

Paradise to Promised Land

A Bible study about the history of the Old Testament

Why the Old Testament?

Today we're starting off on a journey to discover the history of the Old Testament period. These Hebrew scriptures were what Paul was most likely referring to when he said that "All Scripture is God-breathed..." Still, for many Christians, the question arises as to why we study or read the Old Testament at all. How would you answer the question, **"Why is the Old Testament important?"**

The Scope of our Study

We are going to be examining the history of the Old Testament period, some 4000 years if we count the time before Moses was writing the Pentateuch. We will engage with the historical events of Israel and the nations that surrounded Israel in order to understand the texts better. We will be breaking it up into at least 7 separate sessions:

- Before the Promised Land – The Pentateuch will figure in heavily and we will discuss other books such as Job.
- Settlement in the Land – Here we will discuss Israel's early time in the promised land until Israel establishes a monarchy with Saul
- The Early Monarchy – Largely the stories of Israel's first two kings: Saul and David, along with stories of prophets like Samuel and the early Psalms
- The Later Monarchy – Centering on the story of Scripture surrounding King Solomon and the wisdom books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes
- The Divided Kingdom – Israel divides and a series of kings arise that leads to the exile of first the northern kingdom and then the southern kingdom.
- Exile and Return – The history from the first fall of Jerusalem to the eventual return of Israel to Jerusalem in books like Ezra and Nehemiah, including many of the prophets sent to Israel and the book of Esther.
- Bonus: We will spend a little bit of time with the 400-year intertestamental period between the last prophet to the beginning of the New Testament. This will include some information about the books of the Apocrypha that are written in this period.

As we look into these different historical periods, we will consider what Scripture tells us about these times and what other historical markers exist around these times and how they might give us more clarity around Scripture.

- **What was happening around the time that you were born? How did the historical events surrounding your birth shape who you became?**

The TaNaKh

There are 39 books in the Protestant version of the Old Testament, about 2/3rds of the entire Bible. The Old Testament is broken up in the "TaNaKh" order. Tanakh is simply an abbreviation of 3 Hebrew words: Torah (Torah, or Law), Neviim (Prophets), and Khetuvim (Writings). This is roughly the presentation of the books in most Christian Bibles, but it is not a chronological listing.

Torah (or Pentateuch)

These are the first books of the Hebrew scripture. They include Genesis (a sort of prologue or prequel to Moses' main story), Exodus (the story of God's rescue of His people), Numbers (the story of Israel's wandering in the wilderness), Leviticus (the story of Israel's early worship, holiness codes, and national identity), and finally Deuteronomy (the second telling of the Law to Israel before they visit the promised land).

- **What does God tell us about Himself in these 5 books?**

Neviim (or Prophets)

The Neviim or "Prophets" is broken up into three separate categories: The former prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings), the latter prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), and the Book of the Twelve or the minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).

- The writings of the prophets are often a mixture of history and prophecy, although sometimes they are simply a record of God's word being spoken into human history. **If you were to make a "modern day" Neviim, or a record of history and God's word being spoken to His people – what would you include?**

Khetuvim (or Writings)

The Khetuvim is also broken up into subcategories. These include: The Poetic Books (Psalms, Proverbs, Job), the 5 Scrolls (the latest additions to the Hebrew canon, all read at certain points of celebration in the Jewish years – Songs of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), and finally the "junk drawer" of the Khetuvim, the "Other Books" (Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles).

- **These books of the writings are considered "less authoritative" in certain Jewish and Christian circles. Why do you think that is?**

Your Hopes

As you consider the time we will spend in the Old Testament together over the coming weeks, **what are you hoping to walk away from this study with?**