

# OLD TESTAMENT OVERVIEW

## The Nine Eras of Old Testament History - Part One

### THE OLD TESTAMENT CONTAINS 3 TYPES OF WRITING

⇒ History	Genesis to Esther
⇒ Poetry (Wisdom)	Job to Song of Songs
⇒ Prophecy	Isaiah to Malachi

### THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

#### The 9 main eras of Old Testament History

1	Creation & Pre-history	Gen 1 – 11
2	Patriarch	Gen 12 – 50
3	Exodus	Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
4	Conquest	Joshua
5	Judges	Judges
6	Kingdom	1 Samuel – 2 Chronicles
7	Exile	2 Kings - 2 Chronicles
8	Return	Ezra - Esther
9	Silence	

#### 1 CREATION & PRE-HISTORY (Genesis 1 – 11)

##### Storyline summary

⇒ Adam & Eve are created by God but sin, destroying God's original plan for humankind

##### Four Main events

- ⇒ Creation – Humankind created in the image of God (Gen 1 – 2)
- ⇒ Fall – Sin enters the world (Gen 3)
- ⇒ Flood – Judgement for sin (Gen 6 – 10)
- ⇒ Tower of Babel – Beginning of the nations (Gen 11)

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**2 The Era of the PATRIARCHS (Genesis 12 – 50)**

**Storyline summary**

⇒ Abraham & his descendants are chosen by God to ‘father’ a people to represent God to the world

**Four Main characters**

⇒ **Abraham – Father of the Hebrew people (Genesis 12 – 23)**

God’s plan for the redemption of humankind is focused on the creation of a people through whom he can work to produce a reflection of himself, and from whom will one day come the Messiah. He chooses Abraham, and promises him a country (land), countless descendants (seed), and a global and timeless impact (blessing). God leads Abraham from Ur to Canaan, where he settles and has two sons, Ishmael (ancestor of the Arabs) and Isaac (ancestor of the Jews)

⇒ **Isaac – Second Father of promise (Genesis 24 – 26)**

Fathers two sons, Esau & Jacob

⇒ **Jacob – Father of the nation of Israel (Genesis 27 – 35)**

Jacob begins life as a rogue, being gradually transformed by his relationship with God. Has 12 sons, each of whom becomes the father of one of the 12 tribes of Israel

⇒ **Joseph – Leader in Egypt (Genesis 37 – 50)**

Joseph, sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt, becomes a great leader in Egypt. A severe famine brings Jacob & Joseph’s 11 brothers to live in safety in Egypt. After Joseph’s death, the Hebrews are gradually reduced to the status of slaves. 400 years pass, during which the people cry out to God for deliverance

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**3 The Era of the EXODUS (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)**

**Storyline summary**

⇒ Under Moses' leadership, God delivers the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. The central feature of this period comes when God gives Moses 'THE LAW' (the 10 Commandments plus other regulations for the people's life, government and worship) on Mount Sinai

**Four Main events**

⇒ **Deliverance – Freedom from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1 – 18)**

God calls Moses to be his spokesman to the Egyptian Pharaoh, who refuses to allow the Hebrews to leave for the country God has promised them. God visits a series of terrible plagues on Egypt, and Pharaoh relents. After the Hebrews have left, Pharaoh again changes his mind and pursues them. God parts the Red Sea to allow the Hebrew people through, closing it again to swamp the Egyptian army. God's destination for his people is Canaan, the land first settled by their ancestor Abraham.

⇒ **The Law – God's commandments at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19 – 40)**

The Hebrews journey south to the bottom of the Sinai peninsula and camp around Mount Sinai. God summons Moses up the mountain and there delivers the Law which is to govern the people as they become a nation. Leviticus, a sort of recipe book for worship, is also delivered at this time.

⇒ **Kadesh Barnea – Place of rebellion against God (Numbers 10 – 14)**

Israel leaves Mount Sinai and migrates north to an oasis, Kadesh Barnea, the southern gateway into the 'Promised Land' (Canaan). From this vantage point, twelve spies (one from each tribe) are sent into Canaan to report on the prospects of conquest. 10 report that there is no chance. 2, Joshua and Caleb, exhort the people to believe God and go for it. The people follow the majority report, and refuse to follow Moses into the Promised Land.

⇒ **Forty Years Wandering – consequences of rebelling against God (Numbers 20 – 36)**

Because of their rebellion, the 'exodus' generation are condemned to wander in the wilderness until everyone who was 21 years or older at the time dies. A new generation emerges, willing to follow their leaders into the Promised Land. Moses leads them to the north of the Dead Sea near Jericho, the eastern gateway to

Canaan, encourages them, gives them additional instruction found in the book of Deuteronomy, and then dies.

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#### **4 The Era of the CONQUEST (Joshua)**

##### **Storyline Summary**

⇒ Joshua leads the conquest of the Promised Land

##### **Four Main Events**

⇒ **Jordan – a miraculous parting of water (Joshua 1 – 5)**

After Moses' death, God hand-picks Joshua to succeed him. The people cross the Jordan river, God parting the waters as he did at the Red Sea.

⇒ **Jericho – conquest of a city (Joshua 6)**

Jericho, a fortified city straddling the eastern gateway to Canaan, poses a major threat to Israel. God instructs him to march around the city seven times, and the city's walls collapse, leading to its defeat

⇒ **Conquest – the defeat of Canaan (Joshua 7 – 12)**

The land is ruled by individual kings, each with his own city and surrounding area. Joshua cuts through the midsection towards the Mediterranean Sea. Having divided the land, he then sets about conquering it from south to north. The initial defeat of Canaan takes about 7 years

⇒ **Dominion – Finalising the conquest (Joshua 13 – 20)**

The 12 tribes are each allotted an area of land, and made responsible for finalising dominion over it. The 12 tribes are linked in a loose federation

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## 5 The Era of the JUDGES (Judges – Ruth)

### Storyline Summary

⇒ Various individual leaders (called ‘Judges’) are appointed by God to govern the people for 400 rebellious years, during which time Israel was in a state of almost continual warfare with its neighbours, notably the Philistines

### Four Main Subjects

⇒ **Judges – the leaders of Israel (Judges)**

The judges are political-military leaders of Israel who exercise almost absolute power because of their office and abilities. The four major judges were

- i Deborah
- ii Gideon
- iii Samson
- iv Samuel (a transitional character, both the last ‘judge’ and the first ‘prophet’)

⇒ **Rebellion – the breaking of God’s law (Judges)**

Just before Moses died, he instructed Israel to do three things (Deut 7. 1 – 5)

- i destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan
- ii avoid intermarriage with the Canaanites
- iii shun worship of the Canaanite gods

Judges records one of the darkest periods of Israel’s history, as the people fail to fulfil all three commands, and descend into spiritual and moral sin

⇒ **Cycles – repetition of Israel’s misfortunes (Judges)**

Much of this era is occupied with a series of seven cycles, each with five parts

- i Israel ‘sins’
- ii God disciplines them through military defeat by a neighbouring country
- iii Israel repents and cries out to God for deliverance
- iv God raises up a judge who delivers them
- v God frees the land from military oppression for the remainder of that judge’s life

Then, as each judge dies, the cycle begins again

⇒ **Ruth – a model of faithfulness (Ruth)**

Set in the time of the judges, Ruth stands out in refreshing contrast to the general tenor of Israel at this period. Ironically, she is a foreigner, but when her Jewish

husband dies, she pledges allegiance to the true God, and travels back to the land with her mother-in-law. Her story is one of love, loyalty and commitment.

## NEW TESTAMENT OVERVIEW

### The Four Eras of New Testament History – Part One

#### **The 4 main eras of New Testament History**

The Gospel Era (Matthew – John)

The Church Era (Acts)

The Mission Era (Acts)

The Epistles

#### **1 GOSPEL (Matthew – John)**

##### **Storyline summary**

⇒ Jesus comes to earth in fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies of a saviour, and offers salvation and the true kingdom of God. While some accept him, most reject him, and he is crucified, buried and resurrected.

##### **Four Main Divisions**

###### ⇒ **Early Life – Childhood to Baptism**

Through a miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit, Mary gives birth to Jesus in Bethlehem. Jesus grows up in Nazareth, learning the trade of a carpenter. At around the age of 30, he is baptised in the River Jordan by his cousin, John the Baptist. God speaks from heaven, declaring Jesus to be his beloved son. The Holy Spirit then leads him into the wilderness for 40 days, where he resists Satan's temptations.

###### ⇒ **Early Ministry – Initial Acceptance**

Jesus now begins his public ministry, proclaiming that he is the predicted Messiah (Christ) & calling people to believe in him; and challenging people to live lives of genuine righteousness rather than the external hypocrisy of the religious leaders. He validates his message by performing astounding miracles. Initially, he is warmly received.

###### ⇒ **Later Ministry – Growing Rejection**

Jesus' initial popularity does not last. The religious leaders are profoundly jealous of him, and beginning to stir up animosity toward him. Jesus warns them of the seriousness of their attitude. At the same time, he sets aside more and more time for his 12 chosen disciples, and challenges the multitude to count the cost of following him.

###### ⇒ **Death and Resurrection – Final Rejection**

The people become more and more polarised about Jesus, either following him enthusiastically, or resenting Him deeply. In the volatile atmosphere of the festival time of the Passover when Jesus and many other Jews are in Jerusalem, the religious leaders are finally able to stir up enthusiasm for Jesus' crucifixion. They subject him to a series of mock trials on false charges. Then, Jesus is crucified on Friday, buried that night, and rises again from the dead on Sunday, after being in the tomb three days.

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## 2 The Church Era (Acts 1 – 12)

### Storyline summary

⇒ Peter, shortly after the ascension of Jesus, is used by God to establish the church, God's continuation of his plan for the salvation of humankind

### Four Main subjects

#### ⇒ **Creation – birth of the church at & beyond Pentecost (Acts 1 – 5)**

The birthplace of the church is Jerusalem. When he appears to his disciples following his resurrection, Jesus instructs them to wait in the city until they receive the power of the Holy Spirit – and then to be witnesses to him in Jerusalem, its immediate vicinity and even to the ends of the earth. Then, right before their eyes, Jesus ascends to heaven. A matter of days later, on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the disciples are gathered in a house, and the Holy Spirit comes to them with the sound of a violent wind, and flames rest on each one's head. They are filled with the Holy Spirit, and begin speaking in different languages, so that people gathered in Jerusalem from across the world for the feast hear the disciples speaking in their own language. Other miracles take place in the early days of the church, and many people come to faith in Jesus. The early Christians are known for the depth and passion of their love for him and one another.

#### ⇒ **Growth – organisation of the church (Acts 6)**

As the numbers of converts increases, the disciples began to structure the infant church's activities and responsibilities. Deacons are chosen to look after any material needs within the congregations, while the Apostles continue to give spiritual oversight and leadership.

#### ⇒ **Persecution – the first Christian martyr (Acts 7)**

One of the most effective early Christian preachers is a man named Stephen. Arrested by the authorities, he refuses to recant his faith, and is stoned to death. This incident begins a wave of persecution against the church, so severe that many flee Jerusalem for their lives, taking the message of the gospel with them.

#### ⇒ **Transition – a missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 8 – 12)**

One of those involved in the stoning of Stephen is a young Pharisee called Saul of Tarsus. Shortly after Stephen's death, while travelling to Damascus to take the persecution of the church there, Jesus appears to him in a vision. Converted to the Christian faith, Saul's name is changed to Paul, and he becomes a missionary specifically to non-Jews, the Gentiles.

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### 3 The Missions Era (Acts 13 – 28)

#### Storyline summary

⇒ Paul and his missionary companions expand the church across the Roman Empire over the next two decades

#### Four Main subjects

⇒ **First Missionary Journey – Galatia for two years (Acts 13 – 14)**

Paul and Barnabas are selected by the Holy Spirit to take the gospel to Gentiles living in Galatia. They leave from Antioch (the point of departure for all three missionary journeys) and stay in Galatia for two years, with encouraging results. Upon their return to Jerusalem, a council of the church is held amid much controversy (Acts 15) on the question of whether Gentiles must become Jewish in addition to becoming Christians. The council determines that they do not.

⇒ **Second Missionary Journey – Greece for three years (Acts 15 – 17)**

At the start of his second journey, Paul is intending to revisit the new believers from his first journey in Galatia. However, he receives a vision from God in which he sees a man in Macedonia (Greece) asking him to bring the gospel to his land. Paul therefore changes his plans and spends the next three years preaching the gospel in Greece.

⇒ **Third Missionary Journey – Asia for four years (Acts 18 – 21)**

Again, Paul leaves Antioch to visit the new converts from his first two journeys, and to spread the gospel further into Asia. He experiences both great success and great opposition. In Ephesus, the whole city breaks out in riot over his preaching. Despite being warned that he faces imprisonment if he returns to Jerusalem, he returns anyway and is immediately arrested.

⇒ **Trials & Imprisonment – Roman prison for two years (Acts 22 – 28)**

Jewish leaders in Jerusalem have Paul arrested on false charges. Such is the hostility towards him that his life is threatened, even though under guard, he is moved to Caesarea, the Roman capital of the area. There, he is tried under three different rulers – Felix, Festus and Agrippa. Paul exercises his right as a Roman citizen to take his case before Caesar in Rome. He is taken to Rome, surviving shipwreck on Malta en route, but his case never comes to trial. During his Roman imprisonment, he continues to preach to his fellow prisoners and his guards, as well as writing numerous letters to the new churches across the Roman world, many of which survive today. According to church legend, Paul is finally beheaded (the customary form of execution for a Roman citizen).

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## 4 The Epistles (Romans - Revelation)

### Overview Summary

⇒ The Epistles are letters to churches and individuals to encourage and instruct them in the christian faith

### Four Main topics

⇒ **The nature of the epistles – doctrine and behaviour**

Epistles deal with theological doctrine, as the writers unfold what the Holy Spirit inspires them to write. They also tackle specific problems & issues of their day, but in such a way that the information is universal and timeless. The typical pattern is to write a section of doctrinal truth, and follow up with the practical implications of that truth. Doctrine, then behaviour – principle, then practice.

⇒ **Paul's Epistles to local churches**

13 of the 22 Epistles in the New Testament are written by Paul. 9 of these are written to local churches, and are named according to which church they address.

⇒ **Paul's Epistles to individuals**

4 of Paul's letters are written to individuals and pastors, named again according to which individual they address.

⇒ **General Epistles – Letters to the christian public at large**

9 of the Epistles are general letters, written by various authors, to the Christian public at large (with the possible exception of 2 & 3 John).