



Old Testament

# The Pentateuch

## Course 1

# Old Testament Field Guide

### Leader's Guide

Overview

Lesson 1: Getting Ready

Lesson 2: Geography and Religion

Lesson 3: Geo-Political History

Lesson 4: Ancient Near Eastern Sources

Lesson 5: Impact of the Old Testament



## Old Testament Field Guide

**Lesson 1: Getting Ready.** BibleJourney is a study of the Bible that engages you as a whole person. We want to start by looking at our presuppositions and emotions for each genre of the Bible and for the Old Testament in general. Getting a “base line” for each member of your group will give you insight on how best to lead everyone. They will also be able to look back to this first lesson later on and realize how much more full their understanding and appreciation for the Bible has become.

**Lesson 2: Geography and Religion.** Although geography may not be a favorite subject for some people, it will turn out to be a very important part of the Bible’s storyline. We’ll learn to view the Promised Land as a “character” in the metanarrative. This lesson digs into the obvious reason why Israel was tempted to worship other gods—and that will be a sober invitation to consider how we are similarly tempted.

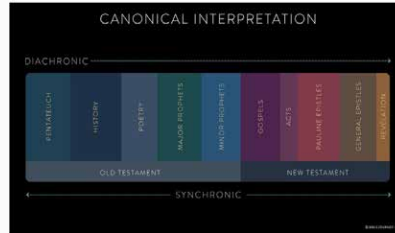
**Lesson 3: Geo-political History.** History may be another subject that isn’t a favorite for some people but one that is at the center of God’s revelation. This lesson is an invitation to pay attention to the historical details where his power and sovereignty are displayed. Here we’ll find the next great temptation both for Israel and for us. You can’t get more relevant than our unbelief around prosperity and peace.

**Lesson 4: Ancient Near Eastern Sources.** One of the Guiding Questions we’ll be asking throughout BibleJourney is about the uniqueness of the Bible—its genres, topics, institutions. This lesson gets us started looking at history, laws, poetry and wisdom to get used to similarities and differences. We’ll also try to expose any assumptions we have about the relevance of the Old Testament and the God of the Old Testament.

**Lesson 5: Impact of the Old Testament.** This lesson ties us back to the final video in the Journey Prep series. It is one major piece of the “In Front of the Text” segments in BibleJourney. We’ll want to begin noticing all the ways the Bible has influenced our social and political institutions, our art, language and science. If group members come from different cultures, you may find some very different answers.

**Resource Pack: Graphics/Images**

*Canonical Interpretation*



**In the Text**



**In Front of the Text**

**Q.** What parts of the Old Testament are your favorites and why?

**A.** ( [OT Favorites](#),  [Psalms](#),  [Rethinking Your Favorite Passages](#))

**Q.** Describe how seriously you take the Bible’s historical accuracy, that is, does it include myths and fairy tales or do you consider it an accurate historical record of people, places and events?

**A.** ( [Taking the Stories Seriously](#),  [Elah Valley](#),  [A “Sunday School” & a “Skeptical” Perspective on the Bible](#))

**Q.** Have you been to Israel and, if so, how did that change how you viewed the historical dimension of the Bible?

**Q.** Which types (genres) of literature in the Bible are you most comfortable with? Which are you least comfortable with?

**Q.** Distinguish between proverb, principle, promise, prediction and prophecy.

- A.** *Proverb*—Short sayings used to promote wise behavior (may include a principle).

*Principle*—Observable reality or idea that is generally true.

*Promise*—Assurance of a future blessing or redemption.

*Prediction*—A statement about specific future events—what and when.

*Prophecy*—A statement about the present or future—often includes words of promise and/or judgment (if/then) and almost always includes predictions.

([□◀ Promises of the Old Testament](#), [□◀ Proverbs as Promises](#), [📖 Proverb, Principle, Promise, Prediction, or Prophecy?](#))

- Q.** What is the most helpful way to think of God's "Law"?

- A.** Help students understand the law as a form of God's revelation and character, as seen in the concept that the nations would say, "What kind of God lives with you?" Discuss the rich language of emotion for the laws in Psalm 119. ([□◀ God of the Laws](#), [□◀ The Law & the New Covenant](#), [📖 The Affect of the Bible—Psalm 119](#))

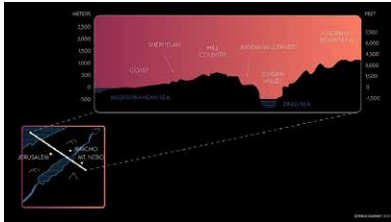
 **Behind the Text**

- Q.** What is your reaction to the militant view of God in the Old Testament?

- A.** Ask for a reaction to the argument that there is a different God in the Old Testament than in the New, i.e., angry and vengeful versus loving and merciful. After allowing for a few responses, you can then make the point that the God of justice is at work to keep order in a world that keeps bending itself towards chaos and injustice. Another important point is our own experience: we have trouble with the wars but we have a passion for justice. Ultimately, the group should realize that the very Gospel requires God's holiness and justice as much as his grace and mercy. ([□◀ God of War](#))

**Resource Pack: Graphics/Images**

Geographic Zones



Rainfall



Fertile Crescent



Baal



 **In the Text**

**Q.** Before this lesson, how important would you have said the Promised Land is in the Bible? Now that we've seen how central it is in the Old Testament, what do you know now that would explain that?

**A.** Abrahamic Promises are like characters in the story: Seed, Land, Blessing  
([□ Land is a Character in the Story](#))

 **Behind the Text**

**A.** Dependence on God for water because Israel was situated between the Sea (Mediterranean) and the Sand (Arabian Desert) in the Fertile Crescent.  
([□ Fertile Crescent](#), [□ Five Geographic Zones](#), [☒ Geographic Zones](#), [□ The Primary Natural Challenge: Water](#), [☒ Where's the Rain?](#) [□ Fertility Gods](#), [☒ Worshiping Local Gods](#))

**Q.** What was Israel's first great temptation?

**A.** To worship the gods of nature who provided fertility. ([□ Fertile Crescent](#), [□ Five Geographic Zones](#), [☒ Geographic Zones](#), [□ The Primary Natural Challenge: Water](#), [☒ Where's the Rain?](#) [□ Fertility Gods](#), [☒ Worshiping Local Gods](#))

**A Temptation that Promises Prosperity**

([☒ A Temptation that Promises Prosperity](#))

**Q.** What factors apart from God are you tempted to rely on as the source of your prosperity? (e.g., education, training, work ethic, luck, relational network)

**Q.** Have you seen that relying on any of those sources of prosperity has estranged you from God and hindered your spiritual well-being? Explain.

**Q.** Take a moment to record in the space below ways you have attempted to manipulate or please God so that he would provide you with the things you want.

**Q.** Jot down a list of the “gods” you think our society most often “worships” in pursuit of prosperity?

**Resource Pack: Graphics/Images**

Old Testament World



Egyptian Empire



Neo-Assyrian Empire



Neo-Babylonian Empire



Persian Empire



Greek Empire



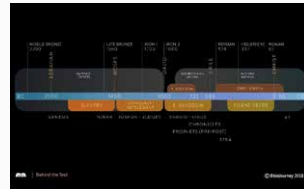
Local Kingdoms/  
International Route



Clover Leaf



Timeline



 **In the Text**

**Q.** How important is geography and history to the storyline of the Bible?

**A.** The faiths that grew out of the Bible are grounded in geography and history more than in other religions. This is the story of God redeeming the real world he literally created. ([□□ Metanarrative](#), [☞ The Bible & the Ancient World](#))

 **Behind the Text**

**Q.** In the last lesson, we learned that the Promised Land was a land between “The Sea and the Sand.” What have we learned about “The Land Between” in this lesson?

**A.** It is between superpowers. Israel was one of the “mice” in the shadow of these geo-political “cats.” ([□□ The Rise of Civilizations](#), [□□ Imperial Domination & Local Politics](#), [☞ The Cats & the Mice](#), [□□ Wadi Zered—Boundary between Moab & Edom](#), [□□ Lower Jordan—Canyons Rich with Biblical History](#), [□□ The Land Between](#), [□□ Petra](#))

**Q.** What was Israel's second great temptation?

**A.** Making political alliances to assure their safety and peace. (□◀ [The Great Temptation of Peace](#))



### In Front of the Text

#### Modern-Day Temptations of Peace

(☞ [Modern-day Temptations of Peace](#))

**Q.** More than likely, you have demands in your life that consistently threaten your peace and prosperity. What are some of the “cats” that threaten your peace?

**Q.** To what do you find yourself turning to secure your peace in the midst of those threats?

**Q.** Are there times when you might even turn to one of those “cats” to protect yourself from other “cats”? If so, explain.

**Q.** How does God and your faith in him help you overcome the threats and not succumb to the temptations to rely on God-counterfeits?

**A.** In your discussion, look at the concept of trust in light of all kinds of “insurance” in our world. (□◀ [The Modern Temptation of Peace](#), ☞ [Modern-day Temptations of Peace](#))





Note: The goal in this lesson is simply to begin looking at literary parallels to the Bible from the ancient world. You want everyone to start feeling comfortable with noticing both differences and similarities. We will engage this kind of exercise in every genre of the Bible and this will progressively highlight the Bible's uniqueness. Be pastorally sensitive. You may find some people very hesitant to consider anything similar. Reassure them that this is a journey into a world that is often foreign to us but familiar to our spiritual ancestors. God was communicating his unique message clearly through their language, literature and cultural institutions.



### In the Text

#### 2 Kings 18–19 & The Taylor Prism

([📖 2 Kings 18–19 & The Taylor Prism](#))

**Q.** What similarities do you observe between the biblical account and the Taylor Prism?

**A.** Both describe the conflict between Sennacherib of Assyria and Hezekiah of Judah. Both say that, during this conflict, many fortified towns in Judah were conquered and Jerusalem—with Hezekiah in it—came under siege.

**Q.** What differences do you notice?

**A.** The Assyrian account emphasizes the overwhelming might of Sennacherib who conquers Judah and traps Hezekiah. The biblical account emphasizes God's miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem and the ultimate death of the Assyrian king.

**Q.** How do you feel about the differences?



### Behind the Text

**Q.** How do you think these sorts of ancient Near East parallel texts should be treated alongside the Bible?

**A.** While historians often describe accounts like those in the Bible as theological wishful thinking, those of their neighbors were often inflated to honor the king and to minimize or eliminate anything embarrassing. In reality both accounts state that Jerusalem was not destroyed. Interestingly, pagan accounts often describe miraculous intervention just like the Bible does.

 In Front of the Text**Colossians 2:8 & Ancient Near East Writings**

(📖 [Colossians 2:8 & Ancient Near East Writings](#))

**Q.** Is studying ancient Near East writings dangerous for a believer? If so, why?

**A.** It may be dangerous if we are overly interested in wisdom that contradicts the Bible. On the other hand, it is helpful to “know the enemy”—to recognize the philosophies that captivate the minds of each generation.

**Q.** In what ways do you think looking at other ancient Near East writings could inform and enrich your study of the Bible?

**A.** The Bible says that “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecc 1:9). Any idea that challenges biblical truth has been around before and it’s always helpful to recognize that. Another saying you may have heard is, “Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it.”

Let’s also remember that the Bible uses many terms, concepts and genres from the ancient world. Studying parallels can help sharpen our understanding of the Bible’s unique message.

**Challenge**

- Describe where you are right now on this topic of biblical parallels: doubtful, troubled, open, excited...



### The Old Testament—Cultural Impact Throughout the Ages

([☒ The Old Testament—Cultural Impact Throughout the Ages](#))

**Q.** Record some Bible stories, passages or topics from the Old Testament that you believe have had an ongoing impact in history and culture. It might help to think about some types of cultural impact. See the list below to help you come up with observations of cultural impact or influence of the Old Testament through the ages:

- Paintings
- Plays
- Symphonies
- Films
- Songs
- Architecture
- Names of places
- Sculptures
- Operas
- Poems
- Musicals

### Pondering the Uniqueness of Israel

([☒ Pondering the Uniqueness of Israel](#))

**Q.** Before we look at the Bible's impact *In Front of the Text*, jot down some impressions about how you think the Bible was unique in its own political, social, literary and ethical world. Try to provide at least two examples of how Israel's institutions and literature were different from its neighboring cultures. This list will get us thinking about how the Bible was meant to impact society and culture.

## Challenge

In this lesson we surveyed the impact of the Bible on religious, social and political institutions and on art, language and science. Take time to discuss examples from each. What did you find most surprising or inspiring about the Bible's impact?