

1. THE PROBLEM ...

... is that, in our bibles, the 39 books of the Old Testament are arranged according to 3 categories: but this is not their chronological order.

BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT		
History	Poetry (Wisdom)	Prophecy
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon	Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations (of Jeremiah) Ezekiel Daniel Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

The Old Testament divides into 9 Eras (all dates approximate)

1. Creation	4. Conquest <i>40 years: 1240 – 1200 BC</i>	7. Exile <i>70 years: 586 – 516 BC *</i>
2. Patriarchs (Fathers) <i>670 years: 1950 – 1280 BC</i>	5. Judges <i>180 years: 1200 – 1020 BC</i>	8. Return <i>138 years: 538 – 400 BC *</i>
3. Exodus <i>40 years: 1280 – 1240 BC</i>	6. Kingdom <i>434 years: 1020 – 586 BC</i>	9. Silence <i>400 years: 400 – 0 BC</i>

* Dating the period of the Exile & subsequent Return is notoriously difficult (see page 8).

Other points to bear in mind

- From the period of the Patriarchs / Fathers (Genesis 12 on), the Old Testament covers roughly 2000 years
- But 800 of those are silence (400 years between Genesis & Exodus; 400 years after Malachi)
- That leaves 1200 or so years to get our heads round ... not too bad!
- The people of Israel faced 2 constants throughout the Old Testament in the form of 'SuperPowers', one to the North and one to the South:
 - South = Egypt
 - North = Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians

2. THE ERAS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. Creation

Biblical sources	Genesis 1 – 11
Dating	It is not possible to date this period, although it is interesting to note that, according to scientists working on mitochondrial DNA, every woman alive on the planet today is related to one common ancestor, who lived a few tens of thousands of years ago. Scientists call her 'Eve' ...
Characters & Events	Adam & Eve Cain & Abel Noah & the Great Flood Babel – the origin of languages ...
Teaching Points	Without a firm belief in Creation and Fall, we lose all sense of origins and are at a loss to explain human suffering. With humankind's fall from grace in Genesis 3, the search for the 'serpent-crusher' (Deliverer, Saviour, Redeemer, Messiah) begins ...
Elsewhere in the world ...	6500 farming begins 4000 Ur becomes permanent settlement (Abraham) 4000 potter's wheel developed 3500 wheel in use 3300 city states in Syria & Palestine 3100 cuneiform writing in Sumer (all dates very approximate!)

2. Patriarchs (Fathers)

Biblical sources	Genesis 12 – 50
Dating	1950 – 1280 BC (670 years – but 400 years of silence in Egypt ...)
Characters & Events	<p>Abraham Isaac Jacob = Israel 12 sons = 12 tribes ... Joseph Captivity in Egypt – 400 years of silence</p>
Teaching Points	<p>“ ...In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” Genesis 15:16. Here, God appears to tell Abraham that the reason for the 400 year captivity of his people in Egypt is to allow the people then occupying the Promised Land to repent – only when this long period of patience was exhausted did Moses receive his call to lead the people out.</p>
Elsewhere in the world ...	<p>1800 Troy established as major city 1780 Hammurabi law code 1700 Minoans develop writing on Crete 1600 Aryans enter India 1333-1323 Tutankhamun Pharaoh of Egypt</p>

3. Exodus

Biblical sources	Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy
Dating	1280 – 1240 BC (40 years)
Characters & Events	Moses The Plagues in Egypt Passover Red Sea Sinai Law Rebellion Joshua
Teaching Points	<p>Echoes in the New Testament – the 400 years silence at the end of the Old Testament ends with the appearance of a Deliverer, who was himself an exile in Egypt (Matthew 2:13-23)</p> <p>The books of the law (and especially Leviticus) can seem totally inaccessible – in fact, they tell the story of God’s desire to establish a type of humanity distinct from the peoples around them. This finds echoes in the work of ‘new creation’ (2 Corinthians 5:17’ Galatians 6:15)</p> <p>The Passover introduces the themes of sacrifice, lamb, blood ... which find their fulfillment in Jesus ‘the Lamb of God’ (John 1:29)</p> <p>The giving of the Law (the Ten Commandments) on Mount Sinai is echoed in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5</p>
Elsewhere in the world ...	1279-1213 Rameses II Pharaoh in Egypt (the Pharaoh of the Exodus) 1280-1250 Egyptian building projects – Karnak, Thebes

4. Conquest

Biblical sources	Joshua
Dating	1240 – 1200 (40 years)
Characters & Events	Joshua Crossing the Jordan The Fall of Jericho (15 miles East of Jerusalem) The gradual (and only partial) occupation of the Land
Teaching Points	The Crossing of the Jordan: an act of faith – the river can swell to over a mile wide in flood season, and the waters only stopped flowing when the priests stepped into the river (Joshua 3:13), making a Gateway to the Promised Land. Jesus was baptised in the Jordan, and as we place our faith in his death and follow him in baptism, we find a Gateway to Eternal Life
Elsewhere in the world ...	1200 Trojan Wars

5. Judges

Biblical sources	Judges, Ruth
Dating	1200 – 1020 BC (180 years)
Characters & Events	Samson Deborah Gideon Samuel
Teaching Points	Samuel is one of scriptures 'hinge' characters: both the last Judge and the first Prophet (like John the Baptist in NT – last prophet, first to proclaim Jesus ...) The book of Judges presents a series of mini-deliverance cycles ... (the search for serpent crusher / deliverer / Saviour goes on ...) The significance of Ruth ... a Moabitess, her people were Israel's enemies, but she is welcomed in and becomes an ancestor of Jesus. God's heart is for all people
Elsewhere in the world ...	Not a lot going on, actually ...

6. Kingdom

Biblical sources	History: 1 & 2 Samuel 1 & 2 Kings 1 & 2 Chronicles	Poetry: <i>see below</i>	Prophecy: <i>see details on p. 7</i>
Dating	1020 – 586 BC (434 years)		
Characters & Events	<p>Samuel King Saul (1020 – 993: 27 years) King David [Goliath] (993 – 960: 33 years) King Solomon (960 – 930: 30 years)</p> <p>The reigns of David & Solomon represented Israel's Golden Era (partly due to the weakness of Egypt and Assyria). The nation enjoyed military success, peace, and a flowering of architecture and culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 966 BC 1st Temple built • Israel's great 'Wisdom' tradition, producing these books (1): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Job ○ Psalms ○ Proverbs ○ Ecclesiastes ○ Song of Solomon <p>But the good times didn't last – in 928 BC, the Kingdom divided in 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Israel' (north: 19 kings) (206 years) – capital Samaria, 10 tribes • 'Judah' (south: 19 kings, 1 queen) (342 years) – capital Jerusalem, Benjamin & Judah <p>The Northern kings are universally bad: lowpoint = Ahab (Jezebel) The Southern kings are a mixture: highpoint is the child king Josiah (finds law of Moses & leads a national revival) (See separate table for details) 722 BC 'Israel' (N) falls to Assyria (its 10 tribes never return ...) 701 Sennacherib attacks Jerusalem (S) 622 Josiah's reforms 597/587-6 Jerusalem falls and its leading citizens (including Daniel & Ezekiel) are taken into captivity</p>		

Teaching Points	When Jesus encounters the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4), she is aware of enmity between Samaritans and Jews – this goes back to the Division of the Kingdom almost 1000 years earlier
Elsewhere in the world ...	771 China fragments into smaller states 760 Nubian kingdom of Cush 575 Ishtar Gate built Babylon 668 Assyria invades Egypt 660 Jimmu 1 st Japanese Emperor 605 Babylon conquers Egypt (battle of Carchemish)

This is also the period of greatest prophetic activity: Firstly, 3 who left no written work of their own

- Samuel – last Judge, first Prophet
- Elijah – Ahab / Carmel ...
- Elisha – Naaman

Then, the writing prophets

- all between **850 – 597 BC**
- I've placed in brackets after each name the number in which they appear in our Old Testaments

2 were prophets to the Northern kingdom	7 were prophets to the Southern kingdom	3 were sent to other nations (remember Ruth – God calls everyone home ...)
Hosea (6) Amos (8)	Isaiah (1) Jeremiah (2) Lamentations (3: written by Jeremiah) Joel (7) Micah (11) Habakkuk (13) Zephaniah (14)	Jonah (10): Assyria, to the north Nahum (12): Assyria, to the north Obadiah (9): Edom, to the southwest

So of the 17 prophetic books which, in every bible, form the tail end of the Old Testament, 12 fit in right here, in this intense period of the Kingdom ...

7. Exile

Biblical sources	2 Kings 24-25 2 Chronicles 36 Ezekiel Daniel
Dating	586 – 516 BC (70 years) *
Characters & Events	Prophecy: from Babylon Ezekiel (4) Daniel (5) In Jerusalem Jeremiah (2) (numbers again refer to the sequence in our Old Testaments)
Teaching Points	
Elsewhere in the world ...	563-483 Buddha 551-479 Confucius

* Dating the period of the Exile & subsequent Return is notoriously difficult (see page 8).

The Old Testament itself refers to the Exile as lasting 70 years

- Jeremiah 25; 29:10
- Daniel 9:2

The dates given above run from the Great Deportation (586 BC) to the Dedication of the rebuilt Temple (516 BC).

See separate paper for further details

8. Return

Biblical sources	History: Ezra Nehemiah Esther	Prophecy: Haggai (15) Zechariah (16) Malachi (17)
Dating	538 – 400 BC (138 years) *	
Characters & Events	Joshua Zerubbabel Ezra Nehemiah Esther 539-8 Cyrus II (The Great) allows Jews to return 536-516 2 nd Temple built 458 Ezra returns with 2 nd wave of Exiles 445 Nehemiah to Jerusalem	
Teaching Points		
Elsewhere in the world ...	539 Cyrus II king of Persia conquers Mesopotamia & Babylon for Medes & Persians 490 Battle of Marathon 486-465 Xerxes 1 & Queen Esther of Persia 480/479 Greeks defeat Persia	

* Again, dating the Return presents significant challenges

See separate paper for details

9. Silence

Biblical sources	None [Apocrypha *]
Dating	400 – 0 BC
Characters & Events	Political groups Maccabees Zealots Religious groups Pharisees Sadducees Jewish governance Sanhedrin (ruling board made up of ‘conservatives’ from both Pharisees & Sadducees) Jewish hope Longing for ‘Messiah’
Teaching Points	
Elsewhere in the world ...	333 Alexander the Great conquers Persia 326 Alexander conquers India 323 Alexander dies – Empire divides into 4 256 Rome invades N Africa 221 Great Wall of China begun 210 China’s ‘Terracotta Army’ 200 Antiochus III conquers Palestine 168-165 Maccabean Wars 63 Rome conquers Palestine 43 Julius Caesar assassinated 37-4 Herod the Great rules Judea 31 BC–AD 14 Emperor Augustus

* The Apocrypha is a collection of Jewish writings from this period, which are not regarded as ‘holy scripture’ by the Protestant churches – but they make interesting reading and shed valuable light on to the world into which Jesus was born.

Paul Langham, September 2017