

Better Understanding of the Old Testament

Testament means covenant , and it has two meanings:

1. **Agreement** as with Noah , when the Lord said to him “*But I will establish My covenant with you;....(Ge. 6:18)* .
2. **Commandment** as when Moses consecrated the book of commandments “ *Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient."* (Ex. 24:7) .

Covenants' Aim: The aim of the covenants is the salvation and return back of the lost human being to consolation with God and to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Old Testament(first) : refer to all the covenants between God and the human beings before the incarnation of Jesus Christ , like

- ❖ the covenant that “ ...Lord God never again cut off the flesh by the water of the flood , set His rainbow in the cloud ...” (Gen.9:11-13).
- ❖ The covenant of circumcision between God and Abraham and his descendents to be their God and to give them the land of Canaan (Gen.17:7-14)
- ❖ The covenant given to Moses (Ex. 20 , Leviticus)

New Testament (second) : refer to the perfection of all covenants given to us in Jesus Christ (covenant of grace)

The Old Testament of the Scripture is the record of the Old covenants, the people who received them , their response to the covenants and how Lord God deal with them either when they obeyed or disobeyed.

The New Covenant of the Scripture is the record of the grace of Our God who send our Saviour Jesus Christ to redeem us and return us back to our rank as children of God.

God , Human race and Satan

There is a continuous war between God and Satan. “ ...the Lord will have war with Amalek (representing Satan) from generation to generation “(Ex.17:16) till the final victory of Jesus Christ in His next coming “ the devil ...was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are.....” (Rev. 20:10). Our Lord in His great love to mankind wants everyone to be saved (1Tim. 2:4), but the devil working hard to deceit everyone to leave the Saviour and to share him his eternal torments .So human being will be all the time struggling in this battle , but his victory will be through the grace of the Lord.

The Plan Of God for Our Salvation

1. Choose a true believer (Abraham) , asked him to leave his country and tribe and to migrate to another land (the promised land)

2. Guarded and guided him and his family , show them how to worship him , gave them the Law and dealt with them in a miraculous way , fought the other nations for them , fulfilled His promise and gave them the promised land.
3. The upmost promise was that “the Messiah” would come from them.
4. He was aiming that His people would be obedient to His commandments and refrain from the practices of the gentiles and worshipping their idols .
5. Unfortunately , they betrayed His trust and lived like the gentile surrounding them . So the Lord punished them , left them to be exiled . But through His mercy – and for the promises given to the fathers – He returned them to their land after 70 years of exile.
6. In the fullness of time He send His only Begotten Son from the tribe of Judah, from the seed of King David.
7. In Jesus Christ the incarnated Logos , the salvation and the good news are offered to all the nations of the earth as “Only in His Name we are saved.”
8. When the fullness of the gentiles enter the faith , then also, the Jews will return to Christ and accepted Him as the “Messiah” they are waiting for.(Rom.11)

An Overview of the OT Books

1. How the OT was collected

The books of the OT were written over about 1000 years by more than 40 writers of different culture, education , wealth , status ,.... Every writer wrote his share , and put it near the tabernacle in the holy place as Moses did “... when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book..... that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying: Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you; ..” (Deut. 31: 24-26) . Samuel the prophet also did the same “Then Samuel explained to the people the behaviour of royalty, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the LORD.” (1Sa. 10:25) . In other occasions the Lord order the writer to write , as in the case of Jeremiah the prophet “Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day” (Jer. 36:2) All these books were collected together -according to the old traditions - by Ezra the writer. About 457 BC. This is the “**Hebrew scriptures**” (OT)

The Hebrew scriptures

(24 books -equivalent to the 39 books in our hands now) is subdivided into

1) **The Law (5 books) ;**

which includes the 5 books of Moses:
Genesis , Exodus , Leviticus , Numbers , Deuteronomy.

2) **The Prophets (8 books) ; include :**

- **the former prophets** , Joshua ; Judges and Ruth ; I&II Samuel ; and I&II kings
- **the later prophets** ; Isaiah , Jeremiah, Ezekiel , and the 12 minor prophesies in one book .

3) **The Writings (Hagiographa) (11 books) , include:**

Psalms , Proverbs , Job , Song of Solomon ,Ecclesiastics , Ester , Daniel , Ezra and Nehemiah ,I&II Chronicles, Lamentations , Ruth.

The Greek Scriptures:

king Ptolemy Philadelphos (285-247 BC) ordered to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek for the benefit of the Alexandrian Jews . Seventy (or seventy two) elders from the Jews went to Alexandria for the translation (six from each tribe).They added in their translation some other books that were not in the Hebrew Scriptures. (Deuterocanonical or Apocrypha), This translation is known as “ Septuagint” (means seventy) , and was famous and used in the time of Jesus Christ . The Septuagint used by the early Church and the Apostles quoted their verses from it. The Church considered the work of the translation inspired and canonical. The books of the Septuagint is subdivided into :

- The Law of Moses (5 books)
- The History books (14 books)
- The Poetical and Wisdom books (7 books)
- The Prophetical books (20 books)

Our Coptic Orthodox Church accept “the Septuagint ” as the canonical OT. This is why- for example - we find some differences between psalms in the “Agbia” and in the bibles in our hands. The King James translation which is used in our churches is using the Hebrews OT , but the Greek subdeisions.

The OT (Hebrews) is subdivided into:

1. The LAW (Pentateuch -Torah) –

the first five books ,written by Moses , most probably in the wilderness.

NO.	THE BOOK	THE WRITER	THE THEME
1	Genesis (50 chapters)	Moses in the wilderness	God’s plan for redemption . The beginnings of the world , life , family , sin , nations , Messianic nation , Fathers , covenants . (it covers more than 2200 years)
2	Exodus (40 chapters)		Salvation through the blood . ❖ The way from slavery to freedom, ❖ the 10 commandments , ❖ the tabernacle
3	LEVITICUS (27chapters)		The life of Holiness, through ❖ The sacrifices , ❖ the priests, ❖ the daily laws , ❖ the day of Atonement ❖ and the feasts .
4	Numbers (36 chapters)		<i>The journey of the wilderness</i> ❖ Lack of faith , ❖ disobedience ,Rebellious , murmuring , ❖ Balaam the false prophet , ❖ the instructions before entering the promised land.

NO.	THE BOOK	THE WRITER	THE THEME
5	Deuteronomy (34 chapters)	Moses in the wilderness (except the last part of the book)	Moses reminded the new generation- who were born in the wilderness and will inherit the land – about the dealings of the Lord in 3 letters – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ what the Lord did with them ❖ the obedience to the commandments. ❖ a call for consecration to the Lord.

2. The History Books (12 Books)

These books uncover the fulfilment of the promises of the Lord to His people to inherit the land of Canaan. Through obedience they got numerous blessings but when they disobeyed they were scattered and exiled . They books cover the history of the people of God for about ten centuries , since they inherited the promised land (~1409BC) till they returned back from the exile and built the fence of Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah (~ 445BC). These books represent how the Lord God deals with His people in all their aspects of life. We have to be very careful not repeating their disobedience, arrogance and deviation from the path of eternal life.

NO.	THE BOOK	THE WRITER	THE THEME
1	Joshua (24 chapters)	Joshua (except for the ending)	Inheritance of the promised land <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The division of land among the tribes of Israel ❖ The cities of refuge [Includes the history of ~30 years]
2	Judges (21 chapters)	May be Samuel in the time of king Saul.	Oppression and Deliverance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The book covers the period after the death of Joshua till before the ordination of a king. This period ~ 320 years ❖ 9 judges mentioned in the book . Deborah Gideon and Samson are famous among them . There are 6 oppressions in this period.
3	Ruth (4 chapters)	May be Samuel (some parts added later)	The reward of loyalty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The events of the story happened during the time of judges. Ruth was rewarded by being the grandmother of King David . She is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Mat.1:5).
4	1st. Samuel (31 chapters)	Samuel (the founder of the school of the Prophets)	The transition from the period of Judges (Samuel was the last Judge) to that of Monarchy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The life of Samuel ❖ The life of King Saul ❖ The life of David before enthronement. The book covers 95 years (birth of Samuel ~ 1105 BC to enthronement of David ~ 1010 BC)
5	2nd. Samuel (24 chapters)	Nathan and Gad the prophets	The united kingdom under the rule of king David for 40 years (~ 1010 BC- 970 BC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ David victories ❖ David sin

NO.	THE BOOK	THE WRITER	THE THEME
			❖ The consequences
6	1st. Kings (22 chapters)	Jeremiah	<p>The division of kingdom (covers from the reign of Solomon 970BC till king Ahab death 853BC. ~ 117 years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The reign of Solomon ❖ The building of the 1st. Temple ❖ The division of the kingdom after 120 years(40 years Saul , 40 years David and 40 years Solomon) ❖ The northern kingdom (10 tribes) with Samaria the capital revolted against King David's family reign and selected Jeroboam ❖ The southern Kingdom (2 tribes –Judah and Benjamin) continue under the reign of King David's family. ❖ The life of Elijah the mighty prophet.
7	2nd. Kings (25 chapters)	Jeremiah	<p>Continue the history of the 2 kingdoms till the their exile. The northern kingdom by the Assyrians ~722BC , and the Southern Kingdom by the Babylonians 160 years later ~586BC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The life of Elisha the prophet. ❖ The deliverance of King Ezekiel.
8	1st. Chronicles (29 chapters)	Ezra the writer after captivity.	<p>The 1st. and 2nd. Chronicles are counted as a supplementary to the books of Kings. The main purpose is to provide the correct genealogies and land so the families returned back to the inherited land. And also, to give the ranks of the priests and Levites who will soon resume their official activities after returning from the captivity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Genealogies from Adam king Saul ❖ King Saul ❖ Reign of King David
9	2nd. Chronicles (36 chapters)	Ezra the writer after captivity	<p>Continue the records of the 1st. Chronicles. Emphasis is given to the kingdom of Judah and the faithful kings which led to the flourish of the kingdom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Reign of Solomon ❖ Reign of kings Asa , Jehoshaphat , Joash , Uzziah , Hezekiah, and Josiah . ❖ The destruction of the kingdom of Jodah.
10	Ezra (10 chapters)	Ezra the writer	<p>Return from captivity and building of the 2nd. Temple according to the prophesy of Jeremiah .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The decree of Cyrus 536 BC . All the Exiled Israelites to return back to their land and built the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel. ❖ The temple was completed 515 BC. (ch. 1-6) ❖ After 78 years (458 BC) , King Artaxerxes gave Ezra permission to return back to Jerusalem to bring religious reforms to the among the Jews as they

NO.	THE BOOK	THE WRITER	THE THEME
			neglected their obligations toward the Law.
11	Nehemiah (13 chapters)	Nehemiah	Nehemiah arrived to Jerusalem as a governor 13 years after Ezra .(445 BC). This is the last narrative of history in the Hebrews OT. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ A man of zeal to rebuilt the fences of Jerusalem. ❖ The enemies did not restrain him from completing his job and reforms ❖ His great zeal in abiding by the Law and traditions of his people
12	Esther (10 chapters)	May be “Mordecai”	The events of this story occurred between 485 BC and 464 BC after the first call for the return of the Jews to their land. This events followed the first part of Ezra (chapter 6), but before the second part starts by chapter 7. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The Lord prepares the events for Esther be a Queen ❖ The power of fasting is evident ❖ The protection of the Lord God to His people

3.The Poetical Books (5 Books)

NO.	THE BOOK	THE WRITER	THE THEME
1	Job (42 chapters)	Unknown	Human suffering is not necessarily a result of sin. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The afflictions of Job ❖ The friends of Job ❖ Dialogue with God ❖ The deliverance (The timing of Job is about the timing of Abraham)
2	Psalms (150 Psalms 151 in the Greek OT)	David and others	It is the greatest book of praising and magnifying the Lord. It contains all the human feeling during all the aspects of life and towards God their creator. It is full of prophesies about Jesus Christ the Saviour. There are 5 books: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Psalms 1-41: The man and his salvation ❖ Psalms 42-72 : the Church ❖ Psalms 73-89 : the new temple ❖ Psalms 90-106 : the new land ❖ Psalms 107-150 :the living word of God ❖ Psalm 151 (in the Greek Scripture)
3	Proverbs (31 chapters)	Solomon	Wisdom is the way of life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ How to gain the wisdom ❖ Jesus is the true Wisdom ❖ Proverbs concerning moral teachings. ❖ Words of Agur and Lamuel.

NO.	THE BOOK	THE WRITER	THE THEME
4	Ecclesiastics (12 chapters)	Solomon	All is vanity. This book is the proof of the repentance of Solomon ❖ All what in the world is futile ❖ Be wise and be prepared
5	Song Of Solomon (8 chapters)	Solomon	The song of the heavenly wedding. It is in a form of dialogue between the groom and the bride. ❖ It expresses the love between Christ and the Church. The uniqueness and power of this love .

4.The Major Prophetical Books (5 Books)

The prophets either major or minor (according to the length of their prophesy) were send by the Lord to His people in the two kingdoms (the Northern and the Southern) .. The main message was to warn them from the consequences of their bad deeds and worshipping the idols. He declared to them many times that HE will surrender them to their enemies , and they will be scattered among the other nations.

Unfortunately, they refused to listen even during their exile to Assyria or Babylon. So, some of the prophets were sent to Israel , others were sent to Judah .Some were sent before the exile , some during the exile and some after they returned back due to the grace of the Lord and for the sake of His Holy name (refer to Ezekiel Ch. 36 ,37) .

He also, sent messages to the surrounding nations and warn them because they were too harsh in dealing with His people and arrogant in their behaviour .(Refer to Isaiah Ch. 10)

The prophesies cover about 400 years . Each is dealing with current events . So , it is important to be aware of these events to have better understanding of the message of the prophesy.

No.	The Book	The writer	To whom	Timing	The Theme
1	ISAIAH (66 chapters)	Isaiah	JUDAH	Before exile 835BC	Salvation of Christ. counted as the 5th. Gospel. ❖ The first 39 chapters are filled with judgement upon all the bad deeds of Judah and the surrounding nations The last 27 chapters declares the message of hope
2	Jeremiah (52 chapters)	Jeremiah	Judah	Before and during the exile 627BC	heartbreaking message to the stiff-necked people.
3	Lamentations (5 chapters)	Jeremiah	Judah	Before and during the exile 586BC	mourning on the disobedient city Jerusalem

No.	The Book	The writer	To whom	Timing	The Theme
4	Ezekiel (48 chapters)	Ezekiel	To the exiled people	During the exile 592BC	future redemption of Israel ❖ He uses prophecies, parables, signs and symbols to declare God's message ❖ Future will be glorious for the sake of the name of the Lord
5	Daniel (12 chapters)	Daniel	To the exiled people	During the exile 605BC	God's sovereign plan for Israel during and after gentile domination ❖ Book of dreams ❖ Prophecies about the time of incarnation of Christ and the next coming.

5. The Minor Prophetic Books (12 Books)

No.	The Book	The writer	To whom	Timing	The Theme
1	HOSEA (14 chapters)	Hosea	ISRAEL	Before the exile 755 BC	God's love to Israel the adulterer ❖ The prophet's life symbolize the love of the Lord to His people who worship idols.
2	Joel (3 chapters)	Joel	Judah	Before the exile 835 BC	The disaster strikes of locusts is a pale symbol of the great and terrible day of the Lord. The promise to send the Holy Spirit
3	Amos (9 chapters)	Amos	Israel	Before the exile 760 BC	The coming-judgement of Israel for their sins. The people replaced the true worship by hypocritical religious motions.
4	Obadiah (1 chapter)	Obadiah	Edom [were the descendents of Esau]	Before the exile 840 BC	declaration of Edom's destruction for its arrogance.
5	Jonah (4 chapters)	Jonah	Nineveh	Before the exile 760BC	God's love for the Gentiles
6	Micah (7 chapters)	Micah	Judah	Before the exile 735 BC	Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly. The book divided to 3 parts ❖ Expose the sins of countrymen ❖ The punishment that will come ❖ The hope restoration

No.	The Book	The writer	To whom	Timing	The Theme
7	Nahum (3 chapters)	Micah	Nineveh	Before the exile 660 BC	The destruction of Nineveh because it returned back to its bad habits of violence, idolatry , and arrogance
8	Habakkuk (3 chapters)	Habakkuk		Before the exile 607 BC	The Lord uses the Babylonian as His rod to chasten His unrepentant people
9	Zephaniah (3 chapters)	Zephaniah	Judah	Before the exile 630 BC	The day of the punishment of the Lord will come to crush Judah and its neighbours because the corruption is not fully removed from the heart. After that the blessing of the Messiah will come.
10	Haggai (2 chapters)	Haggai	The Remnant	After the exile 520 BC	A cry to complete the house of the Lord before their own homes.
11	Zechariah (14 chapters)	Zechariah	The Remnant	After the exile 520 BC	Encouragement to finish the house of the Lord . The glory of the Lord will appear from this house. Zeal is needed for the Messiah is coming
12	Malachi (4 chapters)	Malachi	The Remnant	After the exile 432 BC	The last sound of warning of the Lord in the OT. Malachi highlights the problems of hypocrisy , infidelity , mixed marriages , divorce , false worship and arrogance.