

## 4. Getting to grips with the Old Testament

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The following outline of the Old Testament follows the history chronologically. The ‘Preparation for Christ’ indicates some of the main Old Testament texts that prepare for the coming of the Messiah. The fullest treatment of this subject can be found in the work of Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg *Christology of the Old Testament*. Hengstenberg was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian and tutor in Oriental languages at Basel. He was a prolific author and his three volumes on this subject were published between 1829 and 1835. The page numbers in brackets refer to the English translation published by MacDonald Publishing Company, McLean, Virginia, USA. For a more accessible treatment of this subject, a helpful guide is Walter C Kaiser Jr *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids 1995).

You will notice how the prophecies become more specific and clear as the time of the Messiah’s birth draws closer. From the general promise to Adam and Eve and the broad sweep of a nation and family (2000BC), to the specific details of the Messiah (700BC) and the events of world powers in preparation (500BC).

The word *Messiah* is a Hebrew word and means the ‘Anointed One’. It is used as an adjective or noun around 40 times in the Old Testament (mainly in Samuel and Psalms) and almost always for a king. It is even used of Cyrus of Persia (Isaiah 45:1) as the chosen king for the sake of the people of God. In its immediate context Psalm 2:2 probably refers to the chosen king of Israel, but from Acts 13:32 and Hebrews 1:5; 5:5 it clearly also has a Messianic reference. Some psalms may have the dual reference, but others may be exclusively Messianic because the deity of the Messiah is in focus, for example 45:6-7, cf. Hebrews 1:8-9; 102:25-27, cf. Hebrews 1:10-12; 110:1, cf. Hebrews 1:13.

## An outline of the Old Testament and how God unfolded his plan for the coming of Jesus Christ

Bible ref.	Approx. date	Main content	Preparation for Christ
GENESIS 1 to 11	Before 2000 BC	The Creation. <b>Adam</b> and Eve. The Fall. The murder of Abel. God's choice of Seth. The founding of the nations. Babel and the Flood.	The first promise of Christ: 3:15. The first recorded prayer to God: 4:26. The first plan of election: 4:25; 5:3, 29. The promise of God's faithfulness: 9:13–16.
11 to 25	2091 BC  2066	The family of <b>Abraham</b> . His call to leave Haran. Abraham in Canaan and Egypt. His separation from Lot. The birth of Ishmael. Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The birth and offering of <b>Isaac</b> . Rebekah.  Abraham's change of name (17:5).	A special people: 12:2; 18:18. A special purpose: 12:3. A special protection: 12:3. A special land: 12:7. A special descendant: 18:17–18, cf. Gal. 3:14, 16; Rom. 4:13.  16:7: The appearance of the 'angel of the LORD' to Hagar. An expression referring to a pre-incarnation appearance of Christ—see also 32:1–24. See also where the Angel is referred to: 12:7; 17:1; 18:17; 21:17; 28:13; 48:16. See later Josh. 5:13–15 and especially Judges. Hengstenberg comments that the early Jews all understood the Angel of the LORD as 'the one mediator between God and the world, the author of all revelation' (p. 1308). Here his deity is also revealed. See also in Zech. 3:1; 12:8; etc.  The promises renewed to Isaac: 26:4.  The choice of Jacob: 25:23.
25 to 26	2006	The birth of Jacob and Esau. The death of Abraham.	

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27 to 35		The story of <b>Jacob (Israel)</b> . The great deceit. His exile and dream at Bethel. Living with Laban, Rachel and Leah	The promise renewed to Jacob: 28:13–15.
36		The descendants of Esau.	
37 to 50	1898 1805	Joseph. Slave, prisoner, Egyptian official. The famine in Egypt. Joseph's sons. Jacob comes to Egypt. <b>Judah</b> and the death of Jacob and Joseph.  Between Genesis 50 and Exodus 1 there are 430 silent years of Israel's slavery in Egypt: Gen. 15:13; Exod. 12:40.	The promise passed on through Judah: 49:8–12; cf. Rev. 5:5. The Hebrew of 49:10 is literally 'until Shiloh comes', with 'Shiloh' referring to 'rest'. A reference to the Messiah as the man of rest, cf. Isa. 9:5–7 (p. 45).
EXODUS		'Exodus' means 'the way out'. We are introduced to the oppression of the Hebrews in Egypt and the birth of Moses.	The Passover, with its sacrificial lamb and sprinkled blood, pointed to Christ: Exod. 12:1–14; John 1:29; Luke 22:8, 15, 19–20; 1 Cor. 5:7.
1 to 12		Moses is forced into exile and returns to lead the people. The plagues and <b>Passover</b> .	
13 to 18	1526	<b>The Exodus</b> and miracle at the Red Sea. The desert of Shur and the waters of Mara. Elim and the desert of Sin (quails and manna). Rephidim and the battle with the Amalekites.	
19 to 31	1446	<b>Mt Sinai</b> and the Ten Commandments (three months out of Egypt). God gives Moses plans for living (20–30) and worshipping (24–31).	The purpose of the law was to take charge of us and lead us to Christ: Gal. 3:24; Rom. 4:15; 10:4.
32 to 34		Aaron and the golden calf. Moses prays for the people and the law is renewed.	
35 to 40		The tent of meeting (tabernacle). Gifts offered and the priests and others employed.	

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<p>LEVITICUS 1 to 7</p> <p>8 to 10</p> <p>11 to 22</p> <p>23 to 27</p>		<p>The laws for the tribe of Levi, the priests.</p> <p>The various <b>sacrifices and offerings</b>.</p> <p>The ordination and ministry of <b>Aaron and the priests</b>.</p> <p>Nadab and Abihu</p> <p>Regulations for moral, ceremonial and physical cleanness.</p> <p><b>Festivals</b>, rewards and punishments, the law of redemption.</p>	<p>The whole book is pointing forward to Christ.</p> <p>The Aaronic priesthood, the Levites, the tabernacle and its implements, and the various sacrifices and ceremonies were all a preparation for Christ, the Messiah.</p> <p>We may therefore refer to 'the gospel according to Leviticus'.</p> <p>The book reveals two great facts: (1) The quality of sacrifice: perfect. (2) The cost of sacrifice: death.</p>
<p>NUMBERS</p> <p>1 to 9</p> <p>10 to 12</p> <p>13 to 14</p> <p>15 to 19</p> <p>20 to 21</p> <p>22 to 25</p> <p>26 to 30</p>		<p>From Sinai to the desert of Paran. Two years and two months out from Egypt.</p> <p>A census of the people. Duties of the Levites and the dedication of the tabernacle.</p> <p>The people leave Sinai and complain. Aaron and Miriam rebel.</p> <p>Spies are sent to Canaan. The people lack faith to go forward.</p> <p>Various duties and the rebellion of Korah.</p> <p>Water from the rock. The disobedience of Moses and later of the people. The bronze snake.</p> <p>Moab and the false prophet, Balaam.</p> <p>Another census. Offerings and festivals.</p>	<p>Paul uses the rock as an analogy of Christ in 1 Cor. 10:4. The snake on the pole was a symbol of Christ on the cross: John 3:14.</p> <p>In 24:17–19 the false prophet, Balaam, nevertheless looks on to the Messianic age by reference to the star and sceptre—cf. Gen. 49:10. The ancient Jews saw this as a promise of David and then the Messiah (p. 67).</p>

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31 to 36		Destruction of the Midianites. Campsites though Sinai. Levite towns and cities of refuge.	
DEUTERONOMY		The title means 'the second law'. The scene is forty years out of Egypt, in the land of Moab, at the border of the Promised Land.	
1 to 26		Moses recounts the story of the wanderings from Mt Sinai, forty years before. He includes their rebellion and disobedience, and his own failure.  The Ten Commandments are given a second time and Moses urges the people to remain faithful to God. He passes on to them various laws from God.	18:15–19: this 'prophet' was understood by the ancient Jews, the early church and many Reformers to be Messianic (p. 72). See Acts 3:22–23; 7:37; John 1:46; 5:45–47; Luke 24:44. This is the prophet alluded to in John 4:25–26.
27 to 31		Mts Gerizim and Ebal: Blessings for obedience and judgement for disobedience. The covenant renewed.	
32 to 34	1406	Moses' final sermon. The appointment of Joshua as his successor. A song of praise and his blessing on the tribes. The death of Moses.	
JOSHUA 1 to 5		Joshua takes command on the death of Moses. Spies are sent out, the Jordan crossed and preparations made for war.	5:13–15: compare the 'commander of the army of the LORD' with Christ's claim in Matt. 26:53. See also the angel going before Israel in Exod. 23:20–23 (33:15–16); cf. Isa. 63:9.  The crossing of the sea, the pillar of cloud, the rock from which water flowed, and the manna are pictures of Christ: Deut. 32:18; 1 Cor. 10:1–4; John 6:30–33.

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6 to 10:28		<p>The central campaign:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Jericho and Ai. The sin of Achan.</li> <li>(2) Deceit and rescue of the Gibeonites.</li> <li>(3) The long day at Gibeon.</li> </ol>	
10:29–43 11 12 to 19		<p>The southern campaign. The northern campaign. A list of defeated kings and land still unpossessed. Division of the land among the twelve tribes. Cities of refuge and Levite cities.</p>	Judah inherits Jerusalem: 15:63.
20 to 22		<p>Cities of refuge and Levite cities.</p>	
23 to 24	1356	<p>Joshua's final charge to the Israelites. The covenant renewed. The death of Joshua.</p>	<p>The people are reminded of the promises to the patriarchs and they pledge their allegiance to the LORD. There is no mention of the Messiah at this point, although he is assumed within the promises to Abraham. Israel's pledge of loyalty is short-lived.</p>
JUDGES 1 to 2	1356 to 1050	<p>The judges, or deliverers, who led Israel for 300 years. There were 15 judges (Eli and Samuel are in 1 Samuel). This is possibly the most tragic book in the Bible. It is the 'dark ages' of the Bible, 2:7,10 explaining the recurring theme of rest, rebellion, retribution, repentance, restoration. 2:11–19 describes the sad cycle of events. Nevertheless, there are some outstanding men and women of faith: Heb. 11:32.</p>	<p>Judges is a record of Israel's unfaithfulness. There is no prophecy of the coming Messiah in the book. The line leading to the Messiah is obscured by sin.</p> <p>However, the 'Angel of the LORD' (see 2:1–3) appears fifteen times and speaks more often here than in any other Old Testament book. The Messiah is active though unrecognized (pp.80–90).</p>

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CHAPTERS	YEARS	JUDGE	OPPRESSOR	YEARS	EVENTS
3	40	Othniel	Cushan of Aram (Mesopotamia)	8	
	80	Ehud Shamgar	Eglon of Moab Philistines	18	Assassination of Eglon. Shamgar killed 600 with an ox-goad.
4 to 5	40	Deborah	Jabin of Canaan	20	Assassination of Sisera, Jabin's commander.
6 to 8	40	Gideon	Midianites and Amalekites	7	Destruction of Baal idol. Gideon's fleece and 300 men.
9	3	Abimelech			Abimelech murdered his 70 brothers.
10 to 11	23	Tola			
	22	Jair			
	6	Jephthah	Philistines and Ammonites	18	
12	7	Ibzan			Civil war with Ephraim. 'Shibboleth'.
	10	Eglon			
	8	Abdon			
13 to 16	20	Samson	Philistines	40	Samson's birth, marriage, wars and death.
17 to 21		A catalogue of anarchy: (1) Idolatry of Micah and the Danites. (2) Immorality of the Benjamites. (3) Civil war between Israel and the Benjamites.			
RUTH		Ruth is set in the period of the Judges, possibly during chapters 17–21. An account of the family of Naomi and her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth.			<p>A valuable record of the 'thin red line' of the Messiah preserved during the darkest period of Israel's history.</p> <p><b>Boaz</b> is a 'kinsman-redeemer' (4:14) and the great-grandfather of King David (4:17–22).</p> <p>Its purpose is to demonstrate that, in the darkest period of Israel's history, God was preserving his chosen line for the coming of Christ.</p>



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<p>8 to 10 9</p> <p>10 to 12</p> <p>13 to 19</p> <p>20 to 21</p> <p>22</p> <p>23</p> <p>24</p>		<p>God's promises to the king and David's prayer.</p> <p>David at war. David and his kindness to Mephibosheth.</p> <p>David's success at war and failure at home. Bathsheba and Uriah. Nathan the prophet. Psalm 51 written at this time.</p> <p>Amnon and Tamar, and the exile, rebellion and death of Absalom. Psalm 63 possibly written at this time.</p> <p>The rebellion of Sheba and vengeance of the Gibeonites.</p> <p>A psalm of praise by David when he was delivered from Saul.</p> <p>David's final prophecy and a list of the members of his bodyguard.</p> <p>David counts the people and builds an altar.</p> <p>The death of David is recorded in 1 Kings 2:10–11 and 1 Chr. 29:26–30.</p>	<p>Many of David's psalms are 'Messianic'. See introduction above. For example:</p> <p>(1) The Sonship of the Messiah: 2:2. (2) The Suffering Messiah: Ps. 22. (3) The Sovereign Messiah: Ps. 45:6–7; 102:25–27; 110:1.</p> <p>Heb. 1:5–13 quotes from Ps. 2:7; 45:6–7; 102:25–27; 110:1; and 2 Sam. 7:14.</p> <p>David's final prophecy, with its reference to the Rock and the everlasting covenant, also points forward to Christ: 23:1–7.</p>
<p>1 KINGS to 2 CHRONICLES</p>	<p>970–587</p>	<p>This period of just under 400 years covers a major part of Bible history and prophecy. The period from the reign of Solomon to the destruction of Jerusalem and exile of the Jews takes up four history books (1–2 Kings; 1–2 Chronicles), four poetry or wisdom books (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, plus some of the Psalms), and fourteen prophecy books (Isaiah to Zephaniah). This is more than half the Old Testament.</p>	

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		As the title implies, Kings is the story of the kings of Judah and Israel. Chronicles repeats the history of Kings, often in the same words, but looks more at the spiritual history.	
1 Kings 2 to 11		The reign of <b>Solomon</b> and the building of the temple.	The temple replicated all the ceremonial implements from the tabernacle and therefore continued the preparation for the final sacrifice and priesthood of the Messiah.
1 Kings 12 to 2 Kings 25		<p><b>Rehoboam</b> and the division of the kingdom. Rehoboam in the south (Judah) with Jerusalem as capital. Jeroboam in the north (Israel) with Samaria as capital. There were 20 kings in the north until Samaria was destroyed by Assyria in 722. There were 20 kings (discounting the usurper queen Athaliah) in the south until Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylonia in 587.</p> <p>Many early prophets, from Ahijah to Elijah and Elisha, preached chiefly to Israel.</p> <p>Two outstandingly evil kings in the north were Ahab and Jeroboam II, though all the northern kings mixed pagan worship with that of the Lord.</p> <p>Half of the southern kings were good, though Rehoboam, Ahaz, and Manasseh compromised worship. Hezekiah and Josiah saw periods of vigorous spiritual life and reform.</p>	Through the southern kings in Jerusalem God preserves the line of David in preparation for the Messiah.

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PROPHETS	KINGS (An asterisk refers to those who are named in pagan records outside the Bible)				
	Judah (20 kings in Jerusalem)		Israel (20 kings in Samaria)		
1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 9 The preaching of Elijah, Elisha, Obadiah, Micah Joel Amos, Jonah Hosea	Rehoboam	930–913	Jeroboam I	930–909	
	Abijah	913–911	Nadab	910–909	
	Asa	911–869	Baasha	908–886	
			Elah	886–885	
			Zimri	885	
			Omri*	885–874	
	Jehoshaphat	870–848	Ahab*	874–853	
			Ahaziah	853–852	
			Joram	852–851	
	Jehoram (Joram)	846–841	Jehu*	841–814	
	Ahaziah	841			
	Athaliah (usurper queen)	841–835			
	Joash*	835–796	Jehoahaz	814–798	
Amaziah	796–767	Jehoash*	798–782		
Isaiah prophesied from Azariah to the reign of Hezekiah	Azariah (Uzziah)	767–740	Jeroboam II	782–753	
			Zechariah	753–752	
			Shallum	753–752	
			Menahem*	752–742	
		Pekahiah	742–740		
Micah	Jotham	740–732	Pekah*	740–732	
	Ahaz	732–716	Hoshea*	732–722	The fall of Samaria to Assyria in 722.
	Hezekiah*	716–687			
	Manasseh*	687–642			
Jeremiah	Amon	642–640			
	Josiah	640–608			
	Jehoahaz*	609			
	Jehoiakim (Eliakim)	609–597			
	Jehoiachin*	597			
Ezekiel and Daniel	Zedekiah	597–587			The fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 597 and 587. Many Jews were exiled to Babylon, including Ezekiel, Daniel and his friends.

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OBADIAH	c.848	Obadiah was the first prophet whose ministry is given a Bible book to itself. He prophesied against Edom in the time of Jehoram, king of Judah.	Obadiah reminded Edom that salvation is found only in the God of Judah. Verses 17–21 may have a partial fulfilment in the return from exile in 539, but its ultimate fulfilment is in the kingdom of the Messiah.
JOEL	c.800	Joel preached to Judah in the time of Joash; through the vivid picture of a locust plague he warned of judgement. But Joel looked beyond, to the coming of the Holy Spirit.	Joel 2:23, 'the autumn rains in righteousness', is considered by most of the older commentators to be translated 'Teacher of righteousness'. No matter how this verse is translated, 2:28–3:21 is clearly looking forward to Pentecost and beyond, to the end of the age. In Acts 2:16–21 Peter saw its fulfilment in the cross and Pentecost. The ancient Jews saw Joel as Messianic (p.240).
JONAH	c.796	In the time of Amaziah, Jonah was sent to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.	Jonah was an illustration of the Messiah: Matt. 12:39–41.
NAHUM	642	150 years after Jonah, Nahum prophesied the destruction of Nineveh, and 30 years later the Babylonians fulfilled the prophecy in 612 BC.	A reminder that, ultimately, all who oppose God and his chosen people will meet with his severe judgement.
AMOS	c.782	Although in the time of Amaziah and Uzziah, Amos preached mainly to Israel in the time of Jeroboam II. A warning against disobedience, illustrated by the surrounding nations and prophetic pictures.	9:11–15 look forward to the age of the Messiah's ultimate kingdom. See Acts 15:16–18.
HOSEA	c.767	A contemporary of Amos in the time of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Hosea lived through the fall of Samaria in 722. He speaks on behalf of God against Israel's unfaithfulness, which is illustrated by an unfaithful wife.	3:5: After all the unfaithfulness of Israel and Judah, under the picture of an unfaithful wife, the promise is for the Messiah as 'David their king'.

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<p>MICAH</p>		<p>Micah was a contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah.</p>	<p>Micah's prophecies are radiant with the glory of the coming Messiah and the redeemed church. The promises of the 'latter days' are to be taken to signify the time of the Messiah.</p> <p>(1) 4:1–8: The kingdom of God will, in the future, be exalted above all the kingdoms of the world. In these verses is also a beautiful picture of the effect of the gospel when the Messiah comes; cf. Zech. 3:10.</p> <p>(2) 5:1–2: Here 'the reference to the Messiah was, at all times, not the private opinion of a few [Jewish] scholars, but was publicly received and acknowledged with perfect unanimity' (p. 359). cf. John 7:41–42; Matt. 2:6</p>
<p>ISAIAH</p>		<p>Both Isaiah and Micah had strong messages of judgement, but offered hope and restoration, both in the immediate future if the nation repented, and in the ultimate promise of the gospel.</p>	<p>Augustine (5th century AD) claimed that, because of his numerous Messianic prophecies, Isaiah deserved the name 'evangelist' rather than 'prophet'. The following are only some of the most pronounced Messianic prophecies in Isaiah; almost all of them were seen as Messianic by Jews—until Christ came, after which they were reinterpreted!</p> <p>2:2–5: The ultimate glory of the Messiah's kingdom.</p> <p>7:14–16: Immanuel and the virgin birth as a sign.</p> <p>9:1–7: A child is born who will reign, cf. Matt. 4:15–16. This whole passage was always treated as Messianic by the ancient Jews (p. 453).</p>



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2 KINGS 17	c 732	Hoshea was the last king of Israel. Sargon of Assyria defeated Samaria and thousands were taken into exile, and the land resettled with foreigners.	
ZEPHANIAH	c. 640	Zephaniah's preaching encourages the reforms of Josiah of Judah. However, his message is one of foreboding because many of the people are not sincere.	'The Messiah, although not appearing here, stands in the background and forms the invisible centre' (p. 648). 3:9–20 refers to the return from exile in 539, but beyond this it reflects the ultimate kingdom of God.
HABAKKUK	c. 609	In the time of Jehoahaz. Babylon is the powerful empire. After a dialogue with God pleading Judah's cause, the prophet warns Babylon of her eventual downfall.	2:3: The prophet Habakkuk is told that some of his prophecies will be about the end. And that end is briefly but gloriously described in 2:14. 3:16–19: Even in the face of the terrifying Babylonian army, the prophet is confident in God—a timeless message for God's people.
2 KINGS 24		In 609 Assyria fell to Babylon, whose king, Nebuchadnezzar, attacked Jerusalem, put his own puppet king on the throne and carried many into exile.	
JEREMIAH	c. 626	Jeremiah prophesied through the years of the decline of Judah and the two-year siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BC in the time of Zedekiah. With the capture of Zedekiah, the Hebrew monarchy was at an end. For 50 years the remnant of the people lived almost leaderless in the land. In 592 the governor, Gedaliah, was assassinated and many fled to Egypt to escape reprisals. Jeremiah was taken with them: Jer. 42–43.	3:14–17: Jeremiah looks forward to the Messiah and beyond. 23:1–8: The 'Righteous Branch' who will be called 'The LORD Our Righteousness'. 30–31: 'The whole description in both chapters is Messianic', and 31:31–40 is 'the grand hymn of Israel's deliverance' (pp. 698, 700). These are the promised days of the Spirit. See also 33:14–26; cf. Heb. 10:16–17; John 6:45; 2 Cor. 3:3–6.

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EZEKIEL	c. 592	Both Ezekiel and Daniel were young contemporaries of Jeremiah and prophesied during the years of exile in Babylon and later under the Persians. Both looked forward to the age of the gospel and the heavenly kingdom. Ezekiel preached against many nations.	The temple in 40–48 is symbolic of the church and the kingdom of God. 'Its fulfilment under the New Testament is constantly going on, and the future alone will witness its completion' (p. 783). For example see 47:3–4: 'We have here a representation of the Messianic salvation which, though at first comparatively insignificant, will continue to expand with ever increasing fullness and glory' (p. 786). Compare 47:10 with Matt. 4:18–19; and 47:12 with Rev. 22:2. In addition, the following are clear Messianic passages: 17:22–24; 34:23–34.
DANIEL		Daniel 1–6 is history and 7–12 is prophecy. Although it is in the Hebrew Scriptures, the book of Daniel is not placed among the prophets. He lived in exile and in high office through six pagan kings. Daniel foretold the kingdoms that would follow from the collapse of the Persian Empire.	2:44 points to the time of the Messiah. 7:13–14: a vision of the 'Son of Man', the Messiah. Jesus frequently described himself like this (e.g. Matt. 8:20 and thirty times in this Gospel). The Jews saw this as Messianic and therefore wrote of the coming Messiah as 'the man of the clouds' (p. 795). 9:25–27: a reference to the final destruction of the temple; cf. Matt. 24:15–16. According to 9:2, Daniel had been studying Jeremiah.
2 CHRONICLES 36		Under Cyrus, the empire of the Medes and Persians defeated the Babylonians.	
EZRA 1–4	c. 539	Cyrus decreed that the exiled nations could return from exile and rebuild their cities and temples. Some Jews returned, but after many problems and much opposition the work halted and the people concentrated on their own homes.	2:59, 62–63 reveals how meticulous was the record keeping of genealogies throughout the history of the Jews. It confirms our trust in the genealogies of Joseph and Mary in Matthew 1 and Luke 3.

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HAGGAI		Haggai condemned the people for being more interested in their own comfort than in the temple of God, and he promised a future blessing for the temple.	2:6–9 is a promise of the coming Messiah, before which time the nations will be shaken; cf. Heb. 12:26–28. Calvin explains that ‘the condition of the whole world was to be changed by the coming of Christ’. The temple now represents the kingdom of God and the elect will bring the very best to Christ (pp. 944–949).
ZECHARIAH		Zechariah received eight visions which looked forward to the coming of Christ and the age of the gospel.	Zechariah is about little else than Christ; see e.g. 2:10–11; 3:1–10; 6:9–13; 12:10. Compare 9:9 with Matt. 21:5; and 11:12–13 with Matt. 27:9. Each of the visions has a Messianic reference (pp. 965–1182); cf. 3:10 with Mic. 4:4
EZRA 5–10	Sept. 520	The work on the temple recommenced and was completed. Ezra arrived in Jerusalem for the dedication service and effected some necessary reforms. Mixed marriages.	
ESTHER	c. 478	A Jewess who was taken as wife for Ahasuerus (Xerxes) of Persia. She learned of a plot to exterminate the Jews everywhere. Esther pleaded with the king, who intervened, and the Jews were saved. The Jews celebrate this in the annual festival of Purim.	The name of God is not mentioned in the book of Esther, but it is all about his purposes in protecting his chosen people and therefore the line of the Messiah.
NEHEMIAH	445	An officer in the court of Artaxerxes I at Susa in Persia, Nehemiah obtained permission to return to Jerusalem and organize the rebuilding of the city walls. Severe opposition was overcome and Ezra again arrived to take part in the dedication of the walls. Nehemiah returned to court and various abuses crept into city life. A furious Nehemiah returned to the city and carried out reforms.	

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MALACHI		Possibly Malachi was preaching during Nehemiah's absence at court. He condemned unholy sacrifices, an unholy priesthood and withholding tithes.	Compare 3:1 and 4:5 with Matt. 11:10–15; 16:13–14—the prophecies of John the Baptist as the herald of the Messiah. It is significant that the Messiah, who is promised at the very beginning of Genesis (3:15), is the subject of the last chapter of the final prophet in the Old Testament.
		There are 400 years of silence in Scripture from the close of Malachi to the opening of Matthew. It is known as the 'Intertestamental Period'.	The fourteen books of the <i>Apocrypha</i> —a mixture of history and legend, fact and fantasy—were written during this period. Some of the stories refer to Old Testament events and people, though it also includes the record of the Maccabean wars (167–160 BC). The <i>Apocrypha</i> is never quoted in the New Testament. For the <i>Apocrypha</i> see pages 271–276.

See the next two pages for the period between the Old and New Testaments.

The Intertestamental Period

EMPIRE	DATE		
Persian	539–333	<p>Cyrus defeated the Medes and combined the Medes and Persians into one great empire. In 539 Cyrus conquered Babylon, placed Darius the Mede in charge, and allowed the Jews to return and rebuild their city. His son, Cambyses, pushed the Persian empire from the Nile to India. The biblical record closes around the year 440 with the completion of the city walls of Jerusalem.</p> <p>For two centuries under Persian rule the Jews became a people of the Book (the Torah).</p> <p>The temple in Jerusalem was still the centre of worship, but synagogues grew up among the scattered Jewish communities.</p> <p>The high priest became the political as well as religious leader. Jewish territory extended only 12 to 15 miles around the city and the Jews were economically weak.</p>	<p>Throughout the entire period between the Old and New Testaments there is no visible sign of the ‘thin red line’ of the redemption plan. Tribal distinctions were blurred and we can only believe that, unseen and unheralded, God was keeping safe the line of the family of the Messiah until the ‘time had fully come’ (Gal. 4:4).</p> <p>However, genealogical records were carefully preserved throughout this period, as Matt. 1:12–16 and Luke 3:23–27 reveal. See also Ezra 2:59, 62–63.</p>
Greek	333–323	<p>Alexander the Great defeated the Persians at Issus (northern Syria) in 333. Jerusalem accepted Greek rule without resistance.</p> <p>After the death of Alexander in 323 his empire was carved into a number of rival states:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Macedonia, in northern Greece.</li> <li>• Egypt, the kingdom of the Ptolemies.</li> <li>• The Helespont, under Lysimachus.</li> <li>• Asia Minor and Syria: the Seleucids.</li> </ul>	<p>The rapid, though brief, expansion of the Greek empire planted Greek culture across a wide area and Greek became the common language for communication—a vital preparation for the spread of the gospel. Much of Jesus’ preaching would have been in Greek, and all the books of the New Testament were written originally in this language of commerce.</p>

## Getting to grips with the Old Testament

Ptolemaic (Egyptian)	323–195	By 311 BC Seleucus I was extending his control. Greek culture (known as Hellenism) was spreading among the Jews. Stadiums were built in the cities and traditional Jews were horrified at the nakedness of the Greek games and the cult of the gods.	Around 250 BC the Old Testament was translated into Greek; it was known as the <i>Septuagint</i> . (For the <i>Septuagint</i> see pages 430–432, 453–457.)
Seleucid (Syrian)	195–163	In the reign of Antiochus IV tension flared. In 167 BC hundreds of Hasidim Jews (the 'godly ones') were massacred, the law was destroyed, and the temple and altar were turned over to the cult of Zeus. Pig flesh (abhorrent to the Jews) was offered in the temple and Jews were forced to eat it. The result was the Maccabean wars from 167–160 BC. Judas Maccabeus regained Jerusalem and cleansed the temple and altar. After many brilliant victories, Judas was finally defeated. However, as the Syrian grip declined, the Jews regained their independence, though with factions and bloodshed, until the Romans arrived, and the nationalist cause was lost.	
Roman	from 63 BC	In 63 BC Roman troops entered Palestine and the gates of Jerusalem were opened to them. The Jews were granted control of their internal affairs with a Roman governor. Freedom of worship was guaranteed. In 40 BC the Roman Senate appointed Herod 'King of the Jews', and with the aid of Roman troops he gained control in 37 BC. Herod the Great was a renowned builder, a political adventurer and a cruel tyrant. However, he brought national peace and a degree of prosperity.	A relatively stable government throughout a far-flung empire. Good communication by road and sea provided an excellent preparation for the spread of the gospel.