

Understanding the Old Testament

For many people, the Old Testament can be confusing and a bit overwhelming. If you've ever felt intimidated, *you're not alone!* This guide includes seven key concepts to help you gain some footing so you can read and understand the Old Testament with greater confidence.

KEY CONCEPTS

#1: The Bible is One Big Story

#2: The Story of the Old Testament

#3: The Four Major Time Periods of the Old Testament

#4: Jesus is the Fulfillment of the Old Testament

#5: Three Primary Ways to Interpret the Bible

#6: Applying the Bible

#7: God is Making All Things New

Recommended Online Resources

Recommended Books

Message Resources posted by Friday noon in **two** places:
The APP & brookwoodchurch.org/messages

1. Outline - YouVersion
2. Outline - PDF
3. Manuscript - PDF
4. Group Guide - YouVersion
5. Group Guide - PDF
6. Group Video
7. Understanding the OT - PDF
8. Spanish - PDF

My hope is that the Scriptures would become a greater part of who you are, and that you'd fall in love with the One who has been pursuing you since before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).



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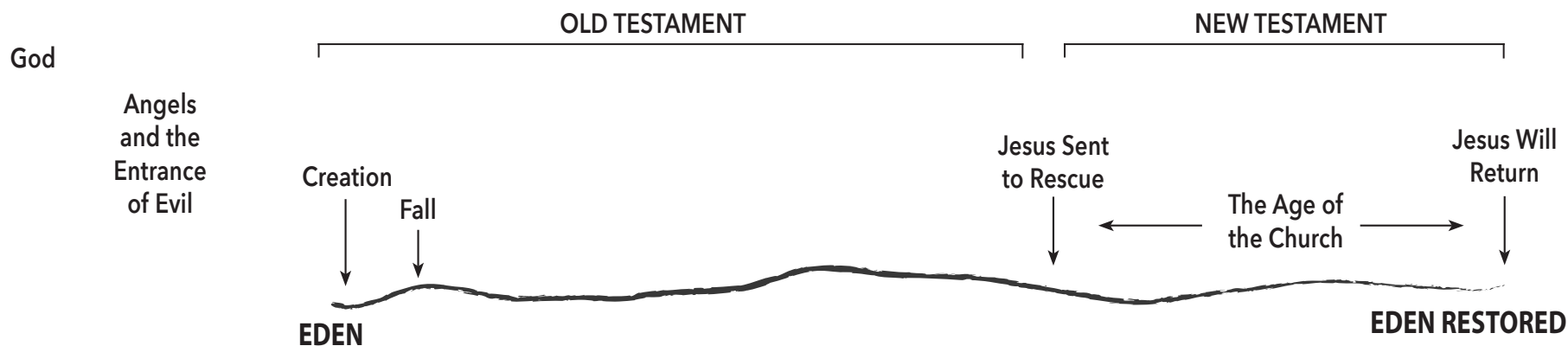
Key Concept #1

THE BIBLE IS ONE BIG STORY

In order to understand any story, it's essential to know the entire story. If all you see is five minutes in the middle of a movie, for example, it's impossible to know what's going on. It's only when you watch the entire movie that the characters and episodes begin to find their place and make sense. The same is true of the Bible. The overarching story provides context for the individual parts of the story. This timeline provides a high-level view the overarching story of the Bible. This is often referred to as *The Larger Story*.

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

Revelation 21:6 (NIV)



God: The Eternal One

There was a time before all time when there was only God. He is eternal.

- He is *from everlasting to everlasting* (Psalm 90:2). *The eternal God is your refuge* (Deuteronomy 33:27).
- See also: Psalm 136; John 1:1-18; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15-17.

Angels and the Entrance of Evil

First, God made angels (before the world).

- The angels rejoiced in heaven during creation (Job 38:1-7). They were present while the waters were *still above the skies* (Psalm 148:1-4)
- Satan became filled with pride and wanted to make himself like God (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:14-18).

- War broke out in heaven. Satan and a third of the angels were cast down (Revelation 12:3-9).
- The serpent was lurking in the garden before the fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-13).

Creation: The Splendor of Eden

Genesis 1-2 was written in the form of a poem, and describes the absolute beauty, glory and goodness of God. Adam and Eve were created in the perfect image of God.

The Fall of Mankind

Satan lured Adam and Eve to mistrust God (Genesis 3:1-6). They disobeyed His single command (Genesis 2:17). As a result, all humanity would be born in sin.

The Old Testament

The rest of the Old Testament (Genesis 4 - Malachi 4) records the history of a nation wrestling with God. It's the story of God's faithfulness in the midst of man's failure to return to Him. The Old Testament lays the foundation for the New Testament.

- *Phillip found Nathanael and told him, We have found the one Moses wrote about... and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth.* (John 1:45).

Jesus Sent to Rescue

Jesus came to save us.

- *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost* (Luke 19:10).
- See also: Isaiah 61:1-7; John 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17.

The New Testament

This is the time in which we live. We look backward in faith and forward with hope as we tell the world a Savior has come.

This is the age and mission of the church.

- *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations* (Matthew 28:19-20).
- *Go into all the world and preach the gospel* (Mark 16:15).
- See also: Romans 1:16; 2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Peter 3:15.

Jesus Will Return

One day, Jesus will bring final restoration.

This is the ache and longing of our hearts.

- *And so we will be with the Lord forever* (1 Thessalonians 4:17:b).
- See also: Matthew 24:36-44; John 14:1-3.

Key Concept #2

THE STORY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

This timeline identifies 12 major turning points that shaped the journey of God's people throughout the Old Testament. You might consider these like a *table of contents* to help you understand the flow of the overarching story.

Josiah was one of the *good* kings during the years of the divided kingdom.

CREATION: God created the world and everything in it. He breathed His life into man (Genesis 2:7). Eden was paradise. Our address is Eden and we are all homesick.

THE FALL: Adam and Eve violated God's design. *Sin came into the world through one man* (Romans 5:12). They chose to worship creation rather than the Creator.

THE FLOOD: Evil grew upon the earth, so God sent a flood. Noah, his wife and their three sons survived. Their offspring are why we're here (Genesis 6-8).

THE TOWER OF BABEL: Even though they had a fresh start, people continued to search for life apart from God. They wanted to build a great city for themselves, so God confused their language and scattered them over the face of the earth (Genesis 11:1-9).

ABRAHAM: God still loved His people, so He called Abraham to begin a new nation and become a blessing for all the nations on earth. God's love is limitless. He had the whole world in mind the whole time (Genesis chapters 12, 15 and 17; Ephesians 1:4-6).

EGYPT: There was a famine in the land, so God's people traveled to Egypt. They became slaves to an evil king. They were in Egypt for about 400 years (Exodus 1:1-14).

EXODUS: Because of His great mercy, God saw their misery and called Moses to rescue them (Exodus 3:7-10). After leaving Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years (Numbers 32:13).

CROSSING JORDAN: Because of Moses' disobedience, his leadership was transferred to Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9-12). Joshua led the people across the Jordan River and headed toward the Promised Land (Joshua 1-4).

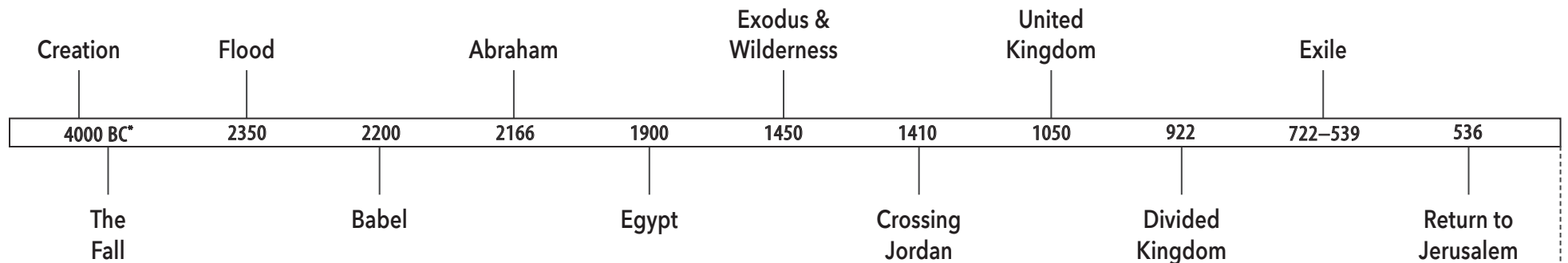
UNITED KINGDOM: As they settled in the land, the Israelites demanded to have a king (1 Samuel 8). Saul, David and Solomon served as the first three kings of Israel (1 Samuel 9-1 Kings 10).

DIVIDED KINGDOM: Solomon's disobedience led to corruption and turmoil among the people, so God divided the kingdom (1 Kings 11:9-13).

The 10 northern tribes ended up having 19 evil kings. They were eventually conquered and taken over by Assyria (2 Kings 17:5-6). The southern tribes also had 19 kings (seven of which could be considered *good*). Eventually, Babylon conquered these two remaining tribes (2 Kings 25). By this point, you can likely see our need for a Savior!

EXILE: God's people lived in exile for generations. Exile is a word that means you can't go home. Once again, they were scattered and became slaves to foreign nations.

RETURN TO JERUSALEM: God stirred the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, who issued a decree that God's people could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the kingdom (1 Chronicles 36:22-23). That's why it's so powerful that when Jesus came, He proclaimed *the kingdom of God is at hand!* He is the one true King.



*Dates are approximate but generally accepted by most conservative scholars.

There are no biblical writings from about 390 BC until the time of Jesus. These are often referred to as *The Silent Years*.

Key Concept #3

THE FOUR MAJOR TIME PERIODS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament can be divided into four major time periods. Think of it like breaking down the periods of your own life (e.g., childhood, teenage years, college, single or married, empty nest, and so on). The timeline below describes the major sections of the Old Testament and lists the books of the Bible most closely related to each time period.

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs span the history of the Old Testament and therefore don't fit neatly into the four major time periods.

BEGINNINGS (4000–1410)	BUILDING THE KINGDOM (1410–922)	FALL OF THE KINGDOM (722/586–539)	REBUILDING THE KINGDOM (536–390)
<p>This first major time period includes creation, the fall, the migration to Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. Moses gives the law and establishes both the priesthood and community worship. He organizes the army of God and prepares them to head toward the Promised Land. Finally, Moses transfers authority to Joshua.</p> <p>Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy</p>	<p>In this next major time period, Joshua picks up where Moses left off. He leads the people across the Jordan River and into battle against countless enemies. The 12 tribes begin settling in the land and cry out for a king.</p> <p>The kingdom of Saul, David and Solomon is established then is eventually torn apart.</p> <p>Joshua Judges Ruth 1-2 Samuel 1-2 Kings</p>	<p>This is the period of the prophets. God sends messengers to call His people to return to Him, to warn them of judgment and to pronounce future blessings.</p> <p>Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah</p>	<p>During this final period of the Old Testament, a good king from Persia (Cyrus), issues a decree that God's people could return to Jerusalem and rebuild their city.</p> <p>These books address the scattered Israelites, teaching them how to live during exile and remind them of the need for God to be their King.</p> <p>Esther 1-2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Daniel Haggai Zechariah Malachi</p>

Key Concept #4

JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

When Adam and Eve disobeyed the command of God in the Garden, three primary things happened. The man and woman were overcome with guilt and shame, forced to live a life of futility, and broke the intimate union with God and each other. This explains the hardship of life. As you can see below, Jesus is the ultimate rescue. He provides forgiveness, offers a life of purpose, and restores our relationship with God and each other. This is the Gospel, the amazing good news of the Bible... our invitation to new life!

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love ...

1 Corinthians 13:13a (NIV)

(see also Colossians 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8)

THE FALL

Genesis 3:7-10 (NIV)

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. ... they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Genesis 3:17b-19 (NIV)

... "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground ..."

Genesis 3:16, 23-24 (NIV)

"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden... He drove the man out, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

THE RESULTS

Guilt/Shame

- *Genesis 2:16-17;*
- *Ezra 9:5-7; 13-15*
- *Romans 3:9-26; 6:23*

Life of Futility

- *Psalms 89:46-48;*
- *Ephesians 4:17-19;*
- *James 1:11; 4:13-14*

Broken Relationships

- *Genesis 4:1-10;*
- *Isaiah 59:1-2;*
- *Galatians 5:19-21;*

THE RESCUE

Forgiveness

You now have a place to go with your guilt and shame.

- *John 1:29*
- *Romans 5:1-5; 8:1*
- *1 John 1:1-9*

Life of Significance

Your life has meaning far beyond what you imagine.

- *Matthew 28:18-20*
- *1 Corinthians 15:58*
- *Ephesians 4:1-16*

Relationships Restored

You don't have to be alone anymore.

- *John 17*
- *1 John 4:1-7*
- *Colossians 3:12-14*

Experienced by

FAITH

Produces

HOPE

Fills us with

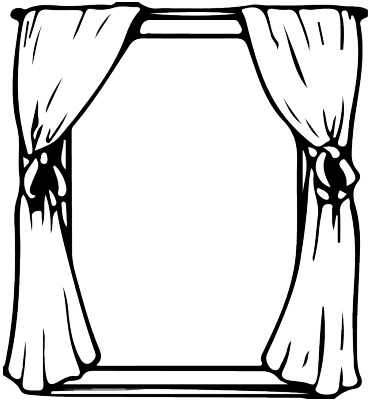
LOVE

Key Concept #5

THREE PRIMARY WAYS TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE

Here are three basic approaches to studying the Bible that will help you explore and understand the meaning of a particular text.

WINDOW

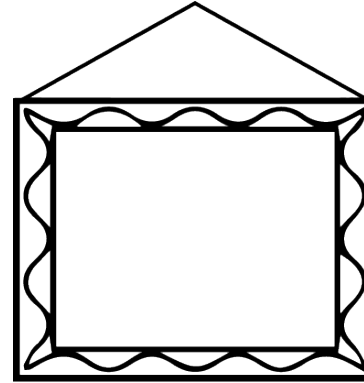


Approaching the Bible as a WINDOW means reading it from a HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE. Imagine looking through a window to simply see what happened. It's like reading a history book.

Using this approach, ask questions like:

- Where did the story take place?
- When did it happen?
- How would you describe the setting?
- Who were the characters in the story?
- What happened?
- What happened next?
- What's the plot or main idea of the story?
- What are the plain facts and details?
- It's essential to understand history because it shapes our future.

PICTURE

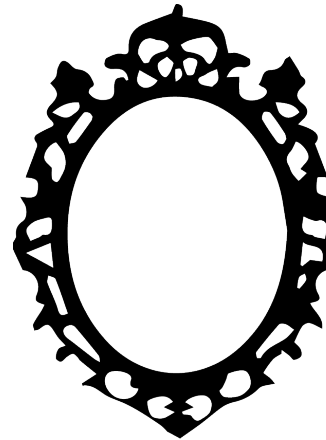


Approaching the Bible as a PICTURE means reading it from a LITERARY PERSPECTIVE. Consider the author, the audience and the intended message.

Using this approach, ask questions like:

- Who wrote this text or passage?
- To whom was this letter written?
- What specific details are included?
- How were the details arranged?
- What important themes emerge?
- What was the central message to the original audience?
- How does this central message apply to me?

MIRROR



Approaching the Bible as a MIRROR means reading it from a THEMATIC PERSPECTIVE. Most passages speak to a specific theme or two, which will help you make more direct applications in your own life. It's like using the Bible as a mirror, comparing who you are right now to the person God is transforming you to be.

Using this approach, ask questions like:

- What are the main topics in this passage (e.g., love, salvation, faith, repentance, God's character, community, etc.)
- Is there a specific truth in this passage?
- What does this teach me about myself?
- What needs to change in my life?
- How does this passage encourage me about the changes I've already seen?

Key Concept #6

APPLYING THE BIBLE

One of the best ways to grow in your understanding of the Bible is to put what you learn into practice. The great thing is, you don't have to figure it all out on your own. God wants to teach us more than we want to learn, and the good news is, God is ultimately the one who gave us these ancient words! In particular, Scripture is meant to change how we think, what we do and how we feel.

Scripture Addresses Three Primary Human Dynamics

MIND

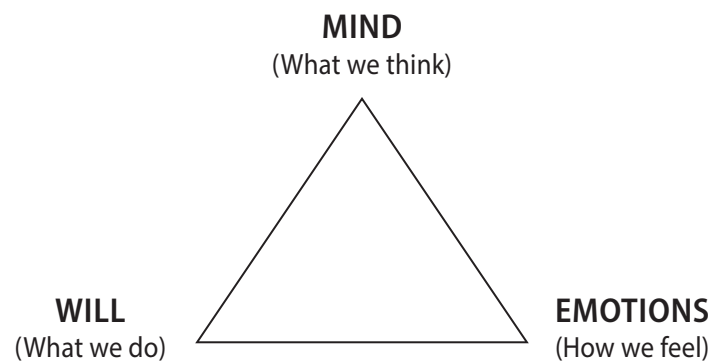
- *We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are **taking every thought captive** to the obedience of Christ ... **2 Corinthians 10:5 (NASB)***
- *Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a **learned** man, with a **thorough knowledge** of the Scriptures. (**Acts 18:24 (NIV)**)*

WILL

- *Whoever is **lazy** regarding his work is also a brother to the master of destruction. **Proverbs 18:9 (ISV)***
- *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by **deeds** done in the humility that comes from wisdom. **James 3:13 (NIV)***

EMOTIONS

- *... the Lord God caused to grow from the ground every tree that is **desirable** and **pleasing** to the sight and good (suitable, **pleasant**) for food ... **Genesis 2:9a (AMP)***
- *Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an **inexpressible and glorious joy**. **1 Peter 1:8 (NIV)***
- ***Rejoice** with those who rejoice, and **weep** with those who weep. **Romans 12:15 (NIV)***



Bible Study Application Questions

MIND

- God, what do You want me to know?
- Is there a specific truth or concept You're trying to teach me?
- What are You trying to help me understand?

WILL

- God, is there something You're leading me to do?
- Is there a specific path or step You want me to take?
- What behavior are You addressing in my life?

EMOTIONS

- God, what feeling are You leading me into?
- What words or phrases resonate with you?
- What's stirring in your heart as you read?

Beyond study, the goal is to deepen intimacy with God. A central question to ask is, *God, what do You want to say to me?* Trust that He will direct your heart and mind as you seek Him.

Key Concept #7

GOD IS MAKING ALL THINGS NEW

After the fall of Adam and Eve, God promised to save those who return to Him and trust Him with all their heart. You can see this in the seed of promise (Genesis 3:15) and through the covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17). For thousands of years, God has been calling us home. Jesus is our final and perfect Savior. As you can see from the comparison between the beginning of the Bible and the end of the Bible, God is making all things new. This is our anchor, this is our hope.

*"See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland."
Isaiah 43:19 (NIV)*

FROM EDEN TO EDEN RESTORED

Genesis 1-4	Revelation 19-22
God created the heavens and earth (1:1)	God creates new heavens and earth (21:1)
Light created (1:3)	Lamb is the light (21:23)
Darkness and night created (1:5)	No darkness or night (22:5)
Waters gathered into seas (1:10)	No more seas (21:1)
God made the sun and the moon (1:16)	No need of the sun or the moon (21:23)
Creation pronounced done (2:1)	New creation pronounced done (21:6)
Man's primeval home by a river (2:10)	Man's eternal home by a river (22:1)
Death for eating from a tree (2:17)	Life for eating from a tree (22:2)
Marriage of Adam (2:18-23)	Marriage of the Lamb (19:6-9)
Eve, the wife of Adam (2:22-25)	New Jerusalem, wife of Christ (21:9-10)
Serpent deceived (3:1,13)	Serpent banned from deceiving (20:3)
Satan's first attack on man (3:1ff)	Satan's final attack (20:7-10)
Satan appeared in garden (3:1)	Satan disappears in lake of fire (20:10)
A garden which became defiled (3:6-7)	A city that can't be defiled (21:27)
Fellowship with God broken (3:8-10)	Face-to-face fellowship with God (21:3)

continued...

Initial triumph of the serpent (3:13)	Ultimate triumph of the Lamb (21:10)
Savior's first coming promised (3:15)	Savior's second coming promised (22:20)
Pain greatly multiplied (3:16)	No more mourning, crying or pain (21:4)
Curse on man and nature (3:14-19)	No more curse (22:3)
Serpent's doom promised (3:15)	Serpent's doom accomplished (20:10)
Curse imposed on nature (3:17)	Curse removed from nature (22:3)
Man's dominion over nature lost (3:19)	Man's dominion restored (22:5)
First death (3:21; 4:8)	No more death, neither sorrow (21:4)
First sacrificial lamb (3:21)	Last sacrificial Lamb (21:4, 14)
First paradise closed (3:23)	New paradise opened (21:25)
Angel kept people from garden (3:24)	Angel welcomes people to city (21:9-10)
Man driven from God's presence (3:24)	Believers shall see His face (22:4)
Tree of life taken from man (3:24)	Tree of life open to man (22:14)
God's mark on Cain (4:15)	God's name on people's forehead (22:4)
First city built by Cain (4:17)	Holy city comes from God (21:2)