

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The promise made

BOOKS	39 books: 5 books of Moses, 12 books of history, 5 books of poetry and wisdom, and 17 books of prophecy.
WRITTEN	Over about a thousand years, from the time of Moses to the prophet Malachi around 430 BC, by the traditional count.
LANGUAGE	Mostly Hebrew. A few chapters of Ezra and Daniel and one verse of Jeremiah are in Aramaic, a sister language.
ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS	The Dead Sea Scrolls, found from 1947 to 1956, hold pieces of every Old Testament book except Esther. They are about a thousand years older than the copies scholars had before.
EARLIEST MANUSCRIPT	Two tiny silver scrolls from Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem, from about 600 BC. They hold the priestly blessing from Numbers 6:24 to 26, Yahweh bless you and keep you, and they spell out God's name YHWH.
THE LIST OF 39	Jesus called these Scriptures the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms in Luke 24:44. Jewish Bibles have the same books but count them as 24 by grouping some together.

What Does Testament Mean

Testament is an old word for covenant, a binding promise. The Old Testament is the story of God's covenants: with Noah, with Abraham, with Israel at Mount Sinai and with King David. Each one moves the story forward, and each one points to the new covenant Jesus would bring.

One Big Story

Thirty nine books look like a library, but they tell one story. God makes a good world, and people break it. God picks one family, Abraham's, to bring the fix. He rescues them from Egypt, gives them His law and a land, and sends prophet after prophet every time they wander off. The Old Testament ends with the people waiting for the Messiah. The New Testament opens with His arrival.

Not in Time Order

English Bibles group the books by type, not by date. Job may be one of the oldest stories in the Bible, and many of the prophets lived during the events in Kings and Chronicles. When a prophet's book confuses you, look up which king was on the throne.

How It Is Organized

THE LAW	Genesis to Deuteronomy. The five books of Moses: creation, the fathers of Israel, the escape from Egypt and the law.
HISTORY	Joshua to Esther. Israel enters the land, gets kings, splits in two, goes into exile and comes home.
POETRY AND WISDOM	Job to Song of Solomon. Songs, prayers and wise sayings for real life.
MAJOR PROPHETS	Isaiah to Daniel. Five longer books. Major means long, not more important.

MINOR PROPHETS

Hosea to Malachi. Twelve shorter books. Minor means short, not less important.

Why We Say Yahweh

God told Moses His personal name in Exodus 3:15. In Hebrew it is spelled YHWH, and it shows up about 6,800 times in the Old Testament. Out of respect, Jewish readers stopped saying it out loud and said Lord instead, so most English Bibles print LORD in capital letters. The Owner's Manual puts His name back. Where you see Yahweh, the Hebrew says YHWH. Where you see Lord, the Hebrew usually says Adonai, which means master. Where you see God, the Hebrew usually says Elohim, the mighty Creator.

How This Bible Marks the Old Testament

PROPHECY. Prophecies are highlighted in green, orange, purple or blue, depending on how they came true. The note at the bottom of the column tells you where.

QUOTED IN THE NEW. When the New Testament quotes an Old Testament verse, that verse is printed in italics, and the note tells you where it is quoted. When the New Testament only points back to a verse without quoting it, the verse gets a note but no italics.

GOD SPEAKING. Words spoken by God are printed in red. Only the words He actually said are red.

THE FAMILY LINE. Names in the bloodline of Jesus are underlined in red, from Adam and Eve all the way to Judah and Perez.

FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: HIGH

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS



Cave 4 at Qumran, near the Dead Sea, where most of the scroll pieces were found.

FOUND BY A SHEPHERD

In late 1946 or early 1947 a young Bedouin shepherd named Muhammed edh Dhib was looking for a lost goat near the Dead Sea. He threw a rock into a cave, heard pottery break and found clay jars holding ancient scrolls. From 1947 to 1956 searchers found scrolls in eleven caves near a place called Qumran.

WHAT WAS FOUND

Pieces of about 900 scrolls, many broken into tens of thousands of fragments. About 230 of them are books of the Bible, and every Old Testament book shows up except Esther. The rest are Bible commentaries, community rules and other religious writings, including 1 Enoch.

HOW OLD THEY ARE

The scrolls were copied from about 250 BC to AD 68, the year the Romans destroyed the settlement at Qumran. Scholars dated them by handwriting, radiocarbon tests and coins found at the site.

THE GREAT ISAIAH SCROLL

One scroll holds all 66 chapters of Isaiah. It is about 24 feet long and was copied around 125 BC. Before 1947 the oldest complete Hebrew copies of Isaiah were from about AD 900 to 1000. This scroll is about 1,000 years older, and when scholars compared them the words were nearly identical. Most differences are spelling and small slips of the pen, and none of them change a major teaching of the faith.

WHERE ARE THE VOWELS

Hebrew was written with consonants only.

Readers knew the vowel sounds by heart, the way you can read txt msgs. Jewish scribes called the Masoretes added written vowel marks between about AD 600 and 1000. So the scrolls have no vowel marks, but the letters match.

BUT WASN'T THE BIBLE CHANGED?

Skeptics often say the Bible was changed over and over until it no longer says what it first said. The Dead Sea Scrolls let us test that claim, and copies made before Jesus was born read almost the same as the Hebrew Bible we use today. To be fair, some scrolls show small differences, and a few books like Jeremiah existed in a shorter and a longer form. But the big picture is clear: the text was copied with amazing care.

ISAIAH 53 BEFORE JESUS

The Isaiah Scroll includes Isaiah 53, the chapter about a Servant who is pierced for our sins. It was copied more than a hundred years before Jesus was born, so no one can say Christians wrote it after the fact.

WHERE THEY ARE TODAY

Most are kept by the Israel Antiquities Authority. The Great Isaiah Scroll is in the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, a building shaped like the lids of the jars the scrolls were found in. In 1954 four of the scrolls were offered for sale in a Wall Street Journal ad, and Israel quietly bought them for \$250,000.