THE TRUE STORY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Responding to God's Revelation and Redemption

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THE TRUE STORY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT:
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How to Use *Life Design*

LIFE DESIGN: Bible Study Designed for the Life You Live. These Bible study materials are designed to engage adult learners in inductive Bible study and in applying the truths of that study to their daily lives.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- The FOCUS of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner's learning.
- The GOAL of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Life Design* lesson has three distinct parts. GETTING STARTED is the attention-getter. The questions and activities "set the table," as it were, for the Bible study. SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES is the heart of the lesson. A series of inductive Bible study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical text. MAKING IT PERSONAL applies the truth to life.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change the focus of the application. You will find more material in the Bible study than you can cover in one class session. Ask God to help you as you tailor the lesson for your learners.

The Study Book

This leader's guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. As the teacher, you will want a copy of the Bible study. Commit to working through the questions before you plan your lesson. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. When a question in the leader's guide is picked up from the Bible study book, you will notice the question number in parentheses. The answers to the questions are usually in the lesson commentary. They are also grouped together in the back of this book.

Other Resources

If you want to use transparencies as you teach, a packet of sixteen full-color transparencies is available. If you prefer to use PowerPoint, the resource CD includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson.

Some teachers stay very close to the outline as they teach. If this is true of you, and if you want your learners to capture that outline, reproducible in-class worksheets are included on the CD. The same worksheets may be downloaded from the Web and photocopied for class members. Visit www.regularbaptistpress.org/downloads. Thank you for choosing *Life Design* teaching materials. May God richly bless you and your learners as you study and apply His Word.

Preface

The True Story of the Old Testament is an overview study of the Old Testament. It is designed to provide the student of the Bible with a panoramic picture of God's self-revelation and His redemption of sinful mankind. The Old Testament story is a true story about God and His dealings with His creation.

This course presents God's dealings with humanity in terms of His self-revelation and redemptive activities. It includes a chronological examination of God's dealings with people, especially with His people Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. It explains how God brought the world and Israel into existence. It highlights this explanation with frequent references to God's love, mercy, and grace. This course also relates how God worked faithfully with Israel and some of the important blessings He has promised to Israel—especially as seen in His covenants with Israel. And this course distinguishes God's dealings with Israel from His dealings with the church.

As an overview, this study is better understood as a "fly over the land" type of study and not a "slow drive through the scenic route" type of study. It is important that you, as the teacher, and your learners understand this design.

Expect to get from Genesis to Malachi in thirteen weeks. That is a good thing. You and your learners will gain an invaluable and comprehensive level of knowledge that will serve as a base for future Bible study. Expect to pass by or pass over many interesting "sights" that deserve a visit the next time you are in that portion of the Bible. This, too, is a good thing. The curiosity created by noting such points of interest can serve as motivation for additional study of God's Word.

Expect to experience some frustration from not having time to look more closely at some worthy person, place, or event. Once again, good value can be drawn from such frustration. The ability to think through the entire Old Testament is achieved by *not* looking at every point of interest. But the ability to think about the Old Testament as a whole will be extremely useful when you and your learners revisit Bible topics not addressed in an overview approach.

Enjoy teaching *The True Story of the Old Testament*. Enjoy the quick pace and the sharp focus on the revelation of God and the redemption of mankind.

Resources for This Course

The transparency packet for this course (RBP0102) includes a transparency on which to record the summary statements from each lesson. The transparency will help you track and review these lessons. Starting with lesson 1, use transparency 1 at the end of each lesson or at the beginning of the next lesson to record the summary statement for each lesson. You may use the suggestions in this leader's guide or ask your learners to suggest summary statements.

The Resource CD (RBP0103) for this course includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson. All of the transparencies are part of the PowerPoint presentation. The transparencies are also included on the CD as printable PDFs. If you would like to make your own transparencies or PowerPoint slides, the CD includes backgrounds ready for your own text.

To help in your promotion of this course, the CD includes a PowerPoint slide, posters, and a flyer. You can add your group's information to all of the promotional material.

The CD also provides in-class worksheets. Each in-class worksheet has a fill-in-the-blank outline that follows the corresponding outline in this leader's guide.

In addition, the CD includes a printable verse card for each lesson's key verse or verses. Blank verse cards are also included so you can enter different or additional verses for your learners to memorize.

LESSON 1

Introducing the Old Testament Story

Scripture Focus

2 Timothy 3:15–17; Psalm 119

Key Verses

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Overview

This lesson introduces some of the special blessings and challenges associated with studying the Old Testament. It introduces the topics of revelation, redemption, and history as well as the major divisions of the Old Testament.

Topic

Studying the Old Testament

Theme

Studying Old Testament books is valuable because they are God's revelation of Himself and His plan for redemption.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will value and commit to the opportunity to learn what God reveals about Himself and what He expects from believers.

Outline

I. The Value of the Old Testament
- A. A New Testament perspective
- B. An Old Testament perspective

II. Orientation to the Old Testament
- A. Major divisions of the Old Testament
  1. Law
  2. History
  3. Poetry
  4. Major Prophets
  5. Minor Prophets
- B. Other considerations for effective study
  1. Different perspectives

Materials

- **Transparencies 1 and 2**
- **Handout 1 (Current Old Testament Outlook) from resource CD**
- **2 Timothy 3:16, 17 verse card from resource CD**
- **Index cards**

2. Diverse literary styles
3. Cultural and linguistic differences

Getting Started

Impactful Art

Distribute a sheet of paper to the learners. Instruct them to sketch a picture of their favorite Old Testament account. Give them three minutes to draw. Have volunteers share their drawings with the class and explain why they chose the account they did.

Discuss: Why are narrative accounts impactful teaching tools? *(They flesh out instruction in real life. We can identify with particular characters or situations.)* **Ask:** How have Old Testament accounts impacted your life of faith? (Questions 1, 2)

Current Old Testament Outlook

Give a copy of handout 1 (Current Old Testament Outlook) to each learner. Give them two minutes to rank their level of agreement with each of the statements. Discuss responses as a class or in small groups.

Searching the Scriptures

I. The Value of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a valuable source of God's revelation for many reasons. The Old Testament is part of God's Word; thus it has inherent value. Many Biblical themes, doctrines, and motifs find the bulk of their support in the Old Testament. The Old Testament relates the beginnings of creation, sin, and Israel. The New Testament authors extensively quote and allude to Old Testament texts. The Old Testament contains hundreds of prophesies about Jesus Christ and the future. Yet, many Christians under appreciate this treasure trove of instruction.

DISCUSS: Why might believers not value the Old Testament? **ASK:** Raise your hand if chose to read the Old Testament in the past week. (Questions 3, 4)

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy there may have been a few New Testament books known to be Scripture. See 1 Timothy 5:18 which quotes Luke 10:7 as Scripture and 2 Peter 3:15, 16 which attributes canonical status to at least some of Paul's writings.

A. A New Testament perspective

READ: 2 Timothy 3:15–17. **ASK:** What Scriptures did Paul have primarily in mind in these verses? (Question 5)

The reference to Timothy's childhood communicates that Paul was thinking

primarily about the Old Testament. We can rightly extend the application of these verses to all of Scripture but we need to be careful to not lose sight of the high value Paul places on the Old Testament.

ASK: According to 2 Timothy 3:15–17, what can the Old Testament accomplish in the lives of Christians? **DISCUSS:** How does viewing these verses as primarily referring to the Old Testament change or increase your appreciation for the value of the Old Testament? (Questions 6, 7)

B. An Old Testament perspective

BIBLE STUDY: Most Bibles note the acrostic nature of Psalm 119. Assign an eight verse stanza to each learner. Instruct the learners to write down all of the benefits of the Scriptures found in their assigned stanza. After three minutes, have several learners share their lists in rapid succession in order to communicate the valuable nature of the Old Testament. (Question 8)

DISCUSS: How would you summarize Psalm 119's teaching on the Old Testament scriptures? (Question 9)

Psalm 119, the longest "chapter" in the Bible, is a hymn extolling the worth of Scripture. Nearly every verse says something about the law of God, about His precepts, or about His ordinances. In the middle of Psalm 119, a paragraph exalts the practice of meditating on God's law (119:97–104). The psalmist explained how he loved God's law and how he had made it the focus of his meditation throughout the day (119:97). God's commandments impart wisdom (119:98), insight (119:99), and understanding (119:100, 104). The psalmist rehearsed his commitment to follow God's Word (119:101, 102), and he relished the sweetness of God's Word (119:103). Christians today should approach the Old Testament with the same joy and passion. The Old Testament perspective of itself is much like Paul's perspective of the Old Testament (2 Tim. 3:15–17).

II. Orientation to the Old Testament

This course looks at the Old Testament in its entirety and relates its major truths in terms of its continuous narrative. This overall approach recognizes the singular, divine authorship of all the Old Testament books. Different holy men of God communicated the various accounts, but God by His Spirit moved the men of the Old Testament to record His message (2 Pet. 1:21).

The story of the Old Testament, then, is God's story. God revealed Himself throughout the books. It is "His story."

Introducing the major divisions, genres, historical setting, and cultural and

linguistic factors helps us appreciate the overarching story and themes found in the Old Testament. And our study will be more effective by considering them.

ASK: What difficulties do you anticipate in studying the Old Testament? (Question 10)

A. Major divisions of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is one story. But at the same time, the Old Testament is a collection of thirty-nine books with a mix of history, law, poetry, and prophecy. When we consider the variety of books in the Old Testament, it might be helpful to think of the Old Testament books sitting on a five-shelved bookcase. Each shelf represents a major division of the Old Testament.

DISCUSS: Why is an awareness of the divisions of the Old Testament an important factor in understanding particular passages? (Question 11)

1. Law

On the top shelf of the Old Testament bookshelf are five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. The shelf is labeled "The Pentateuch," which means "Five Books." Moses wrote these five books.

Genesis relates the creation of the world, the fall of humanity into sin, Noah and the Flood, the call of Abraham, and the accounts of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph). Exodus explains how God delivered Israel out of Egyptian bondage and how He gave the people His law at Mount Sinai. Leviticus records many specific laws concerning the tabernacle and ritual purity. Numbers begins with genealogies, adds more legislation, records how Israel broke the law, and how God took care of His people throughout their wilderness wanderings.

The Pentateuch is filled with examples of how people did and did not follow God. The Pentateuch is also filled with guidance. The laws in the Pentateuch are not directly applicable to Christians, since we are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14). Nevertheless, the Law of Moses—since it came from God—provides us insight into God's attributes.

DISCUSS: Name a lesson you learned from the Pentateuch that has impacted your life. Describe when and how you learned this lesson. (Question 12)

2. History

On the second shelf stand twelve books. This shelf is labeled "History." These books run from Joshua to Esther.

Joshua records the conquest of the Promised Land by the people of Israel. Judges records the cycle of sin, oppression, and deliverance in the chaotic days before Israel had a king. Ruth provides a precious story of belief and obedience during the days of the Judges.

The books 1 and 2 Samuel explain why Saul was unfit to be king of Israel and why David was fit to be king of Israel. These two books record David's ascension to the throne of Israel and the major events of his reign. The books 1 and 2 Kings explain how Israel split into the two smaller kingdoms of Israel to the north and Judah to the south, following the reign of David's son Solomon. The books 1 and 2 Kings assess the kings in terms of their faithfulness to the law of Moses. They record how ultimately both kingdoms were destroyed and people were deported because of their unfaithfulness. They also describe the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. The books 1 and 2 Chronicles relate much of the same material as 1 and 2 Kings, but the Chronicler judged the kings, especially the kings of Judah, for the ways that they treated the temple, the priests, and the sacrificial system.

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther recount the return of some of the Jews from captivity to the Promised Land. The book of Ezra, named for a priest, emphasizes the rebuilding of the temple. The book of Nehemiah, about an administrator, emphasizes the rebuilding of the wall. Esther, named for a member of a Gentile court, emphasizes God's providential care for His people as they lived among the nations.

DISCUSS: Why might knowing Israel's history be valuable for Christians? (Question 13)

3. Poetry

On the third shelf, "Poetry," are five books, which run from Job to Song of Solomon. They are all poetic in nature.

Job, a righteous man, conversed with his friends about the age-old question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" Toward the end of the book, God Himself spoke, and Job withdrew his contention with God.

The book of Psalms includes 150 of Israel's ancient hymns, written by various people and covering various topics. The book is exceedingly rich with insightful theology and self-analysis.

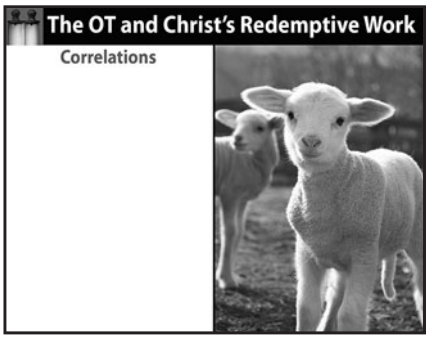
The book of Proverbs provides numerous wise sayings by Solomon and others. Ecclesiastes provides a realistic perspective on humanity's ability to answer all of life's questions. The Song of Solomon, or the Song of Songs, is composed of vivid love poetry spoken between a woman and Solomon.

ASK: Which poetry book is your favorite? Why? **DISCUSS:** Why is poetry an effective communication method? (Questions 14, 15)

4. Major Prophets

On the fourth shelf are five books. This shelf is labeled "Major Prophets." These books are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Lamentations, the only book not bearing the name of a prophet, is a poetic lament for the destruction of Jerusalem, written most likely by Jeremiah, the weeping prophet.

Dividing the Old Testament into sections is an ancient practice. Already by the time our Lord ministered upon the earth, Jewish people were dividing their Bibles (the Old Testament) into three major divisions: Law (the Pentateuch), Prophets (History and Major and Minor Prophets), and Writings (the Psalms and some other books). This ancient tripartite division of the Old Testament appears in Luke 24:44.



5. Minor Prophets

On the fifth shelf sit twelve books, the "Minor Prophets." These books run from Hosea through Malachi. The books may be short in length, but they contain some of the most gripping prophetic material in all of Scripture. In the Jewish Bible, these books are sometimes considered as one book titled "The Twelve."

ASK: How have the fulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament strengthened your faith? **ASK:** Describe a time when you used fulfilled prophecy in an evangelistic conversation. (Questions 16, 17)

B. Other considerations for effective study

There is no ignoring the fact that the Old Testament is a collection of ancient literary works. We can rejoice that God has given us the Holy Spirit to help us understand Scripture (Eph. 1:17, 18; 1 Cor. 2:10–13). We can also increase our awareness of the distinctive characteristics of the Old Testament and be better equipped to learn from this portion of God's Word.

1. Different perspectives

The practices of ancient Israel differ from those of the church. For this reason, the Old Testament can seem detached, almost otherworldly. We rightly acknowledge that we are not under the law of the Old Testament (Rom. 6:14). The tabernacle, temple, feasts, sacrificial system, and priestly order are not part of God's instructions for the church. We need to acknowledge these differences as well as appreciate them. While the practices of ancient Israel are different than our practices as believers today, we can gain a greater understanding of Jesus Christ and His redemptive work.

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 2. **DISCUSS:** What are some correlations between the practices of ancient Israel and Jesus' redemptive work? (Question 18) (Record answers on the transparency.)

2. Diverse literary styles

Those who decide to read through the Old Testament may find that the diversity of the literary styles confusing. Recognizing the assortment of literary styles is essential to effective Bible interpretation.

Narratives record accounts. Every narrative has three components: plot, characters, and setting. The plot is the storyline; it reveals the relationships among the characters in the setting of their lives. While reading the accounts of the Bible, readers should look for repeated words or phrases. The repetitive phrasing makes accounts more memorable; the repetition of words or themes gives structure to longer narratives.

When observing narrative literature, we should remember some keys points. First, narratives are primarily accounts of how God dealt with mankind. We

need to look for God in every account we study. His dealings with mankind will almost always translate to some degree into our lives. The ways people related to God in the accounts are meant to be examples for us.

Second, narratives have value as they are; we do not have to read symbolic meanings into them. Some Old Testament narratives, however, illustrate New Testament truth. Those narratives become symbols of spiritual truth only if the Scriptures designate them as such.

Third, narratives do not teach doctrine directly, rather they illustrate doctrine taught elsewhere. For instance, the book of Judges shows what happens when people deliberately turn their backs on Biblical truth (Judg. 2:10–23).

Fourth, we need to look at the facts as they are presented without getting sidetracked by what is not presented. God never intended for us to know what He did not reveal to us.

Fifth, we need to remember that the stories fall into different dispensations, or systems of revealed commands and promises regulating human affairs. What God expected during a past dispensation may not be what He expects today.

Biblical poetry helps us understand the total experience of the life of faith. It assists us in expressing our emotions to God and others, teaching us to trust and pray.

The primary characteristic of Biblical poetry is parallel structure, where two thoughts are placed in relationship to each other. This literary structure of pairing provides an immediate context in which to interpret the verse.

Observing parallelism is important. It will tell us how to interpret the phrases in poetry. But we have to be careful when the poetry uses picturesque language. We cannot take the word pictures literally. Rather, we should determine what truths the word pictures reveal.

Wisdom literature is poetry that teaches us how to live with Biblical skillfulness. It shows us how to apply truth to reality. We find wisdom literature in the startling directness of Proverbs, teaching how the naïve must make every effort to become wise. The philosophical meanderings of Ecclesiastes and the dialogues of Job with his friends are also wisdom literature.

Prophetic literature contains predictions of future events. Some of those predictions have already come to pass. The prophecies yet to be fulfilled look ahead to the day when God will cleanse and restore His creation and when Christ will rule.

Some of the prophetic literature is apocalyptic. The word "apocalyptic" means "hidden." The writer's meaning is hidden in the symbols he used. Apocalyptic literature often employs figurative or symbolic language in mind-stretching ways. Examples include Ezekiel's four living creatures (Ezek. 10) and Zechariah's vision of the man among the myrtle trees riding a red horse (Zech. 1:7–17). These symbols go beyond the normal use of figures of speech in poetry.

We must be as humble as the original writers when it comes to explaining apocalyptic literature. They needed God to provide revelation about the signs and symbols. Where God has supplied that revelation, the writers decoded the revelation for us so that we could understand the normal meaning. Where

He has not decoded it, we must wait. He will reveal the normal meaning as the end-time events unfold.

When observing prophetic literature, we need to understand when the prophets ministered and to what future events their prophecies pointed. We also need to be careful not to get lost in the obscure when observing prophetic books. We should understand what we can and move on to interpretation and application.

DISCUSS: Why does recognizing genre help believers understand what they are reading? (Question 19)

3. Cultural and linguistic differences

The Old Testament way of life seems far removed from that of modern times. For example, family members sometimes lived in separate tents (Gen. 31:33); real estate transactions entailed long verbal bartering exchanges (Gen. 23); a widow took off her brother-in-law's sandal and spit in his face for refusing to marry her (Deut. 25:7, 9; cf. Ruth 4:7). Customs like this seem so alien to modern life that they may perplex us.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek—an Indo-European language. Both Greek and English are Indo-European languages. The Old Testament, on the other hand, was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Hebrew and Aramaic are Semitic languages. Therefore, English is closer to Greek than to Hebrew or Aramaic. This means that the Old Testament, even in the English translation, can sometimes be perplexing. Hebrew seems to move along rather haltingly, with short, staccato-like phrases. Notice, for example, how often the word "and" appears in the Old Testament (KJV). Also, Hebrew prefers repetition. Good Hebrew, as opposed to good English, might read, "And he opened up his mouth, and he spoke, saying"; or, "And he lifted up his eyes, and he saw, and behold." With a little patience, however, readers of English can soon discover the pleasant way that Hebrew enables memorable storytelling.

Making It Personal

Use these two activities to help each learner value the study of the Old Testament as an opportunity to learn what God revealed about Himself and what He expects from believers.

More/Less

Write "more" on one side of index cards and the word "less" on the opposite side. Make one card for each learner. Distribute the cards to your learners. They will hold up the appropriate side of the card to describe how their perspective on the Old Testament changed during the lesson. Use the following statements or create your own.

- My appreciation for the Old Testament is …

• My knowledge of the Old Testament's structure is …
• My interest in studying the Old testament is …
Discuss volunteers reasoning for their answers.

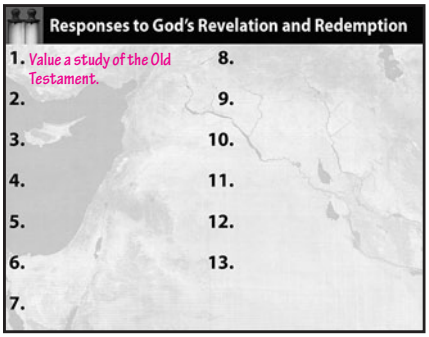
Ask: Why should we value a study of the Old Testament? (Questions 20) Invite several to share their reasons as a means of encouragement to others.

Statement

Direct your learners to complete the following statement: "Based on the personal value that a study of the Old Testament has to me, I choose to commit to this study. I will seek to carry out this commitment by . . . " (Question 21)

Review Transparency

Use transparency 1 to review the response for this lesson: Value a study of the Old Testament.

Memory Verses

Distribute copies of the 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 verse card from the resource CD. Encourage the learners to memorize the verses.