



SECRET CHURCH SURVEY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Two images captivate my mind as we begin surveying the Old Testament. The first is the opportunity I had to be with an underground house church in Asia. It was not part of the plan on this particular trip, but by the grace of God a door was opened for me to be invited to come and do some training. I didn't know what to expect. I walked into a room and saw a small group of believers gathered together in a circle, and we began studying God's Word at about two in the afternoon, and by ten at night we were still going strong. They looked at me and said, "We need you to teach us all the books of the Old Testament". That began a journey, and over the next two weeks we did just that. The people who came together were mostly farmers or agricultural workers. They completely laid down everything for two weeks at a great cost to them and their families to come together for about 12 hours a day to study God's Word. They had a deep passion for God's Word and wanted to make the most of the opportunity they had to study it.

The second picture that captivates me is of our brothers and sisters in Sudan sitting in mud huts. Many of these believers had grown up with war over the last twenty years and had seen about a million die at their sides. During the entire time I taught them, I barely saw their faces and scarcely made eye contact with them. This was not because they were asleep or day dreaming or off somewhere else, but it was because they were writing down every single thing I said. They came up to me afterwards and said, "David we know we have a responsibility to take everything you have taught us and translate it into our languages and teach it to our tribes." I give you these two pictures for two reasons:

First, to show you how believers in Asia intentionally gathered together for long hours to deeply study God's Word. The purpose of this evening is not for entertainment, but we are going to fill each other with the knowledge of God's Word so deep that we will be overflowing by the time it ends. This is more of a seminary study and it is not for the faint of heart or mind. I pray that you will keep your mind and attention devoted to His Word. Just like the Asian believers, we are going to get in as much as we possibly can to make the most of our time as we go through this text.

The second picture from Sudan is to give you the over-arching purpose of this night. It is not to have a greater knowledge of the Old Testament, although I think that would be wonderful. Instead, the purpose is to lead you in such a way that every single person will be able to re-teach the Old Testament to someone else. If what is discussed in these next few hours stops in your life, then we have missed the entire point, and we have received and given ourselves to a self centered study of His Word. This night is aimed at reproducing everything that has been entrusted to us from God's Word and teaching it to others. Then we will be part of making disciples of all nations, and it won't be just thinking about the people in Africa, but we will have an opportunity to impact the people in Africa. My prayer is that an army of believers will be equipped to teach the Old Testament as a result of these next six hours.

Have you ever heard of Larry Lawn-chair? Have you ever heard of Larry Walters? This is a true story. Years ago Larry's boyhood dream was to fly. When he graduated from high school, he joined the Air Force with hopes of becoming a pilot. Unfortunately, poor eyesight disqualified him. When he was finally discharged, he had to satisfy himself with watching jets fly over his backyard. One day Larry had a bright idea. He decided he was going to fly. He went to a local store and purchased 45 weather balloons and several tanks of helium. The weather balloons, when fully inflated, measured more than four feet across. Back home, Larry securely strapped the balloons to his sturdy lawn chair, which he had anchored to the bumper of his jeep. He then inflated the balloons with helium and climbed into the chair for a test while it was still only a few feet above the ground. Satisfied that it would work, Larry packed several sandwiches and drinks, and loaded his pellet gun figuring he could pop a few balloons when it was time to descend.

He tied himself to the lawn chair along with his pellet gun and provisions. Larry's plan was to lazily float up to a height of about 30 feet above his back yard after severing the anchor and after a few hours come back down. Things didn't quite work out that way. When he cut the cord that anchored the lawn chair to his jeep, Larry did not float lazily up to thirty feet or so. Instead he streaked into the LA sky as if shot from a cannon. He did not level off at thirty feet, nor did he level off at 100 feet. After climbing and climbing he leveled off at approximately sixteen thousand feet in the air. Can you imagine being in a lawn chair at sixteen thousand feet in the air? At that height he couldn't risk shooting any of the balloons less he unbalance the load and really find himself in trouble. So he stayed there drifting cold and frightened for many hours. Then he got in real trouble. He found himself drifting into the primary approach quarter of Long Beach International Airport. Larry was first spotted by a United Airlines pilot. He radioed the tower and described passing a guy in a lawn chair with a gun.

Meanwhile feeling cold and dizzy in the thin air three miles above the ground Larry began to shoot several of the balloons with the pellet gun to come back down to earth. He attempted to aim his descent at a large expanse of grass on the North Long Beach Country Club but Larry came up short and ended up entangling his tethers in a set of high voltage power lines about ten miles from his liftoff site. The plastic tethers protected Larry from electrocution as he dangled above the ground until firemen and utility crews could cut the power to the lines. Larry managed to maneuver his chair over to a wall, step out and cut the chair free. He was later quoted as saying, "A guy just can't sit around." I feel like Larry, if I can be honest with you. We are going to go up pretty high and get an overview of the Old Testament and what it reveals about God and ultimately our Savior Jesus Christ. We are going to go up pretty high and it may be a little uncomfortable at times, but I say let's cut the tethers loose and take it for what it is worth.

Why Study the Old Testament?

Common Myths

Why is it important to spend time studying the Old Testament? Here are some common myths we throw out:

The Old Testament is insignificant. Many times we think this is just background material for the New Testament. Why would we want to pay attention to the first half of the game if we already know the result of the second half of the game? Why would we want to sit in the stands with a blocked view when you can already see on the field what unfolds in the New

Testament? The Old Testament is insignificant. It is really not that significant for us in the 21st Century.

The Old Testament is irrelevant. It contains a lot of things we don't observe or seem to relate to our lives any more. There are a lot of people, even in Christianity, who say that the Old Testament is more for Israel and not for us. Let's be honest, what relevance is an ancient animal slaughtering religion that talks about God in a portable tent have for Christianity in the 21st Century? What does that really have to do with us? Have you ever read a passage in the Old Testament and just thought, "Why, Lord, did you decide to include that?" 2 Kings 2:23-24 says,

"From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some boys came out of the town and jeered at him. 'Get out of here, baldy!' they said. 'Get out of here, baldy!' He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys."

Students, be encouraged this is how youth ministry is represented in the Old Testament. Why do we need to know about the bears taking out the boys? This is irrelevant. What does it have to do with us?

The Old Testament is inconsistent. It doesn't make sense in light of the New Testament. This is where a lot of people disconnect the Old Testament from Christianity as a whole. They look at the Old Testament as a Jewish book. There are cults that use the Old Testament as well, such as Mormons. Even Muslims use parts of the Old Testament as part of their scripture. The most commonly asked question is, "Why would the God of grace, love, mercy and compassion we see unfold in the New Testament, pour out judgment, wrath and punishment of sin in the Old Testament?" How do they go together? How do you reconcile the judgment that we see in the Old Testament, whether it is of forty-two poor boys or of whole nations that are being wiped out? How do you justify that with the God of love and grace and mercy? It seems inconsistent?

The Old Testament is incomprehensible. What we basically think is that it is too cumbersome, or it is confusing and doesn't make sense. It often leads us to boredom, apathy and neglect. It is just plain hard to understand. The books are large. They are filled with all kinds of history that many of us don't know as well as unpronounceable names that we never could begin to talk about. How do you really begin to understand this? It is overwhelming. It is long. It is tedious. We are a lot more familiar with the Gospels where we see Jesus. As a result, we use the Old Testament every once in a while in our quiet times, but the bulk of our faith is dependent on the New Testament. The Old Testament just doesn't make sense.

The Central Message

Well, these are myths I hope will be dispelled by one central message: The Old Testament is invaluable. If we abandon the books of the Old Testament, then we abandon the revelation of God. More than that, we hinder our ability to understand the New Testament's revelation of God. If we abandon the Old Testament, we will never get the picture that the New Testament is trying to teach us. The key to the New Testament is the Old Testament. There are at least 1600 direct quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament, in addition to all kinds of allusions and references to it. If we don't get what the Old Testament teaches, we will never get Christ. It is important for us to remember that the Lord of the universe who gave us this book does not waste words. He gave us this entire book for a reason. It doesn't mean that it is not confusing or tedious or doesn't make sense. I will go

ahead and be honest; I am not going to be able to answer all the questions that come up in the Old Testament. My desire is for us to see an overall picture of what God is doing and why the Old Testament is so important.

HOW SHOULD WE STUDY THE OLD TESTAMENT? Examining Three Dimensions

I want us to look at the Old Testament through three different lenses or three different dimensions: First, there is the literary dimension. The Old Testament is a book. It is a piece of literature. We are going to think about it in terms of what kind of literature it is and how that affects the way we understand the Old Testament.

Second, there is the historical dimension. The Old Testament is real history of real people and we are going to get a background for understanding the history. Most of us probably have little knowledge of the history of the Old Testament and how it all ties together. The Old Testament is a fragmented book for us and we try to piece it all together in our minds, but it just doesn't make sense. So I want us to walk away with an overall knowledge of the history and how it all fits together. We will look at it from a literary perspective and from a historical perspective.

Third, there is the theological dimension. This book was not just written to tell us a story about history, but it was written to demonstrate God in the middle of history. That is what theology is—the study of God. The following is an overview of how we are going to approach the Old Testament.

In Part 1, we are going to hit the literary and historical overview. We are going to dive into as many books as we can just to get an overview of how they fit together. With that basic foundation, we are going to see the overall story line of where God is revealing Himself. Not only does He reveal himself to the people of Israel, and to the people of the New Testament, but also to us today. We are going to see the richness and the beauty of the Old Testament unfold. We have to get a foundation in order to get to that point. We are going to dive into the literary and historical in the first part and then we will go to Part 2.

WHAT IS THE OLD TESTAMENT? The Old Testament is Literature

A collection of 39 books

The Old Testament is literature. It is a collection of 39 books. There are 27 books in the New Testament, a total of 66 in the Bible. These books are traditionally classified according to genre. Some will say Law is at the beginning, followed by history, followed by prophecy, and then poetry. We divide it up again into different genres. But that kind of classification really doesn't do justice to the literary picture of the Old Testament. It is rich in literary form. It has more than the Law, history, prophecy and poetry. It is much deeper than that.

It is rich in literary form with historical narrative. It does have stories, pictures of what has happened in history. And not just that, it has laws and statutes. It has the laws God has given to His people. It has prophetic oracles pronouncing things that are happening in the future.

It has genealogies. Genealogies by the way are there for a purpose. There is a reason God has given us these names. Isn't it good to know that we have a God who is concerned about us as individuals and who knows our name? Let that transform the way you look at genealogies in the Old Testament to know that God counts your name as valuable. After genealogies, you have Songs. There are passages that are intended to be sung in the Old Testament. The Old Testament has wisdom sayings, laments and apocalyptic visions, such as Daniel's. Apocalyptic visions can get really extravagant and kind of wild in the Old Testament, but we will dive into that later.

All kinds of different literary forms come together in the Old Testament. Knowing each of the literary forms will affect the way we understand the Old Testament. When we come to the book of Proverbs, we will read it differently than we read the book of 1 Samuel. When we come to the book of Leviticus we are not going to skip over it so we can get to the good stuff in 1 Kings. We are going to dive into Leviticus, the laws that were given to the priests, and appreciate it for the type of form that it is.

Written by a variety of authors

It was written by a variety of authors. Don't forget that the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, has one divine author—the Holy Spirit. However, it is the Spirit of God talking to different men and different servants. But, the beauty of Scripture is God the Holy Spirit inspiring individuals just like you and me. He takes individual personalities, gifts, talents, and passions and brings God and man together to produce a book that is completely and divinely inspired but also written by human authors. It is an incredible picture in this book that makes it unlike any other book. It is one divine author, the Holy Spirit, and various human authors. The Old Testament is predominantly written in Hebrew, though some is in Aramaic.

Over a span of around 1000 years

It was written over a span of about 1,000 years. The span of time is where we get into a variety of issues that are really open to discussion and debate even among biblical scholars. Biblical scholars who are following Christ still debate about some of these things, but it is about 1,000 years. I am only going to focus on what we do know and leave the things that the Old Testament doesn't tell us specifically. We will trust that it is not as important as things that the Old Testament does tell us specifically.

The earliest parts were written around 1500 B.C., give or take a couple of hundred years based on your view of when the Exodus happened. The two most common views of the Exodus, when God brought his people out of slavery in Egypt through Moses, are either in the 15th century or 13th century. What you have is Moses writing these first books in the Bible during that time, some where between the 15th and 13th century. You also have a book like Job in the middle of our Bible, which was possibly written before the first books of our Bible were written. It could have been written even before the Exodus.

So you have the earliest parts of the Old Testament written around 1,500 B.C. and the latest parts written around 400 B.C. Around 400 B.C. you come to Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther closing out the history. Then you have about 400 years of silence until you get to the New Testament and Christ. This is known as the "intertestamental period."

How did we get the Old Testament?

The Old Testament was collected into a canon by God's people. "Canon" literally means a measurement, or standard, or a measuring stick. The measuring standard can be taken two ways.

In order for a book in the Old Testament to be included in the canon, it had to meet certain standards such as: who wrote it, when it was written and how it was written. They would also look at how it corresponded to the rest of the revelation that God had given through other books. If you had to simplify how books were included in the canon, these are the three criteria: who wrote it; who was the audience; and how did it fit with everything else? That was the standard by which books would be included by God's people in the Old Testament and how He led them to get us to these 39 books. But the books of the canon are also a standard, in the sense, by which our lives as God's people are measured. There was a measurement for the Old Testament books to be included in the canon, and then our lives are put up as a mirror to these books to see how we measure up. That is what it means to be collected into a canon.

Also, it was transmitted through Scribes. This is where history really gets fascinating. I want you to think about the Bible, specifically the Old Testament, and to realize that there have been countless people over the last few thousand years who have given their lives to making sure the Word passes from generation to generation. These were scribes who had no word processing software; scribes who did not have computers, even typewriters, who wrote out by hand the words of the Old Testament so that they would be passed down generation to generation. It is amazing that these scribes would do that, and we are indebted to them.

Some may wonder why I am so passionate about the Word and the Church. The reason is because there is a whole lineage of people who were faithful to pass the Word on from generation to generation, and God help us to not let it stop here. We are not going to ignore the Word in the Church. We are going to highlight the Word in the Church. It is going to be supreme and we are going to follow in the tradition of those who sacrificed their lives to make sure that the Word gets passed on. That is our obligation. That is our responsibility as God's people. It was transmitted through scribes. Finally, it was translated through servants. Different people translated the Old Testament along the way.

Septuagint—the Greek Old Testament

You have the Septuagint, or the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and it dates back to about 200-300 B.C. Many of the New Testament authors who quoted from the Old Testament were using the Septuagint. There is this notion that the translation of the Old Testament into Greek affected the New Testament. Adam and Eve did not speak English, but neither did the Israelites, Moses, Abraham, or David. Jesus didn't speak English, but He knew it. We need to realize that once again we are indebted to those servants who translated this book into our language.

On that note I want to remind you that over 2,500 languages in the world still have no Bible translation. An additional 1,000 have only the New Testament. That means over half of the languages in the world still don't have the Old Testament. The churches in America have the resources to put a dent in those numbers. God help us to be faithful servants of the Word.

Now you have a basic picture or brief overview of literature of the Old Testament. The picture shows us how we got this book from the point that it was written to the point we are studying it in this text.

WHEN AND WHERE DID THE EVENTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT TAKE PLACE?

The Old Testament as History

As we move from the literary dimension, let's think about the historical dimension of the Old Testament. When did the Old Testament events take place?

The Old Testament is a real story set in real history

First, remember that the Old Testament is a real story set in real history. I want to emphasize that because we have a tendency to almost view this book as a mythological picture, fable, or story from the past that may or may not be true. Even in the Church, especially in the United States, it is doubted in many different circles. This is real history, a real story of real people. It is not just a book of wise religious council and theological propositions. I want you to grasp this so that when we begin to unlock some of the things that are in the Old Testament, you will remember that we are not just telling stories to each other. This is true and it is about real places, real people and real time.

Old Testament history made simple

I want to give you an overview of the history of the Old Testament. Again, we are Larry Lawn-chair with a view from 16,000 feet in the air. Looking down, this is what happened.

In the beginning . . . nothing, then something. It is that simple. Now that simple truth is a part of much debate in our culture today, but nothing cannot produce something apart from someone. You have nothing one day and if you have nothing then what can you get out of nothing? Out of nothing, nothing comes. But you have nothing one day and then you have something. What you have is creation, life, creatures, and man made in God's image. Man and woman created in the image of God, his prize creation, placed in the Garden of Eden, which quickly becomes the location of the Fall of man. By Genesis 3, bad news creeps in. The Garden of Eden quickly becomes the location of the Fall of man. Humankind then degenerates for many generations.

As a result, God judges the world with a flood, but He spares one righteous man, Noah, and his family. The problem is after that happens, Noah, his family, and generations after him don't do much better. There is not much improvement. Humankind rebels at the Tower of Babel resulting in division and dispersion.

Next, we see a new beginning and God's faithfulness to Abraham and his family. God begins to call out Abraham, the leader of his people. From that point, Abraham's prosperity turns into Israel's slavery. Abraham leads the people of God by the promise of God through his different generations: Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The result at the end of Genesis is people in slavery.

Then comes the Exodus. At the end of Genesis, the people are in slavery, and what that means is the Exodus is necessary. During the Exodus, Moses leads Israel out of Egypt. They are led out of slavery and once they are out, God gives Israel two things. He gives them the Law and His Word, which are the Ten Commandments.

God gave Israel the Law, and then the people entered the Promised Land, where they were ruled for a while by Judges. They are in the Promised Land; judges are ruling them and they see the need for a king, which is when Saul, David and then Solomon enter the picture. Eventually a kingdom was established, epitomized by King David and his son, Solomon.

Solomon builds a temple, which becomes the home of the Ark of the Covenant and the center of the people's worship.

After Solomon, dies the kingdom divides into Israel, the Northern kingdom, and Judah, the Southern kingdom. There are now two kingdoms that are divided, Israel in the North and Judah in the South. Idolatry grows in both places

The nation of Assyria destroys Israel in 722 B.C. Then Babylon destroys Judah from 597-586 B.C. Ultimately the temple is destroyed in 586 B.C. The survivors are taken to exile in Babylon for the next 70 years. Then a remnant returns to Jerusalem and rebuilds the temple, but Israel still longs for the glory it knew under David.

That is the history, the story behind the Old Testament made simple. That is the complete picture. Everything from Genesis to Malachi is encompassed in that story right there. The only problem is that the Old Testament has become a story without an ending. You have the people of Israel longing for the glory it knew under David.

In the Secret Church Old Testament study guide that accompanies this book there are a couple of maps. The "Geographic summary of the Old Testament," is map one. This map shows you how the story we just discussed plays out. If you look to the far right of this map, near the bottom right, you see a place called Ur. That is where Abraham begins his journey. He goes north to Haran, following the line around to Egypt, which is point three on the map. Then the Exodus happens. Moving on to point four, they are at Mount Sinai where the Law is given and land is promised. Following along the line to point five, we find them wandering around in circles for a while. Then they move on to point six, where they go into the Promised Land. You see Canaan there, and it is the point that things begin to unfold. This is the beginning of the rule by Judges, and then they are united into a monarchy first under Saul, then David, and next Solomon at Jerusalem there in the center. Then you have the divided kingdom. The northern half of Canaan becomes Israel, and the southern half becomes Judah. Israel is attacked by Assyria, which is in the northeast; and Judah, in the east on the right side of the map, is attacked by Babylon. They are taken, as you see, from Canaan over to Babylon and back. That is the exile. They come back and rebuild the temple in the city of Jerusalem. They are longing for the glory, the glory of Israel, as they knew under David. That is the picture of the Old Testament.

The second map on the back of Map one gives you a modern day picture of this area of the world to remind us that this is real history, real places and real time. What you have is a picture of Egypt in the bottom left in the Southwest corner. You also see Iraq, Jordan, and of course Israel and Syria. This is where all of this history was happening. This map is to give you a new perspective of what you see on CNN and Fox News. To think this part of the world, these different areas that are quite honestly so volatile today, was the place where all these things we read on a daily basis were unfolding. Hopefully these maps will give you a complete picture.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

I want us to dive into an overview of the books of the Old Testament. We don't have that much time left in this part for 39 books. The study guide notes are available on the Internet so you can fill in from the notes. I want to give you a resource that you can use to get a picture of the overall theme from book, to book, to book. Then you can see how it all fits together. I want you to get a picture of each of the books and how they fit into the historical

and literary dimensions. This overview is going to lay the foundation for us to really dive into theology.

Three main divisions in the Old Testament

The story of God's people—that is the first. Turn to your table of contents in the Old Testament and block out the first 17 books, from Genesis to Esther, and you have the story of God's people. It is fairly chronological for the most part, but we will see how it is mixed up later on. From Genesis to Esther you have a chronological picture of the history of God's people from creation all the way to the remnant coming back to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple. This is the history; the story of God's people.

The writings of God's people. That is the next five books—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon (Songs)—make up the writings of God's people. These are the writings of God's people. They are writings that God's people have given that fit into the previous history. These writings don't continue the history as we are used to. Our minds are trained to read books chronologically. They go together, one after another. As a result, we think that Job happened after Esther. Not the case. Job as I mentioned before was written previous to Esther. The first 17 books are giving us God's story of how He is moving among his people. These books are very God-centered. What you have in Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon is man's response in the middle of that history. How was man responding along the way? The response could have been in praise, in wisdom, in struggling through different things, and in suffering.

The prophets from among God's people. Starting with Isaiah and going all the way to Malachi, you have the prophets from among God's people. The Old Testament has three major divisions, with the prophets from among God's people being the last. From Isaiah to Malachi, they are split up into Major Prophets and Minor Prophets. Isaiah through Daniel would be considered the Major Prophets, and Hosea through Malachi would be considered the Minor Prophets. That doesn't mean poor Hosea was less important than Isaiah. Let's not slight Joel, Amos or Obadiah, they didn't write a lot, but they made their words count. They are called the Minor Prophets mainly because they are smaller. The prophets historically fit into the time that we see in 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. The prophets were not prophesying in the beginning, but they were wandering in the Promised Land. The prophets that are included in the Old Testament really come about during the monarchy, the division of the kingdom, Israel being destroyed by Assyria, and Babylon coming over and destroying Judah.

Methodology

The Old Testament is comprised of the story, the writings and then the prophets among God's people. I want to give you an overview of each section: the story, the writings and the prophets. In the overview of each book, there are two points of discussion:

The first is labeled "primary information for starters." This is basic information that is going to have an effect on the way we understand the book being discussed. In a lot of cases, especially in the New Testament, the basic information would always include the author. The problem in the Old Testament is that authorship was not that important to the Hebrew writers. In many cases, we don't know exactly who wrote the books. There are a lot of guesses about the author. In those cases, I will give you the information that we do know. For each of the books there will be a summary statement that encapsulates everything that goes on in that particular book.

The second point of discussion is "practical advice for study." These are things to think about and look for as we read through a particular book. It will be beneficial in opening our eyes to help us understand how everything fits together.

THE STORY ABOUT GOD'S PEOPLE

The story of God's people is in the first 17 books, Genesis to Esther, and it is divided into two major categories. First of all, there is the Law or the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch basically means: five books of the Law. So the Pentateuch is Genesis through Deuteronomy. Then you have the History, which is Joshua through Esther. The two categories, Law and History are similar to division of the Major and Minor Prophets.

The essential makeup of these books is narrative. What this means is the story of God's people, Israel, is being told. Remember Israel is going to come about when God interacts with Jacob and He says, "I am going to change your name and you will be called Israel." That is the picture that started with Abraham. They are referred to as the people of God, the people of Israel. God is the Holy One of Israel.

Remember, this is a historical narrative because it is a story. Even books like Leviticus and Deuteronomy fit into the story. They are not just books that were included as an "add on." They are part of a story.

Genesis

Primary Information for Starters

Moses is the author of the five books of the Law. Throughout the books of the Law, we see Moses constantly receiving directives from the Lord. Jesus, Paul and John all attributed the writing of these books to Moses. If Jesus thought Moses wrote it, I am with him. Moses wrote most of the books, but the likelihood is that he had some help along the way; whether it was Joshua or others who helped plug in details here and there. Moses is the primary writer. For example, when you get to the end of the books of the Law, Moses passes away. It is unlikely that he wrote that particular section unless he saw it in his mind's eye the day before and was able to write it down. Some parts of the Law had to be filled in along the way.

Genesis literally means "beginning"—in the beginning. Genesis has two pictures—before the Fall, which is the beginning of creation and after the Fall, which is the beginning of God's plan to redeem His creation. Redeem is a thick word that unfolds later, but it basically means to restore his creation or to recreate, to bring it back from what happened after the Fall.

Practical Advice for Study

We need to realize that, just like a good novel you read, the introduction is huge. If you don't get a grasp of the introduction, the rest of it is not going to make sense. The first 11 chapters of Genesis are foundational to the rest of the Bible. The major themes of the Bible begin to unfold. Camp out in Genesis 1-11 because the things that unfold there are huge. The major themes are:

First, you have the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of God means that God is in control. We see that from the beginning in God being the Creator. All of creation works according to His plan, His desires, and His power. He has all authority over all creation. All throughout the book of Genesis we see people wrestling with that foundational theme. Look at Job—"Is

God in control of this?" When the people of Israel are being destroyed by Babylon, is God still in control? All throughout you see people wrestling with the sovereignty of God.

Did you ever wrestle with God's sovereignty? "God are you in control of what is going on in my life? Why is this happening? How can this be explained? Why is that person being prospered and I am falling apart?" Many of you are still wrestling with these questions. This is a constant source of wrestling, but it is also a constant rock for God's people. The sovereignty of God is not an easy picture to get. As we take hold of it, we can know that no matter what happens to any of us, there is a God who has a purpose. His purpose will be accomplished, for He is infinitely wise, He is infinitely good, He infinitely loves, and He is infinitely gracious. It all unfolds from the very beginning in Genesis.

The second theme is the sinfulness of man. Genesis 3 should be an in depth study. It is an incredible passage.

Third, we see the promise of redemption. The beautiful thing is that at the very beginning of the Bible within the first three chapters of Genesis, you see the promise of redemption on a mammoth scale. Most of us have a good grasp of what the New Testament teaches us about who God is, and about who Christ is, but Christ, believe it or not, is seen there in Genesis 3.

Not only should you grasp the major themes, but the major plot as well. The major plot is God's gracious election of Abraham's family. The word 'election' makes some of you cringe a little. Some would say this is bringing Calvinism into the Old Testament. Well Calvin came much later. This, however, is a picture of Abraham not doing anything to earn or merit God calling him, yet God pouring out His affection on him. God elected him by grace. God chose to pour out his grace on Abraham. God graciously elects Abraham, and we see that over and over again throughout his life.

You also have Isaac and Jacob. How about Jacob and Esau? One is chosen by God, the other is not. How does this work? God's grace is being poured out. Then you have Joseph.

All throughout, God's gracious election of Abraham's family, He chooses to pour out His affection on His people. The ultimate truth is, regardless of what you might think about Calvinism, praise God that He chose to show His affection to you and me. We did not earn it. We did not deserve it. We have not merited it and not one of us deserves it. However, God in His grace chose to pour out His love and mercy on us and for that He is worthy of all of our praise. The Old Testament is good.

We will also see some minor sub-plots unfold in Genesis. As mentioned previously, in Genesis 3:15, we are already looking to Christ. The sacrifice passage about Abraham and his son Isaac in Genesis 22 is a picture of who Christ is. When you look at the passages in Genesis 35:11-13 and 49:8-12, what you see is a promise that is given to Jacob that kings would come from his line. Look at Genesis 49. Jacob is blessing his sons and he says something different to each one of them. Look at what happens in Genesis 49:9. He says to Judah,

"You are a lion's cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his."

Did you catch that? In the New Testament, Jesus is known as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Until the scepter, the rule, the authority comes to Him to whom it belongs, it belongs to Him and the obedience of the nations will be His.

Another minor sub-plot is the covenant. I say minor sub-plot, but the covenants are huge throughout, and you see it unfold for the first time with Noah. Even with Adam, though it is not called a covenant, there is one. A covenant basically means a contractual agreement. I mainly see covenants as I do marriage ceremonies, marriage commitments. You unite your life and you commit your life to each other. That is what we see unfold between God and Adam, God and Noah, and then with Abraham.

Also, notice there are major flaws in main characters throughout the book of Genesis. This is where we learn very early on in the Old Testament that these stories of real people were not given to us so that we would emulate them. I am not saying that there were not some good qualities along the way that we are going to learn from characters in the Old Testament, there certainly are. But, no one wants to live like Abraham or Isaac or Jacob—“Jacob the deceiver.” No one wants to live like Moses. He missed out on the Promised Land because of his disobedience. No one wants to live like David. But he was a man after God's own heart, and God gives us a picture of that for a reason. No one would volunteer to emulate David with his or her lives. We see some major character flaws at the very beginning for a reason. It shows us the insufficiency of man and the sufficiency of God. His purpose and His promises are going to continue even despite major flaws. Isn't it good to know that God works in spite of our weaknesses and that the success of The Church at Brook Hills or any church, praise the Lord, is not dependent on the lack of character or flaws in a pastor. It is great encouragement to know that God is faithful. He will accomplish His purpose even through our weaknesses.

Don't forget Genesis was not written to answer every question we may have about these events. Well what about evolution? What about dinosaurs? There are all kinds of questions that you can come up with that are not answered in the book of Genesis. I am not saying that they are not good questions or that they are not important questions, but they are not answered so we don't need to try to make an answer. Someone might say, “Well, this animal must have been the dinosaur.” God has given us the revelation and what we need to know Him, to know His character, and to be in a relationship with Him. That is the purpose of the Bible. It is not to answer every question that we may have, not even the idea of evolution.

Is it a theistic evolution? Is it God creating through a process of evolution? Is it days as in 24-hour days or is it a day with God is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day? How long was the day? Did it all happen in one day? How does that square with science? The answers are not all over the book of Genesis, but we can know this: there is absolutely nothing that unfolds in Scripture that is in the end, going to contradict what we know from observing science. Nothing. It is not that it is not important to think through some of those issues, but to even think of the idea of God creating through a process of evolution misses out on some of the things that we do know.

Evolution is built on random chance and we know that there is nothing random about what is going on behind the activity of a sovereign God in the book of Genesis. Evolution is built on this idea that we, over a process of time, went from this sort of species, to another sort of species. That completely contradicts what we do know in Genesis. In Genesis it talks about man being created unique in the image of God unlike any part of his other creation. So focus on what we do know. Leave some of room open for what we don't know. Don't try to answer every question in the world based on what we see unfold in Genesis.

Exodus

Primary Information for Starters

Exodus literally means "departure." God is all-powerful and mighty to save is the picture that unfolds in the first half of the book of Exodus, Exodus 1-19. Remember the history behind this account. In the beginning, God's people are in slavery in Egypt. Moses is chosen as a leader of God's people, and they depart from slavery in Egypt and go up to Sinai. They wander around for a while in Sinai. Exodus is a departure from slavery.

The second half of the book focuses on how God is faithful to his covenant. That is when God gives his people the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. In Exodus 20:3-17, you see the Ten Commandments unfold. God gives His people the Law, and establishes His covenant, the Mosaic covenant. We saw Abraham in covenant with God, Noah in covenant with God, Adam in covenant with God, and now that covenant is transferred over to Moses and the people of God after they are brought out. This is the story of how God's people came out of slavery and to Sinai, the place where they established their covenant with God.

Practical Advice for Study

There are three defining moments in Israel's history: (1) Their deliverance from slavery; (2) The significance of God's presence—God established His presence with His people through something called the tabernacle; and (3) the terms of the covenant, or God's commitment to His people, and his description of how they will relate to Him, walk with Him, and enjoy him. Just as He had said to Adam and Eve, "walk with me and enjoy," "don't do this and don't eat from this tree." God is saying what you do and what you don't do as you walk with Him. It is a covenant, which can also be thought of as a contractual agreement with each other like a marriage.

There are two key chapters. Exodus 12 is one, because it is where the sacrifice of the lamb is making the deliverance from slavery possible. The sacrifice of the lamb, or the Passover, is huge. Exodus 20 is the other, because it is the giving of the Law. These are the two pivotal chapters when you come to Exodus. Spend time on these two chapters and really get their meaning.

There are also some key places. They go from Egypt across the Red Sea to Mount Sinai where God establishes His covenant. Mount Sinai is a very important place in the book of Exodus. This is where we see God choosing to pour out His grace on people and the election of Abraham.

How does God's sovereignty work? When you read Exodus, I want you to notice both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. When God is bringing His people out of Egypt and Pharaoh is fighting against that, there are times when it says, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart" (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8), and it makes us wonder, "What in the world? God did that to people?" But at the same time there are ten times where it says, "Pharaoh hardened his own heart" (Ex. 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15; 9:7, 34, 35).

This is becoming a big issue in the Church today. How does God's election or sovereignty work with man's responsibility? Do we have a choice? I want you to see that they are both unfolding in Scripture from the very beginning. If you are asking, "How do you reconcile those two together?" You don't reconcile two friends. You don't have to reconcile friends. They go together. "How do they go together?" That is a great question but the important thing is to see that God's sovereignty and man's responsibility aren't going against each other. They work together and this unfolds in the book of Exodus.

Here is the deal: if we don't understand Exodus, we will never understand the New Testament. When Jesus comes on the scene and John says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." That scene is weird if you don't know Exodus. It doesn't make sense. He is the greatest religious teacher in the world and they are calling him a Lamb. What does that mean? Well, in order to understand that, you have to know Exodus. So, know Exodus and know the New Testament.

Leviticus

Primary Information for Starters

In Leviticus God's people are led out of slavery and brought to Mount Sinai. It is referred to as "The Law of the Priests"—the Levites. It literally means pertaining to the Levites. The Levites were members of Aaron's family who were responsible for helping the priests in the tabernacle. The tabernacle was how God dwelled among His people and the priests were the intermediaries between God and His people. That is what it meant to be a priest. It is a rich picture that we will dive into more, later.

Primarily this is a book about holiness. Over 90 times, "holiness", "be holy", "this is holy", "I am holy," are mentioned. It is also a book about sacrifice. In order to come before a Holy God there had to be a sacrifice to make the way for that to happen. What we are seeing set up in Leviticus is the necessity of sacrifice. In order for sinful man who is not holy to approach a Holy God there was a sacrifice, and that is huge. Do you see the importance of it?

Practical Advice for Study

There are two main sections as you study Leviticus. The first half, Leviticus 1-17, talks about fellowship with God through ritual offerings. It talks about the offerings that the people of God were to do, and the different designated times the people of God were to give these offerings. It also talks about the different points of the year for these offerings and celebrations.

The last part, Leviticus 18-27, talks about fellowship with God through righteous living. That is not just about giving your offerings. It is about walking with God and obeying Him. There is a lot of meaning there for us today. It is not just about bringing your songs; it is about giving your lives. It is not just about rituals we do in our Church culture, it is about walking with God on a daily basis. Leviticus has meaning for us today.

There is one main chapter, Leviticus 16: The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur. Atonement literally means "to cover." That word is used 45 times in the book of Leviticus. That means it is important. Somehow our sin had to be covered. It was covered on this Day of Atonement, the day of covering.

There were two necessary elements on the Day of Atonement, a bold priest and a blood sacrifice. A bold priest, and by that I mean, the high priest, would go into the presence of God at this designated time. He would have to wear bells so when he walked you could hear them. When he went into the presence of God, every one standing outside would listen closely to make sure he was still moving. To make sure he had not been struck down in the presence of God. Can you imagine the tension of that scene? A blood sacrifice was needed because in order to cover over the sins, there had to be a blood sacrifice.

Don't miss the practical application and significance found in Leviticus. First, God is holy. Leviticus teaches us that if we are going to bring something to God, it had better be worthy of bringing it to God. He is Holy. The implications are profound. You don't bring junk; you

don't bring trash; you don't bring second best; and you don't bring that which costs you nothing into the presence of God. You don't offer Him meaningless sacrifices. He is holy. He deserves much more than that. He deserves a worthy sacrifice.

Second, sin is serious. Leviticus teaches us that sin before God is very costly and the worship is expensive. Sin is serious.

Finally, God is gracious. When you take the first two together, God is holy and sin is serious, it is not a good picture. However, you get to the third truth and you see God providing to atone and cover our sins. It then begins to unfold what God has done in each of our lives. Christ has paid a high price on the cross, a high price to cover over our sins. If we want to understand the price of the cross, we have to study the book of Leviticus. If the cross doesn't mean anything to us, then we can leave Leviticus alone. If the cross is the center of our faith, then we have to study the book of Leviticus to see how important it was.

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