



WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

LESSON 2: The Old Testament

Lesson Focus:

The Old Testament tells the history of God's faithfulness to Israel.

The Bible is one book, but it is better to think of it as a library of books. There are sixty-six books in the Bible. The books were written by many different people over the course of about 1,500 to 2,000 years.

The first writers of the Bible began writing just after the people of Israel left Egypt. The last writers started writing about seventy years after Jesus died. It took a long time for the whole Bible to come together as one complete book.

The books of the Bible contain different writing styles. Each writing style helps us understand God in a different way. Each book teaches us something new about God.

1. Why are you studying the Bible? What do you hope to learn?



Artwork by anonymous Crossroads student

Writing the Bible

The Bible was written by people who were chosen by God, including prophets* (PRAH-fehts) and apostles* (uh-PAH-suhls). God directed them to record the history, laws, poetry, and stories of the people of Israel and the ministry of Jesus and His disciples. The writers understood that the story of Israel and its people was a central part of what God was doing for all of humanity.* They wrote what God's Holy Spirit* guided them to write.

* An asterisk after a word or phrase indicates that it is defined in the Glossary of Terms on page 7.

God used these writings to speak to His people throughout history. He used the laws and histories to help His people know Him. The people learned how He watched over them. They learned that He was “slow to get angry . . . faithful and full of love” for them (Exodus 34:6). The writings also taught His people how to love and follow Him and how to understand what was important to Him. God still uses the books in the Bible to speak to His people today.

Although the Bible was written by humans, the words in it came directly from God. That is why the Bible is also called **God's Word**.

2. Why is it important to know that the writers of the Bible only wrote what God wanted them to write?



Notes/Questions

The Main Parts of the Bible

The Bible is divided into two main parts called **testaments**. The word “testament” has two meanings. First, it can mean a set of facts used to prove that something is true. Second, it can mean a statement of what someone believes. Both of these meanings apply to the two testaments in the Bible. They include facts about God and His people that teach us the truth about God. They also show what it means to believe in God and follow Him by giving us examples of people who have lived before us.



Video stills courtesy of BibleProject

The first thirty-nine books of the Bible are called the Old Testament. This collection of books includes the history, wisdom, and beliefs of the people of Israel. It starts at the creation of the world and ends about 400 years before Jesus was born.

The last twenty-seven books of the Bible are called the New Testament. The New Testament includes the stories of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection and the ministry of His apostles.

The Old and New Testaments explore the big questions we have about life, death, and what it means to be a human being. The books are filled with exciting stories and beautiful poetry. They teach us about God’s love and His definition of justice. They help us understand what it means to follow Him. Christians read both testaments to know who God is and learn how to love and obey Him.

3. Do you believe that what you read in the Bible is true? Why or why not?

The Old Testament

The Old Testament tells the story of God and His people. It includes God’s laws for His people and the histories of His people. It describes how the world became broken and how God worked through His people to repair it. God promised that He would come to earth and make everything perfect again. But the Old Testament ends with God’s people still waiting for that promise to come true.

There are three types of books found in the Old Testament. They are called the **law**, the **prophets**, and the **writings**. Although each type of book is written in a different style, they all contain information that God wants us to know about Him.

Historical Note

The Old Testament originally comes from the Jewish faith. Jews call the collection of books in the Old Testament the **TaNaK** (tah-NAHK). It’s a word made from the Hebrew letters for “T” and “N” and “K.”

The “T” stands for Torah (TOHR-uh), which means “**law**.” The books in this category are:

Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus
Numbers	Deuteronomy	

The “N” stands for Nevi’im (neh-vee-EEM), which means “**prophets**.” The books in this category are:

Joshua	Judges	1 Samuel
2 Samuel	1 Kings	2 Kings
Isaiah	Jeremiah	Ezekiel
Hosea	Joel	Amos
Obadiah	Jonah	Micah
Nahum	Habakkuk	Zephaniah
Haggai	Zechariah	Malachi

The “K” stands for Ketuvim (kuh-too-VEEM), which means “**writings**.” The books in this category are:

Ruth	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles
Ezra	Nehemiah	Esther
Job	Psalms	Proverbs
Ecclesiastes	Song of Songs	Lamentations
Daniel		

The first five books of the Bible are known as the **law**. These books contain the beginning of the story about God and His people. They start with the stories of creation and the Fall.* They explain how sin entered the world and how evil, death, and destruction became part of life on earth. They show how God began to bring order and beauty into the world again. They tell the story of how God chose a man named Abraham and his family to become the nation of Israel.

God promised to use Abraham's family to bless and save the whole world. Eventually, through Moses, God gave them laws and commandments* to follow so everyone would know they were His people.

Read **Exodus 20:1–17**.

4. What laws did God give to His people? Write them in your own words if you can.

5. What do these laws tell you about what is important to God?

The second category of books in the Old Testament is called the **prophets**. The twenty-one books in this category are scattered throughout the Old Testament.

These books are histories of God's people. They include stories about how God formed His people into the nation of Israel. They describe how Israel continually failed to follow God.

These books also contain warnings and words of encouragement from God, which gave direction to His people throughout their history. The writers reminded the people about what God had done for them in the past, and they wrote down the promises God made for the future. Those promises showed the ways God cared for His people—and they remind us that God will care for us too.

Read **Jeremiah 23:5–8**.

6. What promises did God make to the Israelites?

7. How do those promises show that God cares about His people?

The last category of Old Testament books is the **writings**. There are thirteen books in this category, and they include poems, songs, proverbs,* and stories about God's people.

These books contain godly wisdom, hope, and encouragement. The teachings in them help us understand how to listen and talk to God. They also provide guidance and examples of how to live.

Read **Proverbs 3:1–6**.

8. The writer was talking about God's Word (the Bible). According to this passage, how can following God's Word help us?

9. Why do people sometimes find it challenging to follow God's Word?

10. When have you found it challenging to follow God's Word?

The Old Testament tells us that God's people struggled to obey His laws. They tried to follow Him, but they kept failing over and over. But God did not give up. He continued to watch over His people. He sent prophets to remind them to follow Him. He gave them messages of hope for the future. God still had a plan for His people.

Read **Jeremiah 29:10–14**.

11. What did God promise the people?



Notes/Questions

God kept that promise. The New Testament, which you will study in the next lesson, teaches that Jesus came to keep and complete all of God's promises. He was the promised King who came to save and redeem* God's people and give them "hope for the years to come" (Jeremiah 29:11).

If we are following Jesus, that promise is for us too. God will work in and through our lives to make that promise come true. And just like the people of Israel, God has given us His Word so that we can know Him, follow Him, and trust Him for the future.

Read **Jeremiah 29:10–14** again.

12. Do you believe you can trust God for your future? Why or why not?

Reading the Bible can teach us a lot about what it means to trust God. The Bible contains hundreds of examples of the ways that God has kept His promises to His people. The Old Testament is full of stories about God watching over and providing for His people. He led the writers of the Bible to record all these stories so that His people could read them for years to come. Reading His words helps us learn from those examples and strengthen our faith in Him.

13. What things keep you from reading or studying God's Word?

14. How can you make reading the Bible a more important part of your life?



Notes/Questions

Action Step

Which Bible passage from this lesson stood out to you the most? Read that passage a few more times. Write it down and then read it again every day this week. Why do you think this passage was meaningful to you? What is something you can do this week to apply this passage to your life?

Glossary of Terms

Each lesson contains Bible names, terms, and ideas that may be new to you. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. You will see an asterisk (*) the first time each term appears in the lesson.

Apostle — A follower of Jesus chosen to spread the message of the Gospel.

Commandment — A teaching, law, or rule from God that must be obeyed. Christians follow God's commandments because they love Him.

Holy Spirit — One of the three persons of the Trinity of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in Christians, guides them, and gives them new life.

Humanity — All human beings; also called "the human race" or "humankind."

Prophet — Someone who brought messages from God to His people. Many books of the Bible were written by prophets (for example, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea). These books contain many promises God made to His people that came true years later.

Proverb — A short, well-known saying that contains wise thoughts and is easy to understand and remember.

Redeem — To make up for something, to win something or buy it back, or to free someone from sin.

The Fall — The event in the Bible when Adam and Eve sinned and disobeyed God. Because of the Fall, humans are born sinful, and death and pain exist in the world.

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Use this space for **prayer requests, questions for the mentor who will review this lesson, or comments.**
You can also use this space to **write a poem or draw.**

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