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# INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE OLD TESTAMENT

A person will never properly understand the New Testament Scriptures if the Old Testament Scriptures remain a mystery to him. Yet for the average Christian the pattern, unity, and progression of the Old Testament remain vague or unknown. Although almost everyone knows about Noah and the ark, Moses and the Red Sea, and numerous other stories found in the books of the Old Testament, the Old Testament itself often seems fragmented and is seen only as a loosely knit group of stories. But to understand God's ways and His purposes in this age, as well as His plans for the future ages, requires a clear comprehension of the Old Testament.

For example, there are about 350 direct quotes or clear allusions from the Old Testament found in the New Testament book of Revelation.<sup>1</sup> This amounts to about fifteen Old Testament references per chapter. It is no wonder that for many who do not have a good grip on the Old Testament, Revelation is essentially a closed book. Or who can really appreciate the apostle Paul's discussion about Israel in Romans 9–11 if there is

no understanding of Genesis 12 and Jeremiah 31? Comprehending the Old Testament is crucial to understanding the New Testament.

Great doctrinal truths are developed in the Old Testament. For example, significant revelations concerning the attributes of God are recorded. The New Testament, of course, concerns itself with the Person of God, but it is the Old Testament that gives us our basic understanding of God's majesty, power, holiness, and sovereignty. His love, goodness, and wisdom are the subjects of many psalms and numerous prophetic declarations. What can rival Isaiah 40 on the greatness of God or Psalm 23 on the loving care of God?

Perhaps it is our lack of understanding of the Old Testament that has brought about a basic deficiency in our knowledge of God and, as a result, our walk with Him.

The Church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be unworthy of thinking, worshiping men. . . . The low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us. A whole new philosophy of the Christian life has resulted from this one basic error in our religious thinking.<sup>2</sup>

After serious study of the Old Testament, one is inclined to walk with more reverence before our majestic God.

So much foundational truth is found in the Old Testament—truth that the New Testament writers assume we know and understand. An almost endless list of doctrinal truths and meaningful facts could be given to validate the importance of the Old Testament to the New. Yet so often, students of the Scriptures wrestle with truth found in the books of the New Testament because they fail to recognize Old Testament background.

## THE PURPOSE OF THIS SURVEY BOOK

The purpose of this study is to assist the Bible student in seeing the pattern, progression, and unity of the Old Testament Scriptures and to be able to think through the entire Old Testament.

A person must see the “big picture,” and then he can begin to relate the various parts to this comprehensive view. Also, it is the purpose of this book to develop the central, unifying theme of the Old Testament, which is God’s covenant promises to the nation of Israel.

### THE APPROACH OF THIS SURVEY BOOK

The Old Testament is made up of thirty-nine books. These books contain the history of the nation of Israel, the laws of God for Israel, insightful and inspiring poetry, and the messages of numerous prophets. To observe how these books relate to one another our study will begin with and will emphasize the eleven “foundational books.” These eleven books develop the story line of the Old Testament. Since these foundational books form the chronological and historical basis for the other twenty-eight books, the great emphasis in this study of the Old Testament will be placed on them. Once we work our way through the foundational books, the other books will be linked to this historical base. This approach will aid in our awareness of the pattern and progression of the Old Testament Scriptures (see chart “Order and Classification of the Books of the Old Testament,” pages 16–17).

Another emphasis of this study will be to develop the central, unifying theme of the Old Testament, which is God’s covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants. God’s great covenant promises to Israel are the “glue” that holds the Old Testament together. In fact, the whole of the Bible is unified by God’s covenant relationship with Israel, which also includes the Gentiles. It is unlikely that a full comprehension of the “New” covenant, based on the death of Jesus Christ, can exist without understanding its Old Testament context.

When the chronological framework is understood and the unifying theme is observed, the Old Testament makes sense. The fragmentation is gone, and the unity, pattern, and progression can be appreciated.

## ORDER AND CLASSIFICATION OF THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

THIS STUDY	STANDARD ENGLISH CLASSIFICATION	HEBREW CLASSIFICATION
<p><b>Foundational Books</b>            Genesis            Exodus            Numbers            Joshua            Judges            1 Samuel            2 Samuel            1 Kings            2 Kings            Ezra            Nehemiah</p> <p><b>Complementation Books</b>            Leviticus            Deuteronomy            Ruth            1 Chronicles            2 Chronicles            Esther</p> <p><b>Books of Poetry/Wisdom</b>            Job            Psalms            Proverbs            Ecclesiastes            Song of Solomon            Lamentations</p> <p><b>Prophets During the Divided Kingdom</b>            Obadiah            Joel            Jonah            Amos            Hosea            Isaiah            Micah</p>	<p><b>Books of the Law</b>            Genesis            Exodus            Numbers            Deuteronomy</p> <p><b>Books of History</b>            Joshua            Judges            Ruth            1 Samuel            2 Samuel            1 Kings            2 Kings            1 Chronicles            2 Chronicles            Ezra            Nehemiah            Esther</p> <p><b>Books of Poetry/Wisdom</b>            Job            Psalm            Proverbs            Ecclesiastes            Song of Solomon</p> <p><b>The Major Prophets</b>            Isaiah            Jeremiah            Lamentations            Ezekiel            Daniel</p>	<p><b>The Law</b>            Genesis            Exodus            Leviticus            Numbers            Deuteronomy</p> <p><b>The Former Prophets</b>            Joshua            Judges            Ruth            1 Samuel            2 Samuel            1 Kings            2 Kings</p> <p><b>The Later Prophets</b>            Isaiah            Jeremiah            Ezekiel            Hosea            Joel            Amos            Obadiah            Jonah            Micah            Nahum            Habakkuk            Zephaniah            Haggai            Zechariah            Malachi</p>



**ORDER AND CLASSIFICATION OF  
THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

<b>THIS STUDY</b>	<b>STANDARD ENGLISH CLASSIFICATION</b>	<b>HEBREW CLASSIFICATION</b>
<p><b>Prophets During the Single Kingdom</b>                      Nahum                      Zephaniah                      Jeremiah                      Habakkuk</p> <p><b>Prophets During the Exile</b>                      Daniel                      Ezekiel</p> <p><b>Prophets After the Exile</b>                      Haggai                      Zechariah                      Malachi</p>	<p><b>The Minor Prophets</b>                      Hosea                      Joel                      Amos                      Obadiah                      Jonah                      Micah                      Nahum                      Habakkuk                      Zephaniah                      Haggai                      Zechariah                      Malachi</p>	<p><b>The Writings</b>                      Psalms                      Job                      Proverbs                      Ruth                      Song of Solomon                      Ecclesiastes                      Lamentations                      Esther                      Daniel                      Ezra                      Nehemiah                      1 Chronicles                      2 Chronicles</p>