

OLD TESTAMENT INTRODUCTION I

Grace Bible Church | Spring 2024

PURPOSE

Whenever we approach Scripture, we do it with the ultimate purpose that we would know the God it reveals better. It is, after, His revelation—His self-disclosure. His word allows us to know God; His word is also powerful and transformative. This is no less true of the Old Testament than the New. Further, there is abundant practical instruction and wisdom in the Old Testament that God has given to Christians for our sanctification (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11). It is to our detriment to ignore this rich resource.

RATIONALE

The Old Testament is the first major portion of a story that flows through the pages of Scripture. When we forget that Scripture is a narrative, it can be tempting to focus on particulars with no thought to the broader whole, diminishing our ability to understand their full significance. In other words it can be easy to lose sight of the forest through the trees. This course will seek to provide a high-level understanding of the Old Testament as God’s revelation of Himself and His plan of redemption, enabling us to read all of Scripture in the context in which it was meant to be understood.

OPTIONAL READING

- Andrew E. Hill & John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*. 3rd Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.
- Nathan LeMaster. *Old Testament Survey I: Genesis to Esther*. Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2023.
- Tremper Longman III & Raymond B. Dillard. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. 2nd Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.
- Eugene H. Merrill. *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*. 2nd Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008.
- Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, & Michael A. Grisanti. *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Genesis, Exodus pt. 1

Week 3: Genesis, Exodus pt. 2

Week 4: Leviticus, Numbers

Week 7: 1 & 2 Samuel

Week 8: 1 & 2 Kings

Week 9: 1 & 2 Chronicles

Week 10: Ezra, Nehemiah

Week 5: Deuteronomy, Joshua

Week 11: Esther, Conclusion

Week 6: Judges, Ruth

WEEK 1 | INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not there before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even at all perceived before. The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation that follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged.

B.B. Warfield

Most Christians, when they sit down to study their Bible, immediately and almost reflexively open to the last quarter of Scripture, with scant attention paid to what precedes it. While many are familiar with New Testament revelation, few would claim the same sort of familiarity with the Old Testament. Often, the Old Testament is treated as a collection of moralistic stories for kids rather than an indispensable part of God's self-disclosure. This priority of the New Testament over the Old is reflected in both the pulpit and the pew, and even in the names given to the testaments themselves ("Old" vs. "New").

Christians are worse off for this. Scripture is a unified piece of literature, written under the superintending guidance of a single, divine Author. Just as you would not expect to understand a book by only reading the last chapter, so we cannot expect to understand God's revelation if we relegate ourselves solely to its closing section. For us to truly comprehend and appreciate God's redemptive work accomplished by His Son and recorded in the New Testament, we must understand all that came before. We must understand the Old Testament.

This course is designed to introduce you to the rich depths of God's revelation in the first testament of Scripture. Though time will not permit us to explore each book as much as we might like, this course will orient you to each Old Testament book and its purpose in the greater story God has written.

THE PROMINENCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Bible contains:

- 31,102 verses, 23,145 of which are in the Old Testament
- 1189 chapters, 929 of which are in the Old Testament
- 788,280, words 609,269 of which are in the Old Testament

The Old Testament accounts for approximately 78% of your Bible. As a whole, the Old Testament sets the stage for and anticipates the coming of the Messiah, which is narrated for us in the gospels. The remainder of the New Testament reflects on and illuminates the significance of who the Messiah was and what he accomplished. This reflection, however, can only be understood fully in the light of what God revealed in the Old Testament.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Before we begin to survey the books comprising this first testament, we must first take a step back and look at the structure and organization of the Old Testament as a whole. Our English Bibles divide it into thirty-nine discrete books based on the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint.

The Hebrew Old Testament, however, is organized a bit differently. While the books and text are the same, those books are arranged into three broader categories: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. This organization is reflected in the title given to the Hebrew Old Testament, the Tanakh.¹ It is the organization that would have been familiar to Jesus, the Apostles, and their contemporaries, as seen in Luke 24:27, 44

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. . . Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

The Law—*Torah* in Hebrew or *Pentateuch*² in Greek—comprises the first five books of the Bible, all of which were authored by Moses. These five books are consistently treated as a unit by authors subsequent to Moses.

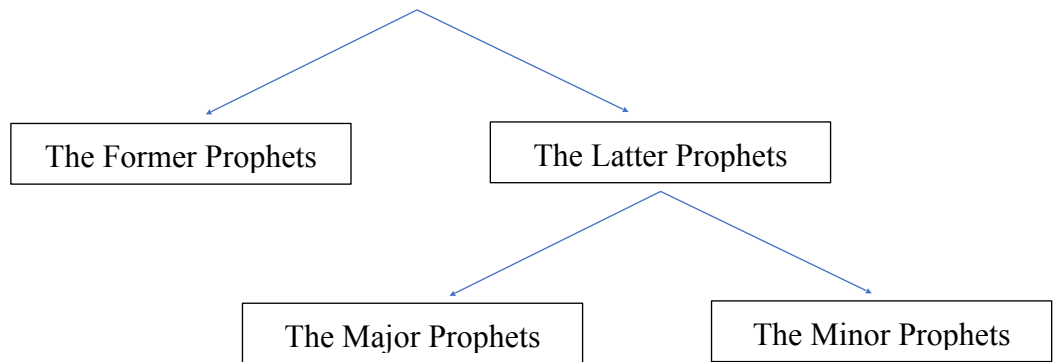
The second major division of the Old Testament, the *Nevi'im* or **Prophets**, is typically further subdivided into the Former Prophets, which includes many of the historical books,³ and the Latter Prophets, which includes the three Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) and the Minor Prophets (The Twelve). The graphic below highlights these sub-categories:

The Prophets

¹ *Tanakh* is essentially an alliteration of the Hebrew words for each section: the *Torah*, the *Nevi'im*, and the *Ketuvim*.

² From the Greek *penta*, meaning five, and *teuch*, meaning volume; hence, a five-volume book.

³ It should also be noted that the historical books split into two volumes in our English Bibles were originally one volume in the Hebrew Old Testament. This includes Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.



The third and final division of the *Tanakh*, the *Ketuvim* or **Writings**, includes the wisdom literature included in the Old Testament (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) as well as the remaining historical books like Ruth, Daniel, Esther, and Chronicles.

The table⁴ below designates how each of the thirty-nine Old Testament books we are familiar with are categorized in the Tanakh:

LAW <i>Torah</i>	PROPHETS <i>Nevi'im</i>		WRITINGS <i>Ketuvim</i>
	FORMER	LATTER	
Genesis			Psalms
Exodus	Joshua	Isaiah	Job
Leviticus	Judges	Jeremiah	Proverbs
Numbers	Samuel	Ezekiel	Ruth
Deuteronomy	Kings	The Twelve	Song of Songs
			Ecclesiastes
			Lamentations
			Esther
			Daniel
			Ezra/Nehemiah
			Chronicles
OT 26.3%	22.7%	23.5%	27.5%
	46.2%		

As likely became apparent from the discussion above, there are other ways of organizing the Old Testament. Rather than the threefold division of the *Tanakh*, we can also divide the Old Testament into the Pentateuch, the historical books, the prophetic books, and wisdom literature.

⁴ Reproduced from Keith Essex, "Old Testament Introduction I Course Notes," TMS BI501, Fall, 2014.

Since these groupings closely adhere to what we see in our English Bibles, we will use this way of organizing the Old Testament in this study:

- 1) **The Pentateuch:** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- 2) **The Historical Books:** Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
- 3) **The Wisdom Books:** Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
- 4) **The Prophetic Books:** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

One thing all of these ways of organizing the Old Testament have in common is their reliance on the Pentateuch. Nathan LeMaster writes,

These first five books of the Old Testament are always at the beginning of the Old Testament. This is because they form the foundation of all that comes after. The main purpose of the Prophetic Books is to show how Israel responded to the Pentateuch on a national level. The Writings have a different focus, asking how the individual should respond to the Pentateuch.⁵

In Scripture, these five books are always referenced as a unified whole:

- The Law – Josh 8:34; Ezra 10:3; Matt 12:5; John 7:19
- The Book of the Law – Josh 1:8; Neh 8:3; Gal 3:10
- The Book of the Law of Moses – Josh 8:31; 2 Kin 14:6
- The Book of Moses – Ezra 6:18; Mark 12:26
- The Law of Moses – Dan 9:11; Mal 4:4; Luke 2:22; John 7:23
- The Law of the Lord – Ezra 7:10; Luke 2:23, 24
- The Law of God – Neh 10:28, 29
- The Book of the Law of God – Josh 24:26; Neh 8:18
- The Book of the Law of the Lord – 2 Chr 17:9; Neh 9:3

Thus, regardless of how you choose to organize your study of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch must be treated first and as a distinct unit so that the right foundation is laid for studying the rest of God's revelation. That is where we will begin.

THEMES

The Bible is theology in history. It reveals to us who this timeless and boundless God is through His sovereign control over events which unfold in time and space and his interaction with His creatures who live bound by time and space. As Longman and Dillard put it:

⁵ Nathan LeMaster, *Old Testament Survey I: Genesis to Esther* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2023), 13.

The question that biblical theology asks is, What is the message of the Bible? A multiperspectival approach responds that the Bible is about God. The Old Testament in particular is a message from the God of Israel about the God of Israel. However, it is not about Yahweh in the abstract. There is very little, if any, abstract theologizing in the Old Testament. No, the Old Testament is a revelation about Yahweh in relationship with humankind, specifically with his chosen people. Furthermore, this relationship is not so much described as it is narrated. There is a historical dimension to biblical revelation.⁶

The Bible is a story. As we familiarize ourselves with the first three quarters of this story, we will try to trace the development of several themes, including:

- The Glory of God
- The Presence of God
- The Kingdom of God
- The Covenant-Keeping God
- The Promised Seed
- The Redemption of Creation

⁶ Tremper Longman III & Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 36.

Other themes specific to individual books will be explored as well as we survey each book in turn.

THE PENTATEUCH

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

AUTHORSHIP

Scripture universally ascribes the authorship of the Pentateuch to Moses:

- Exodus 17:14
- Exodus 24:4
- Numbers 33:1-2
- Deuteronomy 31:9, 24
- Joshua 1:7-8
- Joshua 23:6
- 1 Kings 2:3
- Ezra 6:18
- Nehemiah 13:1
- Mark 12:26 (c.f. Luke 16:29, 31; 24:27; Acts 26:22)
- John 1:17
- John 5:46-47
- John 7:22-23
- Romans 10:5

STRUCTURE

In some ways, the Pentateuch can be understood as a simple question and answer. In light of the fall of man in Genesis 3, Genesis 1-11 ask the question: how can man's relationship with God be restored? The rest of the Pentateuch answer that question. The solution is God's covenant with Abraham. Through Abraham's offspring, God promises to bless all the nations. Through His covenant people Israel, God will reveal Himself and explain how sinful people can be restored to the kind of fellowship with Him that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden.

In light of this central theme, there is a clear unity and progression among the five books that comprise the Pentateuch as God's covenant promises begin to unfold:

The Literary Plan of the Pentateuch⁷

Genesis 1-11:	Creation, fall, and judgment
Genesis 12-50:	Covenant promise, election of Abraham, and providential preservation of his family

⁷ Reproduced from Andrew E. Hill & John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 58.

Exodus:	Miraculous deliverance of Yahweh's people from bondage in Egypt, covenant relationship expanded to Israel as his people at Sinai, and the law given as a theocratic charter for Israel
Leviticus:	Expansion of covenant law for the purpose of holiness among the people of Yahweh, since he will dwell in their midst
Numbers:	Testing, purging, purifying of Yahweh's covenant people in the Sinai wilderness wandering
Deuteronomy:	Covenant renewal and the second law-giving as preparation for entry into the land of promise by the second generation of Yahweh's people

This unity is not only thematic—there is also unity and continuity in the narrative as Moses traces the God's covenant promise given to Abraham and extended to his offspring:

Narrative Structure of the Pentateuch⁸

Genesis 1-11:	Primeval prologue
Genesis 12-50:	Accounts of the patriarchs and matriarchs
Exodus 1:1-12:30:	Israel in Egypt
Exodus 12:31-18:27:	Israelite on the road to Sinai
Exodus 19:1-Numbers 10:10:	Israel encamped at Mount Sinai
Numbers 10:11-12:16:	Desert trek from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea
Numbers 13:1-19:22:	Israel encamped at Kadesh-Barnea
Numbers 20:1-21:35:	Desert trek from Zin to Mount Hor to plains of Moab
Numbers 22-Deuteronomy 34:	Israel encamped at Moab

The Pentateuch is one unified story following the generations of one family chosen by God to be the vessel through which He solves humanity's greatest problem: their sin and alienation from Him.

CHRONOLOGY

The events recorded in the Pentateuch stretch from the beginning of time to the 15th century B.C., a period of several millennia. However, the majority of its pages are spent focusing on the story of Israel, beginning with the patriarchs in the 21st century B.C. and extending many

⁸ Reproduced from Hill & Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 60.

generations to the nation that will follow Joshua and Caleb in conquering the Promised Land some 600 years later.

There are a number of chronological markers given in relation to the Exodus that allow us to build a trustworthy timeline of these first five books of the Bible:

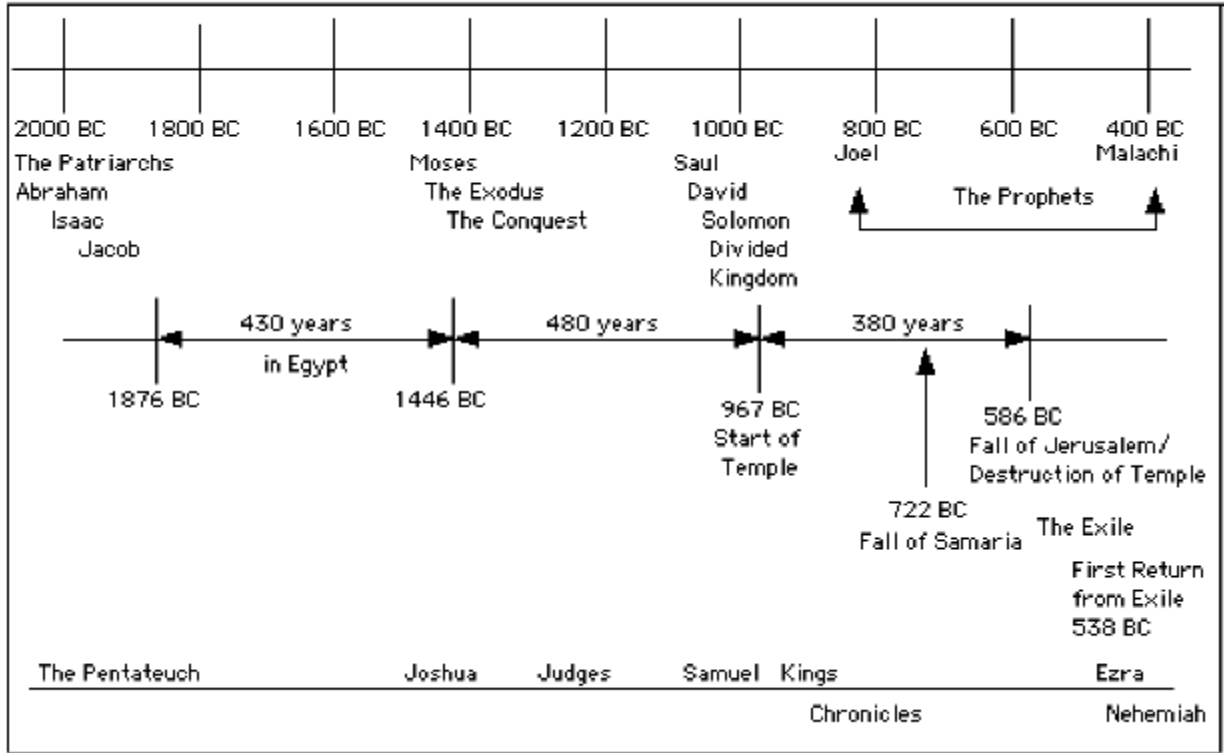
- Genesis 15:13 – Israel will be enslaved and oppressed in a foreign country for 400 years
- Exodus 12:2, 18 – The Exodus takes place on the 15th day, of the 1st month, of the first year following their sojourn in Egypt
- Exodus 12:40, 41 – Israel lived in Egypt for 430 years
- Exodus 19:1 – Israel arrived at Sinai on the 15th day, of the 3rd month, of the year after the Exodus
- Exodus 40:2 – The tabernacle was erected on the 1st day, of the 1st month, of the 2nd year after the Exodus
- Numbers 10:11 – Israel departed from Sinai on 20th day, of the 2nd month, of the 2nd year after the Exodus
- Numbers 20:1 (c.f. 22:1) – Israel arrives at Kadesh-Barnea in the 1st month, of the 40th year after the Exodus
- Deuteronomy 1:1-3 – Moses spoke to Israel on the east side of the Jordan River (on the plains of Moab) on the 1st day, of the 11th month, of the 40th year after the Exodus
- Joshua 4:19 – Israel entered the Promised Land on 10th day, of the 1st month, of the 41st year after the Exodus

Since these are relative time-markers, it is necessary to determine a fixed date for the Exodus that can anchor this timeline. Traditionally, the Exodus has been dated around 1446 B.C.⁹ based on 1 Kings 6:1, which specifies that the 4th year of Solomon’s reign was the 480th year after the Exodus. Using a combination of extra-Biblical sources as well as archaeological and astronomical data, the 4th year of Solomon’s reign has been established as circa 996 B.C.

These dates are corroborated by Judges 11:26 where Jephthah says that Israel had possessed the land of Canaan for 300 years. The timing of his statement has been independently established at approximately 1106 B.C. If Jephthah is referring to the beginning of the conquest, and 40 years are added for the wilderness wanderings, then it would point to 1446 B.C. as the date of the Exodus. Working backwards from this fixed point, a reliable timeline can be developed. The charts below give a broad overview of Israelite history as recorded in the Old Testament (taken from various sources).

⁹ This is known as the “early date” of the Exodus. More recently, some scholars have argued for a later date circa 1290 B.C. Though popular with many contemporary scholars, this date is fraught with difficulties and ignores the clear chronological statements of Scripture.

Chart 4 Chronological Summary of Israel's History



FROM ABRAHAM TO NEHEMIAH (ca. 2000 BC – 400 BC)

2100 BC	2100 - 1900	1446	1100 - 900	722	587/86	450	400 BC
This was the end of the Sumerian Civilization	This is the time frame of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob	The "High Date" for Israel's Exodus out of Egypt under Moses	The Time Period of Saul, David & Solomon of Israel was conquered & exiled by the Assyrian Empire		was destroyed, including the Temple, by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon		The OT concludes, and the Bible picks up with the birth of Christ.
Third Dynasty of Ur	The Patriarchs	Moses	The United Monarchy	Assyria	Babylon	Nehemiah	End of Old Testament Timeline