



TIME TRAVEL

— *to the* —

OLD TESTAMENT

*An Essential Companion for
the Christian Explorer*

CHRIS SINKINSON

Do you ever get the feeling that, despite all your misgivings, there is something you really must do? Reading all the Old Testament part of the Bible is like that for many people. We have no enthusiasm for it, because it is so long, complicated, out of date and beyond our understanding. Well, despair no longer, for help is at hand. Chris Sinkinson has written this marvellous book to give us all the help we need in understanding the big picture and developing a desire for the first part of the Bible. We travel through time with a Doctor who needs no Tardis to help us traverse the various places we will visit. He will show and explain to us many strange and wonderful things. So get on board and enjoy the experience of *Time Travel to the Old Testament*.

—**Clive Anderson**, minister, tour leader and author, co-author of *Through the British Museum with the Bible*

Chris Sinkinson brings to life the sights, sounds and culture of the Old Testament world, giving readers a valuable opportunity to enter into seemingly familiar stories and explore their riches in a fresh way. Informative, yet very readable, this book is a great resource for those who want to begin to study the Scriptures in context, gaining a deeper understanding of the biblical story and the roots of the Christian faith.

—**Heidi Johnston**, speaker, and author of *Life in the Big Story*

In an easy style, Chris Sinkinson shows how the books of the Old Testament are realistic and relevant for today. Without avoiding difficulties, he demonstrates how modern archaeological discoveries aid understanding of the Bible.

—**Alan Millard**, Emeritus Rankin Professor of Hebrew and Ancient Semitic Languages, *The University of Liverpool*

We live in a day when Bible knowledge cannot be assumed. In general, children are largely untaught the Bible, and those who come to faith in their teens or later (as so many do) have a major task on their hands. For such, Dr Sinkinson's book will shine as a bright beacon. When I say that he skips his merry way through a remarkably full summary of Old Testament life, thought, history and context, I do not imply superficiality but call attention to an enviable lightness of touch and style in a book that nourishes heart and head alike.

—*Alec Motyer, author and Bible expositor*

With carefully researched facts and enjoyable wit, Sinkinson invites his readers into the real history of the Hebrew Bible. He helps followers of Jesus Christ remember that the story of Abraham, Isaac, Samson, and David is their story too; they follow the same God and should be familiar with his work throughout history. I commend this book to you, as I believe it will add to Christians' understanding of the world of the Old Testament, and of the God who creates and redeems our world through his Son.

—*Jon Nielson, College Pastor, College Church, Wheaton*

I've suffered from some travel guides over the years. They know too much and bore you by going on and on. But Chris Sinkinson proves a wonderful guide to the long-ago world of the Old Testament: sure-footed, interesting, and dispensing up-to-date knowledge with a light and humorous touch. He's aware of just how much we need to know to make sense of what we read. Under his expert teaching so much that seems difficult is opened up. The book is 'simply wonderful'—and both words are important.

—*Derek Tidball, former Principal, London School of Theology*

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Dedicated to the students at Moorlands College,
for encouraging a tutor to continue to learn

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PATRIARCHS

2200-1550 BC

EXODUS

1446-1240 BC

CONQUEST & SETTLEMENT

1200-1020 BC

UNITED KINGDOM

1020-931 BC

TWO KINGDOMS

931-721 BC

JUDAH ALONE

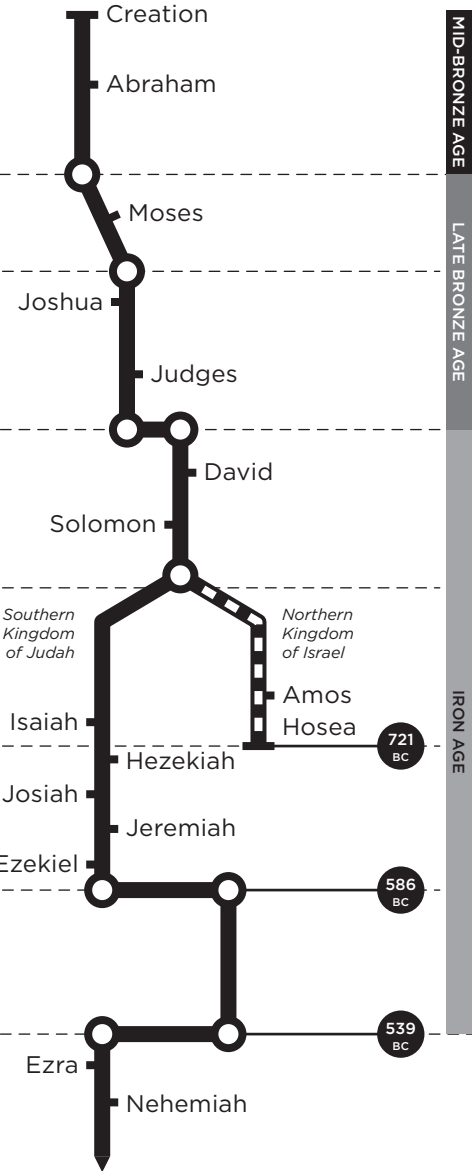
721-587 BC

BABYLONIAN EXILE

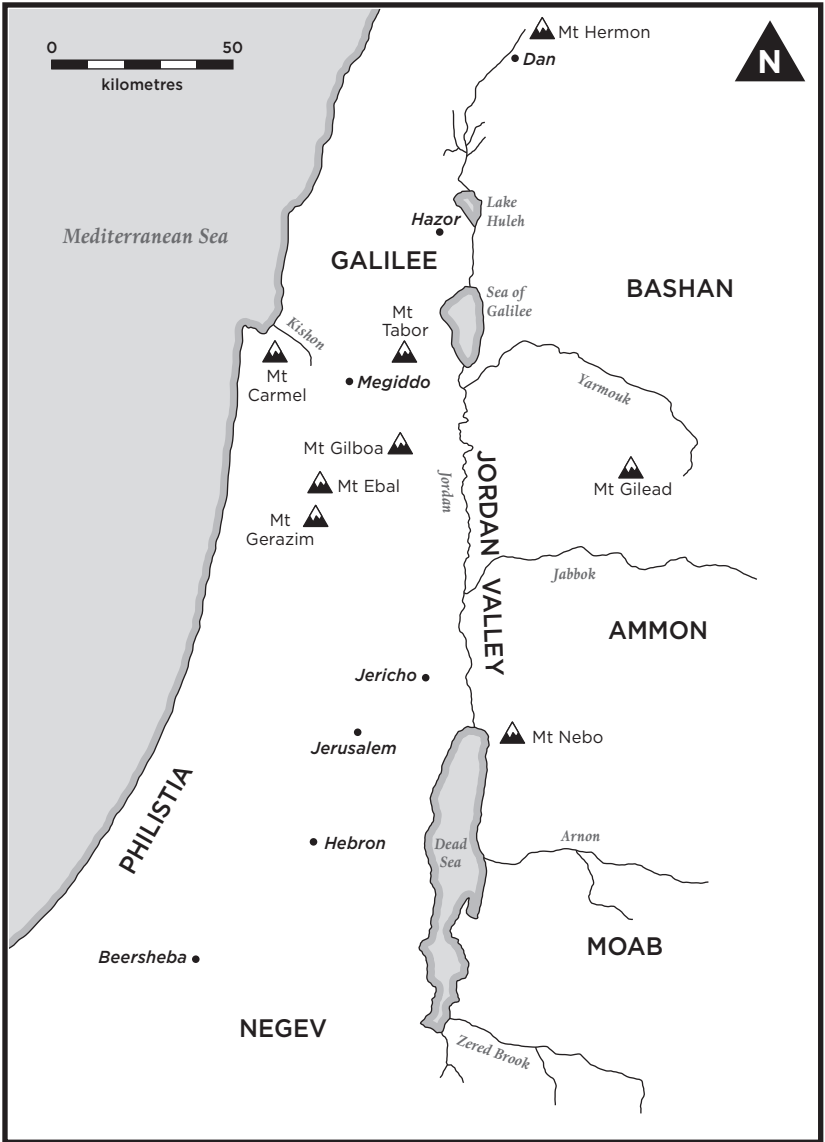
587-539 BC

RETURN & RESTORATION

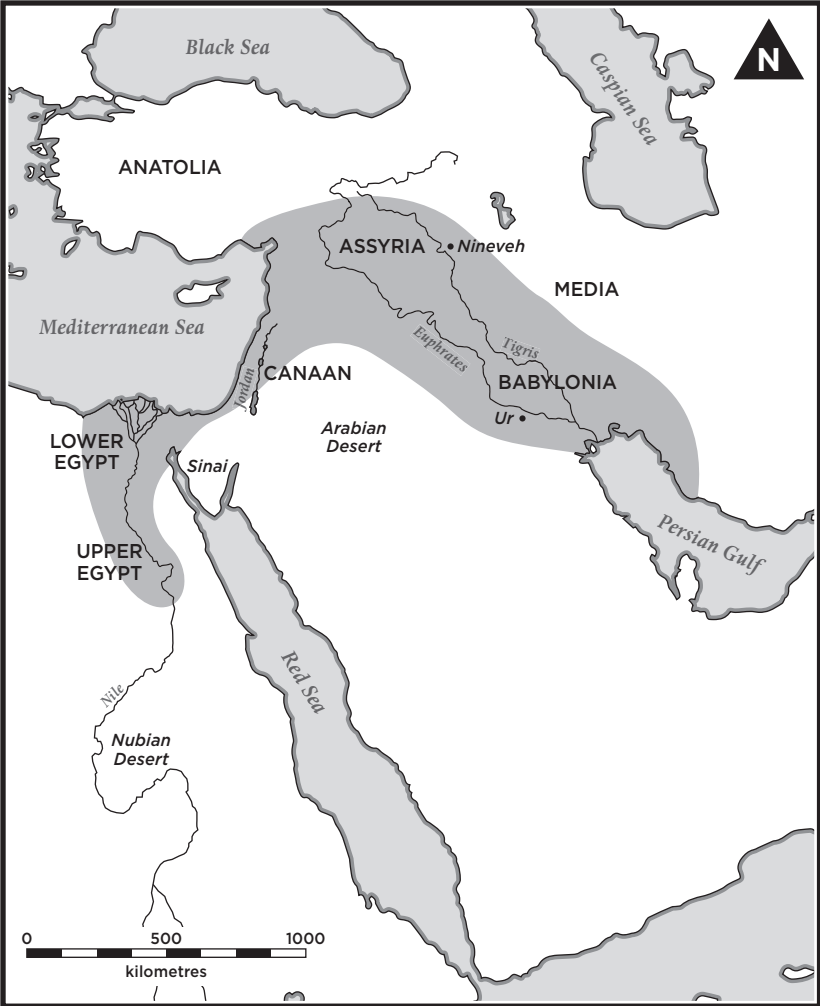
539-333 BC



TIMELINE: THE OLD TESTAMENT STORY



MAP OF ANCIENT ISRAEL'S NATURAL FEATURES



MAP OF THE FERTILE CRESCENT

1

PREPARING TO EMBARK

If I could turn back time

I hardly need to tell you that time travel remains a favoured theme of science fiction writers. From H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* to Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveller's Wife* more than a century later, our appetites for stories that bend the rules of the universe have shown no sign of abating. Perhaps for some, watching *Doctor Who* simply reveals a love of fantasy and adventure. But I have a feeling that, for everyone, there is a deeply held wish to move outside the boundaries of time. We would like to see what it was like to have lived in the past, marched with a Roman army, viewed the building of the pyramids or listened to the philosopher Socrates as he taught his disciples. Particularly with the benefit of a route back to the present, I doubt if anyone would turn down the opportunity to take a trip in that famous blue police box.

For religious people, there is an added reason for this desire. Most of the major world religions were founded long ago and

relate to events in ancient history. Did those miracles really happen? What were those religious founders actually like? And, given how much a religion influences present life, how important is it for us to be sure that we have not been mistaken or misled?

For Christians and Jews, the books described variously as the Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible provide a rich itinerary for the would-be time traveller. What happened in and around the land called Canaan in the ancient world? Who were the Israelites, and did God really speak to them?

There is good news. Time travel is possible. At least, with a bit of communication from the past and imagination in the present, we can enter the world of ancient history. This kind of time travelling has been going on since people first learned how to write down their thoughts and histories. And the people of the ancient world have travelled into the future too—we still hear their words today.

Keys to the past

So here are the tools for a Christian time traveller. First, a Bible. We are going to explore the ancient world of the Israelites through their records. This will involve carefully considering the meaning of what they wrote, thereby avoiding superficial interpretations. Secondly, we will need an imagination. We don't just read their words as if they wrote them yesterday. We recognize the need to take an imaginative leap into another place and time. We are not imagining things that are *not* there, but things that *are* there. By using our imagination, we gain sympathy and empathy with the characters. We start to see things a little like they did and understand a little better what their world looked like.

However, the tools of Bible and imagination need to be supplemented by other guides. There is the important issue of language. Three languages are evident in the Bible: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. To understand the text, we will need either a brilliant, personal grasp of these languages or an accurate translation. Thankfully for non-linguists, accurate translations are easily accessible!¹ Then there is the issue of geographical and historical context. What do we know from outside the Bible that will help us understand the numerous references to places and events from the ancient world? The fact is that we know a great deal, and much of this will enrich our grasp of the Bible.

These additional guides are not hard to find. Exploring the world of the ancient Israelites is not the preserve of experts. With a little assistance, anyone can do it. Indeed, even without knowledge of biblical languages or the archaeology of the Ancient Near East, any thoughtful reader can still make plenty of headway. They can understand the main plot of the Old Testament and grasp the meaning of the individual stories. This is what Christians mean by a doctrine called 'the perspicuity of Scripture'. This doctrine affirms that the Bible is not essentially very complex and mysterious, but deliberately clear and accessible. If it is the Word of God, then that is exactly what we should expect. Not a book that is intentionally hard to understand, but writings that aim to be understood and convey important information to future generations.

However, the perspicuity of Scripture does not imply that this is always easy, or that everything in Scripture is equally clear, or that we will never get confused. After all, even the apostle Peter said this of the New Testament letters of Paul: 'His letters contain some things that are hard to understand' (2 Peter 3:16). So we should be encouraged, both that the Bible

is not being deliberately obscure and that even people far more knowledgeable than we struggled at times!

The last thing I want to do is make the Bible seem more complex to you than it seemed at first. I want us to make use of any and every helpful guide to unlock its meaning. But I also want to be clear that this can be a demanding process. Sometimes we forget or ignore just how different the ancient world can be. Let's face it, those who try reading the Bible from cover to cover, starting in Genesis, often get bogged down by about Leviticus in a system of obscure sacrificial rules and regulations that have little apparent bearing on our lives today.

Obstacles in our way

How many factors conspire to make the Old Testament, in particular, seem obscure to us? There are a number, and I will elaborate on a few here.

Places can seem strange to us, even if we have a modern Hebrew background. Take, for example: 'Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar . . . ' (Genesis 20:1). Exactly where are these places and why do they matter? Too many unusual names or locations, and the text quickly becomes a little blurred. We will tend to skim-read the words. But what if we can identify those places? And what if we can imagine what it is like to stand in the hot, parched Negev desert, knowing that we are not among the rolling sand dunes of the Sahara, but among the grey rocks and chalky canyons of southern Israel? What if we know that the Hebrew word 'Negev' shares a common root with the word for dryness? Then we know that this is a desert where it is possible, though difficult, to eke out a living. A little rain in the winter

is enough to ensure that flowers will bloom there in the spring, and the stunted acacia trees will slowly grow, resisting the intense heat of the day and the cold of the night. With this kind of background knowledge, places quickly come to life, and we find that simple Bible words carry us far away from the park bench where we are reading them.

The **legal codes** of the Old Testament are particularly perplexing. OK, so some, like most of the Ten Commandments, will seem quite obvious. Do we really need to be told not to steal, for example? But others take us by surprise: ‘Do not wear clothes of wool and linen woven together. Make tassels on the four corners of the cloak you wear’ (Deuteronomy 22:11–12). Try as I might, it is hard to shop at the local supermarket and avoid some kind of polyester mix, and even harder to source something with tassels on each corner. Of course, it is easy just to ignore these words and skate over them, muttering, ‘These words don’t apply to us today.’ But why don’t we say that about the command not to steal? And even if some don’t apply to us today, why on earth did they apply to the Israelites at that time? I would not have wanted my neighbour to be a thief, but why would I have worried about his sense of fashion?

However, if I had read my Old Testament more widely, I might have remembered that God explained to Moses that a tassel on the hem of a garment was never a fashion statement: ‘You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD, that you may obey them’ (Numbers 15:39). With that reference in mind, I can now imagine an Israelite considering those tassels a pleasure, a physical aid to remembering that the whole of life is lived in worship. I can imagine him standing in a crowded marketplace, waiting to buy from a stall, curling those tassels in his fingers. It looks as if he is just fidgeting in impatience. But

perhaps he is being reminded of the commands of God. As his fingers touch the tassels, he remembers that it is good to pay properly for goods bought at the market stall, and not to steal or cheat, for this is what pleases the Lord. We worship God at the checkout, as much as in the chapel. Don't those tassels make a little more sense now? And might this not cast some light on why people wanted to touch the fringe or hem of Jesus' garment (Matthew 14:36)? As for the prohibition on mixed fabrics, we will return to that in chapter 7, but obscure laws on mould, eggs, pigs and snakes may leave us bewildered.

But perhaps the greatest obstacle to our appreciation of the ancient world is its apparent **barbarity and violence**. Indeed, the Hebrew Bible raises some perplexing moral issues. Provision for a slave trade, the treatment of women and the way the land of Canaan was captured all present difficult questions. While the fall of Jericho to the marching band of Israel might seem like a suitable story for a children's Sunday school talk, a closer look at the details makes it clear that this is adult-rated material. The destruction of the walls and the death of the inhabitants cause some to dismiss these events as examples of genocide. It leads to the almost proverbial saying that the God of the Old Testament was a God of wrath and anger, replaced by the New Testament God of love and mercy. But such a distinction is deeply misleading. The God revealed in the New Testament remains a God who will bring judgment (Acts 5:9–11; 1 Corinthians 11:29–30; 2 Thessalonians 1:6–9, Revelation 20:11–12). There is no need to drive a wedge between the Testaments, but moral issues remain that can leave us feeling distinctly ill at ease.

And **poems** can be confusing. Imagery and poetry rely on shared conventions to draw our emotions and feelings into what we read. A simple metaphor, 'Love is blind,' can

communicate a great deal. Generally, we know when we are reading a poem or a newspaper article. Within those different texts, we can distinguish between a literal description and an emotive metaphor. But when we travel back in time to the ancient world of the Israelites, these distinctions are harder to make. What is Genesis chapter 1? Is it an extended psalm or a poem? Is it a historical or scientific record of creation? When we turn to a book like the Song of Songs, we easily recognize it as a form of love poetry rather than a historical book. But what do the images and metaphors mean? When I was courting my wife, never once did I describe her teeth as being like ‘a flock of sheep just shorn’, or her neck ‘like the tower of David, built with courses of stone; on it hang a thousand shields’ (Songs of Songs 4:2–4). I’m not sure she would have been best pleased if I had done.

Other obstacles to seeing the world through the eyes of an ancient Israelite include the **complexity of Old Testament history** and the **odd behaviour of some of its heroes**. If Samson really is such a man of faith, why does he sleep with a prostitute? And how can a Spirit-anointed leader of Israel be so completely stupid? Doesn’t he realize that Delilah is just trying to get him killed, or does he think it’s a coincidence that her friends keep trying to murder him?

History or mythology?

So the Bible can be a very strange place. But it can also be very familiar. For all the problems above, there are many things that we can relate to. The Bible’s concern with time and place still matters to us. When we are told that Abraham travels to the oak trees of Mamre (Genesis 18:1), we may not be sure where that is, but we can imagine the oak trees. We get the

sense of a real person travelling to a real place among real vegetation. With some careful study and reflection, the Old Testament can become a portal leading into the very real world of ancient history.

History is an important word. It describes a science of recording events and making sense of them in a coherent narrative. The classical Greek writer Herodotus (c.484–420 BC) was named the ‘father’ of modern history by Cicero. However, the Bible lays claim to being history too. This is a striking fact because religious texts in the ancient world did not normally lay claim to being historical. They were generally a type of literature called mythology, and a myth can be a story or epic tale of great inspirational significance, but not one set in time and place.

Early creation epics from the Ancient Near East, or the long religious epics of Hindu literature, like the Bhagavad Gita, do not share this concern with historical dates. Yes, they are great stories that reflect universal themes, but they lay no claim to historical accuracy.

Myths do not generally come in the form of a linear account of events. By contrast, the Old Testament offers a linear story, which begins at the beginning, pursues an ancestral line down through the centuries and ties into the more recent history of the first century AD. In fact, while the history of God’s revelation in Scripture ceased around the time of the death of the last apostle, history itself continues. There are history books that will pick up where Luke left off at the end of the book of Acts and continue the story towards the present. While these are not part of the Bible as revelation, such books are continuing historical accounts, sharing similar concerns with many of the Bible writers.

It is fashionable to point out that it’s naïve to assume the Old Testament to be historical. Inexplicable miracles, alleged

contradictions and Hebrew folk tales are all used as evidence. We should, we are told, enjoy the Old Testament as literature, much as we would a work of fantasy, rather than imagining it as a historical textbook.

But this objection itself is naïve. It relies on a false dichotomy, in which we must choose between the Bible as history or the Bible as fiction. Without question, some of the Old Testament is not in the style of a historical textbook—there are songs, poems, proverbs and parables scattered throughout. But a song can still convey historical information, and it must have a social setting in which it was composed and sung.

The objection can also be a distraction. By discussing which stories are historical and which are parable, we can quickly lose sight of a more obvious bigger picture, which is that the Old Testament has a linear, historical movement from creation to new creation.

However old the universe may be, it did have a beginning. The earth was formed, and Adam and Eve were created from the dust of the ground. The process described in Genesis 1–2 provides an opening for the epic story of Scripture. The initial state of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is one of harmony and purpose. There is work to be done and a world to be explored. Within the garden grows the tree of life, which ensures an everlasting life, and the visible presence of the God who can walk there in the cool of the day. Eve is mother of the living, and all people will be able to lay claim to her as their ancestor.

Adam and Eve's disobedience in the garden leads to the event described by Christians as 'the fall'. When they are tempted by the mysterious talking serpent into eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the relationship between them and God is broken. They leave the garden, the

tree of life and the visible presence of God. Life east of Eden will be hard and painful, and will lead to death.

The family trees of Genesis may be dull reading, but they are important for giving us the sense of a flowing history: a genealogy for the peoples of the ancient world. This is not intended to be comprehensive and it leaves many unanswered questions, but it does have direction. History is on the move. We watch old people die and new children arrive. The importance of following a family tree may reflect the heads-up we were given by God's words at the fall. He promised Eve that, for all the damage the serpent had done, the solution would come from her own descendants. Speaking to the serpent, God says,

I will put enmity
 between you and the woman,
 and between your offspring and hers;
 he will crush your head,
 and you will strike his heel.
 (Genesis 3:15)

Exactly who is this mysterious serpent crusher? Do these words simply describe a never-ending struggle between the human race and poisonous snakes, or are they referring to a cosmic conflict between the descendants of Eve and the forces of evil? At this stage, we are not told, but we are being directed to watch the linear flow of history, as we leave the garden far behind.²

So how do we relate this account of history to the secular historical timelines evident in museums and referenced by television documentaries?

'Prehistory' refers to the time when historical records were not being kept. The dominant material technology was stone,

so it was also called 'the Stone Age'. In some ways this is a misnomer, as the people of this time actually used a lot more wood than stone and also had access to some metals. But stone is more durable than wood, and so Stonehenge is better preserved than the Woodhenge that preceded it. Stone flints and axes can be found in abundance. And forget those images of bearded men grunting to one another in ignorance. There is evidence of culture, art, civilization and intellectual thought from the Stone Age. It may not be quite Fred Flintstone, but neither is it a story of barbaric savages. However, because we have no written records, we can only guess at what was happening among these people. The opening chapters of Genesis cast light on a prehistoric setting, beyond the reach of secular historians.

However, from the time of Abraham onwards, we find ourselves in the historic period. Developments like bronze, and later iron, aided technological change. But the development of writing and the invention of the alphabet may be even more important still. Written records from across the ancient world preserve information that helps us understand not just historical events, but the lives of ordinary people too. Carved on stone and inscribed in clay is the information that forms the basis for what we call history. Reading the Bible, we witness the linear development of a people over time.

Abraham lives as a nomadic shepherd in the wild lands of Canaan during the Bronze Age. Moses, a later descendant of Abraham, becomes an important figure in what is called the New Kingdom of Egypt, long after the time of the pyramid builders. The exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and the settlement of the Promised Land took place during an important period of technological change. We move from a time known as the Late Bronze Age into the Early Iron Age.

To understand why this matters, we will need to understand something of the significance of these metals.

Bronze is a good, hard metal, so bronze artefacts from the ancient world survived well. It is an 'alloy', or mixture, of copper and tin. How anyone got the idea of mixing these two metals we do not know, but it gave them a strong, malleable metal for making tools and weapons. However, the discovery of iron was a step even further forward. There was a kind of iron that humans had known about since the Stone Age, one that could be found in meteorites. But it was only of limited value. To refine the kind of iron useful for tools and weapons, humans had to work out how to generate enormous temperatures in ovens. And, with enough regulated heat, iron could be smelted and bent to all kinds of purposes.

Iron tools and weapons allow for sharper points and lighter equipment, so an army using iron weapons would have a clear advantage over one relying on bronze.

As the Israelites begin to settle in the land, they arrive as a Bronze Age people. But another group are arriving who are technologically more advanced. The Philistines had begun to make use of iron, and this seems to have given them the upper hand. We will find on our journey that this kind of reference to wider world history will help us make sense of what we discover in the Bible.

As time goes by

The ancient world is marked by empires that rose and fell, and were in time replaced by successors. The Egyptians, Assyrians and Babylonians all take turns at controlling the region of Canaan. During their rise and fall, the descendants of Abraham continue to multiply, appointing kings and forming alliances. And the books of the Bible fit with these different periods.

Some Bible books are obviously in the genre of annals or chronicles of history. Others, like collections of psalms or proverbs, are not historical writings in that sense, but they still have a cultural setting within that historical flow. The psalms that David wrote do not belong to the period of Abraham, and their images and ideas would be misunderstood if we misplaced them in time. Judges belongs to the earliest of these times, when Egypt dominated the region, and 2 Kings will witness the much later fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylon. The book of Daniel will chart the decline of Babylon, and Ezra will take place in the new world order of the Persians.

As the Old Testament draws to a close, the Israelites are only a small rump of a people group, with a territory that is rarely independent of the control of other powers. It will pass from the Persians, to the Greeks, to the Romans, and so the social historical backdrop for the Gospels will be significantly different from that of the Old Testament. Greek and Roman culture have little bearing on our interpretation of Old Testament literature, but they are certainly pivotal in our interpretation of the New Testament. After the collapse of the Roman Empire, other powers will arise and show an interest in this historic land, even right down to the modern age. This forms the backdrop to the modern tensions and struggles, for we cannot understand global contemporary politics without understanding the ancient religious traditions.

So the Old Testament follows a linear timeline, with a beginning, a middle and a journey towards an end. For the Christian reader, that end has not yet been reached, but it is glimpsed in the vision of John called the book of Revelation.

All this shows that the Bible is not a mythical fairy tale set outside time and place. Whether people believe it to be accurate or not, it was written with attention to historical changes and an unfolding plot. This kind of history writing is

sometimes called 'historiography', and many scholars identify aspects of the records that are far from neutral or unbiased accounts. The writing reflects the concerns of the authors and makes moral judgments on the events described. Sometimes this is dismissed as pre-critical propaganda, but such an objection is unfair. The Bible never claims to be a neutral history of Israel or world events. It is prejudiced in favour of a divine perspective on history. And is that such a bad thing? To turn this point around, can *any* historical writing avoid all bias or prejudice? The modern historian claiming objectivity must also be selective in what he or she chooses to record or ignore, and must also make judgments about what matters. History is not a view from nowhere, but a view from some particular window on the world.

So the Bible has a timeline, and no time traveller should leave home without it. This timeline helps us to locate ourselves in history. Unless we grasp where events and characters fit into it, we will misunderstand the stories. We may find universal truths, but we will miss their key place in one unfolding story. And the timeline will also help us relate secular history to what we read.

Trusting the transport

Everything we have said so far is built on one important assumption: that the Bible is a reliable text for discovering history. Can we trust it for this purpose? Furthermore, can we be sure that the text we are using has not been distorted over the centuries? If errors crept in 500 years ago, then what hope is there for us accessing the history of 3,000 years ago?

These two objections are not to be lightly dismissed. The first concerns the content of the Bible: is it an accurate record? The second concerns the transmission of the Bible: has it been

reliably copied? Thankfully, we can answer both of these questions with a resounding ‘yes’.

Regarding the first objection, the Old Testament has consistently been shown to be a reliable guide in those areas where it can actually be tested. The accounts of personalities and conflicts are often corroborated by sources outside the Bible. Some events that we read about are also described by non-biblical writers or have even left material remains in the archaeological record. Of course, the further back we go, the less evidence remains, but there is still enough to remind us that we are dealing with some form of history, even in its earliest writings.

The second objection, that the Bible may have been corrupted over the years, can easily be tested. There is a vast number of manuscripts and fragments going back over centuries that we can compare with the manuscripts we use today. These comparisons enable us to state categorically that Jewish scribal tradition had a genuine commitment to preserving the text, even when it might have been tempting to revise or rewrite it. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls from



Cave 4 at Qumran near the Dead Sea, where many of the longer scrolls were found.

about 1947 onwards provided us with material remains of Scriptures copied over 1,000 years earlier than some of those known at the time. A solid confirmation of the reliability of the copying process.

However, for a Christian there is an even more fundamental reason for trusting the Old Testament Scriptures and spending time in that ancient world, namely that this is the world from which Jesus came. The nation of Israel provided the context for his ministry. He was born a Jew, knew the Hebrew Scriptures and was brought up in its traditions and theology. The New Testament itself assumes this backdrop and is in many ways a commentary on the Old Testament and its relationship to Jesus Christ. Jesus brought the promises and expectations of the Old Testament to fulfilment, but did not devalue its words in the process: 'In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son' (Hebrews 1:1–2). Open any New Testament book and start counting the references to the Old Testament. Nowhere are those writings devalued or downgraded, but everywhere we find them held up as true, as having authority and as being directly relevant to the follower of Christ.³

Many Christians carry around a slim New Testament volume. It is a practical item, fitting easily into a pocket or backpack. It doesn't seem so heavy or religious. When a new believer wants to start reading the Bible, we usually suggest they start with the Gospels rather than in Genesis. All very sensible, but it's a temporary measure. Sooner rather than later, we will need to immerse ourselves in the Hebrew Bible, upon which the New Testament is founded. Not to do so is to risk stunted growth and a shallow faith. I know it can seem a strange place at first, but the Old Testament is our home. So as we travel back in time, we won't find ourselves moving

further into obscurity, but further into clarity and a deeper understanding of our New Testament faith.

Bible field trip

Reading: Genesis 1:1–2:3

Date: Creation

Destination: Planet Earth

1. What truths about creation do we learn from this chapter?
2. How would you describe God's relationship to creation?
3. What is the purpose of humankind in this creation (1:26–30)?
4. See Revelation 21:1–4 and 22:1–5 to glimpse a regenerated creation.

While both the Old and New Testaments are part of our Christian heritage, the Old Testament can feel particularly foreign and mysterious. Its violence is startling, its heroes flawed, its history complex, and its locations a far cry from Kansas. While no one needs to become an archeological expert to grasp the message of Scripture, background information can deepen our appreciation and understanding as we read.

In this wide-ranging, lively introduction to the world of the Old Testament, Sinkinson gives an overview of storytelling techniques, laws, people, beliefs, and geography, removing misunderstandings by putting details in their historical context.

“With carefully researched facts and enjoyable wit, Sinkinson invites his readers into the real history of the Hebrew Bible. . . . This book will add to Christians’ understanding of the world of the Old Testament, and of the God who creates and redeems our world through his Son.”

—JON NIELSON, College Pastor, College Church, Wheaton

“Chris Sinkinson proves a wonderful guide to the long-ago world of the Old Testament: sure-footed, interesting, and dispensing up-to-date knowledge with a light and humorous touch. He’s aware of just how much we need to know to make sense of what we read. Under his expert teaching so much that seems difficult is opened up.”

—DEREK TIDBALL, former Principal, London School of Theology

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