

3 Things You Probably Don't Know About the Old Testament

Roughly three-fourths of the Bible is found in the Old Testament:

- Books: The New Testament has 27 (41 percent of the total); the Old Testament 39 (59 percent).
- Chapters: The New Testament has 260 (21 percent); the Old Testament 529 (79 percent).
- Verses: The New Testament has 7,957 (26 percent); the Old Testament 23,145 (74 percent).

Most Christians, however, spend the bulk of their Bible-reading time in the New Testament. If you're one of them, then you may not be intimately familiar with what was, in the time of Jesus, the entire Bible.

Here are three things that you may not know about the Old Testament.

1. It Is the Source of Many Expressions We Still Use Today

While familiarity with the Old Testament is fading, we still use many expressions that come from the Bible's oldest books. Here are some examples:

- "forbidden fruit" (Gen. 2:17 and 3:3): The term "forbidden fruit" is not in the text but is inferred from the story.
- "scapegoat" (Lev. 16:9-10): It was a real goat, used as a sin offering.
- "How the mighty ... have fallen!" (2 Sam. 1:19): So said David when he learned that Saul and Jonathan were dead.
- "nothing but skin and bones" and "by the skin of my teeth" (Job 19:20): Explaining why even his closest friends wanted nothing to do with him, Job said, "My

bones stick to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.”

- “broken heart” or “broken-hearted” (Ps. 34:18).
- “bite the dust” (Ps. 72:9): Most translations have God’s enemies licking, not biting, the dust, but the implication is the same.
- “at their wits’ end” (Ps. 107:27, NIV): So were men who reeled and staggered like drunks.
- “Pride goes before a fall” (Prov. 16:18, MEV): “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”
- “for everything there is a season” (Eccl.3:1): Much of this chapter became the lyrics to the song “Turn! Turn! Turn!” by The Byrds.
- “eat, drink, and be merry” (see Eccl. 8:15).
- “There’s nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9c).
- “fly in the ointment” (Eccl. 10:1): Just as dead flies “cause a stench” in the perfumer’s ointment, so “a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.”
- “drop in a bucket” (Isa. 40:15): Compared to God, the nations are a drop in (or from) a bucket, or like dust on the scales.
- “See eye to eye” (Isa. 52:8)
- “Rise and shine” (Isa. 60:1)
- “Can the leopard change his spots?” (Jer. 13:23)
- “The writing is on the wall.” (Dan. 5): The handwriting on the wall spelled doom for Belshazzar the Chaldean king.

2. Most of Its Heroes Are Flawed

Throughout the Old Testament, the followers of God performed amazing feats, such as these:

- Abraham: By trusting in and being obedient to God, Abraham became a father at the age of 100, and his descendants became the nation of Israel (the new name given to his grandson Jacob by God).

- Moses: Moses led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and through the wilderness to the edge of the promised land.
- Gideon: Led by Gideon, a band of only 300 men defeated a Midianite army of tens of thousands.
- Samson: Deceived by Delilah and blinded, Samson killed 3,000 Philistines by collapsing a roof on them—and himself.
- David: A shepherd boy named David killed a mighty, giant warrior named Goliath by slinging a stone into his forehead.

After reading or hearing these and other stories of Old Testament heroes, it's easy to miss the fact that most of these heroes were flawed. For example:

- Abraham: Twice, when he feared that a foreign ruler would kill him to get his wife, Abraham falsely stated that Sarah was not his wife but his sister.
- Moses: When God called Moses to lead the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, Moses gave God a string of excuses for why he couldn't lead and then concluded with, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."
- Gideon: Gideon gave similar responses to an angel who told Gideon that he would lead God's people. Even after Gideon did one task for God and emerged unharmed, he asked God for a sign that God would save Israel by Gideon's hand. When God complied, Gideon asked God for another sign.
- Samson: God gave Samson great power, but Samson took it for granted and led a sinful life, expecting God to bail him out again and again. When Samson told Delilah that the secret of his strength was his long hair, God allowed the Philistines to overpower Samson, gouge out his eyes and take him as a prisoner.
- David: Lounging at home while his army was off at war, David, the king of Israel, had sex with Bathsheba, who

was married to Uriah, a faithful fighter in David's army. When he realized that he had gotten Bathsheba pregnant, David called Uriah home and tried to get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba. When Uriah refused and asked to be sent back to battle, David sent orders to leave Uriah exposed in battle so that he would be killed. David then took Bathsheba as his wife.

Throughout the Old Testament, God used flawed men and women to do His will. That should give us hope that God can use flawed people like us to do His will today.

3. It Is Filled with Encouragement

It's impossible to miss the power of God in the Old Testament. Here are some examples:

- When humanity turned wicked, God flooded the entire earth, with Noah and his family the only human survivors.
- When people tried to build a tower to reach the heavens, God scattered them and confused their language.
- When Pharaoh refused to grant freedom to the Hebrew slaves, God unleashed 10 plagues, the final one being the death of every firstborn son, which caused Pharaoh to relent. And when Pharaoh's army pursued the freed slaves, God opened the Red Sea for the Israelites and closed it on the army.
- When the Israelites entered the promised land, God gave them victory after victory, including knocking down the walls that surrounded the city of Jericho.

Amid all the mayhem and bloodshed, you can miss the bigger story of the Old Testament: God loves the people He has created and, even when those people turn their backs on Him, God offers forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and restoration to those who return to Him.

When I set out write a devotional of encouragement for men, my

plan was to use verses from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Once I got immersed in the Old Testament, however, I found more than enough encouraging verses and passages there.

Don't believe me? Check out *Daily Strength for Men*. And rediscover the Old Testament. {eoa}

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