

UNDERSTANDING THE OLD TESTAMENT

Understanding the Old Testament is very simple. Read it faithfully and remember what you read. The main reasons people have problems with the Old Testament are:

1. It is very large.
2. There is sometimes an unclear flow of events in the King James Version.
3. People get "stuck" in the more difficult sections, so they do not get to the easy and fun parts.

Recommendations for learning the Old Testament are:

1. Do not start by reading books about the Old Testament. The best thing to do is read the Bible itself. History is actually easy and fun to learn, but there is no way to learn it except by multiple readings. Also, you cannot gain the entire scope of it all at once. As each book becomes familiar, the whole sequence will begin to make sense.
2. Read the parts that have more "straight history." A person can understand the basic story line of Moby Dick with a single reading, yet can sit down to read the Old Testament and get lost. Most of the historical sections are easy reading. Genealogies, laws, lists, etc., slow a person down and break the "story line." They will be necessary later, but they are not helpful to the beginner.

You can start to understand the Old Testament by reading:

Genesis	Judges
Exodus (chapters 1--20;24;32--34;40)	Ruth
Numbers (chapters 11--25;32)	I and II Samuel
Deuteronomy (chapters 32:44-52;34)	I and II Kings
Joshua (chapters 1--12; 13:1;22--24)	

Read these sections of the Old Testament a few times. This will start to give you a basic historical understanding. Then read Chronicles. Again, stay away from the genealogies. They will slow you down and discourage you. By the time you have done that, you should be gaining a more complete scope of the Old Testament, because Chronicles starts with Adam and covers most of the Old Testament. Skip the first nine chapters the first few times you read it and start with chapter ten, which parallels I Samuel 31. Also, Chronicles should be read in close association with Kings to get the best understanding of both.

After you get a basic historical understanding of the Old Testament, it is important to gain an understanding of the Mosaic law. Understanding the law in Exodus through Deuteronomy is essential to your continuing to develop your understanding of the history. As you get the history in your mind, read more and more books. The more you learn, the faster you will learn.

Do not get in a hurry to learn the later prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc. Every prophet speaks in a historical context. The majority of the prophets spoke about the times they lived in; therefore, it is essential to first learn the history from Kings and Chronicles, as well as the law. Then you will be able to understand the later prophets and other writings.

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are important to read because they are the historical close of the Old Testament.

3. Get a Bible Atlas. As you learn, you need to know the geographical areas, cities, etc., that are mentioned. Be sure to take the time to learn how to use the atlas. The Oxford Bible Atlas is good.

Once you gain a basic understanding of the Old Testament, you can start to read books about it that will be helpful. There are a number of books on history, archaeology, geography, customs, language, etc., that are also helpful.

There is no "easy way" to gain a scope of the Old Testament. It must be read and reread. The reading is fun, however, and a great blessing to anyone who decides to do it.