



# The Story of God

## Table of Contents

- Introduction . . . . . 4
- What is the Story of God? . . . . . 5
- What We Believe about  
the Bible . . . . . 9
- Unpacking the Bible . . . . . 13
- Reading the Old Testament . . . 17
- Common Questions  
about the Old Testament . . . . . 22
- Sermon Schedule . . . . . 26
- Recommended Resources . . . . . 27

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and click on the link.



Dear Revolutionary,

Our aim, when putting this study guide in your hand, is not to promote meaningless religious activity. You've probably heard language like this before at Revolution. It's the purpose behind all our groups, teams, and ministry ideas around here. Our hope is that when we invite people to learn about who God is, we're giving them the best opportunity we can to learn, grow and change in the midst of what God is doing in our city and through our church. And the flip side is that we're teaching people to take ownership of their personal spiritual growth. Growing spiritually isn't just about showing up on Saturday night. One of the goals of this study guide is to show you why. What you'll find in the pages that follow is an overview of the 5 month series through the Old Testament we're calling *The Story of God*.

In addition to this overview, each week we will have daily devotional questions that will correspond with the sermon. You can pick those up each week on the Next Steps table or on our website.<sup>1</sup>

So, without waiting any longer, let's jump into *The Story of God*.

Be Revolutionary,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Josh Reich'.

Josh Reich

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.tucsonrevolution.com/story-of-god/>

## What is *The Story of God*?

For many people and even Christians in our culture, the Old Testament is just that- old. It seems archaic, taking place thousands of years ago. It involves a world we don't understand, names we can't pronounce, animal sacrifices, wars, famines. Besides, God seems different than he does in the New Testament. In the New Testament, we see God as Jesus. He is loving, gracious, inviting and compassionate. In the Old Testament, God is often described as angry, wrathful, and vengeful. We identify with Jesus. Pastors preach about Jesus and spend more time in the New Testament. After all, the thinking goes, Jesus came and now we are under grace, not the law of the Old Testament, so what is the point of reading the Old Testament? We don't sacrifice animals or stone people, so why read it?

That all makes sense.

In fact, if you said that to a group of people in a church setting many of them would thank you for saying what everyone is thinking. Mark Driscoll's first encounter with the Old Testament illustrates most people's first encounter:

*Not knowing where to begin in the Bible, I just started on the first page, assuming that the Bible was to be read like any other book, from front to back. I started with Genesis, where I expected to see God's people living holy, devout lives that would compel God to love them and would give me an example of how to live a good life.*

*What I read in Genesis actually shocked me. The book seemed to be mainly about the story of one family that descended from a man named Abraham. While God clearly loved and blessed this family, it was far more like an episode of Jerry Springer than I was expecting. Abraham had both a young wife and an old wife, and pimped out his elderly wife Sarah to some king named Pharaoh to save his own skin. Their grandson Jacob was clearly a con man and ended up marrying two sisters. Later, one of Jacob's sons, Reuben, actually slept with one of his father's wives. The great Noah got drunk and passed out naked in his tent like some redneck on vacation. Some guy named Lot also got drunk, and then his two daughters had sex with him so they could get pregnant. In perhaps the oddest plot twist of all, Judah thought he was picking up a prostitute only to later discover that it was his own daughter-in-law; she had pretended to be a prostitute because she wanted to have his baby, which as far as I could tell must have thrown the entire Hebrew trailer park where Genesis took place into a tizzy.*

*After Genesis, I continued reading the Old Testament only to find that Moses was known to disobey and argue with God, David was an adulterer and murderer, Solomon had so many women living with him that even Hugh Hefner would have blushed, and other than the occasional person like Joseph, Daniel, or Boaz, most everyone that I had ever heard about in the Old Testament was as messed up as anyone I had ever met.*

*I finished reading the Old Testament in roughly a month, and although I was enjoying the stories, I was confused about how I should understand them. I had always thought that the Bible was the record of good, moral, religious people and that if I read the Bible I could learn the principles of how to live like them. However, I did not think that having a bunch of wives, sleeping with my mother, impregnating strippers, or being drunk and naked a lot were the application points I was supposed to take from Scripture.<sup>2</sup>*

Many of us share the same confusion when it comes to the Old Testament. The only problem is that the Old Testament is in the Bible. In fact, it makes up almost 75% of the Bible. Can you imagine reading a story that was missing 75% of it? How would you know the story if you started it towards the end? Yet, this is how many of us live our Christian lives. We live just knowing the last 25% of the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

The reality is that not only is the Old Testament part of the Bible, the New Testament does not make sense without the Old Testament. If Christ is the key to human history, the Old Testament carefully describes the lock. If Christ is the climax of the story, the Old Testament sets the stage and begins the plot. Do you read just the endings of books? If the New Testament presents God's promises kept, the Old Testament tells us about God's promises made. In other words, if you don't get what the Old Testament teaches, you'll never get Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Going a step further, think in terms of the cross. You will best be able to comprehend Christ's cross if you first understand the question left unanswered by the Old Testament. The cross is the answer. How well do you

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<sup>2</sup>Mark Driscoll, *A Book on the Old Testament You'll Actually Read* (to download the first chapter from this book for free, go to <http://theresurgence.com/files/2010/11/21/MD-OnTheOT-Chap1.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup>Imagine if all you knew about *The Lord of the Rings* was the last half of *The Return of the King*.

<sup>4</sup>Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament*, p. 22

know the question?<sup>5</sup>

One of the things we love to do at Revolution Church is to preach through books of the Bible. So far in our 2 and a half years as a church we have preached through Song of Solomon, Jonah, Hebrews, Nehemiah, 2 Timothy, Philippians, and James.<sup>6</sup> As we were thinking about an Old Testament book to preach through, I felt like we needed to do an overview of the Old Testament. Instead of focusing on one part, what if we looked at the whole thing?

Enter *The Story of God*. For the next 5 months as a church, we will walk through the Old Testament. We will see the story that God writes from the creation of all things all the way up to the birth of Jesus. We will look at how God works through broken people like you and me. We will see how the gospel flows through every page of Scripture and that the mission of God to bring the gospel to all people through his people is on every page and seeps out of every story.

One thing that may surprise you after reading the previous paragraph is that there is an overarching story in the Bible. As one Bible scholar put it,

*No less than sixty-six separate books, one of which consists itself of one hundred and fifty separate compositions, immediately stare us in the face. These treatises come from the hands of at least thirty distinct writers, scattered over a period of fifteen hundred years, and embrace specimens of nearly every kind of writing known among men. There are histories, codes of law, ethical maxims, philosophical treatises, discourses, dramas, songs, hymns, epics, biographies, and letters both official and personal.*

*Their writers, too, were of diverse kinds. The time of their labors stretches from the hoary past of Egypt to and beyond the bright splendor of Rome under Augustus.*

*We may look, however, on a still greater wonder. Let us once penetrate beneath all this primal diversity and observe the internal character of the volume, and a most striking unity is found to pervade the whole...The parts are so linked together that the absence of any one book would introduce confusion and disorder. The same doctrine is taught from beginning to end...Each book, indeed, adds something in clearness, definition, or even increment, to what the others proclaim.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup>Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament*, p. 22

<sup>6</sup>To listen to all our past sermons and access past study guides, go to <http://www.tucsonrevolution.com/sermons/>

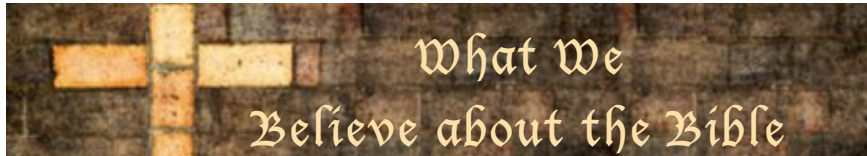
<sup>7</sup>B.B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, p. 436-437

We can't ignore the Old Testament in favor of the New Testament. If you ignore the Old Testament, you ignore the basis and foundation of the New Testament. The context for understanding the person and work of Christ is the Old Testament. God's work of creation, humanity's rebellion against him, sin's consequence in death, God's election of a particular people, his revelation of sin through the law, the history of his people, and his work among other peoples all form the setting for Christ's coming. Christ came into history at a particular point in the story line. So the parables taught by Jesus often refer back to the story line begun in Genesis. His verbal battles with the Pharisees are rooted in differences over the meaning of the law. The epistles build upon the Old Testament again and again. Understanding God's purpose in history, understanding the story line requires us to begin at the beginning. If we can better understand the Old Testament, we will have come a long way toward better understanding the New Testament and so, better understanding Jesus Christ, Christianity, God, and ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

My hope over these next 5 months is not only will you begin to have a greater understanding and appreciation for the Old Testament, but that you would begin to see the overarching story of the Bible. I hope you will see that it begins with God, a God who created you in his image, who sees the brokenness and sin in our lives and our world, and who makes a mission of righting the wrongs of the world through the gospel. To do that, he works through ordinary, broken people who are willing to work with him to bring about the world he imagined from the beginning.

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<sup>8</sup>Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament*, p. 26



## What We Believe about the Bible

Before we get into how to read the Old Testament, who wrote it, and some of the common questions about the Old Testament, we need to begin with some introduction to the Bible.

The New Testament speaks of the Old Testament as Scripture, for which the Greek word is *graphe*, meaning “writing.” The word *bible* comes from the Greek word for book. *Holy Bible*, therefore means “Holy Book.”

Our Bible, like history, is divided into the period prior to Jesus’ coming (BC or “before Christ”) and the period following his coming (AD or *anno Domini*, which is a Latin phrase meaning “in the year of our Lord”). The Bible actually contains 66 separate books. Thirty-nine books are in the Old Testament, which is a record of the time from God creating the world and our first parents Adam and Eve up until the coming of Jesus Christ into human history. The twenty-seven books of the New Testament begin with the four gospels, which record the life, death, burial, resurrection and return to heaven of Jesus. After the Gospels come instructions to various Christians and Christian churches about how to think and live in light of whom Jesus is and what he has done. In this way, the Bible is really more of a library of books rather than a single book. However, as already stated, there is unity and continuity between the various books of the Bible and their Old Testament and New Testament groupings. This point is illustrated by the fact that the New Testament has roughly three hundred explicit Old Testament quotations, as well as more than four thousand Old Testament allusions. *In many ways, the Old Testament is a series of promises that God makes, and the New Testament is the record of the fulfillment of those promises.*

The Bible was written over a period of roughly 1500 years by more than forty authors in three languages (the Old Testament in Hebrew, with a bit of Aramaic in Ezra and Daniel, and the New Testament in Greek). Authors of the Old Testament include kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, and more. Some books of the Bible clearly state their author (e.g. Joshua 24:26 says that Joshua wrote the book bearing his name). Other books of the Bible do not reveal to us who wrote them (e.g. 1 and 2 Kings). Some books of the Bible are deeply personal, so they require knowledge of the author to be fully appreciated (e.g., Lamentations and Nehemiah 1–7 are essentially journal entries). Meanwhile, other books are historical and literary works that do not necessitate an awareness of who penned them.

Stylistically, the Bible includes historical records, sermons, letters, a hymn book, love songs, geographical surveys, architectural specifications, travel diaries, population statistics, family trees, inventories, and numerous legal documents. The Bible is multicultural, in that people from several continents, (Asia, Africa, and Europe) in different periods of history, and with varied backgrounds, incomes, and cultures contributed to the writing of its books.

When first reading through the Old Testament, sometimes people become confused because they simply read through the books of the Bible in the order that they appear, only to find that they are not in chronological order and therefore are difficult to interrelate. The Bible is organized by literary type, much like the books on the shelf at your local library. Therefore, if you would like to read the Old Testament in chronological order, you may want to purchase a chronological Bible so that you can see the timing and relationship between people and events. To help you better understand the books of the Bible according to their literary type, I will later explain each of the Old Testament genres (Pentateuch, history, wisdom, and prophets).<sup>9</sup>

When reading the Bible, especially, the Old Testament, it quickly becomes clear that it includes many records of people, places, and events explained in their historical context. The settings of the Bible range from ancient Egypt under king Pharaoh to Rome under the rule of Augustus. The Bible reveals to us that God is sovereign over history and works in history for individuals, family lines, and nations. What makes the biblical account of history unique is that it does not merely tell us of people, events, and ideas, but it also explains their theological meaning in relation to God. *Therefore, the historical record of the Bible is written with the primary purpose of revealing who God is through his work in history so that we can see our lives as inextricably connected to him in every way and only meaningful when understood in light of him.*

The Old Testament was written on papyrus, a form of paper made out of reeds; the New Testament was written on parchments (prepared animal skins). A lecturer at the University of Paris created the Bible’s chapter divisions in the early 1200’s, which accounts for our current 1,189 chapter divisions. The Bible’s 31,173 verse divisions were fully developed by 1551, in an effort to provide addresses (not unlike those on our homes) that would help us find particular sections.

Roughly three-quarters of the Christian Bible is the Old Testament. The Old Testament has 929 chapters and 23,214 verses. The New Testament has 260 chapters and 7,959 verses. In the Old Testament, the longest book is Psalms and the shortest book is Obadiah. In the New Testament, the longest book is Acts and the shortest book is 3 John.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>See the section titled “How to Read the Old Testament”

<sup>10</sup>Mark Driscoll, *A Book on the Old Testament You’ll Actually Read*

A foundational belief of Christianity is that the Bible writers were inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16) to write the books that later became the Bible. This is what separates the Bible from other religious texts.

Some scholars also use the term “inerrancy” to describe what sets the Bible apart. It is worth pausing to say first what inerrancy is not. Some people want inerrancy to exclude grammatical irregularities and strange spellings. Now, we in the West have only come to standardized spelling fairly recently – just take a look at the Puritan spelling of 400 hundred years ago, with all it’s bizarre variations. Inerrancy does not have anything to do with picky details of that sort. Nor does it address the question whether or not the manuscripts were copied and copied and recopied, and therefore sometimes leading to copies containing mistakes. It does not address any of those sorts of questions.

Inerrancy is tied to one central issue – has God disclosed himself in words? Or has he only disclosed himself in numinous (ethereal) experiences? If he has disclosed himself in somehow subjective, mystical, numinous experiences that can’t be verbalized accurately, then any notion of inerrancy makes no sense. But if God in his mercy talks to us – if he’s a talking God, in our language, despite the fact that he inhabits eternity, he speaks to us in Hebrew and in Aramaic and in Greek (the languages of the Biblical periods) – then the question becomes: are his words reliable? When he speaks, does he speak the truth?

Obviously the Bible is made up of many different literary forms and genres, so sometimes one way God discloses himself in the written word is very different than at another time. For example, through the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament, about six centuries before Christ, God gives Jeremiah certain words. Jeremiah dictates these words to his secretary. His secretary writes them down. In the story, eventually some bad guys come along and pick up the manuscript – the only manuscript – and they start tearing it up and throwing it into the fire. As the reader, you are supposed to laugh because, after all, this was not a PhD dissertation by Jeremiah, but God’s word to Jeremiah. Does it make sense to think God has forgotten what he has said? So God gives it to Jeremiah again. This example is plain dictation.

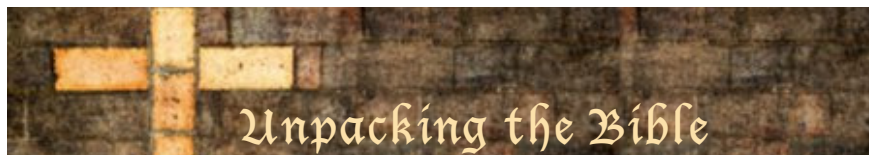
In other passages, like Psalm 23, David can write “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall lack nothing.” David was not given that by dictation. He was expressing his own feelings and own understandings from his days as a shepherd boy. He thought this was a terrific analogy to talk about God. In both cases – Jeremiah and David – God used human individuals. This is true in other cases – some by dictation, some by visions and the like. In the case of Psalm 23, through the experiences of David, God produces a text that is simultaneously a text of the human writer and God’s own ordained, providentially determined words.

So the question is: is this God a truth-speaking God? When the Bible contains a lament you do not question whether the lament is telling the truth. But in so far as there is a truth-claim in the material, inerrancy is merely a way of saying “Wherever there is a truth-claim, God’s words are in fact true”. That is what is meant by inerrancy.

You could also say there are other categories. Is the Bible emotionally evocative? Yes, it is. Is it symbol-laden? In some kinds of writing, yes, it is. In other words, truth is not the only standard to bring up against scripture. But because truth is the standard that is so often denied in today’s world, confessing Christians want to affirm it using a variety of words. Inerrancy is simply one of those words to insist that where scripture tells you stuff, God’s words are reliable. They tell the truth. They don’t make mistakes. God knows what he is doing. That is what inerrancy is about.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>D.A. Carson, *What is Inerrancy?* (accessed at <http://ehrmanproject.com/transcripts/D.A.%20Carson%20-%20What%20is%20%27inerrancy%27%20%28edited%29.pdf> on March 14, 2011)



How does the Bible fit together as a whole? The events recorded in the Bible took place over a span of thousands of years and in several different cultural settings. What is their unifying thread?

One unifying thread in the Bible is its divine authorship. *Every book of the Bible is God's word.* The events recorded in the Bible are there because God wanted them recorded, and he had them recorded with his people and their instruction in mind: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

The Bible also makes it clear that *God has a unified plan for all of history.* His ultimate purpose, "a plan for the fullness of time," is "to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:10), "to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:12). God had this plan even from the beginning. He says through the prophet Isaiah, "Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'" (Isaiah 46:9 – 10).

The work of Christ on earth, and especially his crucifixion and resurrection, is the climax of history; it is the great turning point at which God actually accomplished the salvation toward which history had been moving throughout the Old Testament. The present era looks back on Christ's completed work but also looks forward to the consummation of his work when Christ will come again and when there will appear "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13; see Revelation 21:1 – 22:5).

The unity of God's plan makes it appropriate for him to include *promises and predictions* at earlier points of time, and then for the *fulfillments* of these to come at later points. Sometimes the promises take *explicit* form, as when God promises the coming of the Messiah, the great Savior whom Israel expected (Isaiah 9:6 – 7). Sometimes the promises take *symbolic* form, as when God commanded animal sacrifices to be offered as a symbol for the forgiveness of sins (Leviticus 4). In themselves, the animal sacrifices were not

able to remove sins permanently and to atone for them permanently (Hebrews 10:1 – 18).<sup>12</sup> They pointed forward to Christ, who is the final and complete sacrifice for sins.<sup>13</sup>

Since God's plan focuses on Christ and his glory (Ephesians 1:10), it is natural that the promises of God and the symbols in the Old Testament all point forward to him. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Christ]" (2 Corinthians 1:20). When Christ appeared to the disciples after his resurrection, his teaching focused on leading them to understand how the Old Testament pointed to him: "And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scripture the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25 – 27). One could also look at Luke 24:44 – 48: "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.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.'"

When the Bible says "He opened their minds to understand *the Scriptures*" (Luke 24:45), it does not mean just a few scattered predictions about the Messiah. It means the Old Testament as a whole, encompassing all three of the major divisions of the Old Testament that the Jews traditionally recognized. At the heart of understanding the Old Testament books is the truth that they point forward to the suffering of Christ, his resurrection, and the subsequent spread of the gospel to "all nations" (Luke 24:47). The Old Testament as a whole, through its promises, its symbols, and its pictures of salvation, looks forward to the actual accomplishment of salvation that took place once for all in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

In what ways does the Old Testament look forward to Christ? First, it directly points forward through *promises of salvation and promises concerning God's commitment to his people.* God gave some specific promises in the Old Testament relating to the coming of Christ as the Messiah, the Savior in the line of David. Through the prophet Micah, God promises that the Messiah is to

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<sup>12</sup>I preached through Hebrews in 2009. If you'd like to hear the sermon on this passage to get a better idea of the Day of Atonement and how Christ fulfilled the animal sacrifice system of the Old Testament, go to <http://www.tucsonrevolution.com/sermon/perfect-hebrews-101-18/>.

<sup>13</sup>Taken from "God's Plan for History" in *The ESV Study Bible*, p. 23

<sup>14</sup>Taken from "Christ in the Old Testament" in *The ESV Study Bible*, p. 23

be born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Micah 5:2), a prophecy strikingly fulfilled in the New Testament (Matthew 2:1 – 12). But God often gives more general promises concerning a future great day of salvation, without spelling out all the details of how he will accomplish it (for example Isaiah 25:6 – 9 and 60:1 – 7). Sometimes he promises simply to be their God (see Genesis 17:7).

One common refrain is, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33; Hosea 2:23; Zechariah 8:8, 13:9; Hebrews 8:10). Variations on this broad theme may sometimes focus more on the people and what they will be, while at other times they focus on God and what he will do. God’s promise to “be their God” is really his comprehensive commitment to be with his people, to care for them, to discipline them, to protect them, to supply their needs, and to have a personal relationship with them. The final end of that commitment results ultimately in the salvation that God works out in Christ.

The principle extends to all the promises in the Old Testament. “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Christ]” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Sometimes God gives immediate, temporal blessings. These blessings are only a foretaste of the rich, eternal blessings that come through Christ: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3).<sup>15</sup>

The promises of God in the Old Testament come in the context not only of God’s commitment to his people but also of instruction about the people’s commitment and obligations to God. Noah, Abraham, and others whom God meets and addresses are called on to respond not only with trust in God’s promises but with lives that begin to bear fruit from their relationship with God. The relation of God to his people is summed up in various *covenants* that God makes with his people. A covenant between two equal human beings is a binding commitment obliging them to deal faithfully with one another (as with Jacob and Laban in Genesis 31:44). When God makes a covenant with man, God is the sovereign, or superior, so he specifies the obligations on both sides. “I will be their God” is the fundamental obligation on God’s side, while “they shall be my people” is the fundamental obligation on the human side. But then there are variations in the details.

For example, when God first calls Abram he says, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). This commandment specifies an obligation on the part of Abram, an obligation on the human side. God also indicates what he will do on his part: “And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2). God’s commitment takes the form of promises, blessings, and curses. The *promises*

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<sup>15</sup>Taken from “The Promises of God” in *The ESV Study Bible*, p. 23 – 24

and blessings point forward to Christ, who is the fulfillment of the promises and the source of final blessings. The *curse*s point forward to Christ both in his bearing the curse for his peoples’ sin and in his execution of judgment and curse against sin, especially at the Second Coming.

The obligations on the human side of the covenants are also related to Christ. Christ is fully man as well as fully God. As a man, he stands with his people on the human side. He fulfilled the obligations of God’s covenants through his perfect obedience (Hebrews 5:8). He received the reward of obedience in his resurrection and ascension (see Philippians 2:9 – 10). The Old Testament covenants on their human side thus point forward to his achievement.

By dealing with the wrath of God against sin, Christ changed our situation of alienation from God to a situation of peace with God. He reconciled believers to God (2 Corinthians 5:18 – 21; Romans 5:6 – 11). He brought personal intimacy with God, and the privilege of being children of God (Romans 8:14 – 17). This intimacy is what all the Old Testament covenants anticipated. In Isaiah, God even declares that his servant, the Messiah will *be* the covenant for the people (see Isaiah 42:6, 49:8).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Taken from “Covenants” in *The ESV Study Bible*, p. 24



If you turn to the table of contents in your Bible, you can see that the story of the Old Testament is recounted in not just one book but in thirty-nine smaller books. These books, which together make up the Old Testament, are quite different from one another.

Genesis through Deuteronomy, the first division of five books, is called the Pentateuch or the five books of law. Following these five are twelve books called the histories – Joshua through Esther. Taken together, these seventeen books chronicle the narrative from Creation through God’s people’s return from exile in Babylon, and they conclude about four hundred years before Christ. All seventeen books, one after the other, are fairly chronological.

The five books that follow the historical narrative books in your table of contents – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon – focus on some of the more personal experiences of the people of God. These books are largely collections taken from throughout this Old Testament period of wisdom literature, devotional poems, and ceremonial literature of the Temple.

Following the Song of Solomon, you will see in the table of contents a series of seventeen books, beginning with Isaiah and ending with Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament. These books are the writings of the prophets. If the first seventeen books follow Israel’s history, and the middle group describes individual experiences within that history, this last group provides God’s own commentary on the history. The books of prophecy are, as it were, God’s authoritative editorials.<sup>17</sup>

The Old Testament as a whole provides one very clear and concrete revelation of God to his people, given through a variety of authors and genres over a long stretch of time. Now, let’s break each down into smaller bites.

### Pentateuch

The Pentateuch consists of the first five books of the Bible, i.e., Genesis through Deuteronomy. The Hebrew term for it is *torah* (“law” or “instruction”), so this is how the New Testament refers to it (“law”). While it contains many laws, it is essentially narrative with episodes of law-giving, but in the broader sense of *torah* all the Pentateuch can be seen as instruction, for it teaches as much through the history it records as by the law it gives. The

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<sup>17</sup>Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament*, p. 28

Pentateuch is often called “the five books of Moses” because it provides of a biography of Moses and he has been seen as their main author.

The Pentateuch is not simply the beginning of the Bible; it is also the foundation of the Bible. It serves as a way to show us how to read the rest of the biblical story line. It introduces the key promises that show God’s purpose in history and that lay the groundwork for the coming of Christ.

The Pentateuch shows God’s intention for his creation by describing what the world was like when he first created man and woman in the Garden of Eden. Their sin sets the divine program back but does not defeat it, for God later calls Abraham and promises him descendants, land, and most important of all, blessing to all the nations through his descendants.

The Pentateuch gives insight into God’s character and his ethical standards. It illustrates both his benevolence and his righteousness. He cares for mankind, creating man in his own image, providing him with food, and protecting human life from violent assault. Yet at the same time he demands moral behavior, as in the 10 Commandments, from keeping the Sabbath to refusing adultery or theft.<sup>18</sup>

### History

The Historical Books of the Old Testament, which come after the Pentateuch, tell the story of (1) Israel’s entry into the Promised Land of Canaan under Joshua; (2) Israel’s life in the land under the judges and the transition to kingship; (3) the division of the nation into two rival kingdoms (Israel and Judah) and life in both; (4) the downfall and exile of each kingdom; (5) life in exile; and (6) Judah’s return from exile. These books<sup>19</sup> span close to 1,000 years of history, so it is not surprising that their story includes many ups and downs, twists and turns. Yet, through it all, the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever remains the focal point of all of these books.

The following themes appear in the Historical books: God’s sovereignty over Israel and the nations<sup>20</sup>, God’s presence near and far<sup>21</sup>, God’s promises

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<sup>18</sup>Taken from “Introduction to the Pentateuch” in *The ESV Study Bible*, p. 35

<sup>19</sup>The History books include Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

<sup>20</sup>God is present in these books, over all things and in control, even when Israel goes into Exile. God’s sovereignty and power is seen through various miracles in the book of Joshua, 1 Kings 7- 19; 21; 2 Kings 1 – 9; 13.

<sup>21</sup>God is close at hand in the Historical books, always involved in the life of the nation of Israel. God designated Joshua as Moses’ successor, raised up the judges in response to Israel’s dire straits over several centuries and designated Saul and David as his chosen kings. When God seems hidden in these books, it is because of Israel’s sin.

both present and future<sup>22</sup>, God's kingdom both divine and human<sup>23</sup>, and God's covenant in terms of rewards and punishment.<sup>24</sup>

The Historical books are largely narrative, with some other genres such as poetry, genealogies, lists, and letters. The historical narratives are presented as straightforward accounts of real events, and they treat miracles in the same narrative fashion as they do everyday events.<sup>25</sup>

### Poetry & Wisdom

The Poetry & Wisdom books encompass some of the most beautiful, soul stirring and honest words in Scripture. Books such as Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes make up the Poetry and Wisdom books.

While poetry is found in other books of the Bible<sup>26</sup>, it is most common in this section of the Old Testament. These books focus more on the individual's relationship with God as opposed to his relationship with the entire nation. Men such as Job, David and Solomon take up the majority of space in this section.

### Prophetic Books

The final section of books in the Old Testament is the Prophetic books. If the first seventeen books present historical narrative, and the middle five books present the reflections of various individuals, this last group of seventeen presents God's commentary on Israel's history, particularly Israel's disobedience.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>The Historical books carry forward the stories of the Pentateuch and many of its themes. One them is God's promise to be with his people (Genesis 17:8; Exodus 3:12; Joshua 1:5, 9; 2 Samuel 7; Ezra 7:6; Nehemiah 2:8). God did not and does not forsake his promise to his people.

<sup>23</sup>The Bible teaches God is king over the earth (Exodus 15:18; Psalm 93:1). His rule can be seen in his sovereignty over all nature, people, and nations. God raised up kings to lead the people. The king was God's representative on earth, and God's earthly kingdom was entrusted to him (1 Chronicles 29:23; 2 Chronicles 13:8).

<sup>24</sup>The book of Deuteronomy lays out the rewards and punishments that would follow obedience and disobedience of God's people (Ch. 27 – 28). This perspective governs most of the writing of the Historical books: when people followed the Lord, they were blessed (2 Kings 18:7 – 8), and when they did not, they suffered (Judges 2; 2 Kings 24:3 – 4; 1 Chronicles 10:13; 2 Chronicles 26:16 – 23).

<sup>25</sup>Taken from "Introduction to the Historical Books" in *The ESV Study Bible*, p. 385

<sup>26</sup>See Leviticus, Ruth, Esther, Haggai, and Malachi

The Prophetic books are typically named for the prophet who wrote them or who was used by God to speak to the nation of Israel and call her back into relationship with God. The prophets found in the Prophetic books do not make up the only prophets in the Bible. It is important to recognize that the prophets were not the regular teachers of God's word – that was the priests' calling. Rather, God raised up prophets at particular times in the Old Testament story.

It is important to understand what qualified a prophet or a prophetic book in the Old Testament. First, *the prophets assert that God has spoken through them*. They clearly considered themselves God's messengers, for they repeatedly preface their message with the phrase, "Thus says the Lord." They declared God's word in two basic ways: words<sup>28</sup> and symbols.<sup>29</sup>

Second, *the prophets affirm that God chose Israel for covenant relationship*. The Pentateuch teaches that God chose Abraham and his family to bless all nations (Genesis 12:1 – 9), that he revealed salvation by grace to Abraham (Genesis 15:6), and that he assigned Moses to write a record of this revelation (Exodus 24:4). In Exodus – Deuteronomy, he reveals the lifestyle that reflects this relationship.<sup>30</sup> Through the prophets God revealed the success and failure of Israel's attempts or lack of attempts to fulfill their confession of faith in God and their God-given role as a kingdom of priests charged with serving the nations (Exodus 19:5 – 6).

Third, *the prophets most often report that the majority of Israel had sinned against their God and his standards for their relationship*. They failed to trust God (Isaiah 7:1 – 14). They broke the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1 – 17; Jeremiah 7:1 – 15; Hosea 4:2). They worshiped other gods (Ezekiel 8:1 – 18). They mistreated one another and failed to preserve justice among God's people (Isaiah 1:21 – 31). They refused to repent (Amos 4:6 – 11).

Fourth, *the prophets warn that judgment will eradicate sin*. This judgment is often called "the day of the Lord" (Isaiah 2:12 – 22; Joel 2:1 – 11; Zephaniah 1:7 – 18; Amos 5:18 – 20). This day is an actual day in history (Jeremiah 42:18), and it is also a day to come, when God will judge all the world's inhabitants (Isaiah 24:1 – 23), both living and the dead.

Fifth, *the prophets promise that renewal lies beyond the day of punishment that has occurred already in history and beyond the coming day that will bring history as we know it to a close*. The coming of the Savior lies

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<sup>27</sup>Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament*, p. 52

<sup>28</sup>See Jeremiah 7:1 – 8:3, 36:1 – 32

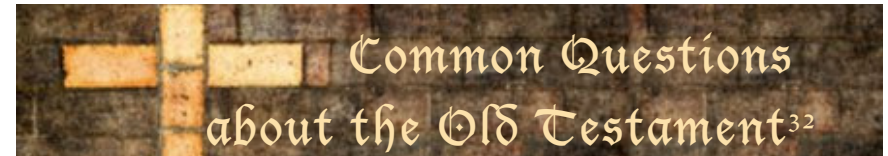
<sup>29</sup>See Isaiah 20:1 – 6; Hosea 1 – 3

<sup>30</sup>We as the church in the New Testament are to continue this relationship and live out this call.

beyond the destruction of Israel and other such events. He will rule Israel and the nations, and he will bring peace and righteousness to the world (Isaiah 9:2 – 7, 11:1 – 6). This Savior must suffer, die, and rise from the dead (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12). God will give him all the kingdoms of the world (Daniel 7:9 – 14). He will cleanse the world of sin and recreate the earth (Isaiah 65:17 – 25, 66:18 – 24; Zephaniah 3:8 – 20). The creation now spoiled by sin will be whole again.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>“Introduction to the Prophetic Books” in *The ESV Study Bible*, p. 1230



## 1. Who wrote the Old Testament?

This question, in many ways, is the most important question. On one hand, the Old Testament was written by various human authors, and it clearly tells us who they were. David wrote various Psalms, Moses wrote all but the closing of the first five books of the Old Testament, Joshua wrote the book bearing his name, Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, just to name a few.

Human authors are not the only authors of Scripture. God communicated through the authors of Scripture in a real and miraculous way so that his divine truth could be perfectly communicated through men. The Old Testament is clear that God spoke through his prophets.

The belief that God wrote Scripture in concert with human authors whom he inspired to perfectly record his words is called *verbal plenary inspiration*. Very simply, this means that God the Holy Spirit inspired not just the thoughts of Scripture, but also the very details and exact words that were perfectly recorded for us as Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16 – 17).

Therefore, the answer to the question, “Who wrote the Old Testament?” is that God wrote the Old Testament through human authors whom God the Holy Spirit inspired to perfectly pen his truth. Consequently, Christians believe that Scripture is our highest authority, or metaphorical Supreme Court, by which all other lesser authorities are tested. Practically, this means that lesser courts of reason, tradition, and culture are under the highest court of truth, which is divinely inspired Scripture.

## 2. What does Jesus say about the Old Testament?

Jesus summarized the Old Testament Scripture as existing in three parts: the Law, Prophets, and Psalms (Luke 24:44). He accepted the Old Testament canon as it exists today without any modifications and came to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). As a rabbi, or preacher and teacher of Scripture, Jesus’ entire ministry involved the instruction and application of the Old Testament. Jesus’ public ministry even began with him reading from the Old Testament book of Isaiah and stating that his ministry was to fulfill the promises about his coming (Luke 4:17 – 21). Jesus clearly stated that his ministry was an Old Testament ministry in that it was to fulfill all the

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<sup>32</sup>Taken from Mark Driscoll, *On the Old Testament*

Old Testament promises and longings that pointed to him (Matthew 5:17 – 20). Consequently, it is impossible to be a faithful Christian and not fully embrace the Old Testament as God’s word.

Often people will debate a literal interpretation of the events of the Old Testament and our present-day responsibility to obey some parts of it. Parts of the Old Testament that are commonly rejected as erroneous are also those sections of Scripture that Jesus clearly taught and believed. These include the literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 (Matthew 19:4 – 5; Mark 10:6 – 8), Cain and the murder of Abel (Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:51), Noah and the flood (Matthew 24:37 – 39; Luke 17:26 – 27), Abraham (John 8:56), Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 10:15, 11:23 – 24; Luke 10:12, 17:29), Lot (Luke 17:28 – 32), Isaac and Jacob (Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:28), the manna (John 6:31, 49, 58), the wilderness serpent (John 3:14), Moses as lawgiver (Matthew 8:4, 19:8; Mark 1:44, 7:10, 10:5, 12:26; Luke 5:14, 20:37; John 5:46, 7:19), the popularity of the false prophets (Luke 6:26), and Jonah in the belly of a great fish (Matthew 12:40).

On matters of controversy, Jesus used the Old Testament as his court of appeals (Matthew 5:17 – 20, 22:29, 23:23; Mark 12:24). On many occasions when an Old Testament teaching was questioned, Jesus simply believed the clear teaching of Jewish Scripture and defended himself by saying, “It is written” (Matthew 4:4, 6, 10, 11:10, 21:13, 26:24, 31; Mark 1:2, 7:6, 9:12, 11:17, 14:21, 27; Luke 2:23, 4:4, 8, 10, 17, 7:27, 10:26, 19:46, 22:37; John 2:17, 6:31, 45, 8:17, 10:34).

In times of crisis, Jesus quoted from the Old Testament, indicating that it was his source of truth, solace and defense. For example, when tempted by Satan, Jesus quoted from the book of Deuteronomy (Matthew 4:1 - 11). At the moment of his death, Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). And breathing his last in Luke 23:46, Jesus quoted Psalm 31:5, saying, “Into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Jesus also repeatedly taught that Old Testament prophecy had been fulfilled (Matthew 11:10, 26:24, 31, 53 – 56; Mark 9:12 – 13, 14:21, 27, 49; Luke 4:21, 7:27, 18:31 – 33, 21:22, 22:37, 24:25 – 27, 24:44 – 47; John 5:39 – 47, 13:18, 15:25, 17:12), showing the truth and trustworthiness of the Old Testament.

Jesus named the authors of some Old Testament books. Some of the most common critiques launched at the Old Testament regard its authorship. For example, many Old Testament scholars boldly claim that Moses did not pen any of the first five books of the OT, or that two or three authors penned Isaiah – none of whom were actually Isaiah. But Jesus taught that Scripture was authored by Moses (Mark 7:10), Isaiah

(Matthew 13:14; Mark 7:6), David (Mark 12:36) and Daniel (Matthew 24:15). Therefore, we are left with the simple decision of whether we will accept Jesus as the most accurate and trustworthy Old Testament teacher or replace him with another teacher or school of thought that we consider to have greater integrity and insight.

Jesus taught that the Old Testament was perfectly inspired and totally truthful Scripture. Jesus devoted his ministry to teaching the Old Testament, defending the Old Testament, using the Old Testament, and fulfilling the Old Testament.

### 3. What is the central message of the OT?

The opening line of Scripture introduces us to its hero, God. Throughout the pages of Scripture this God is revealed. In the closing line of the New Testament Scriptures, we are reminded that the God who is the hero of the true story of Scripture is Jesus Christ. The written word of God reveals to us the incarnate (“in human flesh”) Word of God, Jesus Christ. Without the written word we cannot rightly know the incarnate Word.

Some people prefer the New Testament over the Old Testament because they believe that only the New Testament is about Jesus. However, it was Jesus himself who taught that the Old Testament was primarily about him. While arguing with the “theologians” in his day, Jesus chastised them, saying, “You search the Scriptures [Old Testament] because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39 – 40).

Following his resurrection, Jesus opened the Old Testament to teach others about himself (Luke 24:27). In speaking to his disciples, Jesus said, “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” (Luke 24:44). We then read that he “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45).

Jesus’ own words about himself as the central message of the Old Testament are pointedly clear (Matthew 5:17 – 18). On the night of his betrayal, Jesus taught his disciples about his impending death from Isaiah 53:12 (Luke 22:37).

The Old Testament uses various means to reveal Jesus including promises, appearances, types and titles.<sup>33</sup> 25% of Scripture is prophetic in nature,

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<sup>33</sup>We will focus on Old Testament prophecies about Jesus. For more on appearances, types and titles of Jesus in the Old Testament and what we believe about Jesus, see Mark Driscoll’s book *Vintage Jesus*

promising future events. Neither Islam nor any other world religion or cult can present any specific prophecies concerning the coming of their prophets. Consider the following Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ:

- 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah prophesied that Jesus' mother would be a virgin who would conceive by a miracle (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18 – 23).
- 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Micah prophesied that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:1 – 7).
- 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Hosea prophesied that Jesus' family would flee as refugees to Egypt to save his young life (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:13 – 15).
- 400 years before the birth of Jesus, Malachi prophesied that Jesus would enter the temple. Since the temple was destroyed in AD 70, this prophecy could not be fulfilled anytime after AD 70 (Malachi 3:1; Luke 2:25 – 27).
- 500 years before the birth of Jesus, Zechariah prophesied that Jesus would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12 – 13; Matthew 26:14 – 15).
- 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus, David prophesied that lots would be cast for Jesus' clothing (Psalm 22:18; John 19:23 – 24).
- 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus (and hundreds of years before the invention of crucifixion), David prophesied that Jesus would be crucified (Psalm 22:16; Luke 23:33).
- 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would die and be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:8 – 9; Matthew 27:57 – 60; Luke 23:46).
- 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus, David prophesied that Jesus would be resurrected from death (Psalm 16:10); 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah also prophesied that Jesus would be resurrected from death (Isaiah 53:10 – 12; Acts 2:25 – 32).

The fulfillments of these prophetic promises show the divine inspiration of Scripture and prove that there is a sovereign God who rules over human history and brings events to pass just as he ordains them. Because of these facts, we can trust the internal consistency of the Bible to be a chorus of faithful witnesses who sing together in harmony about the glory of Jesus Christ.



- April 23: The Image of God (Genesis 1)
- April 30: Where Life Went Wrong (Genesis 3)
- May 7: Noah – Grace Beats Sin (Genesis 6 – 9)
- May 14: Abraham – Faith is Costly (Genesis 12 – 22)
- May 21: Jacob – Wrestling with God (Genesis 32:22 – 32)
- May 28: Joseph – Seeing Life Redemptively (Genesis 38, 40 – 50)
- June 4: Moses – Freedom from Slavery (Exodus)
- June 11: Joshua – Freedom from Fear (Joshua 1:1 – 9)
- June 18: Samson – Strength out of Weakness (Judges 13 – 16)
- June 25: Job – Persevering Through Suffering (Job)
- July 2: Ruth – Friendship & Redemption (Ruth)
- July 9: Samuel & Saul – Hearing God's Voice (1 Samuel 3:1 – 11)
- July 16: Solomon – Prone to Wander (1 Kings 3:1 – 15)
- July 23: David – Repenting of Sin (Psalm 51)
- July 30: Ezekiel – The Hope & Hypocrisy of the Church (Ezekiel 36:22 – 32)
- August 6: Daniel – Loving God for a Lifetime (Daniel 1:3 – 7)



If you'd like to study some books on the Old Testament, how we got it, how to read it, what it's point is, etc., here are some good books to check out:

- *The God who is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story* by D.A. Carson
- *The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made* by Mark Dever
- *On the Old Testament* by Mark Driscoll
- *God Has Spoken* by J.I. Packer
- *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* by Christopher J.H. Wright

## 10+10 Questions

Normally we put daily devotional questions in our study guides under the title 10+10. The challenge is to spend 10 minutes each day reading Scripture, diving deeper into it and to spend 10 minutes praying.

Because of the length of this series, we will be providing weekly 10+10 questions in our worship gatherings on Saturday nights at the *Next Steps Table* or on our website each week.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Go to <http://www.tucsonrevolution.com/story-of-god/> and click on the sermon title for the questions you need.