



THE BIBLE: GOD'S AMAZING BOOK • SESSION 3

God Speaking in the Old Testament



The Old Testament gives us different kinds of writings, such as history, wisdom, and prophecy. Put together, they help us understand who God is, how He relates with people, and how He wants us to treat others. This week we'll look at verses from these three types of Old Testament writings.

DAY 1—HISTORY

1. The first book of the Bible tells the story of Abram, who later became known as *Abraham*. Read Genesis 12:1-3. What did God promise Abram from the very beginning?
2. What do you learn about God by reading these few verses?

DAY 2—WISDOM

- 3. Some of the wisdom writings, especially the Psalms, help us sort through various human experiences and emotions. Read Psalms 34:1-3 and 42:5. What emotions do you find expressed in these verses?

- 4. *The Psalms show us we can tell God all about our thoughts and feelings. What examples of this do you see in Psalms 22:1-2; 23:1-6; 51:1-4; and 73:1-3?

- 5. What are some things you'd like to talk to God about?

DAY 3—OTHER WISDOM

- 6. Other wisdom writings contain nuggets of truth or good advice. Read Proverbs 15:16-19 and Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. What wise instruction do you find in these verses?

- 7. Where have you seen an example of one of these truths being lived out in real life?

DAY 4—PROPHECY

- 8. In Old Testament times, the Bible was still being written, but there was enough of it for God's people to know how He wanted them to live. Sadly, they often ignored God and did what they wanted. So God sent prophets like Isaiah to speak His words to the people. Read Isaiah 53:6-8 and 58:3-6. How were the people living? How did God want them to live instead?

- 9. Isaiah's words were written thousands of years ago. How could they apply to us today?

DAY 5—MORE PROPHECY

- 10. Sometimes God sent prophets like Zephaniah to foretell what would happen in the future, either immediate or distant. Read Zephaniah 3:14-17. How might these prophetic words have affected God's people in Zephaniah's day?

- 11. How do these words affect you today?

*Questions marked with a * are optional, but they're really great questions. If at all possible, please take the time to go deeper and experience richer engagement with God in His Word.

The Bible's 66 individual books* are organized into two parts. There are 39 books in what we commonly refer to as *the Old Testament* and 27 books in what we know as *the New Testament*.



The word *testament* means “covenant”—an agreement between two parties. The Old Testament describes the covenant that God made with Abraham and confirmed with Moses. This testament was based on God’s law. It is old because it was written before Jesus came to the earth as a human being. In one way or another, the entire Old Testament points to Jesus. His coming would bring in the new covenant—a covenant based on grace.

History

The Bible’s first 17 books (Genesis–Esther) relate the early history of God’s involvement with people. From His creation of humankind to their rebellion against Him, the story unfolds God’s plan to redeem humanity through the nation He chose for this purpose—Israel. We read of the Israelites’

- escape from Egypt,
- wanderings in the wilderness,
- entry into the Promised Land,
- response to the laws God gave them,
- kings and queens,
- rebellion and consequential exile, and
- return from that exile.

The history contained in these books is exciting, tragic, triumphant, incredible, and inspiring. The account of Israel as a nation is a graphic example of humanity’s struggle to relate to their Maker.

Wisdom

In the middle of the Old Testament are five books referred to as *wisdom literature*—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. They are a

down-to-earth reflection on life and God’s purpose in it. The wisdom writings aim to advise the reader on the best way to handle life, given the nature of the world.

Probably the clearest and simplest example of this writing is in Proverbs. It’s best understood as the teachings of a wise instructor on how to live wisely. They were probably used originally in the education of well-to-do young men. So there is a strong emphasis on self-discipline, self-control, social justice, sexual purity, obedience to parents, careful speech, humility, and the benefits of marrying well.

Proverbs teaches us that it’s not enough to have a merely emotional and intellectual faith. To live wisely, we must ground our faith in real life, in our day-to-day existence. Even though Proverbs’ teachings differ from our modern perspective, we can easily transfer these timeless principles to our own lives. In this way our faith proves to be wise because it works in the real world.

Prophecy

Traditionally, 17 books in the Bible come under the prophecy category. Five of these are referred to as *major prophets* (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel) whereas the remaining 12 shorter books (Hosea–Malachi) are referred to as *minor prophets*. The men who wrote these books

Several people were not excited about the Old Testament CBS study; they assumed it would be a bit dry and historical. But by the end of the year, all agreed that the books came alive and were wonderfully relevant to us in our own lives.

—Janet

delivered their messages to Israel and Judah over the period from the late 700s to the mid 400s BC.

In general terms, the prophets observed their culture's moral decline and warned of impending disaster if the people did not repent and obey God's law. Predictably, their message was largely ignored, and the prophets themselves were often treated poorly. However, God promised to restore His people through His coming Messiah—Jesus. God's judgment was never intended to be an end in itself.

Still Relevant

The history of God's people in the Old Testament is not recorded only for our interest. It has important things to tell about what God is like and what humans are like.

- First, we read of an Israelite nation that simply could not stay faithful to their God. The value of

their example is great, not because they're different from the rest of humanity, but because they are so typical of us. We learn that humans are well meaning and sometimes altruistic, but all too often, wicked and rebellious.

- Second, it teaches us that God is gracious, He does not treat people as their wickedness deserves. We read of a God who takes disobedience seriously—He never glosses over it—but is constantly providing a way for people to be forgiven of their wrongdoings and be reconciled to Himself. God's character is revealed as He interacts with His people.

Under the old covenant—the Old Testament—provision for forgiveness required innumerable animal offerings—a never-ending sacrifice ritual. Through great effort, people could be forgiven. But all along, God had a better way in mind. So stay tuned.

* Believers from all major branches of the Christian faith agree on the Bible's 66 books discussed in this lesson. Some Christians include additional books in their canon. This study will focus on the books that everyone agrees are part of God's Holy Word.