



The Bible Jesus Read Participant's Guide
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Requests for information should be addressed to:
Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

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PREFACE

I have met many Christians who have only read the New Testament, not the Old. They may have tried to read the Old Testament here and there, but they found it too long, too disordered, or simply too strange. I sympathize, but at the same time I feel sad for those people because I don't think we get a full picture of how a life with God works from the New Testament alone.

The book I wrote, which we are studying here, is titled *The Bible Jesus Read* because, when you think about it, Jesus didn't have Paul's Epistles or the Gospels. So when he would go away and spend time meditating on God's Word, he used the Psalms, the Prophets, the books of Moses. That's where Jesus believed his relationship with God the Father was formed and examined.

When I meet people who tell me they were bored by or had a hard time reading the Old Testament, I say, "Welcome to the club!" It takes work. The Old Testament is a long book, and parts of it are slow. What I have found, though, is that the more work you put into it the more you'll get out of it. This Participant's Guide and accompanying materials in this Zondervan *Groupware*[™] curriculum will give you a set of tools and approaches that will help you interpret the Old Testament and appropriate its wisdom.

I find it is helpful for me just to remember what the Old Testament is. The Old Testament is God's living message to us. It consists of truths he wants us to know about himself, about us, and about life.

The effort and commitment you put into your study of the Old Testament—including these Zondervan *Groupware* sessions—will yield a richness and value I believe you cannot obtain from any other source. This is, after all, the Bible Jesus read.

Philip Yancey

Is the Old Testament Worth the Effort?

Apart from the Old Testament, we will always have an impoverished view of God. God is not a philosophical construct but a Person who acts in history: the one who created Adam, who gave a promise to Noah, who called Abraham and introduced himself by name to Moses, who deigned to live in a wilderness *tent* in order to live close to his people. From Genesis 1 onward, God has wanted himself to be known, and the Old Testament is our most complete revelation of what God is like.

—Philip Yancey

Questions to Think About

1. When you hear the words “Old Testament,” what thoughts and feelings come to mind?
2. What personal challenges have you faced when you have tried to read and understand the Old Testament?
3. What have you enjoyed about your ventures into the Old Testament, and what might be some of the benefits of becoming more familiar with it?

Video Presentation: "Is the Old Testament Worth the Effort?"

God wants us to know about him

What Jesus read

Why read the Old Testament?

Discomfort is not bad

Honest feelings

Video Highlights

1. If the New Testament doesn't give a complete picture of what God wants us to know about him, what do you hope to learn from the Old Testament?

Discovering the Old Testament

There is so much of benefit for us to discover in the Old Testament. If only we would read it, we would:

- Gain a better understanding of the Old Testament concepts and allusions found in Hebrews, Jude, Revelation, and other New Testament books.
- Begin uncovering the layers of richness in the Epistles and Gospels that shed light backward on the Old Testament.
- Understand more about what God is really like and how he has worked—and is working—in the lives of his people.
- Benefit from the lessons of faith discovered by ancient Old Testament heroes.
- Have a richer, deeper understanding of the redemptive love story between God and his people that continues to unfold today.
- Begin to grasp the degree to which what we say, how we behave, and even what we think and feel influences God and how much he delights in us.
- Learn the lessons of faith—faith that is entirely human, yet rock-solid—that sustained so many Old Testament characters and can sustain us when we face life's challenges.

Large Group Exploration: Why Read the Old Testament?

Years ago most people knew at least something about the Old Testament—the story of David and Goliath, some of the Ten Commandments, or the story of Noah. Today, however, knowledge of the Old Testament is fading fast among Christians and has virtually vanished in popular culture. Let’s consider some of the challenges to and benefits of reading the Old Testament.

Perspective

The Old Testament is not, as one theologian suggested, “reading someone else’s mail”; it is our mail as well. The people who appear in it were real people learning to get along with the same God that I worship. I need to learn from their experience even as I try to incorporate the marvelous new message brought by Jesus.

—Philip Yancey

1. It’s easy to think that we *ought* to read the Old Testament and therefore lump it into the same category as other things we *should* do—floss our teeth, exercise regularly, eat right, or listen more attentively to a spouse. In what ways have you felt obligated to read the Old Testament? If you have ever attempted to read through the Bible, such as in a “Read the Bible in a Year” program, how did it work out?

Jesus Knew His Bible Well

Jesus often referred to the Old Testament writings and pointed out important facts about himself and his mission. The following chart reveals some of the times when Jesus quoted directly from the Old Testament.

Situation	What Jesus Said
Matthew 13:13–15; Mark 4:12	Isaiah 6:9–10
Mark 7:6–7	Isaiah 29:13
Mark 7:10	Exodus 20:12; 21:17; Leviticus 20:9; Deuteronomy 5:16
Mark 9:48	Isaiah 66:24
Mark 11:17	Isaiah 56:7
Luke 4:4	Deuteronomy 8:3
Luke 4:8	Deuteronomy 6:13
Luke 4:10–11	Psalms 91:11–12
Luke 4:12	Deuteronomy 6:16
Luke 4:18–19	Isaiah 61:1–2
Luke 7:27	Malachi 3:1
Luke 10:27	Deuteronomy 6:5
Luke 18:20	Exodus 20:12–16; Deuteronomy 5:16–20
Luke 20:17	Psalms 118:22
John 6:31	Exodus 16:4; Nehemiah 9:15
John 13:18	Psalms 41:9

3. Jesus considered the command to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” to be the essential commandment. What can you incorporate into your daily life that will help you obey this commandment?

Did You Know?

Unlike many Christians today, the New Testament Christians eagerly pursued the Old Testament Scriptures. They found in the Old Testament a wealth of understanding about the kind of relationship God desired to have with them. Paul, for example, constantly referred to the Old Testament in his writings. Note the many Old Testament connections that appear in the third chapter of Galatians alone!

Galatians 3	Old Testament Connections
v. 6 Mentions Abraham's belief	Genesis 15:6
v. 8 Mentions God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham	Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18
v. 10 Quotes from the Old Testament Law	Deuteronomy 27:26
v. 11 Quotes from an Old Testament prophet	Habbakuk 2:4
v. 12 References the Old Testament Law	Leviticus 18:5
v. 13 Quotes an Old Testament verse	Deuteronomy 21:23
v. 16 Analyzes several Old Testament references	Genesis 12:7; 13:15; and 24:7

Personal Journey: To Do between Sessions

Set aside at least one hour away from distractions to do the following exercise.

1. Take an inventory of what you believe about the Old Testament. List your likes and dislikes, the things that confuse or excite you, your favorite passages, etc. Be sure to include at least two ways in which you might benefit from further exploration of the Old Testament.

2. Write down some ways in which you might be able to use the above “inventory” to chart a new approach toward the Old Testament. For example, if you tend to be bored by all the history in the Bible, you may want to reread portions of it through the lens of a specific perspective. Instead of focusing on the violence or trying to follow the historic sequence, you may want to look for insight into God’s character or look for evidence of his desire for relationship.

Perspective

It may prove dangerous to get involved with the Bible. You approach it with a series of questions, and as you enter it you find the questions turned back upon you. King David got swept up in a story by the prophet Nathan and leaped to his feet indignant—only to learn the barbed story concerned himself. I find something similar at work again and again as I read the Old Testament. I am thrown back on what I truly believe. I am forced to reexamine. . . . After spending time exploring the Old Testament, I can truthfully say that I come away more astonished, not less.

—Philip Yancey

3. Begin reading the Old Testament. Consider how much of an investment you want to make in exploring the Old Testament and set a goal for yourself. If you get bogged down in a difficult area, feel free to take a refreshing break by going to one of your favorite Old Testament passages then approaching the more difficult passage again later, or, choose a new passage.

Two-Week Old Testament Reading Plan

The Student Bible has a two-week Old Testament reading plan that provides an overview of Old Testament highlights. If you are just beginning to study the Old Testament, it's a good way to start.

- Day 1: Genesis 1—The story of Creation
- Day 2: Genesis 3—The origin of sin
- Day 3: Genesis 22—Abraham and Isaac
- Day 4: Exodus 3—Moses' encounter with God
- Day 5: Exodus 20—The gift of the Ten Commandments
- Day 6: 1 Samuel 13—David and Goliath
- Day 7: 2 Samuel 11—David and Bathsheba
- Day 8: 2 Samuel 12—Nathan's rebuke of the king
- Day 9: 1 Kings 18—Elijah and the prophets of Baal
- Day 10: Job 38—God's answer to Job
- Day 11: Psalm 51—A classic confession
- Day 12: Isaiah 40—Words of comfort from God
- Day 13: Daniel 6—Daniel and the lions
- Day 14: Amos 4—A prophet's stern warning