

Our Daily Bread Christian University
This course was developed by
*Christian University &
Our Daily Bread Ministries.*



The Old Testament story begins ...

with God.

Discovering the Old Testament

The Old Testament story begins before time began. It begins:

- before there was man.
- before there were animals, trees, or flowers.
- before there were planets and stars.
- before there was water and air.
- before there was sound.
- before there was light.
- it begins with God.

The Old Testament story emerges like a tiny shaft of light way off in the distance, races toward us through the darkness, and bursts over us in a crescendo of light, color, and sound. It fills our minds, our emotions, and our spirits with the majesty and presence of Almighty God Himself.

It's a marvelous story as it unfolds. It's Adam's story. It's Noah's story. It's Israel's story. It's our story. But, most of all, it's God's story. It's the opening of His book, the explanation of His character, and the record of His mighty deeds among men from the beginning of time.

The Old Testament is a book of great spiritual and personal value. This is because:

- it tells us about God.
- it answers questions about how life began.
- it tells how evil came into our world.
- it prophesies of the Messiah-Redeemer.
- it inspires us to holy living.

- it fills our hearts with gratitude and praise.

Even so, the Old Testament has been undiscovered by many people. To them its wealth lies hidden, like a vast vein of gold under someone's backyard.

Except for a few familiar passages cherished by millions—Genesis 1, Psalm 23, Isaiah 53—it remains a closed book even to many Christians. Comments like these may be heard:

“The Old Testament is not relevant to today’s world. Its ideas are old-fashioned and its language is obscure. Who needs to know about old Jewish kings and outdated laws? We need a book for today.”

“The Old Testament is filled with things that sound more like myths and legends than realities—serpents that talk and fish that swallow people whole. I’d rather read about things that can be proven scientifically.”

“I’ve tried to read the Old Testament but I find it boring. My mind wanders and I just can’t get interested. It’s pretty dull reading.”

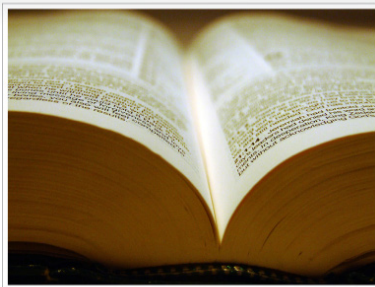
“Frankly, the Old Testament scares me. It’s too big. Besides, there’s so much killing and war. And God seems so mean. The New Testament is more full of love.”

Admittedly, to a new reader the Old Testament does seem overwhelming. It does have sections that are hard to read. And it does contain violence. But once a person grasps some basic facts about it, the Old Testament is not nearly as imposing or old-fashioned as it may seem. It’s exciting. It’s dramatic. It’s realistic. It tells us things we need to know about ourselves and our world. And most of all, the Old Testament tells us about God!

The Riches of the Old Testament

Once you discover the Old Testament and begin to read and study it, you will find that it is filled with great riches. Here are some of the reasons it is a treasure-house of wealth to its reader.

1. The Old Testament provides the foundation for the whole Bible. The Bible is made up of two Testaments—Old and New. Both are equally part of the Bible. Both tell us about God. Both



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inform us about basic truths we need to know. But without a grasp of the Old Testament, the New Testament cannot be fully understood or appreciated; without the New, the Old is left incomplete. The Old Testament establishes the foundation of truth, the New Testament then builds the superstructure.

2. The Old Testament tells us about Jesus Christ. We cannot fully know about Christ and His purpose for coming into our world without studying the Old Testament. It tells us about Him in word pictures and types. It predicts His coming. It puts His ministry into focus. It gives graphic previews of His sacrifice for sin. It goes beyond today to tell us of His judgment of the world and His coming kingdom of peace. In fact, the Old Testament tells us so much about Jesus that some Bible teachers have said Christ can be seen on every page.

3. The Old Testament provides the foundation for faith in Christ. The Christian faith is built on the Old Testament. Erich Sauer, in his book *The Dawn of World Redemption*, said this:

The Old Testament is promise and expectation, the New is fulfillment and completion. The Old is the marshaling of the hosts to the battle of God, the New is the triumph of the crucified One. The Old is the dawn of morning, the New is the rising sun and the light of eternal day.

If Christianity, the “religion of Christ,” may be likened to a magnificent cathedral, the Old Testament is its unshakable foundation.

4. The Old Testament helps us to know God. More than anything, the Old Testament tells us about God. It makes Him known in these ways:

- *Factual Knowledge.* To know God, we must first know about Him. The Old Testament reveals His character in its record of His mighty deeds.
- *Personal Knowledge.* The Old Testament brings us past the information stage and brings us to the place where we can know God personally through the experiences and relationships of others who walked with Him.
- *Practical Knowledge.* Building on a personal knowledge of God, the Old Testament also tells us how to live. It reveals His will and spells out the kind of person He wants us to

be. By obeying its commands, thinking as it tells us to think, and accepting the Savior it presents, we can know how to live in our complex world.

Knowing God Through the Old Testament

The story of the Old Testament begins at creation and ends about 400 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. Its primary setting is Palestine, but its events take place in a variety of locations—the palaces of Egypt and Babylon; the deserts of Sinai and Arabia; the mountains of Ararat, Nebo, and Carmel. Although its primary emphasis is on the Jews, its story involves many peoples of the world: Egyptians, Hittites, Babylonians, Canaanites, Syrians, and a host of smaller groups. It tells of migration, military campaigns, political intrigue, and romance. It has heroes and villains; servant girls and queens; prophets and poets; judges, priests, and kings.

The Old Testament was written over a period of 1000 years (1400–400 BC) by about 30 different authors. Its historical record extends from creation to the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon. It is made up of 39 books, which may be divided into three major sections: history, poetry, and prophecy.

We would like to open the door of the Old Testament to you. We will do so by simply walking through the pages of its history. We will use the four major stages indicated in this diagram. As we do, we will stop along the way to see how the 39 books of the Old Testament fit into this historical pattern. We will also pause to consider two vital factors that relate to us today.

First, we will see how God is made known through the four phases of Old Testament history by looking at representative incidents from each phase. As we see how God worked directly in the lives of the people in a supernatural and life-changing way, we will learn more about His nature and character.

Second, we will show you how you can see yourself in the Old Testament. God has not changed, and neither has humankind. Therefore, what happened in Old Testament days is representative of what happens with us today as well. In that sense, the Old Testament is neither old-fashioned nor



outdated. Rather, it is a book with a great deal to say about God to contemporary people.

In today's world of stunning scientific advances and tense world conditions, we need to know all we can about God as He is made known in the Old Testament. We need to know a God who is bigger than our world and more powerful than any ruler in it, a God who keeps His Word, a God who rescues the lost, a God who meets the deepest needs of the people He brought into existence.