

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.