

SUMMARY OF BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Adapted from "Applied New Testament Commentary" by Dr Tom Hale

The New Testament writers expected their readers to have some knowledge of the Old Testament. They refer frequently to the Old Testament holy writings and to the history of the Jewish people that is recorded there (see Acts Chapter 7; Hebrews Chapter 11). This article briefly presents a summary of the Old Testament. It emphasizes the events and persons that are mentioned in the New Testament. It also notes the main New Testament references that relate to that event or person.

Genesis

The book of **Genesis** starts at the beginning of the heavens and the earth (John 1:1-3). It describes how God made the world in six days. On the sixth day He created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. On the seventh day God rested from His work. This was the beginning of the Sabbath rest and later God commanded all mankind to observe it (Hebrews 4:1-11).

Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden and God gave them only one command: they were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But SATAN came in the form of a serpent and deceived Eve. He tempted her to eat the forbidden fruit. She ate, and then Adam ate also. In this way sin and death first entered the world (Romans 5:12-19). This is called the "fall of man." Then Cain, the oldest son of Adam and Eve, murdered his brother Abel because of jealousy. This was the first shedding of human blood (Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12).

After that, Adam and Eve had other children who married each other – God permitted this at that time. It did not take many years before the world was populated with the family of Adam and Eve. Men became very corrupt so God decided to destroy the world in a flood. He instructed a righteous man named Noah to build a large boat to hold his family and at least one pair of every type of animal. All those on the boat were saved from the flood but every other living person and creature perished (1 Peter 3:18-20).

Abraham, was a descendant of Noah's son Shem. He was born in Ur, which is located in present-day Iraq. God called Abraham to move from Ur to the land of Canaan (modern Israel). God promised to give this land to Abraham's descendants. God also promised to make a great nation from Abraham's descendants and to bless all the peoples of the world through him. This blessing was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ, a direct descendant of Abraham (Matthew 1:1; Romans 4:16-18; Galatians 3:6-9,14,29).

Abraham obeyed God and left his home country. One time after a battle, Abraham gave a tenth of his winnings to Melchizedek, a priest of God (Hebrews 5:6,10). This is the first mention of the tithe, that is, the giving of one tenth of one's income and produce.

God had promised to give Abraham and Sarah a son; but the answer was slow in coming. So Sarah gave Abraham her servant Hagar, and she bore him a son. He was named Ishmael. But God had promised Abraham a legitimate son by Sarah, his wife, so Abraham continued to place his hope in God. Finally, Sarah did bear a son when she was ninety and Abraham was one hundred years old. They named the child Isaac, and the Jewish race came from him. It is commonly believed that the Arab race came from Ishmael. There was trouble between Ishmael and Isaac and their families, which has lasted over 4000 years to this day (Galatians 4:21-31).

Isaac married Rebecca, and she bore twins, Esau and Jacob. Esau was older, but Jacob stole Esau's birthright and his blessing. Jacob escaped from Esau's anger, and on his way to another place he met the Lord in a dream. God promised Jacob what He had promised Abraham: that through his descendants, all the people of the world would be blessed. As we saw above, this promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Jacob married two girls, Leah and Rachel – God permitted this at that time. They and their servants bore Jacob twelve sons and these sons became the twelve tribes of ISRAEL (Acts 7:8): Reuben, Simeon, Levi (their tribe became the priestly tribe), Judah (Jesus was descended from them), Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph, and Benjamin (Revelation 7:3-8). The family moved to Canaan, and on the way God gave Jacob a new name, Israel. Thus the Jewish people came to be called Israelites and the land of Canaan was called Israel, God's promised land for the children of Abraham.

Joseph was Jacob's favourite son. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and sold him as a slave to some traders. They then took him to Egypt. However, God was with Joseph and worked things out for good. Pharaoh made him a high government official. At the time of a famine, Joseph's family came to him to buy food, but they didn't recognize him until he revealed himself to them. All the family then moved to Egypt and settled there, in the north. Jacob (Israel) adopted Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own (Acts 7:9-16).

Job

The book of **Job** was probably written about the time of Abraham. It deals with the sufferings of a man named Job. His faith in God was strong even though he had many troubles. The book reveals the authority and love of God in heaven and on earth, the role of Satan and how man fails to understand the true nature and purpose of God.

Exodus

The Israelites stayed in Egypt for about four hundred years, and their population grew. The Egyptians became afraid of them and made them their slaves. The Israelites in Egypt were very oppressed and finally God raised up MOSES to rescue them. The book of Exodus records the story of the Israelites' rescue and their journey as far as Mount Sinai. This happened around 1400 BC.

Moses and his older brother Aaron asked Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, many times to let the Israelites go. Each time Pharaoh refused, God sent a plague upon the Egyptians. The Passover was an event that protected the Israelites from the final plague, the killing of all the firstborn of Egypt. The "PASSOVER" was instituted. Each Israelite family killed and ate a perfect young lamb and the blood was sprinkled on the doorposts as a sign to the destroying angel to "pass over" that house. Jesus is our "Passover lamb," because it is by Jesus' blood that saves us from death (1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:6-10). The Israelites ate unleavened bread because there was not time to let the dough rise. When Pharaoh discovered his firstborn son was dead, he ordered the Israelites to leave that same day. But as soon as the Israelites had gone, Pharaoh changed his mind and sent the Egyptian army after them. The cloud of the Lord moved between the Egyptian army and the Israelites. God parted the water of the Red Sea, and the Israelites passed through on dry land (1 Corinthians 10:1-2). But when the Egyptians tried to follow, the water came together again and they drowned.

The books of Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

The Israelites travelled on to Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses directions for making the tabernacle, the tent of meeting or worship (Hebrews 9:1-10). God also gave Moses the LAW on Mount Sinai. The first five books of the Old Testament are called the books of the law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). In these books, we can find all the rules and regulations for the Israelites, especially in the book of Leviticus. They had to obey all these laws to remain in a right relationship with God and to be blessed by God. These laws can be divided into different categories: 1) offerings and animal sacrifices, 2) regulations for priests and the temple, 3) personal purity and cleanliness, 4) festivals, 5) social relationships.

In the book of Numbers, we read about the further travels of the Israelites in the Sinai desert. Many times they complained and rebelled against God and Moses. A man named Korah led one of these rebellions, and God destroyed him and his men. At the end of the journey in the desert, twelve spies were sent out to look at the "promised land", the land of Canaan (Israel). God had promised to give this land to Abraham's descendants, the Israelites. Ten of the spies reported that there were giants and strong cities, and that it would be impossible to conquer the land (1 Corinthians 10:1-11). The people were afraid because of the report of the spies. So God punished the people for their lack of faith. He caused them to wander for forty years in the desert wilderness. During the forty years they were fed daily with "manna" from heaven (John 6:30-35). Twice they complained of thirst, and God provided water from a rock (1 Corinthians 10:3-5). Once, the people were punished for grumbling. Poisonous snakes bit them but God in His mercy told Moses how to help the people. Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. If those who were bitten by snakes looked at the bronze snake on the pole, they lived. In the same way we too can be rescued from sin and death by looking in faith at Jesus who is lifted up on the cross (John 3:14-15).

Before the Israelites entered Canaan, the promised land, Moses spoke again to the people. This speech is recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses reviewed the Israelites' history and the law. He repeated the blessings that would come if they followed the law, and the curses that would come if they did not. Then Moses died and God buried him.

Joshua

In the book of Joshua, we read how Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of Israel. The Israelites conquered the city of Jericho by means of God's plan and God's power. After they had marched around the city as the Lord had commanded, they blew their trumpets and shouted. The city walls fell down, and they marched in. A prostitute named Rahab had hidden two Israelite spies in the city earlier, and after the city fell she was rewarded by not being killed (Hebrews 11:30-31). She became an ancestor of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5). Joshua conquered most of the rest of the land of Canaan and divided it among the twelve tribes of Israel.

Judges

The book of Judges contains stories of the times before Israel had kings. Whenever Israel sinned before God there were many troubles but he saved them when they repented. Sampson was one of the well-known judges. Judges tells about the judges who governed the nation of Israel after Joshua died. God remained their king. However, the people did not live in obedience to God. Many times they turned away to the gods and idols of their neighbours and in this way they sinned against God. So God gave them into the hands of their oppressors. Each time they cried out to God to save them from their enemies, God in His mercy sent a deliverer to free them. The most famous deliverers, or judges, were Gideon, Barak, and Samson (Hebrews 11:32).

The book of Ruth

The book of Ruth tells the story of King David's great-grandmother. She was not an Israelite, but a Moabite woman who believed in God. She married an Israelite and became an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

The books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles

The first book of Samuel tells the story of the last judge. Samuel's mother had dedicated her son to God and sent him to serve in the temple as a child. There, God spoke to Samuel and he became a prophet as well as a judge. When he became old, the people wanted to be like the other nations and demanded to have a king. Samuel warned them of the problems with earthly kings, but the people insisted. So God finally agreed to give them a king. God chose a man named Saul and at first he ruled well. However, he did not repent after sinning on several occasions, and so in the end God rejected him.

God told Samuel to anoint a young shepherd boy, David, to be the next king of Israel in place of Saul. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day onward. One time, an enemy giant named Goliath challenged the Israelites, but no one dared to fight him. Finally

David volunteered, and knocked the giant down with a stone from a slingshot. After that, David became a great soldier and Saul became jealous. Saul attempted to kill David several times but David always escaped. Although David had the opportunity to kill Saul on two occasions, he refused to harm him because he was the man God had anointed to be king – even if God later rejected him.

The books of 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles both tell about how David became king after Saul died in battle. David reigned from 1010 to 970 BC. Soon after becoming king, David recaptured the ark of the Lord that had previously been seized by the enemy Philistines. He brought it to Jerusalem, the Jewish capital, with great rejoicing. David wanted to build a permanent temple for the Lord but God told him to let his son build it. David won great victories in war and was God blessed him. God promised David that his throne would be established forever and this promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, whose kingdom will never end. Jesus was descended from David (Matthew 1:1) and was called the "Root of David" and the "Lion of Judah" (Revelation 5:5). David was considered the ideal king by later prophets, but he did sin at times. However, he was different from Saul, because he always repented and renewed his relationship with God. He was also a musician and poet and he wrote many of the Psalms.

1 and 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles tell about the kingdom of Israel, beginning with the reign of David's son Solomon. God told Solomon to ask from Him whatever he wanted and He would give it. Many would have asked for riches or honour, but Solomon asked for an understanding heart, for wisdom. God gave him the wisdom he asked for and also great riches and honour as well (Matthew 12:42; Luke 12:27).

The book of Psalms and the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs

The book of Psalms contains 150 hymns and prayers mostly by David. They were used for worship by the people of Israel. They include prayers of praise, intercession, salvation, forgiveness, thanksgiving, and petitions for protection for Israel and punishment for their enemies. Some are personal prayers of David (Psalm 51) and others include prophecy. Some prophesied about Jesus Christ and His death (Psalms 22, 69). Jesus and the New Testament writers often referred to the Psalms. They have been used as a basis for worship by Jews for 3000 years and by Christians for 2000 years.

Solomon wrote three books of wisdom in the Bible: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. His great work was the building of the permanent temple, the house of the Lord, in Jerusalem.

After Solomon died, the kingdom of Israel was divided. The northern ten tribes broke away and this new kingdom was called the kingdom of Israel. The remaining two tribes formed the kingdom of Judah in the south. The kingdom of Judah was ruled by descendants of David, beginning with Solomon's son, Rehoboam. The period of the divided kingdoms continued for 344 years. Some of the kings of Judah obeyed God and brought the people

back from worshipping idols to the true God. But others did evil in God's sight and encouraged the worship of idols. None of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel worshiped God. Their first king set up two golden calves, one at Bethel and the other at Dan, and the people (later called Samaritans) continued to worship those idols instead of worshipping the true God at the temple in Jerusalem. This was one of the reasons the Samaritans were despised by the Jews in Jesus' day (John 4:9,19-24). One notorious king of Israel was Ahab, who was married to a foreigner named Jezebel. They both hated Elijah, a powerful prophet of God at the time. God performed many miracles through Elijah and his successor. They showed that God was the one true God Yahweh (Luke 4:24-27). Elijah did not die, but God took him directly up into heaven (Mark 9:4-5).

The books of the later prophets

Many other prophets spoke to the people of Israel and Judah during those years. These prophets also warned the people of coming judgment if they continued in rebellion and sin. The prophets predicted that the Jews of the two kingdoms would be exiled in a foreign land if they did not repent. Sometimes the people listened to the warnings and repented, but usually they did not. Finally it came true as the prophets had said. God did exile them to other lands. The people of Israel were taken to Assyria (modern Syria) in 722 BC, and the people of Judah were taken to Babylon (modern Iraq) in 586 BC.

The books of the prophets are commonly referred to as major and minor prophets, but this is based on the length of their writings and not their importance to the purposes of God. The prophets who wrote during the period of the divided kingdom are as follows (in chronological order): **Joel** (Acts 2:16-21), **Jonah** (Matthew 12:38-41), **Amos**, **Hosea**, also **Isaiah** (who is quoted more often in the New Testament than any other prophet), **Micah**, **Nahum**, **Zephaniah**, **Habbakuk**, and **Jeremiah**, who also wrote **Lamentations**. Many of the prophets also prophesied about Jesus Christ, His birth, His death, and His second coming.

The prophets **Ezekiel** and **Daniel** wrote during the times of exile. Possibly **Obadiah** also prophesied during this period. Toward the end of the exile, the kingdom of Persia (modern Iran) conquered Babylon.

In 538 BC Cyrus, king of Persia, made a proclamation saying that anyone who wanted to could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. We read about this in the historical book of **Ezra**. The first group returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel and began to rebuild the temple. There was opposition and the work stopped for a time. The people were encouraged by the prophets **Haggai** and **Zechariah**, and the temple was finally finished. In 458 BC, Ezra led the second group to Jerusalem. Ezra, a priest, taught the Jewish law again. He led some reforms that dealt with the sin of intermarriage with foreign women who persuaded their Jewish husbands to worship false gods.

Esther, Nehemia and Malachi

During this same period the story of **Esther**, the Jewish queen of Persia, took place. She was used by God to save the Jewish people from a plot to destroy them. It shows how important the Jewish people are to God.

Years later **Nehemiah**, the Persian king's cupbearer, returned with a third group of Israelites to organize the rebuilding of the walls around the city of Jerusalem. The prophet **Malachi** spoke during this time also. After about 400 BC, no more prophets spoke to Israel until John the Baptist came to announce the arrival of the Saviour Jesus Christ (Matthew 3, Mark 1, John 1).

HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

The **Old Testament** was written over a period of one thousand years, from approximately 1400 to 400 BC. The first five books of the Old Testament, sometimes called the books of the law, or the Law of Moses, were written mainly by MOSES in about 1400 BC. The last Old Testament book was written by the prophet Malachi in about 400 BC.

The Old Testament Scriptures were carefully hand-copied by Jewish scribes. In this way they were passed on from generation to generation. Each time a scribe made a new copy of Scripture, he destroyed the old copy. For this reason the most ancient copies of the Old Testament are no longer in existence. Indeed, the earliest copy of the entire Old Testament that exists today was copied in the 10th century A.D.

However, in 1947, a shepherd boy found some very ancient leather scrolls in Israel. He found them in some caves, eight miles south of the city of Jericho near the Dead Sea. So they are known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The scrolls contain sections from almost every book of the Old Testament. The Dead Sea scrolls were copied sometime during the 1st and 2nd centuries BC. Except for tiny differences in spelling and style, they are exactly the same as the existing Old Testament copies from the 10th century. This proves that the Jewish scribes copied with great care and accuracy. We can have full confidence that the more recent copies of the Old Testament (from which our modern Bibles are taken) are completely accurate copies of the original writings of the Old Testament authors. This is very important because, as we shall see below, the original writers were inspired directly by God in a special way, to write what God wanted them to write. In this way, we are certain that the copies of what they wrote have been faithfully and accurately passed down to us through the centuries.

Most of the Old Testament manuscripts were written in the Hebrew language, the ancient language of the Jews. However, in the time of Christ, Hebrew was not spoken by the ordinary people. It was used mainly by the Jewish priests and religious scholars. The common language of the Middle East in Christ's time was Aramaic, the language which

Christ Himself spoke. Aramaic is related to Hebrew in the same way that modern Indian languages are related to Sanskrit.

However, there was another major language in use during Christ's time, that is, the Greek language. Greek was spoken throughout the entire Mediterranean region and was known by most of the educated people. The Old Testament was translated into Greek in about 200 BC because so few people understood Hebrew at that time. When the **New Testament** writers quoted from the Old Testament Scriptures, they usually used this Greek translation rather than the original Hebrew.

The Old Testament contains thirty-nine separate books recorded by many different writers. The New Testament (which we call The Jesus Book) contains 27 separate books written by around 10 authors. These were all written in the first century after the death and resurrection of Christ. There were other Christian writers who wrote books on the life of Christ and His Church but these were not included in the New Testament by the Church leaders of the second century BC.