

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Presented by

Blake Brown

In our Bible class on Sunday morning, September 23, 2009, Tyler and I began a brand-new study titled, “A Journey Through the Old Testament.” And even though as of today we have been in our new class for only three weeks, we still are excited about the things that we already have learned, as well as the things that we know we will be learning in the coming months. Today, and in future sermons, we would like to share with you some of the important material found in the Old Testament that can help each of us live faithfully before God in our day and age.

As you probably already know, the Old Testament as found in our English Bibles contains **39** books. But did you know that in Jewish Hebrew Bibles there are only **24** books? Yet, as odd as it may sound, the Hebrew and English Old Testaments are identical in their **content**. The difference in the **number of books** is due only to the fact that in the Hebrew Old Testament, certain books are grouped differently. To mention just one example, books that have two parts in English Bibles (like 1 and 2 Kings or 1 and 2 Samuel) are combined into a single book in Hebrew Bibles. Also, whereas our English Old Testament begins with Genesis and ends with Malachi, the Hebrew Old Testament begins with Genesis and ends with Chronicles.

Also, while the New Testament was written during a period that covered **less than one-hundred years** (from around A.D. 50 to A.D. 100), the Old Testament was written over a span that covered **more than one-thousand years**—from 1500 B.C. (when the books of Moses were written) through about 400 B.C. (when the book of Malachi was completed). The Old Testament was written entirely in Hebrew, except for small sections of the books of Daniel and Ezra that were written in Aramaic, which was the spoken language in Palestine from 200 B.C. through A.D. 200. Also, did you know that during the 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament, God did not give **any revelation at all** to people? We refer to those years as “the four silent centuries.”

Our English Old Testament includes five major groups of books. The **Pentateuch** contains the five books of Moses. The **books of history** include Joshua through Esther. The **books of wisdom and poetry** include Job through the Song of Solomon. The **Major Prophets** include Isaiah through Daniel. And the **Minor Prophets** include Hosea through Malachi. And, just so you will know—the reason that some books are referred to as having been written by “major prophets,” while some were written by “minor prophets,” has to do only with the fact that the books of the major prophets are longer, while the books of the minor prophets were shorter. The words “major” and “minor” do not mean that some books are more or less important than certain other books. As the apostle Paul said, “**All** Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The psalmist said, “The **entirety** of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever” (Psalm 119:160).

The first **five** books, Genesis through Deuteronomy, tell us about the creation of the world, Adam and Eve, Noah and the Flood, Abraham and the other patriarchs, Joseph and the Israelites' relocation to Egypt, Moses and the Exodus from Egypt, and the Israelites' forty years' wandering through the desert. It is in the book of Exodus where we see Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from God, and then passing them on to the people of Israel.

The next **twelve** books, Joshua through Esther, cover a thousand years of human history, including: the conquest of the Promised Land; the period of the judges'; the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon; the divided kingdoms of the North (Israel) and the South (Judea); the defeat of Israel and Judah by the Assyrians and Babylonians; and the exile and ultimate return to Judea and Jerusalem.

The timeless principles found in the **five** books of wisdom and poetry discuss such things as: how to enjoy success and blessings regardless of your outward circumstances; the problem of evil, pain, and suffering; faithfulness to God; the vanity of earthly treasures; and so on. Some of the best-known quotations from God's Word come from these five books.

Seventeen books are designated as the Major and Minor Prophets. These books were written by prophets whom God raised up at important times during the history of Israel and Judah in order to encourage His people to be faithful to Him. Although many of the applications found within these books pertained mainly to the people to whom they were written, there are numerous important principles for us today as well.

Tyler and I are looking forward to studying about people like Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Noah, Moses, Joshua, Jacob, Joseph, Esther, Job, Ruth, Samson, Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, and the many other men and women whose fascinating life stories are told within the pages of the Old Testament. At the beginning of our amazing journey through the Old Testament, our teacher explained to us the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Tyler and I understand that we today are not under the Old Law, but instead must obey the commands of the New Testament. However, we also now realize that there are many important things in the Old Testament that can help us understand God, His relationship with humanity, and even the importance of the coming of Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. As the apostle Paul said in Galatians 3:24-25, "The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." In speaking of the people in the Old Testament, Paul also wrote "All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our learning" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Did you notice the phrase "for our learning" in Paul's comment? That is why our teacher wants Tyler and me to study the Old Testament. He knows that there is much there "for our learning." And, truth be told, **Tyler and I are beginning to figure that out, too!**