“What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

- 2 Timothy 2:2
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**Introduction: Why Read the Old Testament in the 21st Century?**

The Old Testament is a special collection of 39 books. It tells the story of God and His people, the Jews, before the time of Jesus Christ.

These books are often divided into four sections. The first section is the Law, which contains both the rules and earliest history of the Hebrew people. The second section has the History books that are the record of ancient Israel’s rise and decline. The third section is Poetry. This section has songs of worship, collections of wise sayings, and a story of faith. The fourth section is the Prophets. It records God’s message through the men He chose to reveal His blessings, judgments, and promises.¹

Here are the books of the Old Testament as divided into these sections:

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The Old Testament was written between 1440 BC and about 400 BC. Most is about the people and events of those times and before, and the work of God in their lives.
Why should someone read the Old Testament today?

1. **Jesus taught the Old Testament is God’s Word.** As a result, it has very important information about God and His will for us. In fact, the Old Testament was so important that Jesus said:

   > Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets [the Old Testament]. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled (Mat. 5:17-18).

   - A “jot” is the smallest Hebrew letter. A “tittle” is a longer stroke of a Hebrew letter. Jesus would not change any part of the Old Testament; not even the details of how people had written it down.²
   - The writers of the New Testament also had a deep respect for the Old Testament as God’s Word. This is clear from the way they talked about the Old Testament as they wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:
     - The apostle Peter taught that the Holy Spirit was in the Old Testament writers. God guided those writers to testify about Jesus (1 Pet. 1:10-11).
     - Peter again wrote that God inspired the Old Testament writers to prophesy about Jesus (2 Pet. 1:21).
     - Paul said that all Scripture (including the Old Testament) was God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16).
     - The writer of Hebrews says God spoke to His people through the Old Testament prophets, just as He spoke to His people through Jesus (Heb. 1:1-2).

   It is clear that Jesus and the New Testament writers believed that the Old Testament carries God’s message.

2. **We should read the Old Testament to learn more about how God laid the foundations of His world and our faith.** One of the most important verses in the whole Bible is the first. *Genesis*
1:1 tells us, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth.” All that we see, and all that we have, comes from God. How can He love us that much? What does He expect from us? The stories of the Old Testament help answer those questions. Watch for the many ways God showed His power to remind people that He is the Creator and Ruler. A few of those ways include:

- The flood that swept away everyone but Noah and his family (Gen. 7:1-8:19).
- The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for their sin (Gen. 19:1-21).
- The plagues on Egypt for the Pharaoh’s refusal to set Israel free (Exo. 7:14–12:30).
- The food God provided in the wilderness for Israel (Exo. 16).
- The fire God sent to destroy the altar of a false god (1 Kin. 18:20–39).

Look for ways God provided for people to learn to walk more closely with Him.

- God gave His Law so His people could live a life that pleased Him (Lev. 20:22-24).
- David often drew closer to God through worship (Psa. 63:7-8, 28:6-7).
- Daniel spent time in prayer to seek God’s mercies and understand a king’s dream. Daniel had to be very close to God to understand all of this correctly (Dan. 2:14-23).

3. **Learn from the history of God’s people.** When God’s people were faithful, God blessed them. When they were not faithful, they suffered the results of their disobedience. Here are some examples:

- When Israel turned away from God, their families fell apart (Jer. 19:4-9).
- When Israel chose to obey God, God brought them success (Jos. 6).
- What one person does can hurt or help a whole nation (Jos. 7:10-26).
As you learn the lessons of Old Testament history, you will see how they apply today. The results of obeying or disobeying God are much the same. What happens to families in nations today that reject God’s ways? What difference can one person today make in a nation?

4. **As you read the Old Testament be sure to note God’s promises, blessings and judgments.** Many of these are found in the words of the prophets. Some of the most exciting promises are the prophecies about Jesus Christ. These prophecies about the Messiah, Jesus, are just a few found in the Old Testament book of Isaiah:

- He would be born of a virgin (*Isa. 7:14*).
- He would obey the Lord in His mission (*Isa. 50:4-9*).
- He would freely submit to suffering (*Isa. 50:6, 53:7-8*).
- He would take on Himself the sins of the world (*Isa. 53:4-6, 10-12*).
- He would triumph over death (*Isa. 53:10*).

Those prophecies are just the beginning. You will find many more as you explore the Old Testament. The Old Testament shows us how important it is to walk in the ways of God. That wisdom is just as important now as it was 3,000 years ago. The Old Testament:

- Gives us story after story of people who learned to walk with God.
- Gives us wisdom from the very heart of God.
- Offers songs and poems that we can use to worship God today.
- Makes it clear that obeying God is not always easy, but is required for those who follow God.
- Points to the fulfilled promise we have in Jesus Christ.

May God bless you as you “study to show yourself approved, rightly dividing the word of truth” (*2 Tim. 2:15*).
1. **Introduction and Title**

   A. Genesis is the first book in the five books of the Bible called the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). “Pentateuch” means “five books.” These books cover the time from Creation through the death of Moses around 1405 BC.
   - This section of the Bible is also called “the Law.” “The Law” refers to the books written by Moses. These books contain the many laws God gave to His people through the prophet Moses. These laws cover almost every area of life. They are the basis of how God’s people would understand right and wrong.
     - These books also describe the beginning of the world and the beginning of God’s covenant people, Israel.
     - God is shown as the Creator of the universe, and the Creator of His people. 

   B. The title “Genesis” means “beginnings” or “source.”

   C. Genesis talks about beginnings:

      - The Creation (*chapters 1, 2*).
      - Sin – how sin entered the world (*3:1-24*).
      - The peoples of the earth (*chapters 5, 10, 11*).
      - The covenant between God and His people that started with Abraham (*12:1 – 14:24*).

2. **Authorship and Date**

   A. Moses is the author of Genesis.
   - In the Bible, Moses is said to be the author of all five books of the Law (*Jos. 1:7; Dan. 9:11-13; Joh. 7:19; Rom. 10:19*).
B. Genesis, along with the rest of the books of the Law, was written sometime around 1402 BC.\(^5\)

3. **Purpose, Themes & Structure**

A. Genesis’ purpose is to tell the history behind God’s covenant with His chosen people, Israel.

B. The themes of Genesis have to do with beginnings.
   - The beginning of the created world (1:1-2:3).
   - The beginning of the human race (2:4-25).
   - The beginning of the covenant between God and His people through Abraham (chapters 11-50).
     - A covenant is an agreement between two parties that usually requires action from one or both parties.
     - God put a covenant into action between Himself and Abraham. These were the everlasting promises that God said He would perform in His covenant with Abraham.
       - God would create a great nation through Abraham (18:18).
       - God would bless Abraham with long life (15:15), and prosperity (13:2).
       - God would make Abraham’s name live on after he died (17:5).
       - Abraham would be a blessing to others (12:8).
       - Those who blessed Abraham would be blessed (12:3).
       - Those who cursed Abraham would be cursed (12:3).
       - All the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham (12:3).
     - The covenant with Abraham extended beyond his own life on to those who also followed God.
     - God’s covenant promises were unconditional. Yet God required obedience from Abraham so he and his
family could receive the full blessings of the covenant.

- Abram and Sarai had to leave their home for a new land (12:1).
- Abraham had to be a blessing to others (12:2).
- Abraham had to walk before God and be blameless (17:1).
- Abraham had to circumcise the males in his household as a covenant sign (17:10).

C. Genesis is structured in two main parts.

- History before the Covenant People (1:1-11:9). These are the events leading up to God’s covenant with Abraham.
  - God’s creation of the universe (1:1-2:25).
  - Adam and Eve’s fall into sin (3:1-24).
  - God’s judgment through the Great Flood (6:5-8:22).
- History of the First Covenant People (11:10-50:26). These are the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.
  - These men are often called Israel’s patriarchs. A “patriarch” is a founder of a family or tribe.6
  - Israel counted Abraham as its founder. His son Isaac and grandson Jacob followed through with possessing the land of Canaan because of God’s covenant with Abraham (see Deu. 1:8).
    - In the same way, Israel said the land of Canaan was theirs because of God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
  - Although Joseph lived in Egypt as an adult, he still felt a strong connection with Canaan and asked to be buried there (50: 24-25).
  - All four of these patriarchs believed God would continue His covenant with His people.
4. **Historical Background**

A. Genesis was written at a time (about the 15\textsuperscript{th} century BC) when most people believed there was no single, true God above all others. Many people, especially in and around the ancient Middle East, believed in many gods with different degrees of power. What Genesis said about the power of the one true God, and that God was involved in human history, made its ideas unique.

5. **Development of Message**

A. Genesis introduces main sections of the book with a phrase “This is the history” or “These are the generations.”
   - There are 12 such places in Genesis.
     - Creation as a whole (1:1-2:3).
     - The heavens and earth (2:4-4:26).
     - The book of Adam (5:1-6:8).
     - The sons of Noah (10:1-11:9).
     - Shem, one son of Noah (11:20-26).
     - Terah, the father of Abraham (11:27-25:11).
     - Ishmael (25:12-18).
     - Esau (36:1-8).
     - Esau, father of the Edomites (36:9-37:1).
     - Jacob (37:2-50:26).
   - Notice that this list begins with a very broad focus of all creation and narrows its focus as it continues, ending on the people of the covenant.

6. **Theology**

A. Everything exists because of God (1:1; see Act. 17:24-28).

B. God created man in His image (1:26-28, 2:4-7).
• The image of God in man is not physical, because God is spirit (Joh. 4:24). This means the image of God in mankind is moral, intellectual, and spiritual. In these ways, people are supposed to reflect God’s character on earth.

• When God breathed into the first man, He breathed the moral, intellectual, relational and spiritual aspects of His life into mankind. These things make us completely different from the animals God created.

C. The fall of Adam and Eve opened the way for sin to control people (3:1-24). Sin does this in two ways.
   • Through self-deception. This happens when, like Eve, we choose to believe a lie about God and His ways (3:13).
   • Through self-will. This happens when, like Adam, we choose to ignore God’s authority and listen to our own desires (3:17).

D. God rules over the universe. He has the power to bless and to curse according to man’s obedience (12:1-3).

E. God has made Himself known in both word and deed to Israel’s ancestors (chapters 11 – 50).
   • The covenant between God and Abraham (15:1-21), was continued through Isaac (26:24), and Jacob (26:3-5; 35:9-13).
   • God took action to protect His covenant people (the people who descended from Abraham) in many ways. These include:
     o Protecting Abraham and Sarah from destroying the opportunity to begin their family line (12:10-20; 20:1-16).
     o Protecting Isaac and Rebekah from the anger of Abimelech the Philistine (26:6-13).
     o Protecting Jacob from the anger of Esau (33:4-11).
     o Protecting Joseph from death at the hands of his brothers (37:17-28).
o. Putting Joseph in place in Egypt to give Israel food and care during a great famine (47:1-6).

F. God has established Israel to bless the families of the earth (35:9-13).

7. Uniqueness and How to Preach It in Your New Church Plant

A. Genesis shows that everything we see or do connects back to God, who created and sustains everything.
   - Preach that God alone is the Ruler of the universe. Everything exists because of God. As Ruler, God expects people to obey Him. As our Creator, God loves and wants to bless people (47:28-50:26).
   - Preach that God is faithful to fulfill His promises. He will do what is necessary to keep His covenants (16:1-22:19).

Assignment:

Look at the passages where God states His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:1-21), and repeats it to Isaac (Gen. 26:1-5, 24), and Jacob (Gen. 26:3-5; 35:9-13). In the space below, list the covenant promises that are the same to all three men.
8. **Outline of Genesis**

A. History before the Covenant People (*1:1-11:32*).
   - Creation (*1:1-2:3*).
   - Creation of man and woman (*2:4-25*).
   - Sin and the fall (*3:1-4:26*).
   - Family histories from Adam to Noah (*5:1-32*).
   - The Flood (*6:1-9:29*).
   - Early nations and the Tower of Babel (*10:1-11:32*).

B. History of the Early Covenant People (*12:1-50:26*).
   - Abraham (*12:1-25:18*).
     - Call and Covenant by Faith (*12:1-14:24*).
     - Covenant confirmed (*15:1-17:27*).
     - Lot delivered from Sodom (*18:1-19:38*).
     - Abraham and Abimelech (*20:1-18*).
     - Isaac, the son of promise (*21:1-24:67*).
     - Abraham’s last years (*25:1-18*).
   - Isaac (*25:19-26:35*).
     - Esau and Jacob born (*25:19-28*).
     - Esau sells birthright to Jacob (*25:29-34*).
     - Isaac and Abimelech II (*26:1-16*).
     - Argument over Beersheba (*26:17-33*).
     - Esau’s wives (*26:34-35*).
   - Jacob also named Israel (*27:1-37:1*).
     - Early years (*27:1-46*).
     - Exile and journey (*28:1-22*).
     - Jacob and Laban (*29:1-33:15*).
     - Jacob returns to the Promised Land (*33:16-35:20*).
     - Families of Jacob and Esau (*35:21-37:1*).
   - Joseph (*37:2-50:26*).
     - Early years of Joseph (*37:2-36*).
     - Judah and Tamar (*38:1-30*).
     - Joseph gains favor in Egypt (*39:1-41:57*).
     - Joseph receives his brothers in Egypt (*42:1-45:15*).
     - Joseph receives Jacob in Egypt (*45:16-47:26*).
     - Jacob’s last days (*47:27-50:14*).
     - Assurance of forgiveness (*50:15-26*).
• Instructions for Conquering and Settling the Promised Land (31:1-36:15).
• Years of Sabbath and Jubilee (25:1-55).
• Blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (26:1-46).
• Vows and tithes (27:1-34).