



OLD TESTAMENT



*"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone!
Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with
your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with
your whole strength." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5, NABRE)*

Old Testament

Overview

The Old Testament is the first part of the Christian Bible and the sacred scriptures of the Jewish faith. It consists of 46 books (in the Catholic canon) and was written over many centuries. These books are divided into several categories:

The Pentateuch (Torah – the first five books):

- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- These are the foundational texts that recount the creation of the world, the call of Abraham, the lives of the patriarchs, the Exodus from Egypt, and the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Torah establishes the covenant between God and His people, Israel.

Historical Books:

- Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, and others.
- These books recount the history of the Israelites, from the conquest of the Promised Land, the rise and fall of kings, the division of the kingdom, and the Babylonian exile, to the return from exile and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Wisdom Literature:

- Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus).
- These writings reflect on the nature of God, human suffering, morality, and the pursuit of wisdom. The Psalms, in particular, are prayers and hymns that express the range of human emotions in relationship with God.

Prophetic Books:

- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the 12 minor prophets (e.g., Hosea, Amos, Micah).
- The prophets called the people of Israel back to faithfulness to God, denounced social injustice, and foretold the coming of the Messiah, who would establish God's kingdom.

Themes of the Old Testament:

- **Covenant:** Central to the Old Testament is God's covenant with His people, first made with Abraham and renewed with Moses. This covenant binds God and Israel in a relationship of mutual faithfulness.
- **Faithfulness and Disobedience:** The Old Testament is a story of God's unwavering faithfulness and the frequent disobedience of His people. Despite their failures, God continually reaches out to them with mercy and calls them to repentance.
- **Messianic Promise:** The Old Testament looks forward to the coming of a Messiah, a savior who will fulfill God's promises to Israel and bring salvation to all nations. This promise is ultimately fulfilled in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament prepares us for the New Testament by revealing God's plan for humanity, His covenantal relationship with Israel, and His ultimate promise of salvation through the Messiah.

Understanding Old Testament History

Creation:

- The creation of the world and humanity by God marks the beginning of God's relationship with humanity
- God creates man and woman in His image.
- God establishing human dignity and humanity's special relationship with Him
- All creation is good and has a purpose.
- This sets the foundation for the entire biblical narrative

The Fall

- The disobedience of Adam and Eve leads to the fall of humanity
- Resulted in the introduction of sin and death into the world
- This event explains the brokenness in the world and humanity's need for redemption
- Foreshadows God's plan for salvation, which unfolds throughout the rest of the Bible

The Protoevangelium (First Gospel)

- Refers to Genesis 3:15, where God speaks to the serpent (Satan) after the fall of Adam and Eve.
- "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."
- The first prophecy of the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will ultimately defeat Satan
- The "woman" is often interpreted as Mary
- The "offspring" is Jesus, who will crush the head of the serpent, symbolizing the victory of Christ over sin and evil.

The Call of Abraham

- God's covenant with Abraham is foundational to the story of salvation
- God promises to make Abraham the father of a great nation (Israel) through whom all nations would be blessed.
- This was the beginning of God's plan to restore humanity through a chosen people
- Culminates in the coming of the Messiah

The Exodus

- God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, highlighting their relationship with God.
- God's powerful intervention to liberate the Israelites from slavery in Egypt
- Demonstrates God's covenantal relationship with Israel and His faithfulness to His promises to Abraham and the Patriarchs.
- The Mosaic covenant, given at Mount Sinai, establishes the Law through which Israel is called to live in faithfulness to God, setting them apart as His chosen people for His purposes.
- God gives Moses the Ten Commandments

- God is both their Savior and Lawgiver.

The Conquest of the Promised Land

- Under Joshua's leadership, the Israelites conquer the Promised Land (Canaan) as God had promised to Abraham
- The settlement of the land fulfills God's covenant promise and establishes Israel as a nation.
- This event symbolizes God's faithfulness to His promises and the importance of obedience to His commands.

The Judges

- leaders raised by God to deliver Israel during times of crisis.
- During the period between Joshua's death and the establishment of the monarchy
- Their function was both military and judicial - they led Israel in battle against oppressors and acted as arbiters of disputes.
- They helped the people return to faithfulness to God
- The time of the Judges was marked by a cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance (Judges 2:16-19)

The Kings

- The rise of the monarchy, began with King Saul and continued through David and his son Solomon
- This solidified Israel as a nation
- God's covenant with King David established his dynasty, with the promise that his descendants would rule Israel forever.
- This covenant is significant because it points to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who is referred to as the "Son of David" and fulfills the promise of an eternal kingdom
- Solomon's reign represents Israel's golden age,
- After Solomon's reign, the kingdom of Israel was divided into two: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. This weakened the nation
- Both kingdoms fell into patterns of idolatry, social injustice, and disobedience to God's covenant

The Exile

- Israel's fall due to disobedience, the Babylonian exile, and the hope of restoration.
- Despite the prophets' warnings, the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom in 721 B.C.
- The southern kingdom was conquered by the Babylonians in 587 B.C., leading to the Exile.
- During the Exile, the prophets spoke of hope and future restoration, promising a new covenant and the return of the people to their ancestral home - the region of Judah and the city of Jerusalem.

Return and Rebuilding

- The return from exile and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple.

- Cyrus the Great, the Persian king, conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.
- He issued a decree allowing the exiled peoples, including the Israelites, to return to their homelands.
- Many Israelites, especially from the tribe of Judah, returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and restore their religious practices.
- Many Israelites remained in foreign lands, such as Babylon, Persia, and other regions, establishing Jewish communities outside of their homeland.
- The scattering of the Israelites is referred to as the Diaspora
- This dispersion led to the spread of Jewish culture and religion beyond Israel, which continued throughout history

Literary Styles in the Old Testament

Narrative: Historical accounts, genealogies, and stories (e.g., Genesis, Exodus).

Poetry: Found in books like Psalms and Song of Songs, using symbolic language.

Wisdom Literature: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, focusing on moral teachings.

Prophetic: Writings from prophets like Isaiah, and Jeremiah—focused on calling Israel back to God.

Law: The Torah (first five books), outlining moral, civil, and ceremonial laws.