Lesson 2

AN OVERVIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

Before we jump into Genesis (the first book of the Bible), there's a little more foundation work we need to do. We need to briefly review the history of the Old Testament.

As I pointed out in Lesson 1, the Old Testament covers about _____[a] years of history. Before we go any further, though, technically the Old Testament covers about _____[b] years of history.

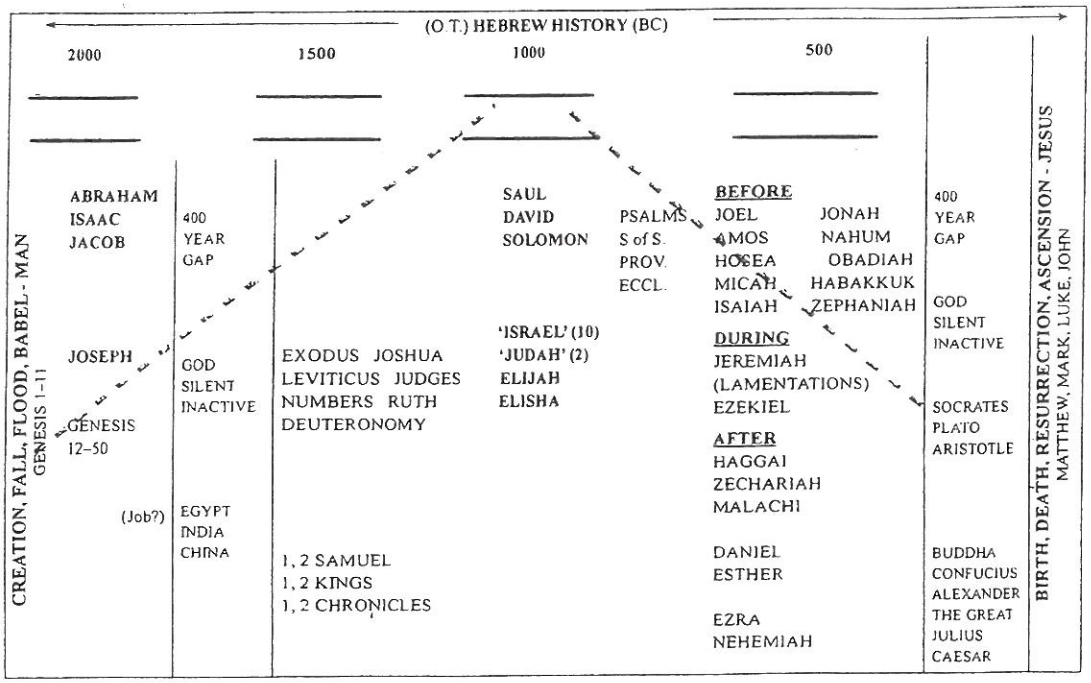
So, if it really covers about 4,000 years of history, why do I say it covers about 2,000 years of history? Great question!

The first 2,000 years of Old Testament history (roughly speaking) is crammed into the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis. These eleven chapters cover what some people describe as the "prehistoric part" of history—the creation of the universe, the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel (we'll talk about all these events in the next lesson). The focus in that part of Genesis is on mankind in general.

When we get to Genesis 12, though, there is an important shift of focus. Instead of focusing on mankind in general, the focus shifts to the nation of _____[c]. From that moment, the rest of the Old Testament will focus on Israel's beginning and its history, and that covers about 2,000 years. Since all but the first eleven chapters of the Old Testament is about the history of Israel, that's why I say the Old Testament covers about 2,000 years of history.

With that said, Old Testament history can be divided into four equal parts of roughly 500 years each (see the chart on the next page). Think of them as "the four quarters" of Old Testament history. Each period (or quarter) has a key event and a prominent person.

Also, as you can see on the chart, there are two "_____[d]-year gaps" during the Old Testament period. During these two "400-year gaps" the Bible records nothing that God said or did.



We can further divide these four periods of Old Testament history into smaller historical periods. As a preview of what you'll soon learn, I want to briefly identify 12 historical periods in the Old Testament. Don't be concerned with remembering the details right now. You'll master them as our study continues (these 12 historical periods and their summaries are from *A Newcomer's Guide to the Bible* by Michael Armour):

1. The Period of _____[e]

This covers all the events leading up to the story of Abraham. This period tells about God creating the universe, the earth, its creatures, and human beings. This period also relates how a great flood once destroyed the earth, how life reemerged after the flood, and how various nations got their start.

2. The Period of _____[f] Family

In this period the Bible introduces Abraham, tells his life story, and then follows his family for three more generations as God works with them. By the end of this period, Abraham's grandson Jacob and twelve sons have moved their households to Egypt.

3. The Period of _____[g] Bondage

During these 400 years the descendants of Jacob undergo harsh treatment. The Egyptians force them into slavery, then intensify that slavery

as time goes by. This enslavement comes to an end when Moses leads his people to freedom after God uses a series of powerful disasters to cripple Egypt.

4. The Period of _____[h] Wanderings

Once they gain their freedom, the Israelites leave Egypt for the wilderness region of the Sinai Peninsula, east of the Red Sea. Moses leads them through this desolate area for 40 years. It's here that God gives Israel his law. At the heart of this law are ten principles—the Ten Commandments—that serve as Israel's basic moral code from this time forward. It's also here that Moses begins to write the first five books of the Bible. During this time the Israelites live as nomads, growing in size and preparing to conquer the land of Canaan. By the end of Moses' life, he has brought them to the border of Canaan and positioned them to invade it.

5. The Period of _____[i]

Under Joshua, Moses' successor, the Israelites enter Canaan, fight a series of pivotal battles with God's help, and take over the region. They divide the land among themselves according to tribes, so that specific sections of Canaan will hereafter bear the name of an Israelite tribe.

6. The Period of _____[j]

After Joshua dies, no national leader appears immediately. All government is at the local level. The only exception occurs when military emergencies arise. Then the Israelites turn to some exceptional individuals to lead them. These individuals primarily provide military leadership, but are known as judges because they often settle legal disputes in addition to providing military leadership.

7. The Period of the _____[k] Kingdom

Israel ultimately wants a permanent leader and Samuel, the last of the judges, appoints the nation's first king. For more than a century, over the lifespan of three kings, all of Israel answers to one ruler (one king). Jerusalem becomes the capital of this kingdom, and Solomon (the third king) builds a great temple there. But following Solomon's death, internal rivalries break the nation apart and two separate kingdoms emerge.

8. The Period of the _____[l] Kingdom

In this period ten tribes band together to form a kingdom in the northern portion of Canaan. Two other tribes pull together in the south.

Sometimes these two kingdoms stand side by side against invaders. At other times they turn on one another in pitched battle. Of the two, the northern kingdom is shorter lived. It was destroyed by the rising Assyrian Empire.

9. The Period of _____[m] Alone

The southern kingdom took the name of its larger tribe, Judah (this is the name that eventually gives us the word "Jew"). Assyria never succeeds in toppling Judah. But Judah does eventually fall to another empire that will rise and defeat the Assyrians and become rulers of the Middle East. That Empire is called the Babylonians.

10. The Period of _____[n] Exile

Like the Assyrian Empire before them, the Babylonians transplant conquered people from their homes to distant lands. The Babylonians take thousands of Israelites from their homes in Judah to Babylon where they live in exile for decades. During this period the Medes and Persians will arise overthrow the Babylonians and seize their empire.

11. The Period of _____[o]

Under the rule of the Medes and Persians, conditions improve for the displaced Israelites. They are permitted to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it. They also reconstruct the temple, which the Babylonians had leveled. As the rebuilding of Jerusalem nears completion, the Old Testament comes to an end.

12. The Period _____[p] the _____[q]

This era, about 400 years long, is addressed only indirectly in the Bible. The book of Daniel foretells some of the events that play out in this period, including the rise of both Greece and Rome. Toward the end of this period Israel falls under Roman rule as does most of the Middle East.

FILL IN THE BLANK ANSWER KEY:

[a] 2,000
[b] 4,000
[c] Israel
[d] 400
[e] Beginnings
[f] Abraham's
[g] Egyptian
[h] Wilderness
[i] Conquest
[j] Judges
[k] United
[l] Divided
[m] Judah
[n] Babylonian
[o] Restoration
[p] Between
[q] Testaments