

Overview of the Old Testament
Course Syllabus
Jeff Duerler

Course Description:

This course offers a deep and practical introduction to the Old Testament, exploring its historical, cultural, and theological significance to help students develop a greater understanding of the Old Testament's message and relevance for today.

Course objectives:

- Become more familiar with the nature and significance of the Old Testament
- Appreciate the transformative role of the Old Testament
- Gain greater confidence in understanding and applying the Old Testament
- Be able to argue for the personal relevance of the Old Testament for followers of Jesus today
- Have more motivation to read, reflect on, and apply Old Testament teachings to your life and in your ministry

Lecture Series:

- Lesson One: Introduction to the Old Testament
- Lesson Two: Relevance and Applicability Today
- Lesson Three: Understanding Culture and Genre
- Lesson Four: Making Sense of the Laws and Killing
- Lesson Five: Theological Implications
- Lesson Six: Preaching and Teaching the Old Testament

Course requirements:

- Watching the course lectures (there are 6 course lectures)
- Attendance in cohort discussions (there are 2 cohort discussion meetings)
- Read selected portions of the Old Testament: 10 hours (there is a reading plan below; read 1.5 hours per week)
- Memorize ten verses
- Pass final exam

Memory Verses:

- Genesis 3:15
- Genesis 12:2-3
- Joshua 21:45
- 2 Samuel 7:12-13
- 2 Chronicles 36: 15-16
- Hebrews 8:7-8

Digging Deeper--Recommended Readings:

I. Bibles with Notes

NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible

- Renowned for cultural and historical insights, highly praised across academic and lay audiences.
- Frequently described as a “go-to” resource for understanding the ancient context of Scripture.

ESV Archaeology Study Bible

- Won the ECPA Bible of the Year in 2018 and delivers deep archaeological insight with extensive visuals.

The Archaeological Study Bible (NIV-based)

- Known for its richly illustrated archaeological content.

NET Bible with Translator's Notes

- Includes 60,000+ translator's notes explaining, cultural background, idioms and metaphors in the ancient world, alternative renderings, why translators chose certain words

SBL Study Bible (New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition)

- A newer academic-focused edition from the Society of Biblical Literature; highly regarded in scholarly circles.

JPS Jewish Study Bible

- An essential resource for understanding the Hebrew Bible through the lens of Jewish scholarship.

II. Overview Textbooks (Big-Picture Surveys)

Hill & Walton – A Survey of the Old Testament (3rd ed.)

- Audience: Bible college and seminary students. Widely adopted in evangelical seminaries.
- Accessibility: Moderate; suitable for lay leaders and teachers.
- Style: Textbook format with charts, visuals, and summaries.
- Approach: Book-by-book overview of historical, literary, and theological content.

Arnold & Beyer – Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey (3rd ed., Baker Academic)

- Why It's Used:
 - Very user-friendly and visually rich.
 - Includes summaries, review questions, application prompts, and integrated archaeology.
 - Companion videos and workbook make it excellent for classroom or group use.
- Best For: New Bible students, church-based cohorts, and lay leaders.
- Difficulty: Easy to moderate.

III. Interpretation & Application (*Understanding the Message Today*)

Duvall & Hays – Grasping God's Word (4th ed.)

- Audience: College students, lay leaders, and serious Bible readers.
- Accessibility: Very approachable; widely used in churches and Bible studies.
- Style: Step-by-step method with lots of examples.
- Approach: Teaches practical skills for interpretation and application.

Fee & Stuart – How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth (4th ed., 2014)

- Audience: Lay readers, students, pastors.
- Why It's Great: Probably the most accessible and practical introduction to biblical genres.
- Approach: Focuses on understanding different literary types (narrative, poetry, prophecy, wisdom, apocalyptic) to improve interpretation.
- Difficulty: Easy; excellent for beginners or group use.

Walton & Hill – Old Testament Today: A Journey from Ancient Context to Contemporary Relevance

- Why It's Used:
 - Connects OT meaning to modern application.

- Emphasizes genre, themes, and theology rather than just chronology.
- Best For: Lay leaders and students who want to bridge ancient meaning and modern life.
- Difficulty: Moderate.

James L. Kugel – *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*

- Audience: Thoughtful laypeople, pastors, and academics interested in interpretation.
- Style: Conversational and narrative-driven but intellectually rigorous.
- Approach: Compares ancient Jewish readings with modern critical scholarship.
- Difficulty: Moderate to challenging.

IV. Cultural & Historical Backgrounds (*Understanding the Ancient World*)

Greer, Hilber, Walton – *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament (2018)*

- Best For: Visual learners who want a modern, highly illustrated introduction.
- Strength: Broad cultural and historical overviews from top evangelical scholars.

John Walton – *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament (2nd ed., 2018)*

- Best For: Understanding the worldview, religion, and cosmology of Israel's neighbors.
- Approach: Shows how the OT interacts with and differs from ANE beliefs.

Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas – *IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*

- Audience: Pastors, teachers, and lay Bible readers.
- Style: Verse-by-verse insights, concise and practical.
- Approach: Gives historical and cultural context to explain OT passages.
- Best For: Using alongside regular Bible reading or teaching prep.

IV. Literary & Structural Tools (*How the Bible Is Written*)

David A. Dorsey – *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament (2001)*

- Focus: Explores patterns like chiasm, symmetry, parallelism, and book-level architecture.
- Strength: Helps readers see the OT's intentional design and composition.
- Best For: Teachers, preachers, and serious Bible students.

Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (1998)

- Audience: Pastors, teachers, and Bible readers wanting literary and symbolic insights.
- Approach: Explores metaphors, motifs, images, and symbols throughout Scripture.
- Best For: Sermon prep, creative teaching, and literary analysis.

Digging Deeper--Recommended Videos:

- <https://bibleproject.com/videos/collections/old-testament/>
- Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1C3q3Zr_R8E
- John Currid, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEcX5jLqGJE>
- John H. Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtQPov75d-c>
- G. K. Beale, *The Old Testament in the New*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zciDJHnqOGc>

10 Hour Old Testament Reading Plan
Jeff Duerler, Renew University

Using an average reading speed of ~200 words/minute, ≈ 12,000 words per hour
Total: ~120,000 words ≈ ~100–110 chapters.

The Torah (Genesis → Deuteronomy)

35 chapters (~3 hours)

The foundation: creation, covenant, law, and God's presence.

| <u>Theme</u> | <u>Chapter(s)</u> | <u>Why It Matters</u> |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Creation & Fall | Genesis 1–3 | The story begins — creation, humanity, sin, promise. |
| God's Covenant with Abraham | Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22 | Election of Abraham; God's promises drive the OT. |
| Joseph & God's Providence | Genesis 37, 45, 50 | God works through suffering for redemption. |
| Exodus & Covenant | Exodus 3, 12, 14, 19–20, 34 | God delivers Israel, gives the Law, and reveals Himself. |
| God's Presence | Exodus 40 | Tabernacle filled with God's glory. |
| Holiness & Worship | Leviticus 16 | Day of Atonement — central theology of sacrifice. |
| Testing & Faithfulness | Numbers 13–14, 21 | Israel's rebellion vs. God's grace. |
| The Shema & Covenant Renewal | Deut. 6, 30 | Love God wholeheartedly; blessings & curses. |

The Prophets (Former + Latter)

25 chapters (~3 hours)

God's messengers interpret Israel's history and reveal His plans.

| <u>Theme</u> | <u>Chapter(s)</u> | <u>Why It Matters</u> |
|------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Israel's Golden Age | 2 Samuel 7 | God's covenant with David — foundation for the Messiah. |
| Elijah vs. Idolatry | 1 Kings 18 | God's power over false gods at Mount Carmel. |
| Isaiah's Vision of God | Isaiah 6 | Holiness and commissioning of a prophet. |
| Messianic Hope | Isaiah 9, 11, 53 | Prophecies of the coming King and suffering servant. |
| God's Justice & Mercy | Isaiah 55 | Invitation to return and receive God's grace. |
| The New Covenant | Jeremiah 31:31–34 | Promise of a transformed heart and Spirit-led obedience. |
| Hope in Exile | Ezekiel 36–37 | God breathes new life into dry bones; renewal for Israel. |
| Justice & Humility | Micah 6:6–8 | God's heart for justice and mercy distilled. |
| The Day of the Lord | Joel 2 | Future restoration and the Spirit poured out. |

The Writings (Psalms, Wisdom, & Narrative)

35 chapters (~3 hours)

Worship, wisdom, and God's faithfulness amid real life.

| <u>Theme</u> | <u>Chapter(s)</u> | <u>Why It Matters</u> |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Worship & Trust | Psalms 1, 23, 51, 73, 103, 139 | Foundational prayers shaping Israel's faith. |
| Suffering & God's Sovereignty | Job 1–2, 38–42 | God's wisdom beyond human understanding. |
| Wisdom for Living | Proverbs 1–4, 8–9 | The fear of the Lord as the path to life. |
| Life's Meaning & Mystery | Ecclesiastes 1, 3, 12 | Wrestling with meaning, mortality, and hope. |
| God's Hidden Providence | Esther 3–4, 7–8 | God rescues His people even when He's unnamed. |
| Faithfulness in Exile | Daniel 1, 3, 6, 7 | God rules history; the Son of Man vision. |
| Rebuilding & Renewal | Nehemiah 8–9 | God's Word revives His people. |

The Grand Story Tied Together

10 chapters (~1 hour)

Finish with passages that summarize the OT's meaning and anticipate Jesus.

| <u>Theme</u> | <u>Chapter(s)</u> | <u>Why It Matters</u> |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--|
| Covenant Renewal | Joshua 24 | God's faithfulness demands loyalty. |
| God's Redemption Plan | Ruth 1, 4 | A Moabite joins God's family, foreshadowing Christ. |
| Messianic Expectation | Zechariah 9, 12, 14 | The humble King, pierced one, and coming restoration. |
| The Coming Messenger | Malachi 3–4 | The OT closes anticipating a prophet who prepares the way. |