

A Panoramic View of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a collection of 39 God inspired books written over a span of about 800 years. Almost all were written in the Hebrew language, with a small portion in Aramaic. The Old Testament contains stories, laws, poems, proverbs, songs, family records, and sermons, not always neatly arranged. It takes time, effort, and prayer to learn how to read the Old Testament, but it is God's Word and definitely worth the effort.

Beginnings

The Creator

Genesis 1 uses the word "God" 32 times. God is the hero of the entire Bible. God brought into existence something that did not previously exist. Everything that God created was good. Mankind was the crown of all creation. We are truly special in His sight. Man was living in paradise, at peace with God, each other, and even the environment. Man was created in the image of God for fellowship with God.

The Creature Falls

Genesis 3 reveals that Adam and Eve were given freedom to live in a garden of paradise with only one limitation. They made a deliberate choice to disobey God, preferring to listen to the voice of Satan. Sin and the consequences of sin have been part of life since then.

The Creator Floods the Earth

Genesis Chapters 6-9 reveal that God sent a flood on the earth because of man's wickedness. Before the flood came, God used a man named Noah to build an ark to preserve his family and the animals. God gave man a chance to start over. Unfortunately, Noah and his family carried sin within themselves. No plan to solve the sin problem could depend on sinful men and women.

The Creature Becomes Foolish

Having been given a second chance, God wanted man to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. Man foolishly rebelled and put down roots instead of scattering. The people built a tower toward the heavens to make a name for themselves. God was displeased and moved in history to use a nation of people to serve His purpose of being a source of blessing to the whole world. (**Genesis Chapters 10-11**)

Birth of a Nation

God's Preference of Israel

Genesis 12 marks the beginning of God's special activity in history. God chose a man named Abraham and promised that he would be the father of a great nation known as the Hebrews (Jews). God confirmed His promise with a legal contract, called a "covenant" (See **Genesis 15**). God also promised a land for them to claim for their very own. This was not the only covenant described in the Old Testament, but it was the most important one. These Jewish people were to be an instrument to return the fallen world to God. God's plan was then (and still is) to restore mankind to fellowship with Him. This plan began with the call of Abraham and would culminate in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God's Preservation of Israel

During the covenant ceremony, God told Abraham that his descendants would be mistreated slaves in a foreign land. After many years they would be released and come to live in the land of Canaan. **Exodus** tells about the persecution that the Jews had to endure under the Egyptian Pharaoh. God called out a man named Moses to deliver these Israelites (Jews) from bondage in Egypt. He led them to a mountain in the wilderness. There, at Mount Sinai, God transformed a group of freed slaves into the nation of Israel.

God's Precepts for Israel

In **Exodus 20**, God gives the Jews His guidelines by which His people were to live as they carried out God's special purpose. God was showing His people the best way to relate to Him and to each other. The Ten Commandments and other laws given to clarify how to keep the Commandments were to reinforce the primary task of the Jews: to love God with their whole hearts and to love their neighbors. If they could love this way, they could minimize the effects of sin among themselves and be God's light to the world.

God's Promise to Israel

The story of how the Jews finally came to realize God's promise of their land begins in **Numbers 13** with failure. God's people simply refused to move forward in faith. The book of **Joshua**, however, tells how their ultimate obedience combined with another opportunity from God led them to begin to possess the land of promise.

The Blessings and Brokenness of a Nation

The Kingdom Built Up

At this point, Hebrew history followed a pattern of consecutive cycles. Israel's rebellion would lead to oppression, which then led to repentance, and then to God's deliverance. At the end of each cycle God would raise up among the people a judge to bring about this deliverance. (See the book of **Judges**). At the end of Judges, the Hebrew people were finally in control of Canaan, the Promised Land.

However, they lacked unity. God's answer was to give them a king. The selection and reign of Saul as king is found in **1 Samuel**, beginning with Chapter 8. The story of David, the second king, is in **2 Samuel**. The third king of Israel was Solomon, and that story is found in **1 Kings Chapters 1-11**.

The Kingdom Broken Apart

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam became king (**1 Kings 12**). Following bad counsel, Rehoboam promised severe policies and took a hard line with people. Ten of the twelve tribes rebelled, selected Jeroboam as their king, and established a rival kingdom: The Northern Kingdom (Israel) had as its capital city, Samaria. The two tribes that stayed with Rehoboam were called the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Their capital city was Jerusalem.

The Kingdom Broken Down

The fall of Northern Kingdom or Israel is described in **2 Kings 15-20**. Because of their idolatry and immorality, God used the Assyrian army to conquer Samaria in 722 B.C. With that defeat, the leaders of the Northern Kingdom were transplanted into other areas of the Assyrian kingdom.

Because of two good kings named Hezekiah and Josiah (**2 Kings 18 and 22**), Judah was spared destruction for another 140 years. Eventually, Judah turned away from God and met the same fate as Israel.

The Kingdom Brought Back

The books of **Ezra**, **Nehemiah**, **Haggai**, and **Malachi** record three different groups of Jews who were brought back home. This was not all of Israel but a faithful remnant. God's deliverance demonstrates that forgiveness was (and still is) God's ultimate desire. **Isaiah 1:18** reminds us that that even though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.
