

# The Bible's Big Story

## Introduction

### What Is An Old Testament Introduction?

Biblical Introduction is a distinct discipline within biblical studies that answers two basic questions: (1) How did we get the Bible? and (2) What is each book of the Bible about? This discipline can be further divided into two areas: general introduction and special introduction.

- **General Introduction** answers the question, “How did we get the Bible?” It specifically looks at the history, transmission, canon, translation, and preservation of the biblical text.
- **Special Introduction** answers the question, “What is the Bible about?” It considers the matters of authorship, date, purpose, theme, and overall content of individual books, as well as any special problems of interpretation.

This class will consider both of these areas; however, the primary focus will be on special introduction.

### What Is the Bible?

**Definition:** The Bible is a God-breathed account of his action in the world and His purpose with all creation. It is a collection of 66 books written by at least 40 different human authors over approximately 1,600 years.

### Foundational Presuppositions

How we approach biblical studies is fundamentally shaped by what the Bible is. Everyone has presuppositions—the only question is whether you recognize and acknowledge them. The two overriding presuppositions which will shape the content of this class are:

1. **The Bible is God's Word—divinely inspired (God-breathed) and preserved.**  
Since all of the Bible is ultimately God-breathed, then each human author, in his own time, wrote exactly what God desired. The Divine Authorship of Scripture extends to the very words, not just concepts. Although God sovereignly chose to work through various human authors, the Scriptures come from the will of God, and are not the product of mere human initiative.
2. **The Bible is true—because it is the Word of God.**  
God's Word is truth (John 17:17), and God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Since the Bible is God's Word, whatever the Bible says is true. There are good logical and rational reasons for believing the accuracy and authority of scripture, however, such evidence is not the foundation of our faith in God's Word. Ultimately, believing the Bible is tied to saving faith. The Bible is the record of who he is. Believing in Jesus requires believing in the Bible.

**The Bible is separate and unified.** The Bible consists of 66 distinct books, written in diverse genres by multiple human authors over 1,600 years. Yet it has one divine Author, one coherent message, and one grand narrative. This unity comes from divine authorship, not merely from unified subject matter. Although they may sound contradictory—both aspects are true.

**The Bible tells one unified story.** God has chosen to primarily reveal Himself through the written word. Scripture is a real, historical accounts of God's interaction with humanity throughout history. The story began at creation, centers on the work and person of Jesus Christ, and continues to the end of the age. The simplest way of stating it is that it is the story of creation, fall, and redemption—God's good creation of all things, humanity's fall in Adam, and the outworking of God's plan of redemption, which ultimately culminates in a new creation. This is the story we will be tracing through the Old Testament, as every part of Scripture contributes to this grand narrative.

### How Do We Follow the Story?

We will trace the divine story through the Old Testament in two primary ways:

#### Introduce and Survey Each Book

We will spend 1–2 weeks examining each book of the Old Testament. In our study of each book, we will consider its title, authorship (including location), date, setting (both in the ancient world and in the canon of Scripture), theme, purpose, structure, special problems of interpretation, and contribution to redemptive revelation. As Michael P.V. Barrett writes in *Old Testament Introduction: Back to Basics*, “Understanding the ‘then’ circumstances of the text is a key to transitioning to ‘now’ circumstances. Whereas truth is timeless and universal, the application of truth is often temporally and culturally restricted.”

#### Trace the Common Themes

As we move through the books of the Bible quickly from week to week, it will become easier to see common threads that run throughout all of Scripture and how they relate to one another. There are many such threads or themes, but we will focus on seven which are both prominent and intertwined:

- **Creation and Fall.** The Bible begins with God's perfect creation, where everything was “very good” and humanity lived in unbroken fellowship with God. However, through Adam's disobedience, sin entered the world, bringing death, corruption, and separation from God. This theme establishes the problem that the rest of Scripture addresses—humanity's need for redemption and restoration to right relationship with God.

- **Covenant.** God relates to His people through covenants—solemn, binding agreements that define the relationship between God and man. In Scripture, God progressively reveals His plan of redemption through these covenant relationships culminating in the New Covenant established in Christ.
- **Atonement.** Because of sin, humanity stands guilty before a holy God and deserves death. The theme of atonement runs through Scripture, showing how God provides a way for sin to be covered and guilt removed. The Old Testament sacrificial system points forward to the ultimate atoning sacrifice of Christ, who takes away sin once and for all.
- **Presence and Kingdom.** God’s presence with His people is a central theme from Eden onward. The tabernacle, temple, and eventually the incarnation of Christ demonstrate God’s desire to dwell with His people. Closely related is the kingdom theme—God’s sovereign rule over all creation mediated through covenant and ultimately fulfilled in Christ.
- **New Creation.** Just as sin brought corruption to the original creation, God’s plan of redemption includes the restoration and renewal of all creation. The prophets speak of new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells, and the curse is removed. This theme gives hope that God’s redemptive work extends beyond individual salvation to the restoration of all things.
- **Promise and Fulfillment.** From the first promise of a seed who would crush the serpent’s head, God makes promises that are progressively fulfilled throughout redemptive history. The Old Testament is full of promises—of land, descendants, blessing, a coming king, and ultimate redemption—that find their “yes” in the person and reign of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 1:20).
- **Redemption.** The overarching story of Scripture is one of redemption—God’s gracious work to deliver His people from bondage to sin and restore them to Himself. From the exodus out of Egypt to the return from exile, the Old Testament repeatedly demonstrates God’s power and willingness to redeem, all pointing to the greater redemption accomplished through Christ.

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What assumptions do you bring to the Bible when you open it to read? How did you develop these assumptions?
2. When you encounter a difficult or seemingly contradictory passage in Scripture, what is your first instinct? How does your view of biblical inspiration and inerrancy shape your response?
3. How does the principle that "Scripture interprets Scripture" challenge or confirm the way you currently study the Bible?
4. In what specific ways could understanding the Old Testament's contribution to the whole counsel of God strengthen your own discipleship and better equip you to share the gospel with unbelievers?

### What Are the Benefits?

Finally, before we conclude, let’s consider the practical benefits of such a study.

- **Increase Biblical Literacy.** Many profess faith in God revealed in the Bible yet, because of the lack of biblical literacy, they never know all that the Bible reveals about God. This class will help you gain a comprehensive overview of the Old Testament and increase your overall understanding of God’s Word.
- **Read Scripture More Profitably.** Learning about the literary structures, historical contexts, and theological themes of each book allows us to glean more from our reading. You’ll be better equipped to understand what you read and how it fits into the larger story of Scripture.
- **Become a More Skillful Interpreter.** Through this study, you will develop a better understanding of difficult passages and how biblical truths apply to your life. Understanding the background and context of each book will help you interpret Scripture more accurately.
- **Grow Your Confidence in God’s Word.** As we study together, you will see how the Old Testament’s historical reliability, internal consistency, and unified message demonstrate its trustworthiness. This will strengthen your faith and confidence in the entire Bible as God’s inspired Word.

### A Final Encouragement

The greatest benefit comes not from simply gaining biblical knowledge, but from allowing it to transform your life.

The Bible is not simply to be read for enjoyment or analyzed as literature. It is to be received as the true and full revelation of God’s character, what He requires of mankind, and His workings in the world.

Scripture can only have its full and intended effect when its truth is revealed to our minds and applied to our hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit.

*“The aim is never to become a master of the Word, but to be mastered by it.” —D.A. Carson*