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# 1

## *Introduction to the Old Testament*

Many pleasant surprises are in store for the one who embarks on a study of the Old Testament. Not the least of these is the discovery of its contemporary application to everyday life. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to offer some motivation and direction for the reader's survey study of this part of God's wonderful Book. Regular studies in the Bible text begin with the next chapter.

### I. WHY STUDY THE OLD TESTAMENT?

There are many compelling reasons why every Christian should study the Old Testament. Consider the following:

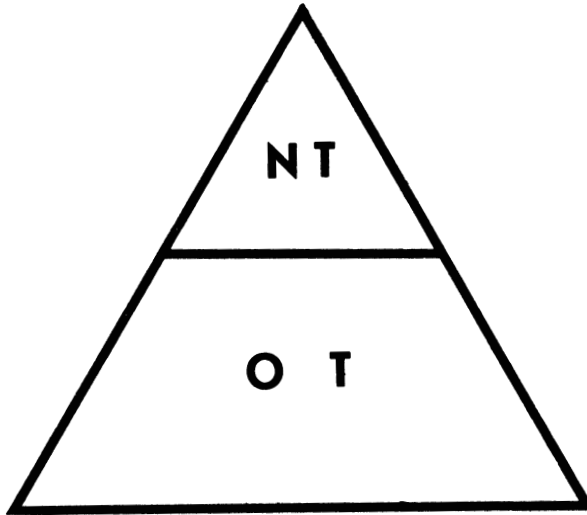
#### A. THE BIBLE IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT

Both Old and New Testaments make up the inspired Scriptures. The New Testament was never intended to replace the Old Testament. Instead, the New was given to complement the Old, to complete its story. For example, the Old prophesies the coming of the Redeemer; the New reports the fulfillment of that prophecy in Jesus. The New Testament is the sequel to the Old Testament's origins, heir of its promises, fruit of its seed, the peak of its mountain. The diagram on page 16 illustrates various relationships of the two Testaments.

What associations between the Old and New Testaments do you see suggested by the illustration?

#### B. THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST WOULD BE AN ENIGMA WITHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT

For example, why did Jesus say, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24)? In what sense was Jesus the



promised Messiah and King, long awaited by the Jews?<sup>1</sup> And why did He have to die? Are His cross and crown irreconcilable? Read Isaiah 53:10-12 for an example of how the Old Testament answers such questions.

#### C. THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF CHRISTIANITY IS FURNISHED BY THE OLD TESTAMENT

Christianity did not emerge mysteriously out of a vacuum. God had been moving among the peoples of the world, especially Israel, for many centuries before Christ. Then, "when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5). Erich Sauer connects the Old Testament with the New in these words:

The Old Testament is promise and expectation, the New is fulfilment and completion. The Old is the marshalling of the hosts to the battle of God, the new is the Triumph of the Crucified One. The Old is the twilight and dawn of morning, the New is the rising sun and the height of eternal day.<sup>2</sup>

Even though the last book of the Old Testament was written about four hundred years before Christ's birth, our knowing the Old

1. See John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pp. 79-95, for an excellent discussion of the subject, "Christ in Old Testament Prophecy."

2. Erich Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption*, p. 186.



Testament is to know the religious, social, geographical, and, in part, the political setting of the New. Besides, the Old Testament was the Bible of Jesus, the apostles, and New Testament writers. When they spoke or wrote, they often quoted or referred to the Old Testament's history and teaching. This in itself is reason enough for every Christian to be acquainted with the Old Testament.

#### D. KEY REVELATIONS OF GOD ARE TO BE FOUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament is mainly history, but it is *sacred* history. That is, it reveals especially how God moves in and through the lives of people and the courses of nations. We might also say that the Old Testament is *redemptive* history, for "God actively directs human history for the purpose of redeeming men to Himself."<sup>3</sup> The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Old Testament to record what would adequately reveal that redemptive purpose. Thus, the writers have much to say about such crucial facts as these:

1. God is the sovereign Creator.
2. Man is a sinner in need of salvation.
3. God is holy, and He judges sin.
4. God is love, and He offers salvation to sinful man.
5. A Saviour would be born to die for the sins of man.
6. Man is saved by faith, not by works.
7. Israel was sovereignly chosen to be God's channel of the redemptive message to the world.
8. All history will culminate at the throne of the sovereign Lord.

The Old Testament is especially valuable for its inspired record about origins. Consider, for example, the historical record of the first man and woman; the first sin committed by a human; the first communications of God with man; and the first revelation of the way of restored fellowship to God.

Miracles are also a key part of the Old Testament, preparing the reader for the climactic event of the Great Miracle, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. John Raven rightly concludes that "Christ and the Old Testament are so united by mutual testimony that a low view of the credibility of the latter must result in a low view of the credibility of the former."<sup>4</sup> The factuality of miracles rests solidly on the person of the miracle-worker. This is one of many reasons why so much is revealed in the Old Testament about *who* God is.

3. J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 3.

4. John H. Raven, *Old Testament Introduction*, p. 6.

**E. THE OLD TESTAMENT IS SPIRITUAL FOOD FOR THE CHRISTIAN**

Paul was referring directly to the Old Testament when he wrote, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). The different parts of the Old Testament reach the reader in various ways:

1. Its indictments bring conviction of sin (Jer 2).
2. Its laws and counsel show the way to please God (Exod 20).
3. Its psalms encourage praise and prayer (Psalm 107).
4. Its testimonies inspire the reader to walk in paths of righteousness (Deut 31:24—32:47).
5. Its historical facts give perspective and direct the reader to learn from the God of all history (Psalm 78).
6. Its prophecies warn of danger and plant hope in the hearts of all believers (Zech 14).
7. Its story of Israel's kingdom gives background for our understanding of the millennial reign of Christ and His kingship (2 Sam 7:4-17; Zech 14:9).

Read the passages cited above to see the relevancy of the Old Testament to the twentieth century.

**II. THE OLD TESTAMENT FROM GOD TO US**

The plan of writing Scriptures originated with God (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:21). So, from its very source, the Bible is a supernatural book. It is the revelation of God, written by divinely inspired human authors. Through the subsequent stages of transmission, canonization, and translation, God has preserved His Word so that today, as we hold a copy of the Bible in our hands, we may be fully confident of its trustworthiness. Let us look briefly at the overall history of the Old Testament. The starting point of such a history is divine revelation.

**A. REVELATION**

Revelation is God's communication of truth to man, without which man cannot know God. Before the first Old Testament book was written,<sup>5</sup> God revealed Himself to man through such media as conscience and nature (*general* revelation) and direct conversation with people (*special* revelation). (Read Rom 1:18-21 for an application of general revelation, and Gen 3:8-19 for an example of special

5. It is not known which was the first Old Testament book to be written. If Moses was the earliest Bible author, then there was no Scripture before around 1500 B.C.

revelation.) But God also wanted to reveal Himself in the form of permanent writing, so that there would be a clear and fixed record of this revelation for all the succeeding generations. So He commissioned chosen men to write on various subjects. In the words of Gleason Archer,

If there be a God, and if He is concerned for our salvation, this is the only way (apart from direct revelation from God to each individual of each successive generation) He could reliably impart this knowledge to us. It must be through a reliable written record such as the Bible purports to be.<sup>6</sup>

#### B. INSPIRATION

Two crucial questions at this point are: How did the human authors know what God wanted them to write? and Were their writings without error? We cannot explain the supernatural process of inspiration, which brought about the original writings of the Bible. Paul refers to the process as *God-breathing*. (Read 2 Tim 3:16, where the phrase "inspired by God" translates the Greek *theopneustia*, which literally means "God-breathed.") Peter says the Bible authors were undergirded, or carried along, by the Holy Spirit. ("Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit," 2 Pet 1:21, Berkeley.) These verses, along with many others, assure us that when the Bible authors wrote, their words expressed perfectly and infallibly the truths which God wanted to convey to mankind. In the original autographs, all the words were infallible as to truth, and final as to authority. Such accuracy applies to every part of the originals—to matters of history and science as well as to spiritual truths. If the Bible student does not believe this, his study of the biblical text will be haunted by confusing and destructive doubts.

#### C. THE ORIGINAL AUTOGRAPHS

The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament were written over a period of about a thousand years (c. 1500-400 B.C.), by about twenty-five to thirty different authors. All but a few portions were written in Hebrew.<sup>7</sup> The writing material of most of the autographs was paperlike papyrus. (Some autographs may have been written on animal skins.) Sheets of papyrus about ten inches high were attached together to make a long, rolled-up scroll, easy for reading. (The page-

6. Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 15. Read this same source for a good discussion of the inadequacies of oral tradition as a sole transmitter of God's special revelation to man.

7. These were the exceptions, written in Aramaic: Genesis 31:47; Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 2:4b—7:28; Ezra 4:8—6:18; 7:12-26.

type codex, or book, did not supplant the roll until the second or third century A.D.) The Bible text was written with pen and ink in vertical columns, with no space between words, sentences, or paragraphs. Only the consonants of the words were recorded.<sup>8</sup> Read Jeremiah 36 for an example of how a portion of Scripture originated. How did Jeremiah receive the message from God? How did the scribe receive it from Jeremiah?

Practically nothing is known about the history of each individual autograph of the Old Testament. During the years of Solomon's Temple, it is likely that some autographs were among the Scriptures deposited there (cf 2 Kings 22). Probably all of the original papyrus scrolls perished within a century or two after they were written, due to such causes as fire and rotting.

#### D. TRANSMISSION

Transmission is the process by which the biblical manuscripts have been copied and recopied down through the ages. God allowed each of the original Old Testament autographs to disappear from the scene, but not before copies were already in the hands of His people.<sup>9</sup> Handwritten scribal copyings of the Hebrew text were made up to the time of the printing press (fifteenth century A.D.).

No ancient writing has been so carefully preserved in the process of scribal copying as have the Old Testament Scriptures. This was due in part to the Jews' almost superstitious veneration of their written Scriptures. During the fifth to sixth centuries of our era, a group of Jewish scholars, now referred to as Masoretes, produced a standard edition of the Old Testament by comparing the existing manuscripts available to them. Minor scribal errors had crept into the manuscripts along the way,<sup>10</sup> and the Masoretes wanted to put into circulation one standard text which would be as close to the originals as possible. When they completed their work to their own satisfaction, this text (later known as the Masoretic text) was the basis of all future scribal copyings, and the existing, not so accurate manuscripts were withdrawn from circulation. Various checkpoints were recorded in the margins of the new manuscripts, to insure that no letter or word would be deleted or added in future manuscripts. The Hebrew Old Testament was so meticulously preserved through the remaining centuries that when the Dead Sea Scrolls (c. 150 B.C.) were discovered

8. Vowels were added to copies of the Old Testament around A.D. 600-800, to help preserve the pronunciation of the Hebrew words.

9. One of God's reasons for not preserving the original autographs may have been man's proneness to worship material objects. Also, even if a genuine biblical autograph existed today, many people would still doubt any proofs offered of its genuineness.

10. Even Bibles printed in the modern twentieth century have printers' errors!

in 1948 and subsequently compared with extant (existing) Hebrew manuscripts of A.D. 900-1000, they were almost identical. Thus was confirmed the dependability of our English Old Testament, which had been based mainly on the Masoretic manuscripts of that tenth century.<sup>11</sup> Also, this preservation of the text accounts for the fact that there are relatively few differences between modern versions of the Old Testament, if they are exact translations (not paraphrases).

So although some scribal errors were committed from time to time in the copying process, God has preserved the Old Testament text so that no doctrinal truth is jeopardized by such errors. Archer writes:

Do we have any objective evidence that errors of transmission have not been permitted by God to corrupt and pervert His revelation? Yes, we have, for a careful study of the variants . . . of the various earliest manuscripts reveals that none of them affects a single doctrine of Scripture.<sup>12</sup>

As divine Author, God wrote an infallible Book (inspiration); as divine Protector, He has preserved the text down through the ages from doctrinal error (transmission).

#### E. CANONIZATION

Canonization is the identification of a writing as being one of the divinely inspired Scriptures. It was not enough that God inspired the *writing* of each book of the Bible. He also gave to His people, in a collective sense, the spiritual perception to *recognize* in each of those books the genuine marks of divine inspiration and authority. With the Holy Spirit's guidance, they knew what spurious writings to reject, as well as what genuine writings to accept. Thus, over the centuries as the Old Testament books were being written, the Old Testament canon (list or group of inspired books) kept growing until it reached its completed form. It was God who foreknew and determined what books would comprise the complete Old Testament. The details of the long human process are veiled in obscurity. But it is clear that God's supernatural hand, working through humans, brought His inspired writings into the canon, while He excluded other writings.

By the time of Christ and the apostles, the Old Testament was a complete set of books that were usually referred to as Scripture(s).

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11. Among the major extant Hebrew manuscripts of this period are: Cairo Codex (A.D. 895); Leningrad Codex of the Prophets (916); Aleppo Codex (930); Leningrad Old Testament (entire Old Testament) (1008).

12. Archer, pp. 18-19.

(Refer to an exhaustive concordance to see the many New Testament references to this name.)

The total number of books in the *Hebrew* Old Testament is twenty-four. Actually, those twenty-four books are the equivalent of the *English* Bible's thirty-nine, due to various combinations. For example, the Jews regard the twelve books of the minor prophets as one book, which they call "The Twelve." Also, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are each one book, and Ezra is combined with Nehemiah.

By the time of Christ, the Jews had grouped the Old Testament books into three major sections: Law, Prophets, and Writings. This threefold division is probably what Jesus had in mind when He said that "all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).<sup>13</sup> Study the groupings shown on Chart 1.<sup>14</sup>

CHART 1

THE HEBREW OLD TESTAMENT ARRANGEMENT		
LAW (Torah)	PROPHETS (Nebhiim)	WRITINGS (Kethubhim)
1. Genesis <sup>15</sup>	A. <i>Former Prophets</i>	A. <i>Poetical Books</i>
2. Exodus	6. Joshua	14. Psalms
3. Leviticus	7. Judges	15. Proverbs
4. Numbers	8. Samuel	16. Job
5. Deuteronomy	9. Kings	B. <i>Five Rolls (Megilloth)</i>
	B. <i>Latter Prophets</i>	17. Song of Songs
	10. Isaiah	18. Ruth
	11. Jeremiah	19. Lamentations
	12. Ezekiel	20. Ecclesiastes
	13. The Twelve	21. Esther
		C. <i>Historical Books</i>
		22. Daniel
		23. Ezra-Nehemiah
		24. Chronicles

Note the following concerning the books listed on Chart 1:

13. Psalms was the first and longest book of the Writings, and so the name may have been used to represent the entire section.

14. At times Hebrew Bibles have appeared with minor variations from this arrangement.

15. These book titles originated with the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Bible, however, the books were named by the first few significant words appearing in the text. For example, Genesis is called *Bereshith* ("In the Beginning"); Exodus is *Shemoth* ("Names"); Numbers is *Bedmidhbar* ("In the Desert").

1. The books of "Former Prophets" are historical in content, and yet are classified under "Prophets." The reason for this may be that their authors had the official status of a prophet, or, as F. F. Bruce holds, they reported events "to illustrate the great principles on which the prophets insisted."<sup>16</sup>

2. Each of the five "rolls" was read at an annual Jewish feast or commemoration, in this chronological order: Song of Songs at Pass-over (first month); Ruth at Feast of Weeks (Harvest) (third month); Lamentations at the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem (fifth month); Ecclesiastes at Tabernacles (seventh month); and Esther at Purim (twelfth month).<sup>17</sup>

3. Chronicles appears last in the Hebrew Bible. This is why Jesus used the expression "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah" (Luke 11:51) to sum up all the martyrs whose blood had been shed in Old Testament times. Abel was the first and Zechariah was the last martyr appearing in this order of the Hebrew Bible. Read

## CHART 2

THE PROTESTANT OLD TESTAMENT ARRANGEMENT <sup>18</sup>				
<b>LAW (Pentateuch)</b> 1. Genesis 2. Exodus 3. Leviticus 4. Numbers 5. Deuteronomy	<b>POETRY</b> 18. Job 19. Psalms 20. Proverbs 21. Ecclesiastes 22. Song of Solomon			
<b>HISTORY</b> 6. Joshua 7. Judges 8. Ruth 9. 1 Samuel 10. 2 Samuel 11. 1 Kings 12. 2 Kings 13. 1 Chronicles 14. 2 Chronicles 15. Ezra 16. Nehemiah 17. Esther	<b>PROPHECY</b> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <b>A. Major</b>                23. Isaiah                24. Jeremiah                25. Lamentations                26. Ezekiel                27. Daniel             </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <b>B. Minor</b>                28. Hosea                29. Joel                30. Amos                31. Obadiah                32. Jonah                33. Micah                34. Nahum                35. Habakkuk                36. Zephaniah                37. Haggai                38. Zechariah                39. Malachi             </td> </tr> </table>		<b>A. Major</b> 23. Isaiah 24. Jeremiah 25. Lamentations 26. Ezekiel 27. Daniel	<b>B. Minor</b> 28. Hosea 29. Joel 30. Amos 31. Obadiah 32. Jonah 33. Micah 34. Nahum 35. Habakkuk 36. Zephaniah 37. Haggai 38. Zechariah 39. Malachi
<b>A. Major</b> 23. Isaiah 24. Jeremiah 25. Lamentations 26. Ezekiel 27. Daniel	<b>B. Minor</b> 28. Hosea 29. Joel 30. Amos 31. Obadiah 32. Jonah 33. Micah 34. Nahum 35. Habakkuk 36. Zephaniah 37. Haggai 38. Zechariah 39. Malachi			

16. F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, p. 92.

17. Consult a Bible dictionary for descriptions of these feasts.

18. The Catholic Old Testament includes all of these books plus seven apocryphal (noncanonical) writings, as well as apocryphal additions to some of the inspired books.

the account of Zechariah's martyrdom in the last book of the Hebrew Bible: 2 Chronicles 24:20-21.

The books of our Protestant English Old Testament are grouped in a fourfold arrangement, different from the Hebrew threefold format. This fourfold arrangement is traceable back to the Latin Vulgate version (c. A.D. 383-405), which derived its format from the Greek Septuagint (c. 280-150 B.C.). Chart 2 shows this familiar breakdown of the list of thirty-nine books.

The following facts apply to the books listed on Chart 2:

1. The first seventeen books chronologically record selected highlights of man's history from creation to the marriage of Abraham (Gen 1-11), and from the birth of the nation of Israel to its return to Canaan after the Babylonian Captivity (Gen 12—Nehemiah).<sup>19</sup> The section called History may be subdivided into these three groups:

- a) Period of confederacy among the tribes: Joshua, Judges, Ruth
- b) Rise and fall of the monarchy: 1 Samuel through 2 Chronicles
- c) Captivity and return: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

2. The books of Law are so designated because of the prominence of God's Law in the experience of Israel during those centuries. (The name *Pentateuch* comes from the Greek, meaning "fivefold vessel." The name *Torah* is the Hebrew word for "Law.")

3. The five books of Poetry are mainly reflections, hymns, dialogues, and maxims, directed to the reader's inner life. They are classified as poetry because this is the prominent literary style of the books.

4. The distinction between major and minor books of prophecy is based only on length. Although Lamentations is not long, it is in the major group because it could be considered as an appendix to Jeremiah.

5. All of the prophets ministered in the period of about 900 to 400 B.C. Most of their messages were directed to either Israel (Northern Kingdom) or Judah (Southern Kingdom), or to both. More is said about this later in the chapter. Chronologically, Malachi is the last Old Testament voice to speak.

#### F. TRANSLATIONS

If the Old Testament had never been translated, it could only be read and understood by students of Hebrew. But God intended the

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19. The chronological pattern is not always followed in this order. For example, the account of Esther is between Ezra and Nehemiah, and the books of Chronicles parallel much of the books of Kings.



Scriptures to be everyman's Book; hence, the many translations (versions) made over the centuries.

The first translation of any portion of the Old Testament was the Greek Septuagint (LXX).<sup>20</sup> It was made for the benefit of Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria, who could not read Hebrew. The Pentateuch was translated around 280 B.C. Before the coming of Christ, the entire Testament was translated, and it became the Scriptures of many people throughout the Mediterranean world. Such timing was according to divine schedule. Greek was the universal language at that time, and because the New Testament was soon to be written in Greek, God was using this Greek Old Testament version to prepare the way for the New Testament. It must have been a very dependable translation, for out of thirty-seven Old Testament quotations credited to Jesus in the gospels, thirty-three are from this Septuagint version.

During the early centuries of the Christian Church, many translations of the Bible appeared as the natural outcome of Christianity's expansion to foreign lands. The Latin Vulgate (A.D. 383-405), the most prominent, was the official Bible of Christendom on the Continent for a thousand years.

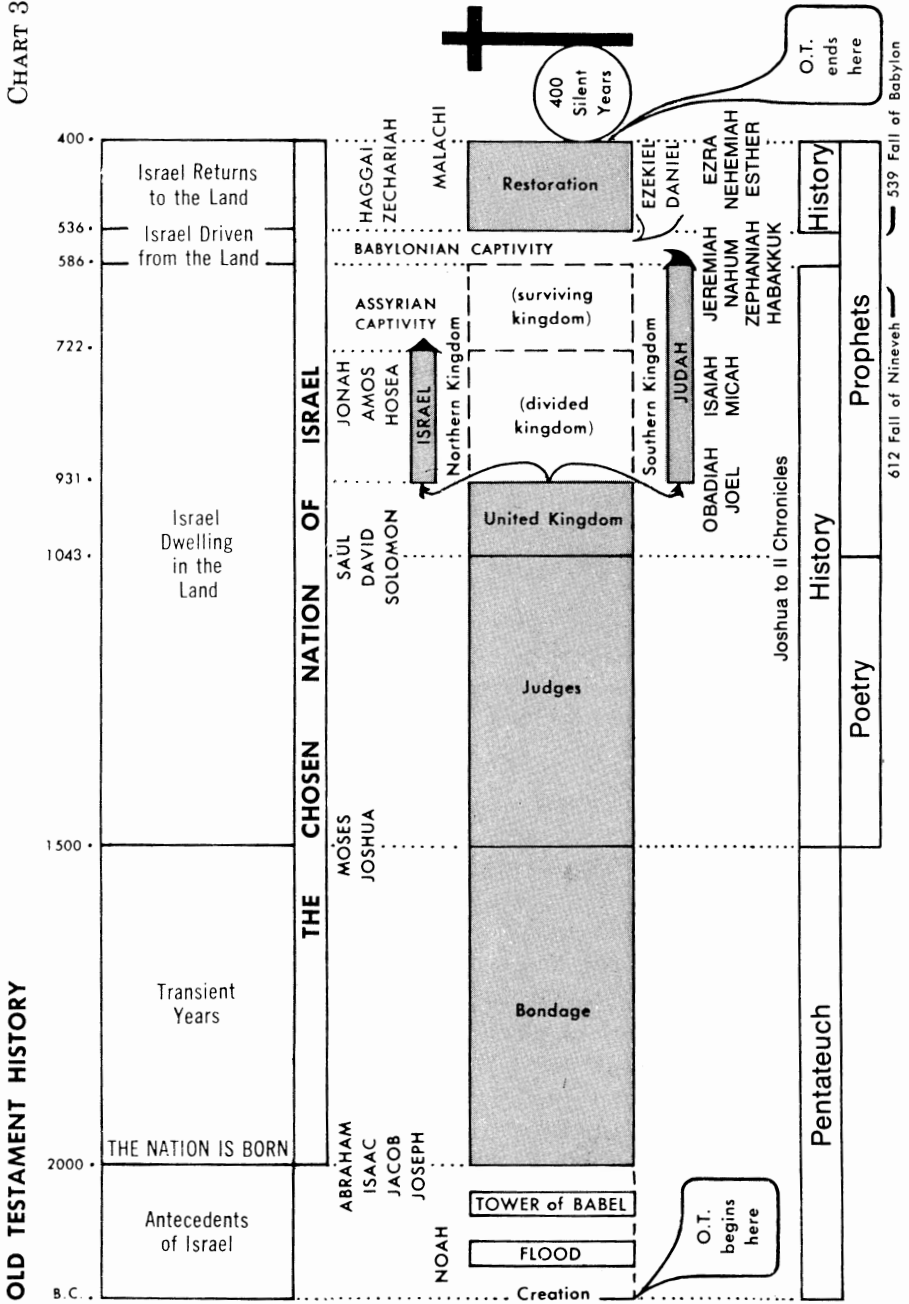
The Reformation brought a revival of translation activity, spurred on by renewed interest in Hebrew and Greek Bible manuscripts, and by the recent invention of the printing press. These were the years when the famous early English versions were appearing, such as Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale, Great Bible, Bishops, King James.

Then came the modern missions era of translation activity, beginning around 1800. It is aptly called *modern* because the era has not yet ended. In fact, one of the brightest aspects of the Christian witness today is the unprecedented production of new Bible translations. Portions of Scripture are reaching people of many languages and cultures in the remotest parts of the world. And in America, new English versions and paraphrases, written in contemporary style, are geared to such needy mission fields as homes without a church, and campuses with drifting youth. For the serious Bible student today who wants to analyze a Bible text which is virtually the same as the originals minus the translation factor, various excellent versions are available, such as the *American Standard Version* (ASV of 1901), the

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20. The Roman numeral LXX (seventy) and the Latin word *septuaginta* (seventy) were assigned to this version because of a story which said that seventy-two translators were engaged in the original work. Actually, the name *Septuagint* was not assigned to the whole Greek Old Testament until the time of the Church scholar Origen (early third century A.D.).

CHART 3



*New American Standard Bible* (NASB of 1971), and the *New International Version* (NIV of 1978).

Thus, the Bible, with its Old Testament, has come a long way—from *God to us*. And the most thrilling part of it is that, not counting the translation difference, “we hold in our hands to-day a Bible which differs in no substantial particular from the originals of the various books as they came from the hands of their authors.”<sup>21</sup>

### III. THE SETTING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

#### A. HISTORICAL SETTING

All the books of the Old Testament are intimately involved in a historical strand that begins with the creation in Genesis 1 and ends with the last prophecy of Malachi (c. 430 B.C.). The first eleven chapters of Genesis report highlights of the beginnings of man and the world. At Genesis 12, the nation of Israel is divinely born at the call of Abraham; and for the remainder of the Old Testament, the nation or individual Israelites are in view.

Chart 3 shows how the different books of the Old Testament are related to this historical strand. Study the chart carefully. You will want to refer to it often as you proceed in your survey study from book to book.

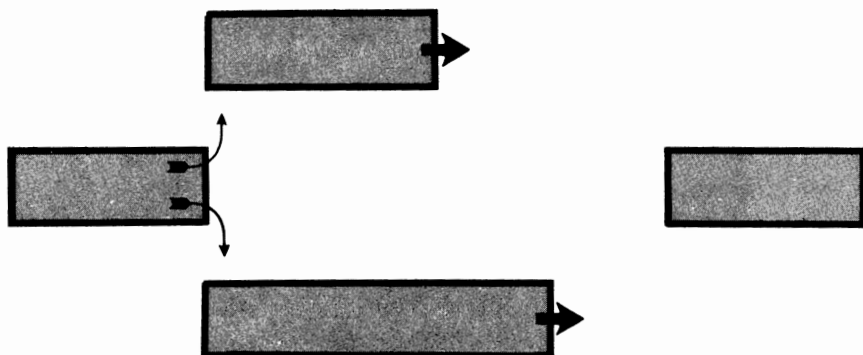
Use Chart 3 to answer the following questions:

1. About when was Israel founded? What four patriarchs are identified with its earliest years?
2. The word *bondage* identifies the first crucial experience of Israel, which took place in Egypt. What words describe the next two periods? 1500-1043 B.C.; 1043-931 B.C.
3. What two men did God use to lead Israel from bondage in Egypt to their homeland of Canaan?
4. The Jews were ruled by judges during the first few centuries in Canaan. Then the Jews demanded to have kings to be like their idolatrous neighbors, wholly independent of God. God let them have their own way, but He warned them of future troubles because of such inroads of idolatry. Read 1 Samuel 8. Who were the first three kings of the united kingdom?
5. What are the names of the two kingdoms that resulted from the split of the united kingdom in 931 B.C.?<sup>22</sup>

21. G. T. Manley, *The New Bible Handbook*, p. 19.

22. In the Old Testament, the name Israel usually refers to all of God's chosen people. During the years of the divided kingdom, however, it more often refers only to the Northern Kingdom. The context will usually indicate which meaning is intended.

6. At what dates did each of the two kingdoms go into captivity?
7. When did the captive Jews begin returning to their homeland of Canaan?
8. Without looking at the chart, see how much you can recall of the highlights of Israel's history in Old Testament times. As memory aid, visualize the four shaded blocks of the following chart.



It is not an overstatement to say that the above diagram of four blocks represents the heart of Old Testament history. This is why it is so important to thoroughly learn the outlines shown on Chart 3.

9. Now you are ready to see how the books of the Old Testament contribute to this setting. Review the list of books that was discussed earlier, in this fourfold arrangement: Law (or Pentateuch), history, poetry, prophecy. Note at the bottom of Chart 3 where these four groups appear. What is the time span of the five books of the Pentateuch? Read Genesis 50:26 and Deuteronomy 34:5. What deaths are recorded here? Locate the two names on the chart.

10. The history books from Joshua to 2 Chronicles cover what periods of Israel's history? The last three history books (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther) are of what time?

11. Over what span of years were the books of poetry written? Note that David and Solomon, who wrote most of the biblical poems, lived during the middle of this period.

12. The names of the prophets appear on the chart approximately when and where they ministered. Who were prophets mainly to the Northern Kingdom? Who prophesied to Judah? Who was the first writing prophet? Who were the two prophets of the captivity period? What three prophets ministered during the closing years of the Old Testament?

13. Account for the designation "400 Silent Years" on the chart. Did God forget about Israel after He inspired Malachi to write the last book? Read the last chapter of the Old Testament for the answer.

Whenever you are studying in an Old Testament book, get in the habit of mentally locating it in this historical scheme of Chart 3.

B. GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

Most of the Old Testament is action, and action involves places. This is why geography is a key ingredient of Old Testament setting.

Someone has said, "To visualize is to empathize." If you want to help yourself *feel* the action of ancient Bible history, visualize where it is taking place as you read the Bible text. This should be one of the strongest motivations for you to learn the geography of the Old Testament.

One basic Old Testament map and two related maps will be studied in this chapter. These maps show the large areas of setting. Other more detailed maps appear at appropriate places throughout the book. It is important to have a good grasp of the large, overall geographical setting before zeroing in on the details of the smaller areas.

1. *Three major regions of Old Testament geography.* The accompanying Map A shows where virtually all Old Testament history took place.

Observe the following on the map:

1. There are three major regions (encircled). The middle region is Canaan, the homeland of Israel. It is strategically located at the crossroads of international traffic. For example, the land route from Egypt in the west to Babylon in the east followed the Fertile Crescent through Canaan because the desert lands of Arabia were impassable.<sup>23</sup>

2. To the north and east of Canaan are the lands of Syria, Assyria, and Babylonia. All three nations were Israel's strongest and bitterest enemies at some time or other.

3. The ancient kingdom of Egypt was Israel's foe in the southwest. A quick glance at an exhaustive concordance shows that the name Egypt appears hundreds of times throughout the Bible. This indicates the important part the nation played in Bible history.

4. A number of small kingdoms (e.g., Edom, south of the Dead Sea), which were a constant threat to Israel's peace, were located around the southern and eastern borders of Canaan. These are not shown on this map.

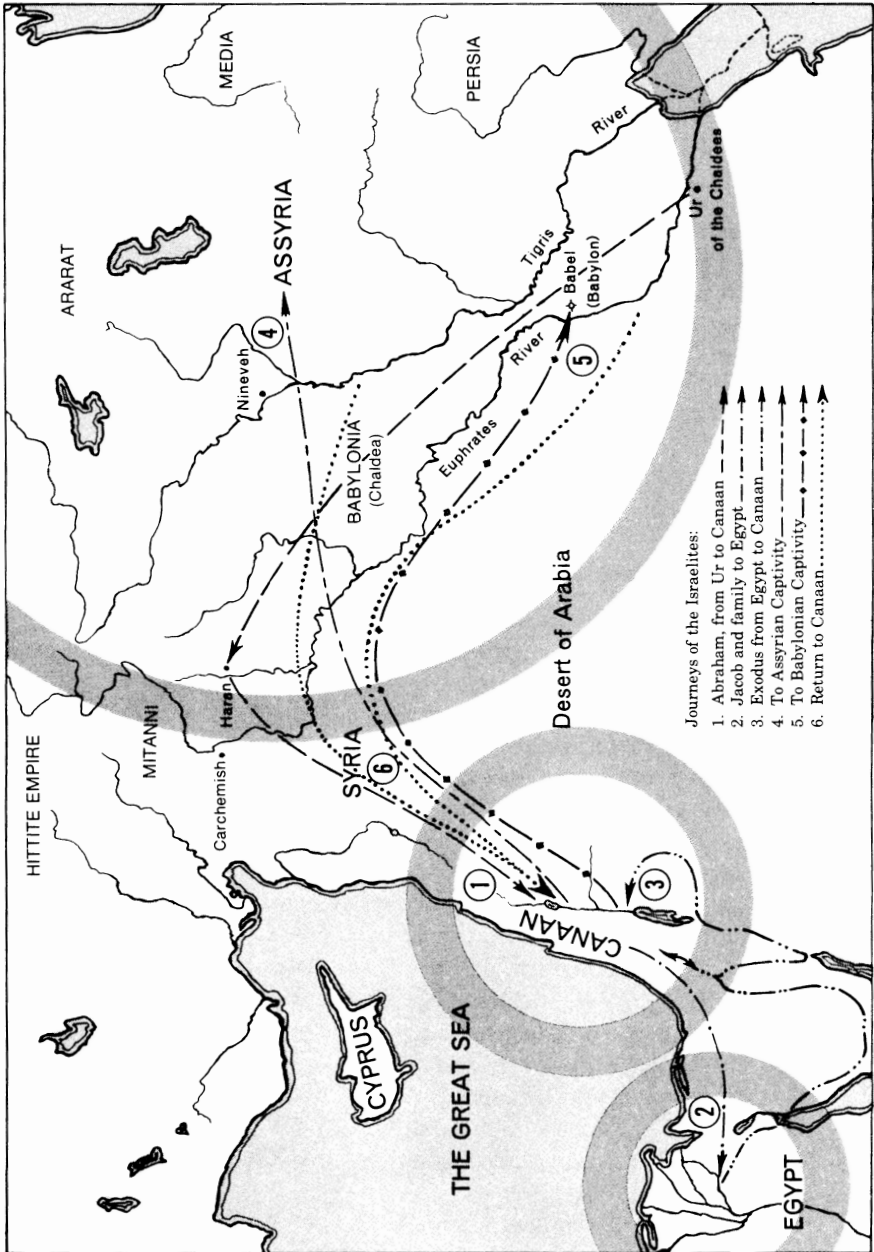
5. There were six major journeys of the people of Israel in Old

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23. The semicircular strip of habitable land from Canaan to Babylonia has been appropriately called the Fertile Crescent. It was the center of civilization from man's beginning to the golden age of Greece in the fifth century B.C. The two key waterways of the long Mesopotamian Valley are the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

THREE MAJOR REGIONS OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

MAP A



Testament history. They marked turning points in the experience of God's chosen nation. Follow the journeys on the map, using the encircled numbers:

- ① The first journey of the first Israelite family, Abraham's. From Ur of Chaldea to Canaan (c. 2000 B.C.). Read Genesis 11:27—12:9.
- ② Migration of Jacob and his relatives from Canaan to Egypt, to join Joseph (1875 B.C.). Read Genesis 37:28; 46:1-34.
- ③ Exodus of over two million Israelites from the bondage of Egypt to the promised land of Canaan (1445 B.C.). Read Exodus 12:40-41; Joshua 1:1-9; Galatians 3:17.
- ④ The Northern Kingdom of Israel carried away into exile to Assyria (722 B.C.). Read 2 Kings 18:9-12.
- ⑤ The Southern Kingdom of Judah taken captive to Babylon (586 B.C.). Read 2 Kings 25:1-12.
- ⑥ Two separate, large groups of Israelites return from Babylon to their homeland, led by Zerubbabel (536 B.C.) and Ezra (458 B.C.). Read Ezra 1-2; 7:1-10; 8:1-21.

2. *Physical features of Palestine.*<sup>24</sup> The best way to recall the locations of Old Testament cities is to picture the physical features of the land where they were started. Other values of learning this physical geography are understanding the strategy of battles and recognizing why journeys followed certain routes.

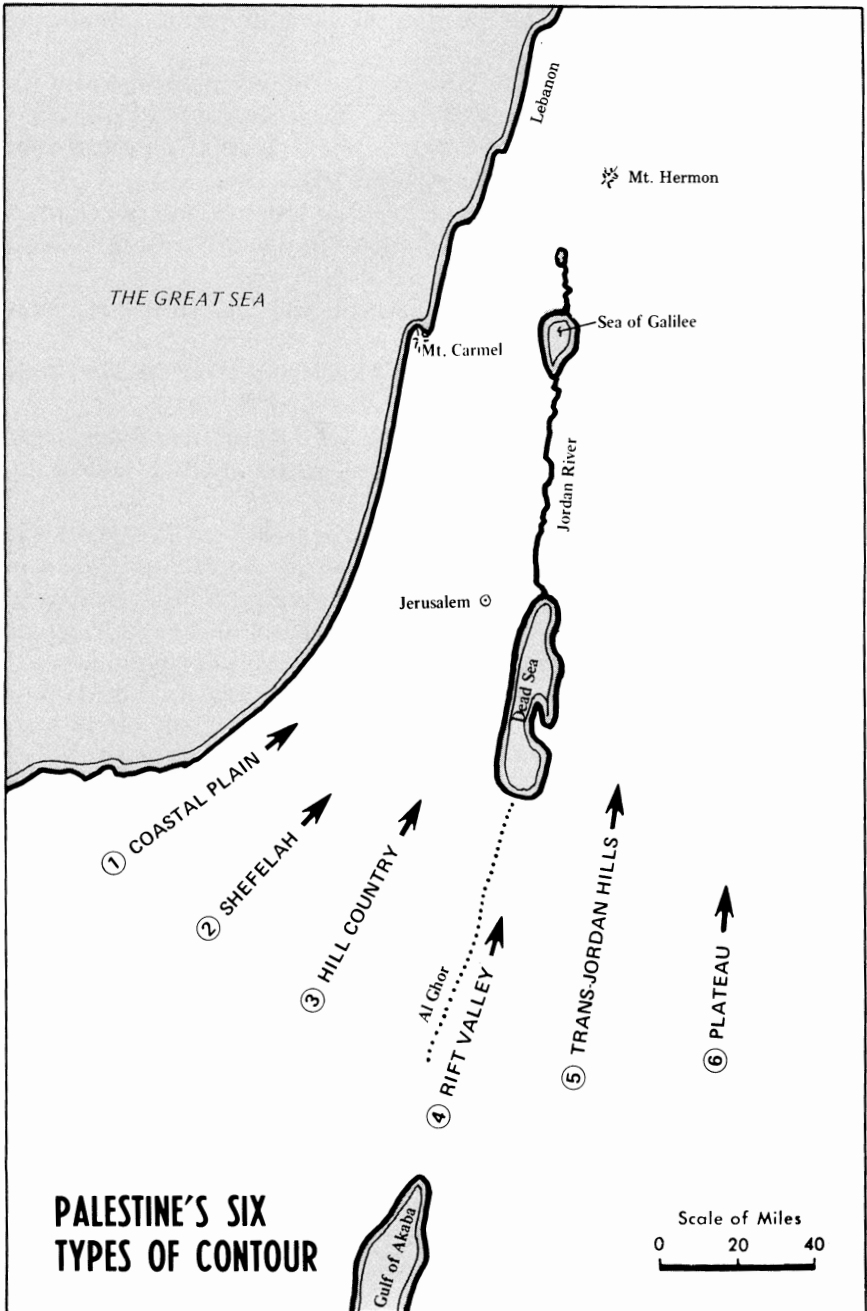
Study the general features of Palestine as shown on Map B. The natural contours of the land run north-south. As you move from west to east on the map, you will observe six major types of contour.

Observe the following about each of these:

- ① *Coastal Plain.* This follows the coast up to the promontory of Mount Carmel. Relatively few cities were located here during Old Testament times, partly because of the absence of navigable harbors.
- ② *Shefelah (also called Lowlands).* Here the terrain begins to ascend from the low coastal plain. Many cities sprang up here, due in part to the semifertile soil.
- ③ *Hill Country (also called Cis-Jordan Hills).* Follow on the map the prominent north-south ridge which bisects these hills, especially in the southern half of the country. Many cities were built along this ridge, especially because of the natural fortifications.

24. The name *Palestine* is derived from the Hebrew *eres Pelistim*, meaning "land of the Philistines." Philistia was a small region in the southwest, but by the fifth century B.C. the name was applied to the entire land of Canaan.

MAP B





Jerusalem is on the ridge, just west of the northern tip of the Dead Sea. The one major break in this ridge is at the Plain of Esdraelon, just southwest of the Sea of Galilee.

- ④ *Rift Valley*. This is the most consistent feature of the north-south contour. Its average width is about ten miles. For the entire length of Palestine, the depression is below the level of the Great Sea (Mediterranean). Follow this depression from north to south on Map B as you read the descriptions given below.

*Valley west of Mount Hermon*. The Jordan River originates here, north of the Sea of Galilee. Between the Lebanon and Hermon ranges, the rift valley is very prominent.

*Lake Chinnereth (New Testament name: Sea of Galilee)*. The sea is 685 feet below the level of the Great Sea. This beautiful area was not inhabited as heavily as in New Testament times.

*Jordan River*. The river is entirely below sea level, from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. The hot and humid climate of this valley discouraged the building of cities. Jericho was an exception.

*Salt Sea (Dead Sea)*. This is 1,286 feet below sea level. What main river flows into it? The sea has no outlet, hence its dense mineral content. A few cities were located on its shores. See Maps E and K.

*Al Ghor (Araba)*. A hot, dry valley. No cities here.

*Gulf of Aqaba*. Solomon built a fleet of ships at the north end of this gulf (1 Kings 9:26).

- ⑤ *Trans-Jordan Hills*. The rugged hills rise sharply from the low rift valley to the high plateau. Few cities located here.
- ⑥ *Plateau*. From the fertile tableland of the north to the semidesert south, this plateau was the scene of no little Old Testament history. Its rolling land was used mostly for grazing livestock. See Maps E and G for the location of cities, such as Ramoth-gilead and Damascus.

As you proceed with your survey of the Old Testament, visualize the topography which you have just studied.

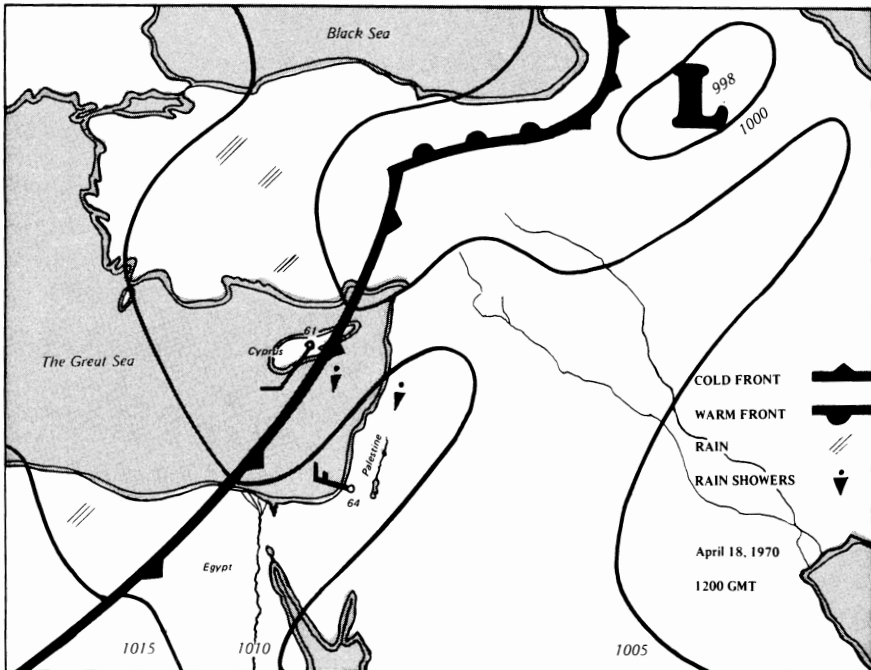
3. *Climate of Palestine*. Palestine is of the same latitudes as southern United States. Its climate is controlled generally by the prevailing westerly winds from the Mediterranean Sea. However, because of the diversity of topography, the climate varies considerably from place to place. Overall, there are two seasons: warm, dry summers, and cool, wet winters. The rainy season lasts from

November to March. Average temperature ranges for Jerusalem, representing recent records, are forty-one to fifty-four degrees (Fahrenheit) in January and sixty-five to eighty-five degrees in August. The moderating effect is caused by the more constant temperatures of the Mediterranean Sea.

In the regions around the Sea of Galilee, the climate is more moderate and pleasant than around Jerusalem. In Old Testament times, however, more people inhabited the warmer regions. Hot desert winds (*sirocco*) plague the plateau lands east of the Jordan. This is one of the main reasons for sparse population there in biblical times.<sup>25</sup>

### WEATHER MAP OF THE BIBLE LANDS

MAP C



Climate is distinguished from weather in that the former is the prevailing atmospheric condition over a period of time, whereas weather is the condition at a particular time. The accompanying

25. The above observations are based on the reasonable assumption that Palestine's climate has not changed much since Old Testament times.

weather map (Map C) of the Bible lands shows the weather pattern prognosticated for noon of April 18, 1970. The cold front over Cyprus is moving from west to east, and is about two hundred miles west of the coast of Palestine. When it has passed through Palestine, the sixty-four-degree temperature (Fahrenheit) at the Gaza Strip will not lower too much, because the front is not very strong, as shown by the Cyprus reading behind the front. Much of the rainfall of Palestine during the winter season is induced by oncoming fronts similar to the one shown here.

### C. LEADING POWERS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WORLD

Throughout their career in Old Testament times, the Israelites were well aware of the universal truth that man does not live in isolation. We saw in earlier geographical studies that Palestine was located at the hub of the world powers: Egypt to the southwest; and Syria, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia to the north and east. For the most part, this central location meant conflict, for each foreign nation coveted the strategic military position which Palestine offered, not to mention the economic booty. But such conflict was not outside divine providence, for God was sovereignly guiding even the foreign nations to fulfill His purposes with His chosen people. For example, when Israel persisted in rejecting God as Lord, He sent the Babylonian invaders into the land to take the people into captivity. It was a military encounter, but basically it was divine judgment.

Because the Old Testament has so much to say about Israel's relations with foreign powers, it is important at the outset of your studies to get an overview of each nation's history during Old Testament times, for whatever bearing this had on Israel's experience. The discussion which follows stresses highlights rather than details of those histories. At a later time you should refer to comprehensive outside sources to fill in the details. Our present purpose is of a panoramic scope, so that we do not overlook the forest when viewing the individual trees.

First, review Map A "Three Major Regions of Old Testament History." Note especially the locations of Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. These were the five most powerful nations which played such vital roles in Israel's history.<sup>26</sup> When you study history, always visualize the geography involved.

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26. Although Syria's domain was not geographically extensive, that nation is studied here with the other four because of its direct relation to the Northern Kingdom of Israel for two centuries.

*Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament*

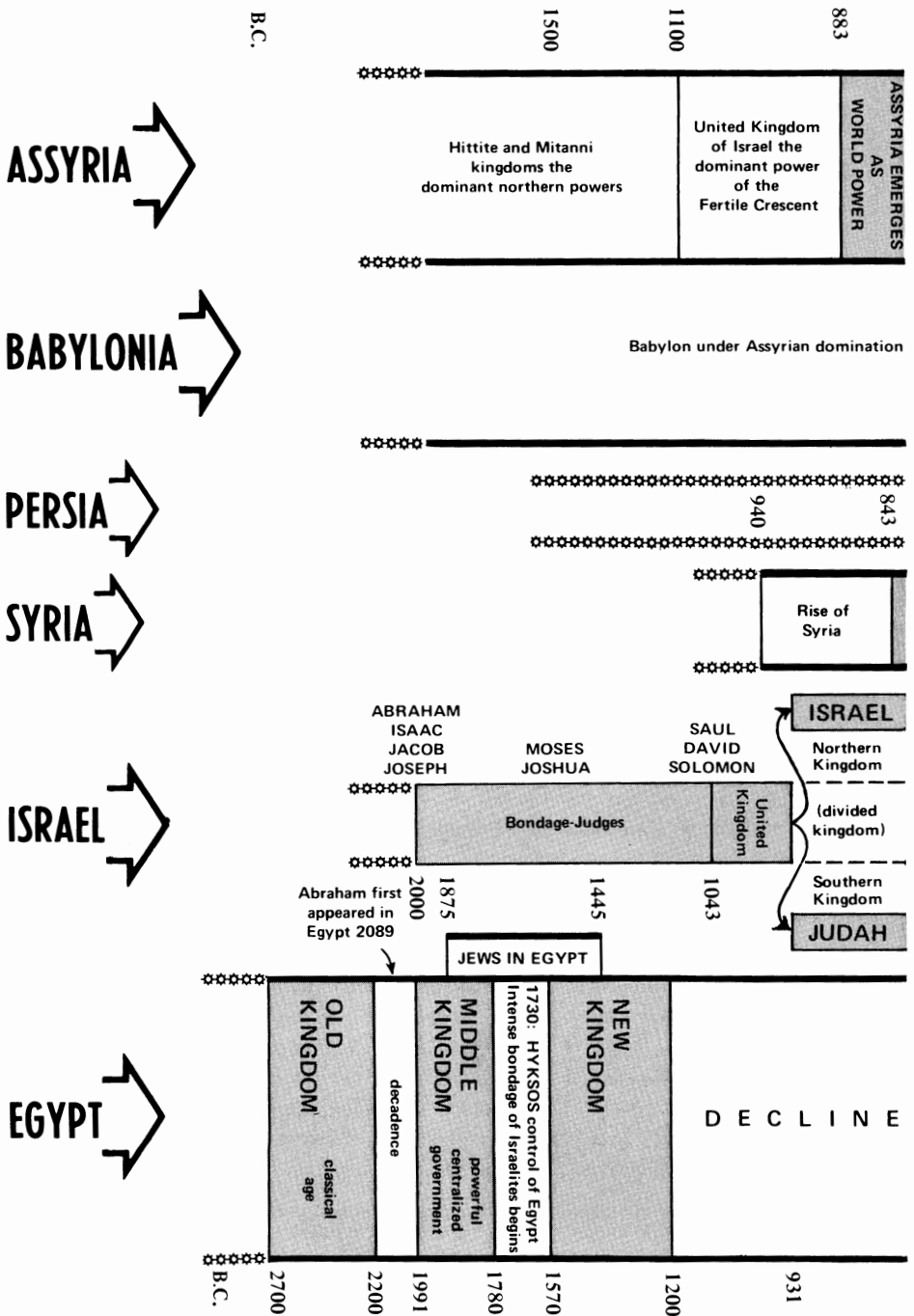
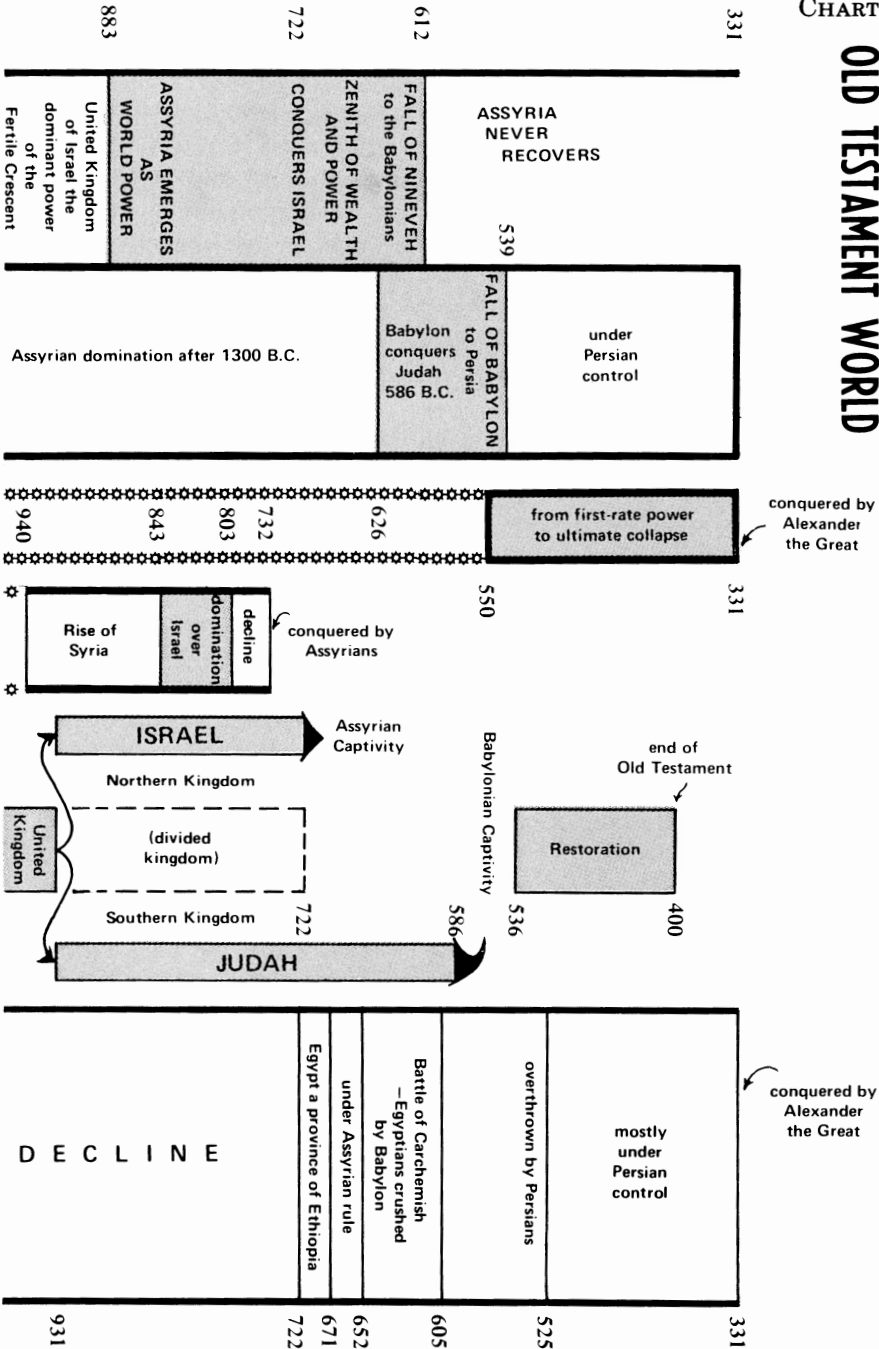


CHART 4  
LEADING POWERS IN THE  
OLD TESTAMENT WORLD



Now begin to acquaint yourself with Chart 4, which shows the history of each of the leading Gentile powers in the Old Testament world. First, scan the chart to see its general organization, without pausing over any of the details. Israel's history shown in the middle of the chart is an excerpt of Chart 3, which you studied carefully earlier in the chapter. The major value of superimposing all the histories on one chart is that the total political picture of any particular year or era of the Old Testament world may be viewed simultaneously. To illustrate, note that when the united kingdom split into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah (931 B.C.), Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt were not dominant world powers.

Follow the study suggestions given below as you learn the significant facts of Chart 4.

1. The shaded block areas of the five foreign nations show the periods when those nations were at the height of their power and influence.<sup>27</sup> Note how the ascendancy moved from Assyria to Babylonia to Persia.

2. Note the three bright kingdom eras of Egypt between 2700 and 1200 B.C. How would you describe the two intervening periods? Observe when it was that Abraham first visited Egypt (read Gen 12:10—13:4). For how many years were the Jews in Egypt? (Cf. Exod 12:40-41; Gen 15:13; Acts 7:6; Gal 3:17.)<sup>28</sup> When did their intense bondage begin?

3. How would you describe the political status of Egypt from 1200 to 331 B.C.? How many times does the chart show Egypt to be subject to another nation? (Read 2 Kings 25:22-26.) According to this passage, some Jews fled to Egypt soon after the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem. According to Chart 4, to whom was Egypt subject at this time?

4. Study the section on Assyria. About when did the nation originate? When did it emerge as the reigning world power? What nearby kingdoms were strong prior to that?<sup>29</sup> Note that it was during Solomon's reign that the united kingdom extended Israel's influence the farthest.

5. When did Assyria conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel? When did it reach its zenith of wealth and power? How long after Israel was conquered did Assyria fall to the Babylonians?

27. The blocks show *general* eras of ascendancy. Within an era, a nation could experience temporary decline, depending on such factors as who was king.

28. The duration of Israel's stay in Egypt is discussed in Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, pp. 83-109.

29. See Map A, "Three Major Regions of Old Testament History" for the locations of the Hittite and Mitanni empires.

6. Did Babylon arise as an independent nation about the time of Assyria? What was the relationship between the two from 1300 to 626 B.C.? The Chaldean (Babylonian) dynasty began in 626 B.C. with King Nabopolassar. The empire at this time is usually referred to as the Neo-Babylonian Empire, to distinguish it from the Old Babylonian Empire of about a thousand years earlier. What key Bible event happened in 586 B.C.? How soon after that was Babylon conquered by the Persians?

7. Around 1000 B.C., immigrants from various lands were beginning to merge with the local inhabitants of the land of Persia to form what was to be a first-rate empire. Cyrus the Great began his reign in 550 B.C. How long after that was Persia conquered by Alexander the Great?<sup>30</sup>

8. The Jews in Babylonian captivity were granted permission to return to Canaan during the ascendancy of what empire? In this connection, read Ezra 1:1-4.

9. What were the three periods of Syria's history, as shown on the chart? When were the Syrians conquered by the Assyrians? How soon after that did the Assyrians take Israel captive?

10. One of the important things to observe on the chart is that during the years when Israel was ruled by kings (1043-586 B.C.), the worst troubles for the Jews came by the hands of foreign powers: Syria, Assyria, and Babylonia. Recall from your earlier reading of 1 Samuel 8 that the Israelites, in demanding kingly rule against God's will, wanted to be like their neighbors: "No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam 8:19-20). Little did they know then what devastating battles would ultimately be fought when their God, whose lordship they rejected, would grant victory to their enemies!

#### D. EVERYDAY LIFE IN CANAAN DURING OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

The Old Testament was written by Orientals about Orientals. People of Western cultures need to keep this in mind to better appreciate the Bible stories and testimonies coming out of those ancient times. Fortunately the foundational doctrines which are taught in that Oriental setting are timeless and universal, such as man's sinfulness and God's holiness. So the Bible is not a closed book

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30. Alexander the Great was king of Macedonia from 336 to 323 B.C. He conquered the Greek city-states and the whole Persian Empire from the coasts of Asia Minor and Egypt to India. Palestine was under Persian control at the time, so it also fell into Alexander's hands.

to those not acquainted with the everyday life of the people of Israel. But it can be sharper and clearer if that setting is at least mentally visualized and felt.

Bible dictionaries and commentaries are among the best sources for learning the local settings of the Old Testament text. Also, there are books which specifically discuss this subject, such as E. W. Heaton, *Everyday Life in Old Testament Times*; H. F. Saggs, *Everyday Life in Babylonia and Assyria*; and Fred H. Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*.<sup>31</sup> It is beyond the scope of this introductory chapter to describe in detail the typical everyday life in Canaan during Old Testament times. The following list is included, however, to suggest a thumbnail sketch of such a setting.<sup>32</sup> As you read the list, use a little imagination and let a picture gradually emerge which will be etched upon your memory for later studies in the Old Testament. The most fruitful outcome of this short exercise may not be so much the learning of new facts as becoming alert to the Oriental flavor of the Old Testament.

*An Oriental town or city*—walls, gates, towers, narrow streets, and busy marketplaces—location of a city preferably on an elevated site, such as Jerusalem on Mount Zion—fields and grazing plots outside the city limits

*Water supply*—wells, cisterns, streams, and reservoirs

*Houses*<sup>33</sup>—average size of houses of the common people: one room<sup>34</sup>—roofs constructed of beams overlaid with reeds, bushes, and grass—earthen floors; mud-brick walls—few windows on the street side—fireplace on the floor in the middle of the room—furnishings: mats and cushions, storage chest, lampstand, handmill for grinding grain, cooking utensils, goatskin bottles, broom

*Domestic animals*—dogs, donkeys, mules, horses, camels, sheep, goats

*Foods*—barley and wheat bread, oil, buttermilk, cheese, fruits (olives, figs, grapes, raisins, pomegranates), vegetables, grain, honey; eggs, meat, poultry, and fish were eaten, but not regularly; fish was a major food in the cities around the Sea of Galilee; gener-

31. An interesting chapter on this subject, written in narrative style, is "Israel at Home," by John B. Taylor, in his book *A Christian's Guide to the Old Testament*, pp. 12-20. This is highly recommended reading.

32. All of these items are described, at least briefly, in Fred H. Wight's *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*, from which this list is constructed. It should be understood that all of the items are not necessarily part of every setting. Also, the descriptions are of life *after* the nomadic years of the earliest patriarchs, like Abraham.

33. Before settling down in Canaan, the Israelites dwelt in tents. The main purpose of tents and houses was that of shelter. The average Israelite spent less time in his abode than does the average person of Western culture.

34. Houses with more than one room were built around an open courtyard.



ally, the people ate two meals a day: breakfast, and late dinner (about 5 p.m.)

*Dress*—both men and women: inner garment (tunic); girdle for the tunic; outer garment (mantle) used as shelter from wind, rain, cold, heat, and as a blanket at night; turban (head); sandals—women only: longer tunics and larger mantles, veil (entirely covering the head in public), elaborate ornamentations (earrings, bracelets)

*Education*—children educated mainly by their parents: Hebrew religion and Scripture, reading and writing, practical skills—advanced training for leaders: such as in schools of the prophets, and by tutors

*Worship*—worship by the family in each home—called worship meetings in public areas<sup>35</sup>—temple worship in Jerusalem: regular participation by residents of the vicinity; participation at the annual religious feasts by Israelites from far and near

*Trades and professions*—agriculture (grain, grapes, olives, figs), sheep-raising, fishing, hunting, pottery, carpentry, masonry, metal work, tentmaking, merchants, physicians

*Women’s tasks*—grinding grain, weaving, making clothes, washing, care of flocks, carrying water, cooking, housecleaning, rearing and educating the children—children of the home, especially girls, helped in these daily chores

*Travel*—usually in groups, for the sake of safety—mode: most often by animals, sometimes by foot—meals: lunch brought along, as the main source—overnight lodging: at homes, sometimes inns

The following two paragraphs illustrate how one writer has used his imagination, based on known facts, to describe the everyday life of the average Israelite. Do the same in your own thinking as you study the stories of the Old Testament.

Tucked away along the winding streets of the town of Ramah, five miles north of Jerusalem, you will find the tiny one-roomed dwelling where Benaiah lives with his family. He lives much the same sort of life as the people round about him, never far from starvation level, cooped up in the city through the cold rainy months of winter and longing for the springtime when he can get out into the fields and work his ground.

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For beds the family shared two straw mats which were laid on the bare,

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35. During the Babylonian Captivity the Jews began worshiping regularly in meeting places, later called "synagogues" (from the Greek *synagoge*, "place of assembly"). They probably continued this tradition upon returning to their homeland, though there is no specific reference to it in the postexilic books of the Old Testament. By New Testament times the synagogue was a well-established institution.

earthen floor; for blankets they used the cloaks which were their normal outdoor garb. The little oil lamp burned dimly on a ledge in the corner. It was never allowed to go out except when the fire was alight in the daytime. It was the only box of matches they had! However, it gave very little light and so once you had settled down for the night it was impossible to get up without waking the whole household (farmyard and all!) and a caller late at night was never welcome.<sup>36</sup>

#### E. THE HEAVEN-EARTH SETTING

As much as the Old Testament concerns people and nations, with all of their frailties and sins, it is unique along with the New Testament in that the dimension of miracle controls its story. In its pages, heaven touches earth, God comes down and works through man. This heaven-earth setting pervades the entire book. He who wants to know what God is communicating in the temporal, local setting must accept and believe the supernatural dimension, for the message is meaningless without it. More will be said about this below, as we think about how to approach the Old Testament and what to look for in our study of its pages.

#### IV. HOW TO APPROACH THE OLD TESTAMENT

Without the right approach and clear guideposts, it is easy to get lost when studying the myriads of historical facts of the Old Testament. Also, it is easy to become discouraged and confused over difficult or obscure portions of the text. But these pitfalls can be avoided in various ways. One way is to keep in mind *the key revealed truths* which underlie all the details of the whole Old Testament story. You are on firm ground when you recognize these truths as you study a Bible passage. Some of the main ones are discussed below.<sup>37</sup>

#### A. GOD ALWAYS ACTS IN CONFORMITY TO HIS NATURE

One of the main purposes of the Old Testament is to reveal *who* God is. He is eternal Spirit, alive and personal, "the first cause, Himself uncaused."<sup>38</sup> He is holy, righteous, just, loving, merciful, gracious, true, omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-12); omniscient (Psalm 147:5); omnipotent (Job 42:2; Jer 32:17); and immutable (unchangeable, Mal 3:6). All of these divine attributes are absolutely perfect and eternally concurrent. When He sends awful judgment for sin, because He is a holy God, He does not thereby nullify His grace. For

36. Taylor, pp. 12, 17.

37. The Bible itself is the revelatory source of these key truths. This will become more apparent to you as you survey the various books of the Old Testament.

38. Compare this quote by the theologian Thomas Aquinas with the truth suggested by Exodus 3:14.

God never acts contrary to His *manifest* nature. In our human limitations we may not always understand His workings, and may even ask such questions as Why did a loving God permit the ravages of war in Old Testament times? By faith we must see God as the never changing One, who is holy but always acts in love, and who is loving but never violates His holiness. There is absolutely no alternative to this approach.

**B. ALL HISTORY IS IN GOD'S SOVEREIGN CONTROL**

There are no accidents in world history. God directs or permits the course of events in a person's or nation's career according to His sovereign and perfect will. For example, He granted Israel's evil demand for kingly rule, and in righteous judgment He sent the Babylonian conqueror. In both diverse actions He was sovereign, and in both He revealed His own nature as well as man's.

Whenever you have unanswered questions about Old Testament history (such as Why?), rest confidently in the truth that God is Lord of all history, in whose will every event fulfills His perfect purposes.

**C. ISRAEL WAS GOD'S DIVINELY CALLED AND FAVORED NATION**

God called Abraham to be the father of the nation of Israel, and then God made the nation (Gen 12:1-2). Humanly speaking, it was not an act of favoritism in the sense that out of many existing nations God picked one of intrinsic superiority to be His exclusive favorite (read Deut 10:14-17). And yet it is true that He sovereignly chose from the world's population one man, Abraham, to be the nation's father. If you are disturbed about why God would elect one nation to be the object of special blessing (Gen 12:2), keep in mind that sovereign election also applies to His saving of individuals (Eph 1:4-5). Even though you cannot fully comprehend it, be assured that God, in the exercise of His rightful sovereignty over the entire universe, never violates His attribute of justice in the expression of His love.<sup>39</sup>

**D. GOD WANTED TO USE ISRAEL AS HIS CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION TO THE REST OF THE WORLD**

God has always used people to communicate to others the message of salvation. In New Testament times, He started with a nucleus of believers in Jerusalem, to whom Christ gave the commission, "You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The

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<sup>39</sup>. Read Sauer, pp. 90-92, for an extended treatment of God's sovereign calling of Israel.

same principle of believer reaching out to unbelievers applies today. Back in Old Testament times, God wanted Israel to enjoy the fullest blessings of fellowship with Him in this life, and thus be a living witness of this to the nations around them. Israel, for the most part, failed God's purposes during the fifteen hundred years of its Old Testament career, and that is one reason why relatively few stories of evangelistic outreach to foreign nations appear in the Bible text. God did not overlook these foreign nations, but neither was He able to use His chosen nation, Israel, to the extent that He had desired.<sup>40</sup>

#### E. REDEMPTION IS THE KEY SUBJECT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT REVELATION

There are other vital ingredients in the story of the Old Testament, such as the creation account (cosmogony). But from the time of Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned and broke fellowship with God, to the last words of Malachi, the message centered on how sinful man can be redeemed and reconciled to God.<sup>41</sup> Erich Sauer says this about the Old Testament: "Thus the whole pre-Christian history of salvation is a guiding of mankind to the Redeemer of the world. The people of Israel were prepared in advance by historical revelation; the peoples of the world by the happenings of politics and civilization."<sup>42</sup>

The Old Testament makes it very clear that God seeks to save all lost sinners, not only Israelites. Also, because their spiritual deliverance is infinitely more important than any physical help, He uses even the severest of measures, such as war and captivity, to bring them to conviction of sin, repentance, and faith.

Another clear redemptive truth in the Old Testament is that man is saved by faith, not works. Abraham was an example (read Gen 15:6; Rom 4:1-3). If we find that a large portion of the Old Testament text is about the Israelites' attempts to appear religious, we may conclude that God wants us to see the futility of depending on works for salvation.

Because redemption is the key subject of the Old Testament, we may expect that each of the thirty-nine books contributes measurably to this theme. And we may also expect that at times the biblical

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40. The book of Jonah is the story of such a mission to foreign nations. Sauer writes that the Old Testament from end to end is "full of promises of salvation for the whole human race." Read *ibid.*, pp. 92-95, for a discussion of God's dealings with the Gentile world during Old Testament times.

41. The doctrine of salvation in the Old Testament is not confined to theological terms such as "redemption." More often it is designated by descriptive language, such as "delivered" (Joel 2:32); "life" (Deut 30:20); "walk in the light" (Isa 2:5); "his God" (Isa 50:10); "return to the LORD" (Isa 55:7); "heal" (Isa 57:18). Read Psalm 19:14 and Job 19:25 for two appearances of the word "redeemer."

42. Sauer, p. 186. This book is highly recommended for its analysis of the Old Testament's redemptive theme.

writers omitted details which had no direct relation to that theme. The Holy Spirit was responsible for such selectivity in inspiration.

**F. THE OLD TESTAMENT CONSTANTLY POINTS FORWARD TO THE COMING SAVIOUR AND KING, WHO IS JESUS CHRIST**

If redemption is the key subject of the Old Testament, and if Christ (the "anointed One," the Messiah) is the Redeemer of the world, then we may expect to find many Old Testament passages pointing to Christ. These may prophesy solely of a glorious future for Israel as a nation under Christ's rule, or they may point to the blessings of salvation to all who believe in the coming Saviour. Read Isaiah 53, which is a classic Messianic prophecy of Christ's substitutionary death for sinners. It should be pointed out that Old Testament references to the person and work of Christ often appear in the form of type and symbol (e.g., the Levitical offerings), not necessarily in direct predictive language.

Christ was literally, according to the flesh, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the promised seed, the Heir to David's throne (Matt 1:1; Luke 1:32; Gal 3:16; Isa 9:7; Jer 23:5). G. T. Manley writes of Jesus:

He is the second Adam, and there is not a name in the long line of His genealogy, nor any event in the Old Testament story of redemption which does not illuminate in greater or lesser degree His wonderful Person and work.<sup>43</sup>

Norman Geisler has written very effectively about Christ as the theme of the Old Testament. He says:

Viewing the Old Testament Christocentrically is not an interpretive (hermeneutical) option; for the Christian it is a divine imperative. On five different occasions Jesus claimed to be the theme of the entire Old Testament: (1) Matthew 5:17; (2) Luke 24:27; (3) Luke 24:44; (4) John 5:39; (5) Hebrews 10:7.<sup>44</sup>

Geisler sees in these verses four different Christocentric ways to view the Old Testament. These are shown on Chart 5, adapted from his book.<sup>45</sup>

Read the five New Testament passages as you study this chart, and you will see why the Old Testament must be studied with this Christocentric perspective.

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43. G. T. Manley, *The New Bible Handbook*, p. 14.

44. Norman L. Geisler, *Christ: The Theme of the Bible*, p. 31.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

## CHART 5

FOUR CHRISTOCENTRIC VIEWS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT		
Christ's own words	Christ the Fulfiller of	Christ Viewed as
Luke 24:27,44	Messianic Prophecy	Messiah and King
Hebrews 10:7	Levitical Priesthood	Priest and Sacrifice
Matthew 5:17	Moral Precepts	Prophet and Teacher
John 5:39	Salvation Promises	Saviour and Lord

**G. MIRACLES IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES WERE ONE OF GOD'S WAYS TO REVEAL HIMSELF**

Jesus performed miracles during His earthly ministry to vindicate His claim to being the Christ, the Son of God, with the ultimate purpose that people might be saved through faith in Him (read John 20:30-31). In pre-Christian times also, the Lord revealed Himself through miracles, that men might turn their hearts to Him. Since the creation of man, a common purpose of all biblical miracles has been to manifest the nature of the Lord of heaven as He has been moving among people on earth. Any reader of the Bible who disbelieves miracles is refusing to listen to God's voice. This is where most Old Testament critics commit intellectual and spiritual suicide.

**H. THERE IS A PROGRESSION OF REVELATION IN THE BIBLE**

The most obvious test of progression in the Bible is to compare the first book (Genesis) and the last (Revelation). Genesis records origins and God's first words to man. Revelation prophesies end times, and shows Christ enthroned forever as King of kings and Lord of lords. What happened in the intervening years, particularly up to the close of the first century A.D., is the progressing story of how God was revealing more and more of Himself and His redemptive work to men.

One progression of this revelation may be cited.<sup>46</sup> In the Garden of Eden, God first showed His authority over Satan and announced the coming of Christ, as the seed of the woman Eve, who would ultimately deal Satan the deathblow ("He shall bruise you on the

46. Only selected highlights of the progression are cited here. You may want to pursue this further by citing other parts of the progression.

head," Gen 3:15); with Noah, He established a covenant guaranteeing protection of the earth from any future universal flood (Gen 9:9-17); to Abraham, He promised blessing for the new nation (Israel) which He would make (Gen 12:2-3); through Moses, He instructed His people how to live pleasing to Him (Exod 20:1-17); through the prophets, He foretold in detail Christ's birth and ministry (e.g., Isa 9:6); through John the Baptist, He announced the inauguration of Christ's public ministry (John 1:6-36); to the apostles and New Testament writers, He revealed the full and deep truths of the new life in Christ (e.g., Eph 1-3); and final visions, which He gave to John at Patmos, were of Satan cast into the lake of fire and brimstone forever (Rev 20:10), and of Christ on the throne in the New Jerusalem, saying, "It is done" (Rev 21:6).

Earlier in this chapter we studied the progression of history unfolded in the drama of the Old Testament (e.g., Chart 3). Intimately involved in this historical progression were the ever enlarging and deepening revelations which God gave to man (doctrinal progression). When we study the Old Testament we must keep this in mind, otherwise we might force upon an early book a doctrine which is not there, or fail to see in a later book a truth that is really there. This does not mean, however, that in studying the Old Testament we should not interpret it in the light of events which took place hundreds of years later, during New Testament times. We who have been enlightened with the truth of the New Testament should always be looking for the anticipation of it in the Old.<sup>47</sup> This is how Jesus and the New Testament writers applied the Old.

#### I. THE OLD TESTAMENT IS GOD'S VOICE TO US TODAY, ANCIENT AS THE BOOK IS

If we discard a message only because it is ancient, we would reject the New Testament as well. But God's Book—both Old and New Testaments—is timeless in its application. That is why the apostle Paul, writing to his friend Timothy about their ancient Bible, asserted dogmatically that "all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). In the same context, Paul had

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47. An example of this was cited earlier, where Christ is interpreted in Genesis 3:15 as being the seed of the woman Eve. An Old Testament Messianic passage is not always clear and specific in its reference to the story of Christ. For example, who would have seen Jeremiah 31:15 as a prophecy of the weeping mothers of Bethlehem, were it not for Matthew's interpretation in Matthew 2:17-18?

reminded Timothy that it was the sacred writings which had given Timothy "the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). So it is correct to say that all spiritual lessons derived from passages in the Old Testament have something to say, directly or indirectly, about these two timeless, vital life truths: *way to God*, or *walk with God*. The Old Testament is that contemporary. And so we must open our hearts to its message. In the words of Edward Young,

In approaching the Bible . . . we need to remember that it is sacred ground. We must approach it with humble hearts, ready to hear what the Lord God says. The kaleidoscopic history of negative criticism is but further evidence that unless we do approach the Bible in a receptive attitude, we shall fail to understand it. Nor need we be ashamed to acknowledge that the words of Scripture are of God. . . . The attempt to explain them as anything less than Divine is one of the greatest failures that has ever appeared in the history of human thought.<sup>48</sup>

#### SOME REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the important reasons for studying the Old Testament?
2. In what ways is the Old Testament related to the New?
3. In your own words, describe the history of the Bible's coming from God to man.
4. What is revelation, as referring to God? What is the difference between general revelation and special revelation?
5. How were the original Scriptures inspired by God? Were the original autographs inerrant?
6. Do we have any portion of the original autographs? Are the existing ancient copies of the Bible inerrant in every letter and word? If not, how confident can we be that they accurately represent what the authors originally wrote?
7. What did the discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm?
8. How can we be sure that God intended the Old Testament canon to be no larger or smaller than the present existing group of books?
9. How does our arrangement of thirty-nine books differ from the Hebrew arrangement of twenty-four books? Is the text of one list longer than the text of the other?
10. What has been the history of the Old Testament as far as translation is involved?
11. What highlights of Israel's history formed the setting of the

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48. Edward J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 10-11.



writing of the Old Testament books? How much of Chart 3, "Old Testament History," can you recall? (Try putting this down on paper.)

12. When did the writing prophets first appear in Israel's life?

13. What were the three major regions of the world in Old Testament geography?

14. What do you recall about the topography of Canaan? In what regions did many towns and cities appear?

15. Describe the general climate of Palestine. What are the annual seasons?

16. What five foreign powers did Israel have contact with in Old Testament times? How did each one affect Israel's history?

17. Describe the setting of a typical house and family in a small town of Canaan during the days of King David.

18. How a person approaches the Old Testament is crucial in the study process. This chapter discussed nine recommended approaches. Recall as many as you can, and explain why each approach is so vital.

## V. SELECTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY

### A. DIVINE REVELATION

Chafer, L. S. *Systematic Theology*, 1:48-60.

Henry, Carl H. *Revelation and the Bible*.

Kelso, James L. *Archaeology and the Ancient Testament*, pp. 13-19.

Manley, G. T. *The New Bible Handbook*, pp. 6-8.

Packer, J. I. "Revelation and Inspiration." In *The New Bible Commentary*, pp. 24-30.

Pinnock, Clark H. *Biblical Revelation*.

Warfield, B.B. "Revelation." In *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 3:2573-82; and *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 71-102.

### B. INSPIRATION

Allis, Oswald T. *The Old Testament: Its Claims and Its Critics*, pp. 1-171. These pages are on the facts, doctrines, and literary form of the Old Testament.

Archer, Gleason L. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, pp. 13-27.

Clark, Gordon H. "How May I Know the Bible Is Inspired?" In *Can I Trust My Bible?*, edited by Howard F. Vos, pp. 9-34.

Gausson, L. *Theopneustia: The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*.

Geisler, Norman L., and Nix, William E. *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 26-124.

Hodge, C. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 151-86.

Manley, G. T. *The New Bible Handbook*, pp. 8-18.

Pache, René. *Inspiration and Authority*.

Payne, J. Barton. *The Theology of the Older Testament*, pp. 505-19.

Unger, Merrill F. *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, pp. 22-45.

Walvoord, John F. ed., *Inspiration and Interpretation*.

### C. TRANSMISSION

Archer, Gleason L. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, pp. 31-38; 47-58.

Bruce, F. F. *The Books and the Parchments*, pp. 114-24.

Geisler, Norman L., and Nix, William E. *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 235-66.

Laird, R. "How Reliable Is the Old Testament Text?" In *Can I Trust My Bible?*, edited by Howard F. Vos, pp. 119-34.

Skilton, John H. "The Transmission of the Scriptures." In *The Infallible Word*, edited by N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley.

Unger, Merrill F. *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, pp. 115-47.

### D. CANONIZATION

Archer, Gleason L. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, pp. 59-62.

Bruce, F. F. *The Books and the Parchments*, pp. 95-104; 163-75.

Geisler, Norman L., and Nix, William E. *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 127-78.

Harris, R. Laird. "What Books Belong in the Canon of Scripture?" In *Can I Trust My Bible?*, edited by Howard F. Vos, pp. 67-87.

Manley, G. T. *The New Bible Handbook*, pp. 26-32; 38-39.

Robinson, G. L. "Canon of the Old Testament." In *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1:554-63.

Unger, Merrill F. *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, pp. 46-114.

### E. TRANSLATION

Archer, Gleason L. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, pp. 38-46.

Bruce, F. F. *The Books and the Parchments*, pp. 125-62; 191-94; 201-11; 219-38.

Geisler, Norman L., and Nix, William E. *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 297-343.

Purkiser, W. T. *Exploring the Old Testament*, pp. 27-37.

Unger, Merrill F. *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, pp. 148-79.

### F. HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Bright, John. *A History of Israel*, pp. 23-66.

Harrison, R. K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 147-63. Technical discussion.

Kline, Meredith G. "Is the History of the Old Testament Accurate?" In *Can I Trust My Bible?*, edited by Howard F. Vos, pp. 135-54.

Manley, G. T. *The New Bible Handbook*, pp. 77-106. Concise treatment of the historical background of all parts of the Old Testament.

Payne, J. Barton. *An Outline of Hebrew History*, pp. 13-15. Condensed summary.

Schultz, Samuel J. *The Old Testament Speaks*. Historical setting is interspersed throughout this excellent work.

Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Bible Handbook*, pp. 8-17. Tabulation of dates and events.

**G. GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING**

Adams, J. McKee. *Biblical Backgrounds*, pp. 52-85.

Aharoni, Yohanan. *The Land of the Bible*.

Baly, Dennis. *The Geography of the Bible*, pp. 125-266.

Orni, Efraim, and Efrat, Elisha. *Geography of Israel*. An excellent, large map of Palestine appears in a flap under the back cover.

Payne, J. Barton. *An Outline of Hebrew History*, pp. 15-19; 23-32.

Pfeiffer, Charles F. *Baker's Bible Atlas*.

Pfeiffer, Charles F., and Vos, Howard F. *The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands*.

*The Sacred Land*. Excellent topographical maps.

Smith, George Adam. *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*.

Wilson, Clifford A. *Exploring Bible Backgrounds*, pp. 39-47.

Wood, Leon. *A Survey of Israel's History*, pp. 19-26.

**H. EVERYDAY LIFE IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES**

Bailey, A. E. *Daily Life in Bible Times*.

Corswant, W. A. *A Dictionary of Life in Bible Times*.

Freeman, James M. *Manners and Customs of the Bible*.

Gordon, Cyrus. "Biblical Customs and the Nuzu Tablets." *Biblical Archaeologist* 3: (February 1940).

Grosvenor, Gilbert, ed. *Everyday Life in Ancient Times*.

Harrison, R. K. *Old Testament Times*.

Heaton, E. W. *Everyday Life in Old Testament Times*.

La Sor, William Sanford. *Daily Life in Bible Times*.

Manley, G. T. *The New Bible Handbook*, pp. 428-38.

Miller, M. S., and Miller, J. L. *Encyclopedia of Bible Life*.

Pritchard, James B. *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*.

Saggs, H. F. *Everyday Life in Babylonia and Assyria*.

Taylor, John B. *A Christian's Guide to the Old Testament*, pp. 12-20.

Wight, Fred H. *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*.

**I. ISRAEL, GOD'S CHOSEN NATION**

Douglas, J. D. ed. *The New Bible Dictionary*, pp. 578-83.

Sauer, Erich. *The Dawn of World Redemption*, pp. 89-120.

Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, pp. 541-43.

**J. CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Baron, David. *Rays of Messiah's Glory*.

Baxter, J. Sidlow. *The Strategic Grasp of the Bible*, pp. 141-56.

Cooper, David L. *Messiah: His First Coming Scheduled*, pp. 136-56.

Geisler, Norman L. *Christ: The Theme of the Bible*, pp. 9-101.

Hengstenberg, E. W. *Christology of the Old Testament*, pp. 1-12.

Sauer, Erich. *The Dawn of World Redemption*, pp. 141-64.

Walvoord, John F. *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pp. 36-95.