

The Bible Part 2:

The Old Testament

“The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed, the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed” St. Augustine of Hippo.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is challenging to most readers. Whereas the story of Jesus’ life and ministry or the clear, easy style of St. Paul grabs our attention and feels relatable, the stories of the Old Testament feel foreign and strange like venturing into a foreign world. For these reasons many people like to skip over the Old Testament or focus on the New Testament. Some groups tried to omit the Old Testament entirely for the sake of the New Testament. Other groups focus only on the writings of St. Paul and even ignore the Gospels. Yet, every part of Scripture is important even if it poses a serious challenge to us. We cannot understand nor grasp the value and importance of the New Testament without understanding the Old. Here are a few examples. How would we know that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah except for through the prophets and prophecies of the Old Testament? How would we understand the disciples’ confusion when Jesus was speaking to a woman at a well except for knowing Jacob’s conversation with a woman at a well? Or the cryptic phrase from the Wedding Feast of Cana – “what is it to me and to you” – except by knowing the phrase Joshua used in the Book of Joshua? Those who wrote the New Testament had an incredible understanding and knowledge of the Old Testament and assumed their readers had the same knowledge. For us to appreciate the New Testament we must understand the Old.

Why are they called the Old Testament and the New Testament? Before the time of Jesus, the Scriptures were called “books.” These books formed a collection of important texts that told the story of the Jewish people and the God they believe in. As the Christian community developed, they saw both of these collections of books, what we call the Old Testament and the New Testament, as two separate stories and two different origins. The Old Testament, which scholars call the Hebrew Bible, was already in wide-scale use throughout Jewish and Christian circles. Why change the book when it is already formed? As the New Testament canon began to solidify, the Christians chose not to mix the two into one book but keep them separate and united. Thus the Old Testament contains the stories from the old covenant, the one inaugurated by Abraham, and the New Testament is the stories that show the fulfillment of the covenant inaugurated by Jesus. The word “testament” means witness. The word martyr comes from the same root word as someone who witnesses to their faith by the shedding of their blood. The Old Testament *witnesses* to those events that predict the Messiah and explain who God is; the New Testament *witnesses* to Jesus who fulfilled the covenant. Notice how different these focuses are. They have good reason to maintain their separation.

Timeline of the Old Testament with the books in their proper order

Pre-history: Genesis

The time in the desert and law books: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Establishment of the Kingdom until divided kingdom: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, Ruth, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs

Divided kingdom until exile: Amos, Hosea, 1 and 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Jonah, Micah, Obadiah, Isaiah 1-39, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Joel, Zephaniah

Exile: Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Isaiah 40-55, Ester, Daniel, Tobit

Post-exile: Ezra, Nehemiah, Zachariah, Ecclesiastes, Haggai, Malachi, Isaiah 56-66

Greek Conquest: 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Baruch, Sirach,

Old Testament Themes:

Covenant: A covenant is a pact made between two parties. Unlike a treaty which is between two equal parties, a covenant is formed between two unequal parties like a king and his peasants. Both parties agree to terms with a stipulation that if either party breaks their end of the deal, there are consequences. For instance in chapter 15 of the Book of Genesis, God makes a covenant with Abraham that if Abraham remains faithful to God, then God will give him this land to be his ancestral heritage. To show the gravity of this covenant, God asked Abraham to cut a certain number and type of animals in half separating the halves from each other. The word covenant comes from the Hebrew word “to cut” as well as the root for “treaty.” Thus the cutting of the animals illustrates the covenant, “the cutting of a deal”, that is happening between God and Abraham. The animals also represent the consequence for breaking the covenant: that you will be cut into pieces like these animals if you break the covenant. The final act of the covenant is that God passed between the two parts of the cut up animals. The normal process of inaugurating a covenant required both parties to come together in the middle and walk with each other symbolizing the establishment of the covenant. Thus God walked between the cut up animals showing the ratification of the covenant.

The other major covenants symbolize essential ways in which the people understood that God was their god and how they are to be his people. The most important covenants are the following. The covenant of circumcision. This covenant literally marked the men as God’s people. Every other nation would not dare cut the foreskin of their penis since that is considered a disgrace and a provocative gesture. Thus whenever a Jewish man entered the room, engaged in combat, or was at a bathhouse, everyone knew what religion he professed. The covenant of an heir. God also promised Abraham an heir. This promise was that Abraham’s lineage would have no end and that the promise made to Abraham would be passed down through his lineage. The final major covenant is the between David and God where God promises to raise up kings from David’s lineage. These covenants are not only important for the people of Israel but they are also symbolic of the events that would culminate in Jesus’ life, which we will discuss later.

Kingdom: the area of Israel was considered the kingdom of Israel. Land and a king were exceptionally important for the Israelites. The land represented the place where God dwelled, the place where they would encounter God, and a place special to them. God promised that he would always protect them and provide for them and that they would always be on this land. The kingship started much later. God promised the land of Israel to Abraham in chapter 15 of The

Book of Genesis and ratified it much later during the time of Isaac in Genesis 26. In sharp contrast to the other nations that surrounded the Land of Israel, the Israelites were not a warring nation and neither were they interested in conquest. The Israelites had a profound sense that God gave them this land and no more and no less. Therefore they strongly defended their land but did not seek to expand their territory. This shows how important their land is. Even today the people of Israel take exceptional care of their country. Streetsweepers come through the streets three to four times a day to make sure the land is clean and cared for. The kingship started after the people had already settled in the Promised Land and noticed all the other kingdoms around them with a king and they didn't have one. Out of envy and a desire for unity, they appealed to God for a king in 1 Samuel. God allowed it under the warning that they are rejecting him as king. This started an entire lineage and saga of kings some of whom were good kings and others were rather evil.

Deuteronomic Philosophy: toward the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses gave the Israelites a choice before they enter the Promised Land. If they choose God's laws, they will prosper and God will continue to provide for them and protect them. If they choose against God's laws or choose not to follow them, then God will punish them and they will be considered cursed. This mentality of blessings and curses coming from God for those who follow his laws versus those who do not becomes both a common theme for the Old Testament and even our modern day. For the vast majority of Jewish history the people believed that those who are rich, healthy, and famous were blessed by God because they followed God's laws blamelessly. The converse was also true. They said that those who were ill, poor, and destitute as having sinned against God or were unwilling or unable to follow his commands. As a clear example of this philosophy see John 9. The disciples see a man who is born blind. They ask Jesus, why is this man blind? Is it because of his sin or his parent's sin? The same idea permeates and becomes the core narrative of the Book of Job: why is Job suffering? What sin did he commit? The Deuteronomic Philosophy – that God blesses those who follow his commands and curses those who do not – maintained its importance for the majority of the Old Testament. By the era of the wisdom books, the people were beginning to realize that this philosophy doesn't work. The good, blameless people are often punished in many ways and the wicked are prosperous. Even the Psalms call out this conflict in this philosophy.

Passover and Temple Worship: These two events become the standard form of worship for the Israelites. As a sign of their freedom from Egypt and the ratification of the covenant from Abraham, God creates a feast to celebrate and remember the events of Egypt called Passover. The term makes more sense in English in that the people *passed over* from the land of Egypt to the Promised Land. The events of Passover are very specific. The feast must start at sundown and include a slaughtered and offered 3-year-old male sheep. If a family is too poor to afford a sheep, then they join with another household. Every person must eat the Passover Lamb to be considered Jewish for the next year. If they don't eat the lamb, they are cut off from the people until the following year. The other events focus on worship of God in the Temple or Meeting Tent. The laws governing their worship are found in the Book of Leviticus. These forms of worship teach the people about God, forgive the sins of the people, and honor important events in Jewish history. These events were not optional. Most of the forms of worship required the

slaughter of animals, the offering of animals, and the consuming of the slaughtered and offered animals. Other forms of worship included incense offering, cereal or grain offering, and prayers and liturgical dance. Once the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD all forms of worship revolved around the written word and the explanation of the laws and covenant.

Outline of Salvation history and the Old Testament

Salvation history is the story of God working with his people to help them know his ways and live it. In a more specific sense, salvation history is the story of God's people culminating in the final, pivotal moment when God became man in Jesus. Therefore I am going to briefly cover the main events of the Old Testament that tell the story of God's people which culminated in Jesus.

Creation: we cannot dismiss the beginning when God created all things and created man in *our*, God's, image. Creation set the stage for sin, which set the stage for redemption, which allowed the people to realize their need for God and come to hope in a final restoration, a theme more common than any other in the Bible.

The Covenants: Through Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God made clear his will through promises to his people. Promises that they would be his special people, that they would have an ancestral land, that God would be their God and protector. All of the promises central to Jesus' life came in the age of the covenants.

Egypt: Egypt was the place that provided for the tribe of Jacob during the famine. Egypt became a place of refuge, then a place of persecution, and then a place of profound encounter with God. Through the events in Egypt, the people came to recognize God and became rather wealthy. No event will be recalled more often and expanded upon than the story of the Israelites in Egypt.

The desert: during their sojourn in the desert, the people encountered God through signs, providence, and laws. All of the principle laws came during their time in the desert. Temple worship and the centrality of sin offerings came during their time in the desert which paved the way for the one ultimate sin offering, Jesus. The lamb who was slain, the scapegoat who took the sins of the people, the need for a sin offering, the importance of blood, and the consummation of the sacrifice as healing are all in the Book of Leviticus.

The establishment of their land: the crossing of the Jordan river became symbolic of leaving a past life behind and beginning something new: becoming a nation. At first God was their ruler and king and the prophets and judges would deal with situations of law.

The establishment of the king: the people were not happy with God as their king and wanted a king like the other nations. God gave them a king who stood in the place of God. The king was given a throne, paraded around in the streets, and could even offer incense in the temple. Their king was more-or-less God's representative.

The building of the Temple: under King Solomon God finally had a place to dwell. The magnificent temple represented God's presence to the people, a place of ritual sacrifices, and a symbol of his ever presence with them.

The divided kingdom: After the death of Solomon, his two sons argued and fought over who would become the next king. In their squabbles, they divided the kingdom into the north and the south. The south had the Temple and king, the north had to make up their own stuff.

The exile: technically the Israelites were exiled twice. The northern kingdom was exiled in 721 and the southern in 538. The first exile was from Assyria who was later conquered by Babylon. The second was by Babylon and lasted 40 years until Persia conquered Babylon. This pivotal moment was the first time they were without Temple, king, or land. Had God's promises come to an end? Was God a liar? The answer is no, as told by Ezekiel and Jeremiah who convinced the people that God was still there.

The second Temple period: after returning from exile they rebuilt the Temple under the mandate of King Cyrus the Great, the protector and savior of the Jewish people. The main change in this age was the end of the kingship. The priests were reestablished as were the prophetic tradition and the temple worship, but not the kingship. Persia ruled the kingdom.

The Greek age: Although not a crucial point in Jewish history, the Greeks conquered the Persians and established a new rule in Israel. This rule was not tolerant of Jewish thought and religion as the Persians had been. Instead, the Greeks banned the basic practices of Judaism and led the Jews to revolt against them. The Greek age becomes the core philosophy and language that leads to the New Testament.

The end of the Jewish age: in 70 AD, the Roman empire, now fed up with the revolts and fearing a massive scale revolt by the Jewish people, launched a full-scale assault upon Israel. This fighting led to the destruction of the Temple, the end of the temple sacrifices, the end of the priests, and the beginning of exclusive synagogal worship by the Jews.