

CHAPTER ONE

TOURING THE LIBRARY

Picture a library complex consisting of two buildings with a courtyard separating them. The older books in the library's collection are housed in the first building. The books in the first building range from 2400 to 3800 years old. Across the courtyard in the second building the newer books are housed. They, too, are now very old. These "newer" books are approaching 2,000 years of age. In this chapter we want to take a tour of the first building of our imaginary library.

Christians refer to the books housed in the first building of the imaginary library as the *Old Testament*. There are thirty-nine valuable books in this building. For Jews these books constitute the entire Bible, which they call *Tanak*. The consonants of this term (*T N K*) refer to the three major sections into which the Jews organize the books in their sacred library: *T = Torah (law)*, the Jewish name for the first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy); *N = Nebhiim (Prophets)*, the Jewish name for eight books (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve). *K = Kethubim (Writings)*, the rest of the books of the Old Testament.

Jews count only 22 or 24 books in their biblical library. They combine several of the 39 books that Christians count in their Old Testament. Here, however, is the bottom line: The 22 or 24 books

counted by the Jews in their Bible are the same as the 39 books that Christians count in their Old Testament. Christians believe that God delivered his oracles or Scriptures to the Jews (Romans 3:2). So only the books accepted by the Jews as Scripture were included by the Christians as part of their Bible. Furthermore, most of these books were cited by Christ and the apostles in such a way as to indicate that they were to be received as Scripture by Christians.

The Old Testament books describe God's choice of a special people through whom he planned one day to bring his Son into the world. Within the Old Testament library there is a variety of literature. Here one finds history, law, poetry, wisdom literature, worship literature, and predictive material, just to name a few categories.

Here are some interesting facts about the Old Testament:

- ❖ **Consists of 39 books.**
- ❖ **Written by at least 32 writers.**
- ❖ **Took about 1,000 years to write.**
- ❖ **Covers at least 3800 years of history.**
- ❖ **Makes up 77% of the Bible.**
- ❖ **Contains 929 chapters; 23,214 verses.**

Overview of the Old Testament

Now let's look more closely at some of the points listed above.

Writers

Christians believe that God is the ultimate Author of all Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). He guided the various human writers so that what they wrote reflected exactly what God wanted people to know. This guiding process is called *inspiration*. Through his Holy Spirit God exerted his influence over the writers (2 Peter 1:21) so that they were guided into all truth (John 16:13). Because

the writers received supernatural assistance in their writing, Christians believe that the writings of Scripture are *inerrant*, i.e., without error.

God used about 32 human writers to produce the books of the Old Testament. The names of some of these writers are rather famous. You may have heard of Moses, David, and Solomon. The names of other writers are not so well known. Have you heard of Ezra? Of Amos? Of Agur?

Some of the writers contributed multiple books to the collection. Moses wrote five, possibly six, of the Old Testament books. Solomon wrote three books, Jeremiah at least two. Sixteen writers contributed but one book to the collection. Some of the books have contributions from multiple writers. A number of the Old Testament books are written anonymously.

Time Frame

When considering the matter of chronology, two issues must be considered separately. First, how old are the *books* of the Old Testament? This issue might be designated *literary time*. Second, how much time is covered in the history reported in the Old Testament? This issue might be designated *historical time*.

The oldest books of the Old Testament were written by Moses just before 1400 BC. These books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Ancient tradition also attributed the Book of Job to Moses. The latest books of the Old Testament were written just before 400 BC. These are the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Malachi. So the writing of the Old Testament took about 1,000 years.



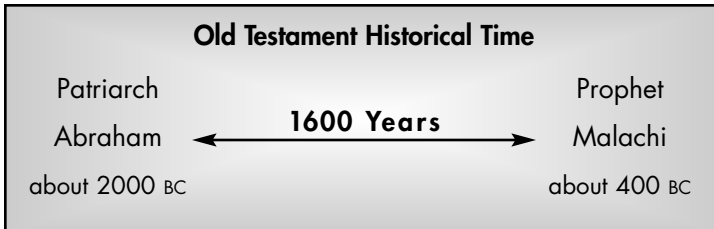
While the Old Testament contains sermons, proverbs, hymns, prophecies, and laws, it also tells a story. In fact, that story or history is the framework without which nothing else in the Old Testament makes sense. This framework is present primarily in the following books: Genesis, Exodus 1-19, Numbers 10-14 + 16-17 + 20-27 + 31-33, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. This constitutes about 37% of the Old Testament.

In reading through this material one must distinguish between *forward motion books* and *sidestep or spotlight books*. For the most part the historical books of the Old Testament tell their story in chronological order. There are, however, three major exceptions. The last six chapters of Judges + Ruth do not move the history forward. The same is true of 1 & 2 Chronicles and Esther. This material must be “plugged in” to the historical framework established by the forward motion books. Let’s illustrate:

Historical Material of the Old Testament	
Forward Motion Material	Insertion Material
Genesis	
Exodus 1-19	
Numbers	
Joshua	
Judges	Judges 17-Ruth
1&2 Samuel	1 & 2 Chronicles
1&2 Kings	
Ezra	Esther
Nehemiah	

Most Bible scholars do not attempt to put dates on the events of Genesis prior to Abraham. From biblical data the birth of Abraham can be placed at about 2165 BC. For the purposes of simplicity, this figure can be rounded off to 2000 BC.

The last dateable event of the Old Testament is the second governorship of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13). This can be dated to about 432 BC. This number can be rounded off to 400 BC. So the dateable history related in the Old Testament covers at least 1600 years.



Importance of the Old Testament

Why should a Christian be interested in the Old Testament? This is a fair question. It deserves a forthright answer. There are at least twelve good reasons why every Christian should be acquainted with the contents of the Old Testament.

1. The Old Testament constitutes the first great portion of the revelation of God to man. By its very nature divine revelation is permanent. God spoke in many different ways to the saints of old through the prophets (Hebrews 1:1). The methods of revelation changed, as did the commandments of God and the symbolism; but the revelation itself was intended to do its work in the hearts of men through the ages.

2. The Old Testament begins with the declaration *in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* (Genesis 1:1). The existence of the one true and living God is the first principle of true religion. Our dependence upon the Creator and our accountability to him are made crystal clear in the older Testament.

3. The Old Testament offers lengthy discussion of some of the most challenging questions of life: Why do good people suffer? (Job) What is the meaning of life? (Ecclesiastes) Where did we come from? (Genesis) How can I get along with those around me? (Proverbs) How can I know if I'm in love? (Song of Solomon)

4. The opening chapters of Genesis constitute the historic seed plot of the whole divine plan of human redemption.

5. The Old Testament contains an authoritative account of salvation history through the Patriarchal and Mosaic ages of time. Without the older Testament the believer will lack perspective. Only those who have looked upon the awesome sweep of Genesis to the Gospels and the Revelation can hope to glimpse the range and scope of God's redemptive purpose.

6. It is impossible to understand the New Testament accurately without a grasp of the Old Testament. In many cases the New Testament writers assume a prior knowledge of Old Testament concepts as they discuss matters like atonement and holiness.

7. The Old Testament contains many fundamental principles that are still as true today as the day they were written.

8. The Old Testament contains an abundance of rich biographical material that illustrates, motivates, warns, and challenges Christians. Close the Old Testament and you shut yourself off from the spiritual biographies of men and women whose experiences with God offer rich and practical instruction.

9. Much helpful devotional material will be found throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. Without the Old Testament the Christian is deprived of rich resources for worship and prayer.

10. In the Old Testament we see the gospel of Christ in preview, promise, and prophecy. No person can intelligently make the confession that Jesus is the Christ without some knowledge of Old Testament prophecies that predict the details of his life.

11. The New Testament encourages Christians to learn from events in the Old Testament. See 1 Corinthians 10:11 and Romans 4:22-25.

12. The example of the use of the Old Testament by Jesus and his apostles encourages Christians to pursue the study of this portion of God's word.

Organization of the Old Testament

Like the books of a library, the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are organized into four major sections: Foundation Books, Framework Books, Faith Books and Focus Books. Let's look briefly at each of these sections.

Foundation Books

The first five books of the Old Testament are sometimes called the Books of Law; but they contain much more than legal material. Jews refer to these books as the *Torah*, a term that means *teaching, instruction, or law*. An ancient name for these five books in Christian circles is *Pentateuch*, a term that means *five scrolls*.

First Section of the Biblical Library <i>Foundation Books</i>				
1	2	3	4	5
Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus	Numbers	Deuteronomy
Gen/Gn	Exod/Ex	Lev/Lv	Num/Nm	Deut/Dt
History	History & Law	Law	Law & History	Law

The traditional view of the church and the Jewish authorities as well is that Moses is the author of these first five books. In dozens of verses the Pentateuch *claims* that Moses is the author. Other Old Testament books *concur* in this assignment. Mosaic authorship is *confirmed* by Christ and the apostles.

The Christ-link of the first five books is this: *Foundation for Christ*. These books lay the foundation for the coming of Christ in four ways:

- ❖ **Promises**
- ❖ **Prefigurements**
- ❖ **Precepts**
- ❖ **Prophecies**

Throughout the first five books God made *promises* to various individuals. Many of those promises have implications for mankind in general. God's initial blessing of Adam implies that mankind will be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28). God promised Noah as representative of the human race that "*as long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease*" (Genesis 8:22). God promised Abraham that through one of his descendants all nations of the earth would one day be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

Prefigurations are actions that display in some manner the principles of the spiritual truths of the Christian Age. The sacrificial rituals described in Leviticus and Numbers have as their long-range goal depicting the final sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Some of the historical events narrated in the first five books are interpreted in the New Testament as illustrations of present-day spiritual principles. For example, the great Flood of Noah's day is said by the Apostle Peter to be an illustration of baptism (1 Peter 3:21). Some of the individuals who appear in the first five books prefigure Christ. For example, Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of the Most High (Genesis 14:18-20) prefigures Christ as our king and high priest.

The *precepts* or laws recorded in the Pentateuch were designed to prepare the world for the coming of Christ. God's Law reveals the sinfulness of man; it demonstrates man's need for God's grace and mercy.

The five foundational books contain several specific *predictions* that Christians think are the earliest announcements of the coming of Christ. The first such prediction (Genesis 3:15) announces that one born of woman ultimately will crush the head of Serpent (Satan). Jacob predicted that Shiloh, the Rest-bringer, will come to establish a glorious kingdom (Genesis 49:10). Balaam spoke of him as the Star and Scepter (Numbers 24:17-19) who will defeat the enemies of God's people. Moses announced that God will raise up a prophet like himself (Deuteronomy 18:17-19).

Framework Books

The next shelf in the biblical library contains twelve volumes. These are frequently called the *Historical Books*. The designation *Framework* indicates that these books describe the history of God’s people from the death of Moses to the death of Malachi (about 1,000 years). The rest of the books of the Old Testament fit into this historical framework at various points.

Section Two of the Biblical Library					
Framework Books					
History before the Kings		History during the Kings		History after the Kings	
Joshua (Josh)	Judges (Judg)	1&2 Samuel (Sam/Sm)	1&2 Kings (Kgs)	Ezra	Nehemiah (Neh)
Ruth		1&2 Chronicles (Chron/Chr)		Esther (Esth)	

The Framework Books are anonymous. Jewish tradition assigns these books to eight different writers: Joshua, Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Jeremiah, Ezra, Nehemiah and Mordecai.

The Christ-link for the twelve Framework Books is *Preparation for Christ*. These twelve books cover a history of roughly a thousand years, from the death of Moses (ca. 1400 BC) to the death of Malachi (ca. 400 BC). They report how God worked with the nation Israel over this period to shape a remnant that was prepared to recognize Christ when he appeared.

There are four major emphases in the Framework Books. First, God is faithful to his promises to Abraham and to David. Second, the prophets are God’s ambassadors sent from the Great King to hold his people accountable for observing God’s covenant. Third, God’s earthly dwelling was first in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple. Fourth, faithfulness to the Lord is the single standard by which all leaders of Israel were measured.

Faith Books

The Faith Books of the Old Testament are five in number—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon). These books focus on individuals. They are sometimes called Devotional Books or Poetic Books or Experiential Books. This section explores how the faith of individual believers expresses itself in a variety of circumstances.

Section Three of Biblical Library <i>Faith Books</i>				
Job	Psalms	Proverbs	Ecclesiastes	Song of Solomon
	Ps/Pss	Prov	Eccl	S. of Sol
Wisdom Lit.	Worship Lit.	Wisdom Lit.	Wisdom Lit.	Wisdom Lit.

Most of the material in the Faith Books was written about a thousand years before Christ. David and his son Solomon were the major contributors. Solomon wrote the Song, most of Proverbs, and probably Ecclesiastes. Solomon included a few sayings of Agur and a King Lemuel in the Book of Proverbs. David wrote at least seventy-five of the psalms. Asaph, Heman, Jeduthan, and the sons of Korah were Levites living at the time of David/Solomon who contributed to the Book of Psalms. Psalm 90 is attributed to Moses. Fifty psalms are anonymous, but many of them were probably written by David. Job is anonymous. Jewish tradition assigns the Book of Job to Moses; but many modern scholars think Job was written during the time of Solomon.

The Christ-link for the Faith Books is *Aspiration for Christ*. The only book of the five that has significant messianic prophecy is Psalms. David was a prophet. He wrote of Christ in at least thirteen psalms. For the most part the rest of the psalms, and the other four Faith Books express longings or aspirations that ultimately were fulfilled in Christ. Job, for example, expresses the desire for a mediator or go-between to stand between himself and God. Christ is that mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).

Focus Books

The last seventeen books of the Old Testament are prophetic books. They focus on national issues that arose in various periods of the history of Israel. These issue-oriented books again have been broken down into two subgroups according to size. The five larger focus books are often called the Major Prophets.

Section Four of the Biblical Library <i>Larger Focus Books</i>				
Isaiah	Jeremiah	Lamentations	Ezekiel	Daniel
Isa	Jer	Lam	Ezek	Dan
Announcement of Jerusalem Destruction		Description of Jerusalem Destruction	Implications of Jerusalem Destruction	

The five books of Major Prophets were written by four great prophets. The five poems that constitute the Book of Lamentations were written by Jeremiah to express sorrow over the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. In fact, early in the history of the Bible, the Book of Lamentations seems to have been an appendix to the Book of Jeremiah.

Isaiah and Jeremiah had long ministries in Jerusalem; Ezekiel and Daniel had long ministries in Babylon. Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied mostly before the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC); Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied immediately before and for several years after the destruction of Jerusalem.

The twelve smaller focus books are frequently called Minor Prophets. The best way to learn the names of the Minor Prophets is by groups of three.

Section Five of the Biblical Library <i>Smaller Focus Books</i>			
Hosea Joel Amos	Obadiah Jonah Micah	Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah	Haggai Zechariah Malachi

The twelve Minor Prophets are more like pamphlets than books. In fact, because of their size the Jews lump them all together and count them as one book, which they call The Twelve. The nature of the material contained in the Minor Prophets resembles that of the Major Prophets. The issues of concern, however, may be different because some of the Minor Prophets lived in different historical periods.

Although the books of the Minor Prophets follow the Major Prophets in the Bible, the ministries of these prophets do not chronologically follow the ministries of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Four of the Minor Prophets (Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos) preceded Isaiah, earliest of the Major Prophets. Hosea and Micah were contemporary with Isaiah. Two Minor Prophets (Nahum, Zephaniah) preached between the ministries of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Habakkuk’s ministry overlapped that of Jeremiah. Three Minor Prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) prophesied after Daniel, the last of the Major Prophets. For the present do not concern yourself about the relationship of these ministries except for this one fact: *the Minor Prophets do not appear in the Bible in chronological order.*

So the picture looks like this. Read the following chart from top to bottom and from left to right, with the earliest prophetic books to the left. Capital letters are the Major Prophets. It is not important for now that you know the prophets in chronological order. We will place them in the proper periods of Old Testament history later.

Obadiah Joel Jonah Amos	ISAIAH	JEREMIAH	DANIEL EZEKIEL	Haggai Zechariah Malachi
	Hosea Micah	Nahum Zephaniah Habakkuk		

You have now completed your tour of the Old Testament library. We have seen that the books are placed in four sections that we called Foundation Books, Framework Books, Faith Books,

and Focus Books. The fourth section is subdivided into two shelves. The first Focus shelf contains the larger books by the Major Prophets. The second shelf contains the pamphlet-sized books by the Minor Prophets.