

The True Story of the Old  
Testament



# The True Story of the Old Testament

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## *Responding to God's Revelation and Redemption*

This inductive Bible study is designed for individual, small group, or classroom use. A leader's guide with full lesson plans and the answers to the Bible study questions is available from Regular Baptist Press. Order RBP0101 online at [www.regularbaptistpress.org](http://www.regularbaptistpress.org), e-mail [orders@rbpstore.org](mailto:orders@rbpstore.org), call toll-free 1-800-727-4440, or contact your distributor.

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## The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

Alex Bauman, Editor

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Adult Bible Study Book

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# Contents

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Preface .....	7
<b>Lesson 1</b> Introducing the Old Testament Story .....	9
<b>Lesson 2</b> Revelation and Redemption at Creation .....	19
<b>Lesson 3</b> Revelation and Redemption after the Fall .....	27
<b>Lesson 4</b> Revelation and Redemption in the Days of the Patriarchs ..	37
<b>Lesson 5</b> Revelation and Redemption at the Exodus .....	47
<b>Lesson 6</b> Revelation and Redemption in the Pre-Kingdom Days ....	57
<b>Lesson 7</b> Revelation and Redemption in the United Kingdom .....	65
<b>Lesson 8</b> Revelation and Redemption in the Divided Kingdom. ....	75
<b>Lesson 9</b> Revelation and Redemption after the Kingdom .....	85
<b>Lesson 10</b> Israel Responds to God's Revelation and Redemption .....	95
<b>Lesson 11</b> Israel Practices God's Revelation and Redemption .....	103
<b>Lesson 12</b> Israel Anticipates God's Ultimate Revelation and Redemption	113
<b>Lesson 13</b> Concluding the Old Testament Story .....	121



# Preface

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**T**he *True Story of the Old Testament* is an overview study of the Old Testament. It is designed to present God's dealings with humanity in terms of His self-revelation and redemptive activities. It includes a chronological examination of God's dealings with people, especially with His people Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. It explains how God brought the world and Israel into existence. It highlights this explanation with frequent references to God's love, mercy, and grace. This study also relates how God worked faithfully with Israel and some of the important blessings He has promised to Israel—especially as seen in His covenants with Israel. And this study distinguishes God's dealings with Israel from His dealings with the church.

As an overview, this study is better understood as a “fly over the land” type of study and not a “slow drive through the scenic route” type of study. It is important that you understand this design.

Expect to get from Genesis to Malachi in thirteen studies. That is a good thing. You will gain an invaluable and comprehensive level of knowledge that will serve as a base for future Bible study. Expect to pass by or pass over many interesting “sights” that deserve a visit the next time you are in that portion of the Bible. This, too, is a good thing. The curiosity created by noting such points of interest can serve as motivation for additional study of God's Word.

Enjoy studying *The True Story of the Old Testament*. Enjoy the quick pace and the sharp focus on the revelation of God and the redemption of mankind.



## Lesson 1

# Introducing the Old Testament Story

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*Studying Old Testament books is valuable because they are God's revelation of Himself and His plan for redemption.*

### **2 Timothy 3:15–17; Psalm 119**

**“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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).**

**A** sling and a stone, a lion's den, a golden calf, a whale, and a fleece. All of these objects probably triggered in your mind scenes of Old Testament accounts. Perhaps you also thought of learning about these accounts as a child.

The Old Testament is filled with narratives with all kinds of action and drama. But the Old Testament is much more than a collection of stories that are entertaining to read. The Old Testament is meant to impact our lives of faith and help us understand God. This study will help you realize the impact of the Old Testament on your life.

## Getting Started

1. Why are narrative accounts impactful teaching tools?
  
2. How have Old Testament accounts impacted your life of faith?

## Searching the Scriptures

### Value of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a valuable source of God's revelation for many reasons. The Old Testament is part of God's Word; thus it has inherent value. Many Biblical themes, doctrines, and motifs find the bulk of their support in the Old Testament. The Old Testament relates the beginnings of creation, sin, and Israel. The New Testament authors extensively quote and allude to Old Testament texts. The Old Testament contains hundreds of prophecies about Jesus Christ and the future. Yet, many Christians under appreciate this treasure trove of instruction.

3. Why might believers not value the Old Testament?
  
4. When was the last time you chose to read or study the Old Testament?
  
5. Read 2 Timothy 3:15–17. What Scriptures did Paul have primarily in mind in these verses?

6. According to these verses, what can the Old Testament accomplish in the lives of Christians?

7. How does viewing these verses as primarily referring to the Old Testament change or increase your appreciation for the value of the Old Testament?

Psalm 119, the longest “chapter” in the Bible, is a hymn extolling the worth of Scripture. Nearly every verse says something about the law of God, about His precepts, or about His ordinances.

8. Read through several sections of Psalm 119. Record ten benefits of the Old Testament Scriptures recorded in that Psalm.

9. How would you summarize Psalm 119’s teaching on the Old Testament scriptures?

In the middle of Psalm 119, a paragraph exalts the practice of meditating on God’s law (119:97–104). The psalmist explained how he loved God’s law and how he had made it the focus of his meditation throughout the day. God’s commandments impart wisdom, insight, and understanding. The psalmist rehearsed his commitment to follow God’s Word and relished the sweetness of God’s Word. Christians today should approach the Old Testament with the same joy and passion. The Old Testament perspective of itself is much like Paul’s perspective of the Old Testament (2 Tim. 3:15–17).

## **Orientation to the Old Testament**

This course looks at the Old Testament in its entirety and relates its major truths in terms of its continuous narrative. This overall approach recognizes the singular, divine authorship of all the Old Testament books. Different holy men of God communicated the various accounts, but God by His Spirit moved the men of the Old Testament to record His message (2 Pet. 1:21).

The story of the Old Testament, then, is God's story. God revealed Himself throughout the books. It is "His story."

Introducing the major divisions, genres, historical setting, and cultural and linguistic factors helps you appreciate the overarching story and themes found in the Old Testament. And this study will be more effective by considering them.

10. What difficulties do you anticipate in studying the Old Testament?

## **Major Divisions**

The Old Testament is one story. But at the same time, the Old Testament is a collection of thirty-nine books with a mix of history, law, poetry, and prophecy. When we consider the variety of books, it might be helpful to think of the Old Testament books sitting on a five-shelved bookcase. Each shelf represents a major division of the Old Testament.

11. Why is an awareness of the divisions of the Old Testament an important factor in understanding particular passages?

On the top shelf of the Old Testament bookshelf are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. The shelf is labeled "The Pentateuch," which means "Five Books." Moses wrote these five books.

Genesis relates the creation of the world, the fall of humanity into sin, Noah and the Flood, the call of Abraham, and the accounts of the

Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph). Exodus explains how God delivered Israel out of Egypt and how He gave His law at Mount Sinai. Leviticus records many specific laws concerning the tabernacle and ritual purity. Numbers begins with genealogies, adds more legislation, records how Israel broke the law and how God took care of His people throughout their wilderness wanderings.

The Pentateuch is filled with examples as well as guidance. The laws in the Pentateuch are not directly applicable to Christians (Rom. 6:14). Nevertheless, the law provides insight into God's attributes.

12. Name an impactful lesson you learned from the Pentateuch.

On the second shelf are twelve history books. These books run from Joshua to Esther.

Joshua records the conquest of the Promised Land by the people of Israel. Judges records the cycle of sin, oppression, and deliverance in the chaotic days before Israel had a king. Ruth provides a precious story of belief and obedience during the days of the judges.

The books 1 and 2 Samuel explain why Saul was unfit and why David was fit to be king of Israel. The books 1 and 2 Kings explain how Israel split into the two smaller kingdoms of Israel and Judah following the reign of David's son Solomon. The books 1 and 2 Kings assess the kings in terms of their faithfulness to the Law of Moses. They record how ultimately both kingdoms were destroyed and the people were deported because of their unfaithfulness. They also describe the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. The books 1 and 2 Chronicles relate much of the same material as 1 and 2 Kings, but the Chronicler judged the kings, especially the kings of Judah, for the ways that they treated the temple, the priests, and the sacrificial system.

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther recount the return of some of the Jews from captivity to the Promised Land. The book of Ezra, named for a priest, emphasizes the rebuilding of the temple. The book of Nehemiah, about an administrator, emphasizes the rebuilding of the wall. Esther,

named for a member of a Gentile court, emphasizes God's providential care for His people as they lived among the nations.

13. Why might knowing Israel's history be valuable for Christians?

On the third shelf are the books Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. They are all poetic in nature.

Job, a righteous man, conversed with his friends about the age-old question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" Toward the end of the book, God Himself spoke, and Job withdrew his contention with God.

The book of Psalms includes 150 of Israel's ancient hymns, written by various people and covering various topics. The book is exceedingly rich with insightful theology and self-analysis.

The book of Proverbs provides numerous wise sayings by Solomon and others. Ecclesiastes provides a realistic perspective on humanity's ability to answer all of life's questions. The Song of Solomon is composed of vivid love poetry spoken between a woman and Solomon.

14. Which poetry book is your favorite? Why?

15. Why is poetry an effective communication method?

On the fourth shelf are the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. This shelf is labeled "major prophets." Lamentations is a poetic lament for the destruction of Jerusalem.

On the fifth shelf sit the twelve "minor prophets." These books run from Hosea through Malachi. The books contain some of the most gripping prophetic material in all of Scripture.

16. How have the fulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament strengthened your faith?

17. Describe a time when you used fulfilled prophecy in an evangelistic conversation.

We can rejoice that God has given us the Holy Spirit to help us understand Scripture (Eph. 1:17, 18). We can also increase our awareness of the distinctive characteristics of the Old Testament and be better equipped to learn from this portion of God's Word.

### **Different Perspectives**

The practices of ancient Israel differ from those of the church. For this reason, the Old Testament can seem detached, almost otherworldly. We rightly acknowledge that we are not under the law of the Old Testament (Rom. 6:14). The tabernacle, temple, feasts, sacrificial system, and priestly order are not part of God's instructions for the church. While the practices of ancient Israel are different than our practices as believers today, we can gain a greater understanding of Jesus Christ and His redemptive work.

18. What are some correlations between the practices of ancient Israel and Jesus' redemptive work?

### **Diverse Literary Styles**

Those who decide to read through the Old Testament may find that the diversity of the literary styles confusing. Recognizing the assortment of literary styles is essential to effective Bible interpretation.

**Narratives** record accounts. Every narrative has three components: plot, characters, and setting. The plot is the storyline; it reveals the relationships among the characters in the setting of their lives. While reading the accounts of the Bible, readers should look for repeated words or phrases. The repetitive phrasing makes accounts more memorable; the repetition of words or themes gives structure to longer narratives.

When observing narrative literature, we should remember some keys points. First, narratives are primarily accounts of how God dealt with mankind. We need to look for God in every account we study. His dealings with mankind will almost always translate to some degree into our lives. The ways people related to God in the accounts are meant to be examples for us.

Second, narratives have value as they are; we do not have to read symbolic meanings into them. Some Old Testament narratives, however, illustrate New Testament truth. Those narratives become symbols of spiritual truth only if the Scriptures designate them as such.

Third, narratives do not teach doctrine directly, rather they illustrate doctrine taught elsewhere. For instance, the book of Judges shows what happens when people deliberately turn their backs on Biblical truth (Judg. 2:10–23).

Fourth, we need to look at the facts as they are presented without getting sidetracked by what is not presented. God never intended for us to know what He did not reveal to us.

Fifth, we need to remember that the stories fall into different dispensations, or systems of revealed commands and promises regulating human affairs. What God expected during a past dispensation may not be what He expects today.

Biblical poetry helps us understand the total experience of the life of faith. It assists us in expressing our emotions to God and others, teaching us to trust and pray.

The primary characteristic of Biblical poetry is parallel structure, where two thoughts are placed in relationship to each other. This literary structure of pairing provides an immediate context in which to interpret the verse.

Observing parallelism is important. It will tell us how to interpret

the phrases in poetry. But we have to be careful when the poetry uses picturesque language. We cannot take the word pictures literally. Rather, we should determine what truths the word pictures reveal.

**Wisdom literature** is poetry that teaches us how to live with Biblical skillfulness. It shows us how to apply truth to reality. We find wisdom literature in the startling directness of Proverbs, teaching how the naïve must make every effort to become wise. The philosophical meanderings of Ecclesiastes and the dialogues of Job with his friends are also wisdom literature.

**Prophetic literature** contains predictions of future events. Some of those predictions have already come to pass. The prophecies yet to be fulfilled look ahead to the day when God will cleanse and restore His creation and when Christ will rule.

Some of the prophetic literature is apocalyptic, meaning “hidden.” The writer’s meaning is hidden in the symbols he used. Apocalyptic literature often employs figurative or symbolic language in mind-stretching ways (see Ezek. 10; Zech. 1:7–17). These symbols go beyond the normal use of figures of speech in poetry.

When observing prophetic literature, we need to understand when the prophets ministered and to what future events their prophecies pointed. We also need to be careful not to get lost in the obscure. We should understand what we can and move on to interpretation and application.

19. Why does recognizing genre help believers understand what they are reading?

## **Cultural and Linguistic Differences**

The Old Testament way of life seems far removed from that of modern times. For example, family members sometimes lived in separate tents (Gen. 31:33) and a widow took off her brother-in-law’s sandal and spit in his face if he refused to marry her (Deut. 25:7, 9; cf. Ruth 4:7). Customs like this seem so alien to modern life that they may perplex us.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek. Both Greek and English are Indo-European languages. The Old Testament, on the other hand, was written in Hebrew and Aramaic, both Semitic languages. Therefore, English is closer to Greek than to Hebrew or Aramaic. This means that the Old Testament, even in the English translation, can sometimes be perplexing. With a little patience, however, readers of English can soon discover the pleasant way that Hebrew enables memorable storytelling.

### **Making It Personal**

20. Why do you value a study of the Old Testament?

21. Complete the following statement: Based on the personal value that a study of the Old Testament has to me, I choose to commit to this study. I will seek to carry out this commitment by . . .

22. Memorize 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17.