

Old Testament Introduction

Introduction

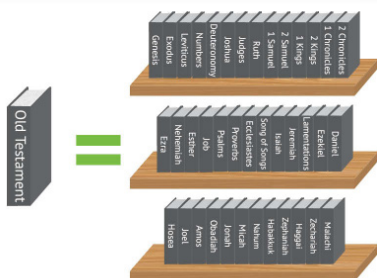
The Old Testament is *Essential*

The Old Testament is a Story About God

The Old Testament

- God creates people to be in a relationship with Him.

The Old Testament is a Story About God



The Old Testament isn't just important, it's much more than that—it's essential. In fact, when Paul told Timothy that "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16 NASB) he was referring first of all to the Old Testament. Peter wrote, "You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20–21 NIV). So while we diligently study these Old Testament books, we must do so with awe and worship of their true Author.

The Old Testament Is a Story About God

The Old Testament claims that God created you and me for a relationship with Himself and that He loves us and invites us to love Him. But tragically, it also says that Adam and Eve sinned and fractured this relationship with God. Their sin not only alienated them from God, but as representatives of the human race they plunged us *all* into this fallen state. Their legacy continues even into the New Testament where we read, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). So the Old Testament story is about God's plan to rebuild the relationship between Himself and the people He created to love and to love Him.

The Old Testament is a collection of books. Now when we use the word *book*, it's important to understand that we refer to the Bible as a book, but it's a book that's made up of other, smaller books. In the Old Testament there are thirty-nine books written by various authors. In this Old Testament Basics course we will refer to a *book* of the Bible and we will also refer to the Bible as a book, because although the Bible itself is a book, it is made up of a collection of smaller books.

Although the Old Testament is about God, the Old Testament doesn't really explain or defend God's existence. It assumes God's existence. When the Old Testament was written, gods were everywhere. The Egyptians, the Canaanites, and the Hebrews were all theistic. The difference between Israel and her neighbors was

The Old Testament is a Story About God

The Old Testament Assumes God's Existence

The Old Testament is a Story About God

The Old Testament is the story about God's plan to rebuild the relationship between Himself and humanity.

The Old Testament helps us understand who God is and what He is like.

not that the Jews had a God and the others didn't. The difference was that Israel had one God while their neighbors had many gods. And the Old Testament books carefully present how unique Israel's God is. Consider the fact that when we read the Old Testament, the fourth word we come to is "God." Genesis 1:1 states that "In the beginning *God*." That's assumed. And if we don't get beyond that fourth word, we really have trouble with the rest of the Bible, not just the Old Testament but the New Testament as well. If God is not who the Bible claims He is, the miracles, for instance, are nonsense.

So how we think about God is crucial, and the Old Testament helps us understand who He is and what He's like—including His love, His grace, His character, and so much more. Writer after writer explains the effort God has put forth in His love and His grace to heal the broken relationship between Himself and His alienated people.

Most People Know *About* the Old Testament

There are people and events in the Old Testament that may be familiar to people who don't even read the Bible. Many people have heard of Adam and Eve, of Abraham and David and Goliath. They may have heard about the plagues in Egypt and about Moses and the Red Sea. They may know about the Ten Commandments.

We can go to a motel and read the *Gideon Bible*. We talk about Samson's strength and about Solomon's wisdom. People who have never been in a church want the twenty-third psalm read at their loved one's funeral. There are so many people and stories that are household words to people who don't even realize they're in the Old Testament. Or if they do, they have no idea who the characters actually were or where they fit into the Old Testament story. In these ten lessons, we will provide an overview of the Old Testament so we can put these characters and events in perspective. Who was Samson? How did he relate historically to David and Moses? When did he live? What did he do? What do the Ten Commandments refer to? Why were they written? To whom were they given? What do they mean? Each event and individual is important by itself, but when we see them in their proper historical setting we have a better understanding of how and what they contributed.

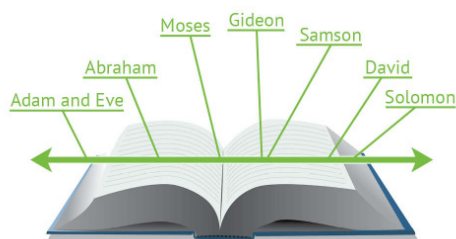
The Old Testament is a story of God's patient forgiveness. It

Most People Know *About* the Old Testament

Have you heard of these?

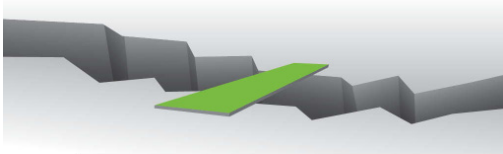
- Adam and Eve
- Father Abraham
- David and Goliath
- The Plagues of Egypt
- Moses and the Red Sea
- The Ten Commandments
- **Gideon the Judge**
- **Samson's Strength**
- **Solomon's Wisdom**
- **Psalms 23**

Most People Know *About* the Old Testament



Most People Know *About* the Old Testament

God's ultimate answer to the problem of sin:

Jesus

Why the Old Testament Is a Closed Book



Why the Old Testament Is a Closed Book

Try this experiment:

presents God's teachings, His people's rebellion against that teaching, and God's willingness to forgive them. That is the recurring theme from the Old Testament's beginning in Genesis to its ending in Malachi.

Jesus is also introduced in the Old Testament. He is God's ultimate answer to the problem of alienation between God and the humans He created. There are continual references to the Suffering Servant, to the Messiah, to the Great High Priest who would come and deliver us from evil and restore us to a right relationship with God.

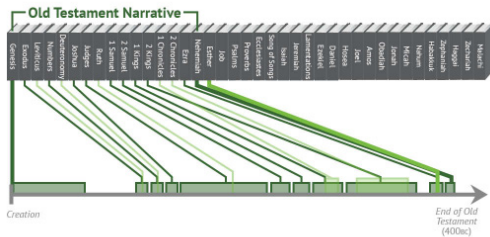
Why the Old Testament Is a Closed Book

The Old Testament is packed with essential truth, but sadly for many of us it's a closed book. All the priests, prophets, kings, and peoples confuse us. We read the prophets (such as Isaiah or Ezekiel) and don't have any idea when they lived, whom they talked to, or what they talked about. And that's because few people read the Old Testament and so they miss an enormous amount of God's teaching. Try this experiment. If you have a Bible, go to the first page of Genesis and then go to the end of the Old Testament at the end of Malachi, and put your finger there. Then go to the beginning of the New Testament in Matthew and to the end of the New Testament in the book of Revelation (before you get to your maps and concordance). Now look at the difference. On the left is the Old Testament, and on the right is the New Testament. Notice the difference in size. The Old Testament is about three times thicker than the New Testament. Yet most of us are at least three times more familiar with the New Testament than we are with the Old. The strange names and customs, the long genealogies, and the unfamiliar geography are only some of the reasons why people find it difficult to read the Old Testament. Over a third of the Bible is closed to many people because they just don't understand how it works.

Fewer People *Know* the Old Testament

So what we want to do in these ten lessons is to help you understand how it works. There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament. Seventeen of the books—the first seventeen—are mostly narrative. The story begins in Genesis with the account of the beginning of all things and ends with the story of Nehemiah

Fewer People *Know* the Old Testament



around the year 400 BC. Although Esther's story occurred almost 40 years before Nehemiah's story, Esther's book is placed after Nehemiah in our Old Testament. The book of Nehemiah, which is the historical end of the Old Testament, is located in just about the middle of the Old Testament. Even though Nehemiah's story occurred about 900 years after David's story, his book is placed in the Old Testament *before* David's psalms. Nehemiah lived many years after Isaiah but Isaiah's prophecy is located in the Bible six books after Esther's book. If you're trying to figure out the who, what, where, when, how, and why of the Old Testament, it can get confusing.

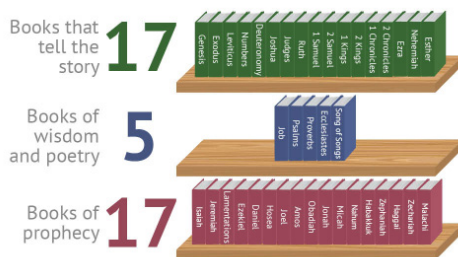
It's important to understand that the Old Testament books are not arranged by chronology but by their three types of literature, or by what we call genres or styles of writing. The first seventeen books—Genesis to Esther—tell the whole story from beginning to end. After Esther there are five books of wisdom and poetry: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are called Israel's poetry and wisdom writings. The third collection of books is the seventeen Old Testament prophetic books. So we have the narrative books that tell the story, we have Old Testament poetry and wisdom books, and then the last section of the Old Testament contains the prophetic books.

That is how the Old Testament is divided, and we will look at each of these three parts a bit more closely as we move through the lessons in this course. The goal is to have a working knowledge of how the Old Testament works and what it is saying to us.

Why the Old Testament Is Important

The first question we will explore is how the Old Testament fits together. Second we will discuss why it's important to read, study, and meditate on this ancient literature. Why take the time and effort to navigate our way around the Old Testament? Paul said it best, "All Scripture is from God." It isn't the work of brilliant men, although the men who God used to write it were brilliant. It's the work of God. It's not wisdom thought up by some sages. Because God inspired these writers, their messages are profitable to us. Paul tells us that Scripture is profitable for "doctrine," or for a way of thinking about the world. It's profitable to show us when we're in error, when we're living our lives in ways that lead to tragedy. It's profitable for "correction." It doesn't just tell us we're wrong, it shows us how to get right. And it's also profitable to instruct us

Fewer People *Know* the Old Testament



Why The Old Testament Is Important

How does the Old Testament fit together?

Why is it important to read, study, and meditate on this ancient literature?

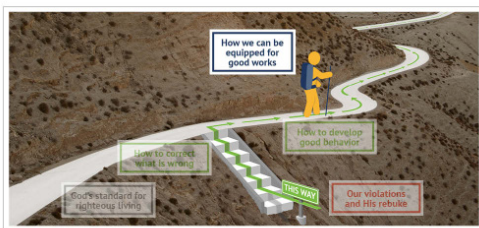
Why The Old Testament Is Important

All Scripture is ...

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.
2 Timothy 3:16-17

- From God.
- Profitable to us for...
 - » Giving us a way of thinking about the world.
 - » Showing us when we are living our lives in error.
 - » Showing us how to get right.
 - » Instructing us in righteous living.

Why The Old Testament Is Important

Scripture shows us ...

in righteous living. The Old Testament literature can equip those who read and live by it to do good works.

Think about that for a moment. God's inspired Old Testament teaches us what His standards are for righteous living. As we read it we discover that we have violated those standards, and we are rebuked. But Scripture doesn't stop there. It is also profitable because it shows us how to correct what's wrong. God is interested in more than just teaching how to correct our errors or sins. He also "instructs us in righteous behavior." More than just teaching us how to correct bad behavior, He instructs us how we can positively develop good behavior. His Scriptures instruct us in righteousness so that we can be equipped to do good works.

That's an amazing claim isn't it? Following God's teaching takes us from being wrong to getting right and then on to equipping us to live righteous lives so we can do God's good work. So these Old Testament books are a treasure. They teach us how to live a superlative life. They equip us to become contributors. But we have to read them. We have to understand them. And we have to live them. These Old Testament books contain God's message of love and grace and wholeness to you and to me.