

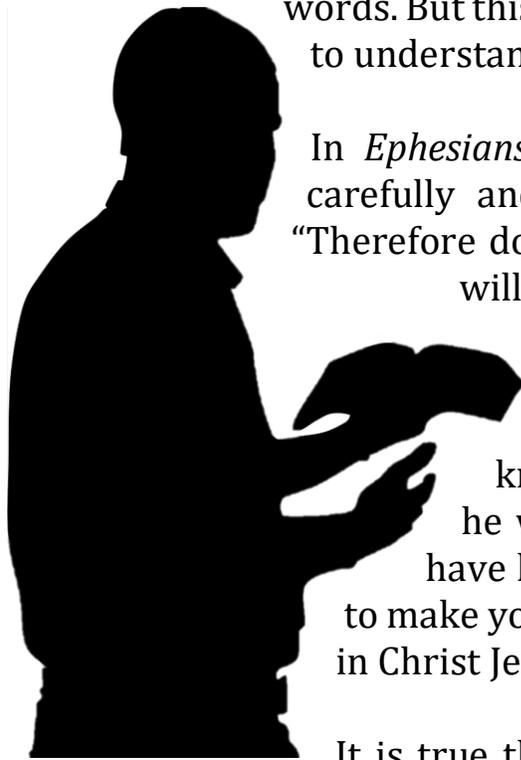
Unlocking The Bible

Lesson 1

Section 1

Understanding the Bible

Do you understand the Bible? Most people must honestly say no. Many people are taught that the Bible *cannot* be understood without some miraculous aid, or at least a special college education. Thus, most people leave the task of understanding the Bible to preachers, priests, or some other person who can communicate the *important* parts in simpler words. But this is not God's will! God wants all His people to understand His Word.



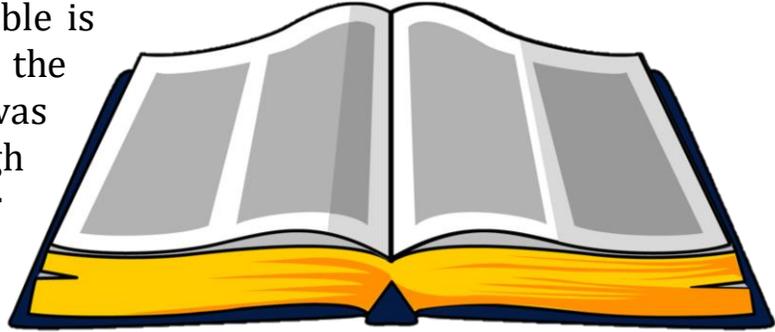
In *Ephesians* 5.17, after exhorting Christians to live carefully and with wisdom, the Apostle Paul says, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

In *2 Timothy* 3.15, the Apostle Paul remarks to one man how he was able to know the meaning of scripture, even when he was a young child: "...from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

It is true that some things in the Bible are "hard to understand" (*2 Peter* 3.16) and one may have difficulty without someone to guide or teach (*Acts* 8.30-31), but the Apostle Paul expressed confidence that his audience "when [they] read, [they might] understand [his] knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (*Ephesians* 3.4). This Bible Study is designed to equip Bible *readers* with the necessary tools to become effective Bible *students*.

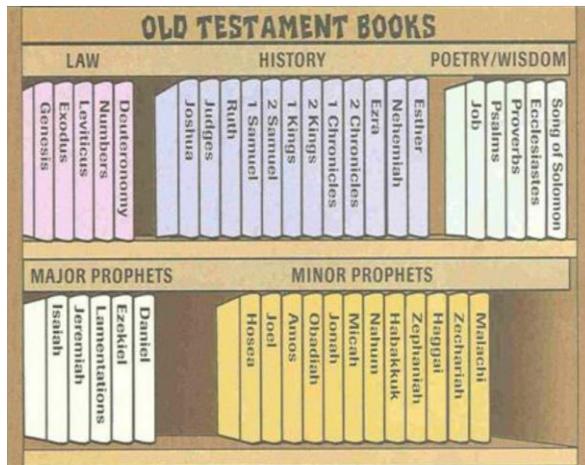
Getting Acquainted with the Bible

The word Bible means “*book*”. Why would we call one book “The Book”? Because the Bible is a book like no other! It is the Book of Books. As you read and study the Bible, you will find internal marks of its supernatural origin and nature. The Bible is God’s Word. Originally, the message of the Bible was communicated through speech, or orally. Over time, God had men write down all the words needed to communicate his teachings, testimonies, instructions, and promises (*2 Timothy 3.16-17*). For this reason, the Bible is sometimes called: *The Word of God* and *Scripture*.



The Bible is not, in fact, one book. The Bible is a collection of 66 writings: some books, some letters, some post cards. These books were written by God’s earthly representatives: The Apostles and Prophets. Although there are no living Apostles or Prophets on the earth today, their teachings and guidance are still with us through the Scriptures. The writings of the Apostles and Prophets were compiled into one collection under their superintendence by the authority of the Holy Spirit, and God promised to providentially preserve His Word for all time (*1 Peter 1.24-25*)! We can rest assured that we have the true Word of God today in our copies of the Bible.

The Bible has one major division within its library: 1) the Old Testament, and 2) the New Testament. The purpose of this lesson is to introduce you to these two collections and to explain the difference between them.



The Old Testament library contains 39 books. These books may be subdivided into four categories: 1) 5 books of Law; 2) 12 books of History; 3) 5 books of Wisdom Literature; 4) 17 books of Prophecy.

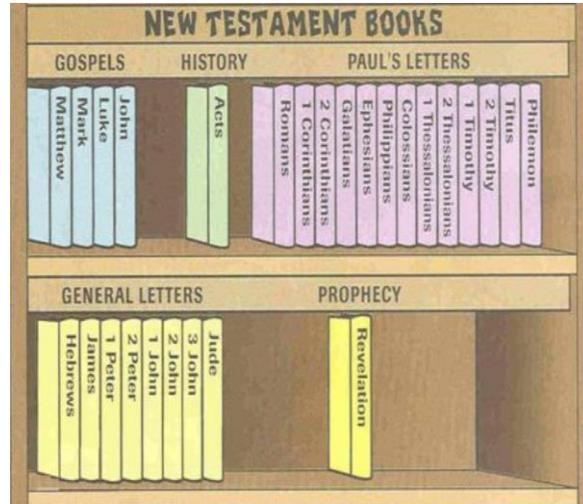
Generally, the first five books of the Old Testament (*Genesis* – *Deuteronomy*) are called the *Books of Law*. These books contain the foundational teaching of God’s will for His old covenant people – the Nation of Israel. Although they are called the *Books of Law*, these books also contain stories, census information, and genealogies – in addition to legal codes.

The books of *Joshua* – *Esther* are *Books of History*. These books tell the history of the Israelite Nation from its origin through approximately 430 B.C.

The books of *Job* – *Song of Solomon* contain inspired counsel and guidance for the affairs of life such as marriage, raising children, growing old, dealing with difficulties, etc. Thus, these books are often called *Wisdom Literature*. Much of the Wisdom Literature is written in poetic style.

Finally, the books of *Isaiah* – *Malachi* are the *Books of Prophecy* in the Old Testament. Mostly, these books record God’s messages to Israel and Judah calling them back to obedience to His teachings. A prophetic message was called an *oracle*. Some of the Old Testament prophecies were predictions about the future, and some of them were specific predictions about Jesus and His Church. The prophecies of the Old Testament have all been fulfilled and are wonderful proofs of the Bible’s inspiration.

The New Testament library contains 27 books. These books may also be subdivided into four categories: 1) 4 Gospels; 2) 1 book of History; 3) 21 Letters; 4) 1 book of Prophecy.



The books of *Matthew – John* are called *The Gospels*. Sometimes these are called biographies of Jesus, but they are not like normal biographies. The Gospels tell us very little about Jesus’ early life. Many things Jesus said and did are not recorded (*John 20.30-31 & 21.25*). The purpose of the Gospels is to tell us about Jesus’ ministry and especially about His death and resurrection. The word gospel means “good news.”

The book of *Acts of the Apostles* (called *Acts* for short) tells the history of the Church of Christ. This book tells how people became Christians and how congregations were established and organized by focusing on the experiences of some of the Apostles (primarily Peter and Paul).

The books of *Romans – Jude* are letters, also called *epistles*, written to local churches and individual Christians to explain Christian doctrine and offer guidance for living and service to God. The book of *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, sometimes called *The Apocalypse*, is the New Testament book of prophecy. It explains, in highly symbolic language, how God delivers His people from their enemies.

Why Should We Study the Bible?

We should study the Bible because the Bible is the Word of God and God is our Creator! If we want to know the reason for our existence, the Bible gives us the only true answer (*2 Timothy 3.16-17*)! The Bible is also a message of God's love for us. Without reading the Scriptures, we can never comprehend how much God cares about us (*1 Corinthians 2.9-10*). One of the simplest, yet most profound Christian songs reminds us of this truth:

**“Jesus loves me, this I know:
for the Bible tells me so!”**

The Bible will judge us in the Last Day. If we are ignorant of the Bible, we cannot prepare ourselves for eternity. (*John 12.48; Romans 2.16*)

He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words,
has that which judges him—the word that I have
spoken will judge him in the last day.

In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by
Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

Section 2

The Difference in the Old and New Testaments

Thus far, we have noticed that our Bible consists of two collections of books called the Old and New Testaments. In this section, we shall consider the meaning of those terms and different purposes for those two sections of the Holy Scripture.

“In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old.”

The words *testament* and *covenant* are used interchangeably in the Bible. A *testament* is “a written declaration of one’s will” (Webster). *Covenant* is an ancient word for a contract. The Old Testament may also be called the Old Covenant. The New Testament may also be called the New Covenant. The Old Testament scriptures were God’s written declaration of His will to the Israelite Nation. They expressed the promises and the terms and conditions of God’s covenant with that people. The Old Covenant is also called *The Law of Moses* (*Deuteronomy* 5.1-22).

“By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.”

God chose the Nation Israel for a temporary service. Through that nation, the Messiah would be born (*Romans* 9.4-5). After Jesus was born, God’s special purpose for Israel was completed and today all nations are made one in Jesus Christ (*Galatians* 3.26-28). Since God’s mission for Israel was temporary, His covenant with them was temporary as well. When Jesus the Messiah came, He took the Old Covenant out of the way and replaced it with the New Covenant: A covenant for all nations. Read *Hebrews* 8.6-13 and *Romans* 7.1-4.

Hebrews 8.6-13

The writer of Hebrews shows that the ministry of Jesus Christ is superior to that of the Levitical Priesthood (the priestly system under the Old Covenant). The reason for this conclusion is: “He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises” (verse 6). The scripture goes on to say that God found fault with the first covenant, and God declared that He would make a new one. The New Covenant would be different from the Old: 1) it would be a *spiritual* law, placed in the minds of the people; 2) it would be *personal*, based on individual faith so that all would know the Lord; 3) it would be *merciful* – based on the forgiveness of sins and resulting in eternal salvation. *Hebrews 8.13* clearly says that the New Covenant made the first covenant old and obsolete – ready to vanish away. Thus, the New Covenant replaced the Old.

Romans 7.1-4

In this passage, the Apostle Paul explains how Christ freed the Jews from the obligations and condemnation of the Law of Moses (the Old Covenant). Paul makes his case by an analogy to marriage. A wife may have only one husband at a time – to be married to two men at one time would make her an adulteress. However, if her husband died she would then be free to marry another man. Just so, the Jews could not be under the Old and New Covenants at the same time, because the Old and New Covenants have different promises, different purposes, and different commandments. To become Christians, the Jews had to “become dead to the law through the body of Christ.” The New Covenant, or Testament, came into force through Christ’s death on the cross (*Hebrews 9.16-17*). The work of Jesus and the gospel made the Jews free from the Law and put them into a new arrangement: The New Covenant of Jesus Christ.

These and other passages show that the Old Covenant, and all of its laws, instructions, and authority, was only given for a limited time to the Israelite Nation. When the Messiah came, the Old Covenant was taken away and replaced with the New Covenant. The Law of Moses was replaced with the Law of Christ (*Galatians 6.2*).

Section 3

The Purpose of the Old Testament for Christians

We have learned that the Old Covenant was for the Nation Israel during their special period of service and was taken out of the way and replaced with a New Covenant. Considering this information, one question remains: Is there any value for Christians in studying the Old Testament? The answer is yes.

In *Romans* 15.4, the Apostle Paul, having just quoted from the Old Testament book of *Psalms*, says: “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

Contextually, these writings from “before” are the Old Testament scriptures. While not a source of authority, they offer learning, comfort, and hope to Christian readers.

For whatever
things were written
before were written
for our learning...

All these things
happened to them as
examples, and they
were written for our
admonition...

In *1 Corinthians* 10.11, the Apostle Paul, having just recounted several events from the history of Israel, says, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

As Christians, we may learn valuable history, lessons about service to God, and lessons about the danger of sin from the Old Testament. We find prophecies in the Old Testament that confirm our faith in Jesus as the Messiah. We find confirmation of God’s covenant faithfulness by reading of His faithfulness to others in the past. We learn about the nature of God through the Old Testament. Although his commandments and laws are different for us today, His attitude toward obedience and disobedience remains the same.

Conclusion

Christians are not under the Old Covenant – Christians are under the New Covenant. Christians live, work, worship, and serve according to the teachings of the New Testament Scripture. The New Testament is the written declaration of Jesus' will for our lives.

A failure to distinguish between the Old and New Covenants has caused much religious division and the teaching of many errors. Many denominations create confusion by borrowing practices from the Old Testament and putting them into Christian worship and living. If Christians reject the authority of Jesus Christ and choose instead to follow the teachings and instructions of Moses – will God be pleased? Let God Himself answer:

“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”

Matthew 17.5

