, 25:10.
123 The Bible, Psalm, 69:18.
124 The Bible, Jeremiah, 50:34.
The act of redemption involves forgiveness. Exile was a consequence of Israel’s sins. Only by forgiving, redemption is possible:

I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud thy sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed thee . . . 125

Seeking forgiveness, one has to admit his guilt and confess it. In the Old Testament religion, the act of forgiveness has been institutionalized and it is pronounced by the mediator, namely, the priest. The confession of sin was accompanied by an act of penance, usually the sacrifice of an animal:

And it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing:
And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord for his sin which he hath sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin . . . 126

The ritual of atonement was obviously of very great significance.

This is the Old Testament background to Jesus Christ’s great work of redemption. When the Israelites were led from Egyptian bondage to the promised land of Canaan, the life of every first born was forfeit. But God made a provision, that by killing a lamb and sprinkling its blood on the lintel and side posts of the first door, the first born of the Hebrews could be redeemed. It was called a Pascal lamb and the event was known as Passover.

Man’s alienation and bondage are spiritual. Man’s sin -- his rebellion

125 The Bible, Isaiah, 44:22.
126 The Bible, Leviticus, 5:5, 6.
against both his creator's authority and his neighbour's welfare -- enslaved him and separated him from God. Man in sin is under judgement, and the "wages of sin is death."\textsuperscript{127} "In the fulness of time God sent His son Jesus Christ\textsuperscript{128} "made flesh" and "made Him to be sin for us"\textsuperscript{129} and even "a curse".\textsuperscript{130} So the Old Testament covenant is fulfilled in the New covenant made by the lamb of God, who offered Himself as a Passover sacrifice -- Christ's blood, the blood of the lamb without blemish or spot -- being the ransom paid for our redemption. One turns into a true Christian only after the truth and spirit behind Christ's sacrifice is fully appreciated.

The journeys repeatedly referred to in the Old Testament symbolise in a way the spiritual aspirations of the people. The journey throughout is seen as a quest, a search in which human feet, free from the lameness, bear the redeemed soul of man away from exile, back home to Jerusalem of old, the sanctuary of God. The Psalmists also have based their poems upon earthly journeys seen in terms of restlessness. David, a wanderer in the wilderness, living in fear of King Saul puts his confidence in God and asks:

\begin{quote}
Thou tellest my wanderings; . . are they not in thy book? . . .
\end{quote}

Psalm 121 is such a pilgrim song, depicting how the wanderers first see the hills above the Holy City and suggesting with its images of heat and of danger the rigours of the journey which they undertook across the deserts:

\begin{footnotes}
\item 127 The Bible, Romans, 6:23.
\item 128 The Bible, John, 1:14.
\item 129 The Bible, II Corinthians, 5:21.
\item 130 The Bible, Galatians, 3:13.
\item 131 The Bible, Psalm, 56:8.
\end{footnotes}
I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber.
Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is thy keeper: The Lord is thy shade upon the right hand.
The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul.
The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore. . . .

The physical journeys of the Old Testament -- always prophetic and spiritual -- have their spiritual implements or counterparts which deal with the journeys of the mind and soul. "To seek", or "to have sought" are terms repeatedly used in Old Testament poetry, as stated earlier. The long poem of Job is a search into the problem of pain and suffering in the world, a search after the nature of God:

Oh, that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat!
I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.
I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me.
Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me.
There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge.
Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him; . . .

132 The Bible, Psalm, 121.
Again this quest is,

Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?
Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. . . . 134

His search is over only when he gets the right answer:

. . . The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding . . . 135

Solomon, the preacher, also is found engaged in a similar quest, having given his heart

to seek and search out wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven . . . 136

The Wisdom books, The Book of Job, Psalms of David, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are not mere appendages, but form a very important layer of tradition that affirms that God made humans rational and free, with divine powers of searching and choosing and behaving ethically. Israel never developed philosophers like the Greeks who exalted human reason, but maintained that search for wisdom must be done in reverence and fear of the Lord. The Greeks were sceptical of how the gods could actually interact with the created world. Israel never doubted how active and directly God was present in the world. Instead, Israel's wisdom thinkers turned the believers' questions and problems of sufferings and inequalities among people toward "the mystery of existence."

135 Ibid., 28:28.
136 The Bible, Ecclesiastes, 1:13.
Thus, it ought to be recorded that the redeemer, Messiah, the Hope of Glory that is Jesus Christ, therefore, is the key that unlocks all the mysteries of Jewish Scriptures. In Christ all the prophecies and promises are fulfilled:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or prophets:  
I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.  

The Old Testament therefore, is essentially a message of hope. It speaks of hope and expectation. The New Testament speaks of fulfilment:

When we speak of the Old Testament, we are at the same time speaking of the roots of Christian faith.

The Old Testament, though basically the scripture of the Jews, is for every citizen of the world. In its pages one hears the voice of God, directed to every man, in every age and place, through all the perils and problems of his life:

It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men. The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God but what he says to us; not how we find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us; not the right relation in which we must place ourselves to him, but the covenant which he has made with all who are Abraham's spiritual children and which he has sealed once and for all in Jesus Christ. It is this which is within the Bible. The word of God is within the Bible.

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137 The Bible, Matthew, 5:17.
138 Mattom Zecharias, Opening the Bible, p.47.
The Old Testament speaks to our day by simplifying its message; and its ideas and themes could be neatly categorised to be related to the present day problems and needs. The Old Testament has something vital and significant to everyone. Above all, the pages of Old Testament are replete with references to the coming of the Messiah, the redeemer. It draws the readers' attention to Jesus Christ, the promised Saviour, who made a New Covenant with His blood on the Cross, in whom is the "hope of glory."  

Thus the message of the Old Testament crystalises into God's anger at the unjust ways of men, His loving care for the faithful, His design to test the faithful by subjecting them to suffering, His mercy and kindness to pardon the confessing and penitent repentant and His abiding interest in redeeming the sinner and liberating the suffering lot.

140 The Bible, Colossians, 1:27.