Many people have difficulty studying their Bibles because they have trouble making sense out of what seems to be a jumbled collection of information. They do not know when or why God inspired men to pen the various books of the Bible. They do not understand who wrote what to whom. To many, the 66 books of the Bible are confusing.

As a whole, the Bible may be boiled down to two bottom-line themes: grace and obedience. “Grace” refers to the incredible things that God has done to make it possible for human beings to be forgiven of sin and permitted to live eternally with Him. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to save humanity from sin. This is the most important thing in the entire world. God’s plan for saving man is the central theme of the Bible.

The second key point of the Bible is the need for human obedience—our correct response to God. Most of the information in the Bible details how human beings have responded to the instructions of God. Sadly, the Bible reports to us that most people have chosen not to obey God’s will.

As you study through the Bible you will notice that God’s communication to the human race has been carefully orchestrated. Ultimately, everything in the Bible is designed to teach people about the one true God of the Universe (and His gracious activity) and the obedience God rightly expects from mankind.

There are important differences between the two major covenants of the Bible. One is called the “old” covenant (testament) because it existed for 1,500 years before the “new” one was given (after Jesus died on the cross). The covenant of Christ also is “new” because it remains effective, while the covenant of Moses has passed away (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8:8,13; 9:15). Jesus’ teaching also is called a “better” covenant (Hebrews 7:22), or the “second” covenant (Hebrews 8:7). These words show the greatness of Christ’s system compared to that of Moses. This does not mean that Moses’ covenant was faulty in its design; rather, it just never was planned to be permanent. God always intended that it would be temporary in the way it worked.

To make things easier to understand, we refer to the two major divisions of the Bible as the Old and New Covenants, or the Old and New Testaments.

The Old Testament, which has 39 books, deals with the history of man from the Creation (Genesis 1), until a time about 400 hundred years before the birth of Jesus. From Genesis 12 onward, it mainly is about how God used the Israelite people to prepare the world for the coming of His Son.

While we do not live under the Old Covenant today, there still are many great lessons we can learn from it. For example, we must always obey God. Also, the Lord is faithful to keep His promises.

In our language, a “testament” usually refers to a “will” that someone makes before he dies, so that after his death, his property can be divided according to his wishes. In the Scriptures, however, the word “testament,” “covenant,” or “will” means much more than that (read Hebrews 9:15-17 and 10:10 where “covenant,” “testament,” and “will” are used to describe the religious system given by Christ).

The word “covenant” was very important in the ancient world. Covenants (contracts or agreements) were made between countries (1 Samuel 11:1) and between people (Genesis 31:44ff.). A very important “covenant” was made by God with the nation of Israel when the Hebrew people came out of Egypt and camped at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:1-8; 24:1-8). Most of the Old Testament is about this covenant.

Very often we use the word “covenant” to mean an agreement between two people where both of these give certain conditions that must be accepted. You may enter into a “covenant” with your friend. You will let him borrow your skates, if he will let you use his bicycle. Each of you gives and takes.

According to the Bible, though, God, because of Who He is, has a right to set all of the conditions of any covenant He makes with human beings. It is our obligation to obey these conditions. Because humans have sinned against God, they do not have the right to demand anything from Him.

One purpose of this issue of Discovery is to pinpoint the essence and thrust of the first two books of the Bible so that you can get a better handle on God’s Word as a whole. Central themes of Genesis and Exodus are identified in hopes that you will learn the main purpose of these two important books of the Bible. Brief outlines are also provided to help you grasp the overall layout of the books.

The message of the Old Testament has been summarized as “Christ is coming,” while the New Testament teaches that “Christ has come and will come again.”
GENESIS MEANS “COMING INTO BEING.” IT IS THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS because it refers to the beginning of so many features of the created order. It tells us of the beginning of (1) the Universe, (2) life, (3) the human race and human history, (4) the home and family, (5) sin, (6) the Jewish race, and (7) God’s scheme of redemption. But God Himself had no beginning since He is the eternal Supreme Being.

GENESIS OUTLINE:

1-2 Creation
3-4 Sin introduced
5 Genealogies
6-9 The Flood
10 Genealogies
11 Babel
12-25 Abraham
25-36 Isaac and Jacob
37-50 Joseph

CENTRAL THEME:

Genesis provides us with the very critical understanding of who we are, how we got here, and why we are here. As our Creator, God has brought us into existence, made us in His image, and He is to be the focus, purpose, and meaning of our lives. Thus Genesis gives us the right way to view life, directing us to approach it correctly and with meaning.

Because Genesis tells about the entrance of sin into the world, the first book of the Bible also prepares us to understand the need for redemption and forgiveness. (Consider how Joseph is a type of Christ, as he delivered his family from famine, even though they had sold him into slavery years earlier.) In Genesis, God begins to unveil His grand plan to save man (3:15; 12:3; 49:10).

THERE WAS A GREAT MAN OF FAITH NAMED ABRAM, WHO lived in the city of Ur, in Chaldea. God changed his name to Abraham, which means “father of a multitude (many people).” God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as many “as the stars of the heaven and the sands of the seashore,” and that through one of his descendants all people would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham and his great-grandson Joseph were the first to be called “Hebrews” (Genesis 14:13; 39:14).

Jacob, a grandson of Abraham, also was specially chosen by God, and was given a new name, “Israel.” After this, Jacob’s twelve sons and all their descendants were called the twelve tribes of Israel, or Israelites.

Centuries later, after King Solomon died, the twelve tribes of God’s people divided into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. Because of their disobedience and idolatry, God allowed the Northern Kingdom to be taken to Assyria as slaves. Around that time, God’s people were called “Jews.”

The word “Jew” doesn’t appear in the Old Testament until the book of 2 Kings (16:6, KJV; 25:25). It refers to someone from the tribe of Judah, or the Southern Kingdom (which included the tribes of Judah and Benjamin). In 586 B.C., the people of the Southern Kingdom were carried away into Babylonian captivity. Years later, when they were allowed to return to their homeland, these descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were called “Jews.” That name continued to be used to refer to all people who followed the Old Testament laws given by God to Moses.

The Old Testament is filled with the adventures of the Israelites. Throughout their history of hundreds of years, the Lord continued to promise them that He would send someone special: the “seed” or offspring of Abraham. Who was that special Someone? It was Jesus Christ (read Galatians 3:16). Jesus followed the Old Testament laws given by God to Moses.

Jesus faithfully and obediently following Jesus. What a wonderful blessing it is to belong in the family of that great man of faith, Abraham (Hebrews 11:8), faithfully and obediently following Jesus.
Dear Digger Doug,

Why does the Bible list the descendants of Adam, Abraham, and others?

Dear reader,

There are at least two reasons for these lists (also called genealogies). First, God chose the descendants of Abraham (the Hebrews) to "bless all nations" (see Genesis 12:1-3). Jesus descended from these people and brought that blessing. Therefore, it was very important to keep a record of their history. The genealogies provide such a record.

Second, the Bible foretold that Jesus would be a king, and that He would descend from David (see 2 Samuel 7:12-13). The genealogies in Matthew and Luke show that Jesus descended from David. This qualified Him to be king (see Matthew 1 and Luke 3). Though they are hard to read, these genealogies are very important for Christians.

On a Separate Sheet of Paper

MATCHING

1. ___ Section of the Bible that contains 39 books
2. ___ Doing what God tells us to do
3. ___ Another word for Testament
4. ___ This book tells about the creation of the Universe
5. ___ Father of "many nations"
6. ___ God's chosen people of the Old Testament
7. ___ Leader of the Israelites in Exodus
8. ___ Mountain on which God gave the Ten Commandments

A. Abraham  G. Obedience
B. Sinai  H. Moses
C. Old Testament
D. Genesis
E. Israelites
F. Covenant

TRUE OR FALSE

1. ___ The Bible is comprised of 77 books.
2. ___ Grace and obedience are two themes of the Bible.
3. ___ Genesis means "coming into being."
4. ___ Abram was renamed Daniel by God.
5. ___ God promised Abraham that he would be the father of only a few nations.
6. ___ Abraham was from the land of Egypt.
7. ___ Exodus is about God sending a flood on the Earth.
8. ___ Moses was God's chosen leader of the Israelites.
9. ___ Exodus is the second book of the Bible.
10. ___ The Israelites left Egypt in the book of Exodus.

Complete the Bible Verses (NKJV)

1. "In the ___ God created the ___ and the ___" (Genesis 1:1).
2. "No longer shall your name be called ___, but your name shall be ___, for I have made you a ___ of many nations" (Genesis 17:5).
3. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of ___ out of the house of ___" (Exodus 20:2).
4. "Behold, I send an ___ before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the ___ which I have prepared" (Exodus 23:20).

Dear reader,

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EXODUS MEANS “EXIT” OR “DEPARTURE.” SPECIFICALLY, EXODUS refers to the nation of Israel leaving slavery in Egypt and moving towards the Promised Land. The book describes how God interacted with the Israelites through His chosen leader (Moses) in order to lead the nation to the land that He promised to give to Abraham’s descendants. The book has three settings: in Egypt (1-12); the trip to Sinai (12-18); at Sinai (19-40).

Deliverance comes from the one and only God of the Universe. He alone can release us from the confinement and burdens of this life. This release frees us to serve Him exactly the way He has instructed us. He is the solution to and freedom from life’s hardships. He is the “way out,” the “exit,” the way of escape.