

Old Testament 101

An Introduction to the Old Testament

The purpose of this lesson is to help us develop a better sense of the chronological and theological flow of the Bible from Genesis to Malachi. A comfortable understanding of the *Big Picture* that this overview is designed to facilitate will help each of us to better understand the particular events and teachings we encounter in Old Covenant study. Please set aside time to study this overview. With but a small, consistent expenditure of time, the things covered in this lesson can significantly improve the quality of our overall studies of the Old Testament.

The Basic Blocks of the Bible's Story and Their Emphasis

- Genesis (the book of universal, chaps. 1-11, and Jewish, chaps. 12-50 beginnings).
- Exodus – Deuteronomy (with Genesis, the remainder of the Torah, the Law of Moses).
- Joshua -- Esther (the Historical development of the Old Testament from the entrance into the Promised Land to the Return from Babylonian Captivity).
- Job, and Proverbs – Song of Solomon (the Wisdom Literature of Israel).
- Psalms (the song book of Israel).
- The Writing Prophets (the interpretation of God's plan and Man's condition).
- Matthew – John (the life of Jesus).
- Acts (salvation).
- Romans – Jude (Christian Living).
- Revelation (ultimate hope for the faithful).

The Old Testament Pattern of History (Genesis – Esther)

- The Book of Genesis
 - The universal foundation (Genesis 1-11).
 - The foundation for the Jews (Genesis 12-50).
- Exodus – Numbers
 - The formation of the Jewish nation.
 - The initial giving of the law (teaching) for the Jews and their struggles in the wilderness.
- Deuteronomy
 - The explanation of the law for the religious and civil practices of the Jews (Cf. Deut. 1:5).
 - The application of God's teaching to the nation of Israel living in the Promised Land.
 - An emphasis on the trust and heartfelt service that was required in acceptable obedience to God's teachings
 - The most influential book of the Law of Moses.
- Joshua 1:1 – Judges 3:11, the conquest of Canaan.
 - The Promised Land is conquered.
 - God kept all His promises, but the people failed to receive all the benefit because of unbelief and idolatry.
- Judges 3:12 0 I Sam. 12:25, the period of the Judges.
 - A time of disunity and weakness.
 - The pagan influences from an incomplete conquest led to a severe weakening of Israel.
- I Sam. 13:1 – I Kings 11:43; I Chron. 10:1 – II Chron, 9:31, the United Kingdom.
 - The rise and fall of a united nation.
 - Sin is seen living in the midst of faith and weakening the vitality of a nation that had grown strong.
- I Kings 12:1 – II Kings 18:12; II Chron. 10:1-28:27, the Divided Kingdom.
 - A remnant left for David in Judah.
 - The majority goes the way of false worship in a rival kingdom to the north.
- II Kings 18:13-25:7; II Chron. 29:1-36:21, Judah alone.

- The Davidic remnant is given a final chance.
- Failure leads to captivity.
- II Kings 24:1-25:30; II Chron. 36:6-23, Babylonian Captivity.
 - A nation is taken away because of her sins.
 - Only a remnant would return.
- Ezra 1-6; Esther 1-10; Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah 1-12, a return for a remnant, an ever growing dispersion for the many.
 - Three stages of return become possible as Persia conquers Babylon.
 - Most elect to remain in foreign locations.
 - The religion of Moses enters a period of alteration that will lead to a distinctly different entity – Judaism, the religion of the rabbis.

The Place of Poetry and Wisdom Literature (Job – Song of Solomon)

- With Job this literature probably goes back to the times of Abraham and with certain of the Psalms reaches to the return from captivity.
- The majority of the literature of this section is from the time of David and Solomon.
- Certain themes are stressed: Faith, Reverence, Praise and Practical applications of truth to everyday life are the most commonly encountered.
 - Job seems to date from the time of the patriarchs and stresses the need to trust God even when we cannot understand why certain things happen.
 - Psalms – Most of the Psalms fit into the period of David's life, and should be read in relation to the events of that dynamic era. Seventy Psalms in all are ascribed to David, with fourteen entitled so as to identify certain specific occurrences; the remaining eighty are from a variety of authors.
 - Psalm 90 is the oldest, having Moses as its author.
 - Asaph, the Levite choir leader in the time of David, wrote Psalms 50 and 73–83.
 - Psalms 42-49, 84-85 and 87-88 were composed by the sons of Korah, the Levite choir director, and range from the time of David to the Babylonian captivity. Information concerning these choirs supplied by I Chronicles 6:31-44, 16:5, and 2 Chronicles 29:30.
 - Ethan, probably the Jeduthan who founded the remaining Levite choir, composed psalm 89.
 - The wise Solomon composed Psalms 72 and 127.
 - The remainder of the Psalms is untitled, though some fit certain stages of Old Testament history.
 - Psalm 137 is from the Babylonian exile period.
 - Psalms 107 and 126 are from the time of the return from Babylonian captivity.
 - Psalm 147 is from the time of Nehemiah.
 - The other untitled Psalms could perhaps best be read as independent devotional material.
 - Song of Solomon. - This is from Solomon's early life, prior to the corrupting influences of sin. A picture is seen of his once unspoiled view of love before political ambition took hold and women became mere objects in his life.
 - Proverbs – These wise sayings represent the great ability Solomon had been given by God. They stand as a stark testimony to what might have been. It can best be read in connection with the early and middle portions of his reign to show a contrast with his later mood.
 - Ecclesiastes – Here, Solomon reflects on a life that became vain. As an old man, he finally realizes that greatness is found in service and reverence toward God.

The Writing Prophets (Isaiah – Malachi)

- Obadiah (844) – A burden against Edom for joining with “strangers: in looting the holy city of Jerusalem, Obadiah wrote in the reign of Jehoram (848-842), recorded in 2 Kings 8:20-24 and 2 Chronicles 21:16-20.

- Joel (830) – Joel spoke of Israel's future punishment and Messianic renewal. He spoke during the time of the minority of king Joash when Jehoida the high priest was the true power behind the throne (835-828), as found in 2 Kings 11,12 and 2 Chronicles 23,24.
- Jonah (762) – Jonah was a reluctant prophet with a successful preaching mission in Nineveh that the prophet deeply resented. His mission was in the reign of Jereboam II (793-753), when Israel enjoyed material peace and prosperity, as is indicated by 2 Kings 14:23-29.
- Amos (760) – An unschooled herdsman and farmer from Judah who spoke out against the sins of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Amos spoke during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753), as recorded in 2 Kings 14:23-15:7 and 2 Chronicles 26.
- Hosea (760-722) – Hosea's ministry also began in the reign of Jeroboam II. However, his work extended until just before the fall of Israel in 722. Read Hosea in connection with 2 Kings 15 – 18:12 and 2 Chronicles 26-30.
- Isaiah (740-686) – The decline and fall of Israel, as well as the near fall of Judah, dominate the historical material of this prophet to Judah's kings. In addition, Isaiah stands out as the "Messianic Prophet" for his frequent visions of the spiritual King and His Kingdom. Read Isaiah along with 2 Kings 15-20 and 2 Chronicles 26-32.
- Micah (735-715) – This contemporary of Isaiah prophesied of the injustices the rich enacted on the poor during the period found in 1 Kings 15:32-18:12 and 2 Chronicles 27-31.
- Nahum (660) – Nahum wrote of the coming fall of Nineveh, as Assyria's sins were soon to find her out. Read Nahum along with 2 Kings 21:1-18 and 2 Chronicles 33:1-20.
- Zephaniah (632-627) – This prophet, who was related to the royal family of Judah, spoke out against the wickedness of his people, as found in 2 Kings 22:1-23:30 and 2 Chronicles 34-35. Perhaps Josiah's reformation of 621 was influenced by Zephaniah's preaching.
- Jeremiah (627-582) – Jeremiah records the decline and fall of Judah to Babylon. Much is learned of the personal struggles this great prophet faced in his difficult ministry. His great sorrow over Jerusalem's fall is recorded in Lamentations. Read in connection with 2 Kings 22-25 and 2 Chronicles 34:1-36:21.
- Habakkuk (605) – Habakkuk questioned the judgment of God in using Babylon to punish Judah. God, much as He had done with Job, showed the prophet his mistake. Read along with 2 Kings 23:36-24:7 and 2 Chronicles 34-36:21.
- Daniel (605-536) – Daniel spoke as a captive in Babylon from the court of Babylonian, and later Persian, royalty. His personal encounters and detailed visions of distant historical events give Daniel a unique place among the prophets. Read along with 2 Kings 23:36-25:30 and 2 Chronicles 34-36:21.
- Ezekiel (597-570) – Ezekiel also spoke from captivity. However, he worked among the people and far from a regal setting. The fall and future hope of Jerusalem dominate his writings. Read with 2 Kings 24:8-25:30 and 2 Chronicles 34-36:21.
- Haggai (520) – The rebuilding of the temple by the returned captives is the major emphasis of Haggai. See Ezra 5-6.
- Zechariah (520-475) – Working with Haggai, Zechariah ministered in the era recorded in Ezra 5-6 and beyond. Zechariah is noted for the Messianic revelations of his majestic book.
- Malachi (432) – The last of the Writing Prophets spoke between the governorships of Nehemiah, recorded in Nehemiah 12:27-13:31. He closes with a prediction of the coming of John the Baptist as the man who would renew the office of "prophet" after a silence of over 400 years.

With a good understanding of the basic purposes of the books of the Old Testament, our studies will be enhanced. With this, the larger themes of God's word come alive and we are ready to receive the Christ.

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