

UNDERSTANDING  
THE STORY OF  
THE OLD TESTAMENT



# HOPE

FOR ALL THE EARTH

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# A SELECT TIMELINE

The following list of dates is a timeline of major Old Testament events.

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2000 BC      The call of, and covenant with, Abraham

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1446 BC      The exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt under Moses

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1446–1406 BC      The forty years of wandering

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1406 BC      The conquest of the promised land under Joshua

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1010 BC      The beginning of David's reign

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970–930 BC      The reign of Solomon

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930 BC      The division of Israel's united kingdom

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722 BC	The destruction of the northern kingdom by Assyria
586 BC	The destruction and exile of the southern kingdom by Babylon
539 BC	The end of the Babylonian captivity
536 BC	The return of many exiles to the promised land
520 BC	The ministries of Haggai and Zechariah
516 BC	The completion of the rebuilt temple
483–473 BC	The story of the book of Esther
458 BC	The arrival of Ezra
444 BC	The completion of the rebuilt wall around Jerusalem under Nehemiah

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INTRODUCTION:

# THE BIBLE JESUS READ

The Old Testament exists to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. The narratives and songs, the prophecies and patterns, point to the Savior who would rescue us from our sin and establish an everlasting kingdom. Jesus is the hope for all the earth.

These thirty-nine Old Testament books are the Bible that Jesus read. Joseph and Mary would have taught him the Scriptures as he grew, and he would have delighted in its divine commands. Jesus treasured the Old Testament, and at the same time he was—and is—its treasure. The many characters and promises and institutions in these books were like shadowy outlines of the coming Christ.

As Jesus read the ancient words of the faith, he would have discerned in the Scriptures that he was the covenant Son, the true Israel, the promised king, the greater temple, and the perfect priest. While such ideas will become clearer as our study of the Old Testament unfolds, Jesus knew he was fulfilling expectations and patterns that dated back millennia.

After Jesus' resurrection, he told his disciples, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). The Scriptures which Jesus read had testified of him.

We need the New Testament to understand the Old, and we need the Old Testament to understand the New. But haven't you sensed how much more challenging the Old Testament is to read and interpret? The Old Testament makes up three-quarters of our Bibles, so we would be wise to study it and think through the Big Picture.

The Old Testament was written over a period of one thousand years. More than thirty authors were involved in the composition of its thirty-nine books. Paul wrote, "All Scripture is God-

breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Holy Spirit inspired the biblical authors, ensuring that the content of the Old Testament is true and trustworthy.

The more we understand the Old Testament story, the more we can rejoice in Christ together, since the biblical authors anticipated his advent. Their message of hope was not just for some parts of the world. News of a coming Savior should be spread as far and wide as the reach of sin and death.

Do you see Christ in the Old Testament? Do you want to recognize the ways it points to him? The reason Jesus saw himself in Scripture was because of its design. The Bible Jesus read was a Bible about Jesus. As we understand the Old Testament in light of its grand purpose, we shall be blessed readers indeed. Let’s learn more about Holy Scripture, then, pursuing greater joy in Jesus.







1

# IN AND OUT OF SACRED SPACE

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth so that we might glorify him and enjoy him forever. He formed and filled creation, making it habitable for creatures and particularly his image bearers (Gen. 1:26–27). All the work God did was through his Son, the Word, who was with him in the beginning before the foundation of the world (John 1:1–3). By the Son all things hold together, and for him all things exist (Col. 1:16–17).

We live in a universe made for the glory of Jesus Christ, and we read a Bible written for that same purpose. We need to understand how the foundation of our faith begins in Genesis.

5

## CREATED AND COMMISSIONED

Adam and Eve were our first parents, whom God made by his power and in his image. They dwelled in sacred space, a garden in Eden, and there God blessed them with abundance and life. This space was sacred because the conditions outside Eden weren't the same as those inside Eden. This place was set apart as ground zero for a global, glory-spreading project. As image bearers, Adam and Eve represented God in creation, tasked with subduing and exercising dominion over the land as they became fruitful and multiplied (Gen. 1:26–28).

Like a king's image represents his authority and claim over that territory, God's image bearers represented him in the world he had made. God was the cosmic king, and Adam and Eve were his viceregents; they were king and queen of creation who were to bring honor to the one they represented.

If Adam and Eve would have remained in the Garden of Eden, no doubt the boundaries of that sacred space would have expanded to include their descendants: image bearers whose lives would glorify the Lord with worship and

obedience. The expansion of the garden would be in sync with the goal of God's creative acts: to fill the earth "with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14).

But Adam and Eve did not remain.

## TAKING WHAT IS FORBIDDEN

In the center of the garden were two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God gave a command concerning the second tree: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Gen. 2:16–17).

Isn't it easy to focus on what is forbidden so that we fail to grasp the vastness of God's gracious provision? The allure of what is forbidden can be strong. You can wonder if God is holding out on you, whether he really loves you, whether he's really as good as the Scripture claims.

Into the sacred space of Eden there came a tempter. The crafty serpent came to the woman and bent God's words (Gen. 3:1–5). The tempter depicted God as stingy and misleading. In fact,