

CHARACTER

Old Testament People: Encounters with God

Explanation and Overview

Why Study *Character*?

The pages of the Old Testament are full of amazing stories about remarkable people. But the Old Testament is about so much more than those people; it is about God. From the very beginning, God has been at work in people's lives, whether kings, prophets, judges, or ordinary individuals. By looking at how God worked in these people's lives, we see God's character, His redemptive plan for humanity, His love and provision, and His judgment and discipline.

What Will We Study in *Character*?

Character looks at how God interacts with humanity by examining the stories of many of the major players in the Old Testament. Some of the lessons include:

- The key life events of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph,
- The leadership shown by Moses and Joshua as they guided the Israelites,
- The reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon,
- The ministry and messages of the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Hosea, Isaiah, Jonah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

Students will become familiar with the story of the nation of Israel, God's chosen people. Through observing Israel's tumultuous history, students will learn about God's favor, His call to obedience, His discipline, and His ultimate grace and forgiveness.

How Will We Study *Character*?

Your students will be exposed to the remarkable story of the Old Testament in a variety of ways. As you journey throughout the year, your students will be challenged to learn with their *heads*, their *hearts*, and their *hands*.

Your students will constantly be challenged to learn about the Old Testament with their *head*—to learn what they need to *know* about God and how He relates to people. This type of learning is all about a basic understanding of the truths of Scripture. But students will be challenged to go beyond simple understanding, moving to application of what they have learned. Some of the Learning Goals from actual lessons demonstrate this *head* knowledge of the Old Testament:

- Students will understand God's purpose for calling Moses.
- Students will understand the promises God gave Abraham and Abraham's faith response.
- Students will understand God's covenant with David and its fulfillment by Jesus.

Your students will also be challenged to learn about Jesus with their *heart*—to allow God to transform their feelings as they look at His Word. What your students know about God's interaction with the people in the Old Testament should affect them emotionally, not just mentally; they should learn to value the things of God. Here are some examples of *heart* learning taken from Learning Goals of actual lessons:

- Students will respond in faith to God's promises.
- Students will genuinely worship and thank God for His promised blessings in their life.
- Students will express their feelings toward God as the true source of their abilities.

Occasionally, your students will be challenged to learn with their *hands*—to learn what they should be able to *do* as a result of their Old Testament study. Students will be able to apply a specific skill or discipline after studying God’s interactions with His people. Examples of *hands* learning from actual lessons include:

- Students will act in faith in difficult circumstances, knowing that God is with them at all times.
- Students will take a stand for Christ even in the face of opposition.
- Students will have a more meaningful prayer life as a result of the lives they have studied.

Preparing to Teach

Read

Ideally, you should have a working knowledge of the Old Testament before teaching this course. If you are attempting to bone up on the Old Testament for the first time, the majority of the lessons in *Character* come from the books of Genesis, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings. Reading these four books before you begin teaching would be beneficial. If you want to read these books in a month, you might consider pacing yourself by reading Genesis 1–32 the first week, Genesis 33–50 and Samuel 1–14 the second week, 1 Samuel 15–31 and 1 Kings 1–15 the third week, and 1 Kings 16–2 Kings 25 the fourth week.

Since most people are not as familiar with the Old Testament as they are with the New, you may have forgotten many details. In preparing to teach *Character*, you may discover truths you never knew. Marvel in these new discoveries and realize that the Bible still has much to teach you.

In addition to the Bible, some suggested sources for further reading and preparation include:

- *Courageous Faith: Life Lessons from Old Testament Heroes* by Ed Hindson (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003)
- *Running with the Giants: What the Old Testament Heroes Want You to Know About Life and Leadership* by John C. Maxwell (Nashville: Warner Books, 2002.)

As you study for each session, concentrate on the lives of the Old Testament characters: their backgrounds, their actions, and the settings for their stories. In addition, explore the kinds of questions students may have as you lead them through this study of how God used ordinary people in the Old Covenant.

Pray

As you prepare, here are some specific things to pray about:

- Ask God to open your eyes to the way He worked in the lives of people in the Old Testament.
- Pray that God would show you what He wants you to learn as you prepare to teach and lead students.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit would open the hearts and minds of the students you teach.
- Pray that you and your students will be able to apply this study to your lives.

Lesson Overviews

Lesson 1: Jesus and the Old Testament

Biblical Passage: Matthew 5:17–20

Key Question: Does the Old Testament affect my life?

Biblical Truth: The Old Testament affects my life because Jesus fulfilled its promises.

Learning Goals:

- To understand that the Old Testament finds its true, intended meaning in the person of Jesus Christ.
- To appreciate God's faithfulness in moving history toward redemption in Christ.
- To respond to Jesus Christ in faith as the fulfillment of all of Scripture.

Lesson 2: The Creator

Biblical Passages: Genesis 1:1–2, 26–31; Hebrews 11:3

Key Question: What is my responsibility toward God's world?

Biblical Truth: God expects me to enjoy creation.

Learning Goals:

- To consider the greatness of the Creator and His creation.
- To appreciate how perfectly God made humankind and our special place in the world.
- To respond obediently to God's direction to care for His world.

Lesson 3: Adam and Eve

Biblical Passage: Genesis 3:1–24

Key Question: How does God deal with me when I blow it?

Biblical Truth: God allows us to feel the consequences of sin, but through Jesus Christ He forgives us and heals our relationships with Him.

Learning Goals:

- To describe how sin initially entered the world.
- To investigate the ways we can be tempted to disobey God.
- To repent and respond to God's invitation of forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Lesson 4: Cain and Abel

Title: Unacceptable Sacrifice

Biblical Passages: Genesis 4:1–16; Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12

Supporting Passages: Genesis 4:17–26

Memory Verse: Genesis 4:7

Key Question: How can I approach God?

Biblical Truth: You should approach God with an attitude of faith and humility.

Learning Goals:

- To examine Cain's offering to determine why God rejected it.
- To evaluate our own worship to determine if we are offering God our best.

Lesson 5: Noah

Biblical Passages: Genesis 6:1–22; Hebrews 11:7

Key Question: How should I live my life?

Biblical Truth: Like Noah, we must trust the Word of God and be obedient because of our faith in Him.

Learning Goals:

- To describe Noah's faithful, obedient life in contrast to his wicked generation.
- To explain how Noah's example can encourage us to follow God faithfully in an evil world.

Lesson 6: Job

Biblical Passages: Job 1:1–2:10; 42:10–17

Key Question: Does anything happen outside God's control?

Biblical Truth: God is in control of all things.

Learning Goals:

- To acknowledge God's control over all things.
- To understand obedience does not ensure an easy life.
- To be motivated not to sin even when we suffer.

Lesson 7: Abraham (1)

Biblical Passages: Genesis 12:1–5, 13:1–18

Key Question: How can I demonstrate my faith in God?

Biblical Truth: My obedience demonstrates my faith in God.

Learning Goals:

- To understand the promises God gave Abraham and Abraham's faith response.
- To determine ways to respond in faith to God's promises.

Lesson 8: Abraham (2)

Biblical Passages: Genesis 15:1–6; 16:1–6; 17:1–8; 21:1–7

Key Question: Can I trust God to fulfill His promises?

Biblical Truth: We must patiently wait on God's plan and timing rather than taking matters in our own hands.

Learning Goals:

- To comprehend that God considered Abraham as entirely righteous simply because he trusted in what the Lord had promised.
- To differentiate between God's plan and Abraham's actions.
- To patiently wait on God to keep His promise, rather than taking matters into our own hands.

Lesson 9: Abraham (3)

Biblical Passages: Genesis 22:1–19

Key Question: Why would God command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the only son of the promise?

Biblical Truth: God tested the authenticity of Abraham's faith by commanding him to sacrificially kill his son Isaac, the only son of the promise.

Learning Goals:

- To comprehend that God's promise to Abraham rested entirely on the continued life of Isaac.
- To empathize with Abraham's emotions when the Lord commanded him to kill his only beloved son as a sacrifice.
- To appreciate God's trustworthiness even when circumstances may indicate otherwise.

Lesson 10: Isaac (1)

Biblical Passages: Genesis 24:1–4, 10–26

Key Question: Why did the LORD answer the remarkable prayer of Abraham's servant?

Biblical Truth: The Lord faithfully answered Abraham's servant's prayer in order to provide a godly wife for Isaac, the son of the promise.

Learning Goals:

- To confirm the reason that Abraham ordered his servant to find a bride from his relatives.
- To identify the events God directed.
- To determine to pray when faced with impossible circumstances, trusting that the Lord is with us.

Lesson 11: Isaac (2)

Biblical Passages: Genesis 27:1–29

Key Question: Why did God honor Isaac's blessing of Jacob, which was granted because of a mistaken identity?

Biblical Truth: God chose Jacob to continue the line of promise. God blessed Jacob, even though Isaac loved Esau and desired to bless him.

Learning Goals:

- To distinguish between God's plan for the twins and Isaac's.
- To identify the ungodly deeds of Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau.
- To appreciate that God is able to work all circumstances for the good of those who love Him, even in spite of ungodly actions.

Lesson 12: Jacob (1)

Biblical Passages: Genesis 29:1–35

Key Question: How did God use Jacob's life?

Biblical Truth: God protects and preserves each person according to His plan.

Learning Goals:

- To realize that God protects and preserves each person according to His plan.
- To respond to the revelation of God's presence and promised blessings in my life with genuine worship.

Lesson 13: Jacob (2)

Biblical Passages: Genesis 31:43–55; 32:24–32; 35:1–15

Key Question: How can we deal with past hurts and broken relationships?

Biblical Truth: God changes the patterns of our lives and brings reconciliation with our past.

Learning Goals:

- To understand that God directs our lives to shape us into His image.
- To recognize that fractured relationships can be put back together.
- To realize pain can be a way God heals us.

Lesson 14: Joseph (1)

Biblical Passages: Genesis 37:12–36; 50:15–21

Key Question: How can we become better and not bitter when others reject us?

Biblical Truth: God's love in our hearts removes anger and allows us to forgive others.

Learning Goals:

- To understand that when someone rejects me, God is protecting me.
- To recognize that my forgiveness shows God's love.
- To appreciate how all things in my life work together for good and for God's glory.

Lesson 15: Joseph (2)

Biblical Passages: Genesis 39:7–12; 1 Corinthians 10:13

Key Question: Why should I run from temptation?

Biblical Truth: Temptation leads to sin, but with the help of the Lord, I can escape temptation.

Learning Goals:

- To recognize that planning to avoid temptation is the best response of those who fear God.
- To realize how temptation can destroy my life.
- To increase my faith that God will provide a way of escape from overwhelming temptation.

Lesson 16: Joseph (3)

Biblical Passages: Genesis 40:14–15; 41:9–16, 32–36, 38–41, 53–54

Key Question: How do we trust God's plan for our lives?

Biblical Truth: When we exalt God and give Him glory, He works out His will in us in due time.

Learning Goals:

- To discover that all things in our lives really do work together for good.
- To realize that when we trust God, there are real tangible benefits.
- To have assurance that God's plan for us is always good, no matter the circumstances.

Lesson 17: Moses (1)

Biblical Passages: Exodus 3:1–12; 6:10–13

Key Question: Why did God call Moses?

Biblical Truth: Moses was God's answer His people's prayers and the fulfillment of God's promises.

Learning Goals:

- To understand God's purpose for calling Moses.
- To recognize that we need God to do God's will God's way.
- To identify some of the reasons why we question God's plan for our lives.

Lesson 18: Moses (2)**Biblical Passages:** Exodus 7:1–7; 19:20–25; 24:3–8**Key Question:** How did God communicate His will to His people?**Biblical Truth:** God led the people by speaking through Moses.**Learning Goals:**

- To identify reasons why God's Word is important.
- To understand how we must represent God as we lead others.
- To recognize it is important that we understand and obey God 's laws.

Lesson 19: Caleb**Biblical Passages:** Numbers 14:20–38**Key Question:** Does God reward faithfulness?**Biblical Truth:** God rewards faithfulness with life.**Learning Goals:**

- To encourage bold expression of faith, even when unpopular.
- To illustrate that God's justice is not defined democratically.
- To emphasize that God's reward for faith is life.

Lesson 20: Joshua (1)**Biblical Passages:** Deuteronomy 31:7–8, 14, 23; 34:9; Joshua 1:1–18; 3:7; 4:14**Key Question:** How did God prepare Joshua for an awesome task?**Biblical Truth:** God equips and encourages those He calls to serve Him.**Learning Goals:**

- To recognize that God equips me to fulfill what He's called me to do.
- To describe the characteristics that made Joshua a great leader.

Lesson 21: Rahab**Biblical Passages:** Joshua 2:1–24; 6:17, 22–25**Key Question:** Why did Rahab risk her life for these two men?**Biblical Truth:** Rahab recognized the power and grace, the holiness and love, and the majesty and mercy of God. She was willing to dedicate her life to following and trying to please the Lord.**Learning Goals:**

- To distinguish how Rahab was different from everyone else who lived in Jericho.
- To explain why Rahab helped God's people.
- To describe the long-term benefits of rightly assessing a situation and making a God-honoring choice.

Lesson 22: Joshua (2)**Biblical Passages:** Joshua 6:1–27; Hebrews 11:30**Key Question:** Does it matter if I am obedient to God?**Biblical Truth:** It is necessary to seek God's will and follow His Word.**Learning Goals:**

- To recognize the necessity of following God's Word and seeking His will for my life.
- To realize that I need to trust God and be obedient to Him.

Lesson 23: Judge Gideon**Biblical Passages:** Judges 6:11–16; 7:1–18**Key Question:** Who powers God's plan: people or God?**Biblical Truth:** God chooses average people in unusual circumstances and supplies the necessary power to accomplish His purposes.

Learning Goals:

- To understand that God is glorified when average people faithfully respond to Him.
- To reflect on God as the true source of my abilities.
- To consider the consequences of living in apostasy and the nature of God's faithfulness.

Lesson 24: Judge Samson**Biblical Passages:** Judges 13:1–7; 16:4–30**Key Question:** Why did God answer Samson's prayer for strength to destroy the temple of Dagon, the god of the Philistines?**Biblical Truth:** God graciously restored strength to Samson despite his unfaithfulness to God in order to carry out judgment on the Philistines and their god.**Learning Goals:**

- To contrast the actions of Samson with the requirements of his Nazirite vow.
- To characterize the relationship between Samson and Delilah.
- To justify the destruction of the Philistine temple through Samson's final prayer.
- To appreciate God's willingness to restore those who seek Him.

Lesson 25: Ruth**Biblical Passages:** Ruth 1:15–18; 2:8–13; 3:6–13**Key Question:** What was God's blessing for Ruth?**Biblical Truth:** Ruth's simple obedience and faith brought about the birth of an important ancestor in the line of Jesus Christ.**Learning Goals:**

- To understand God's faithful care for those who trust Him.
- To determine ways to place trust in God, especially in difficult times,

Lesson 26: Hannah**Biblical Passages:** 1 Samuel 1:1–2:11**Key Question:** Does God really answer my prayers?**Biblical Truth:** God does answer my prayers.**Learning Goals:**

- To appreciate that the Creator of the universe listens to me.
- To understand God wants me to share my concerns with Him continually.
- To acknowledge I am to praise God for answered prayers.

Lesson 27: Samuel**Biblical Passages:** 1 Samuel 2:18–21, 26; 3:1–20; 12:1–5**Key Question:** Can God use me for His glory?**Biblical Truth:** God can use any one at any age for His glory.**Learning Goals:**

- To understand the importance of obedience.
- To recognize God knows what is best for me.
- To acknowledge God can use a student like me for His glory.

Lesson 28: King Saul**Biblical Passages:** 1 Samuel 13:6–14; 15:10–11, 26**Key Question:** Is God serious about dealing with disobedience?**Biblical Truth:** Because of Saul's disobedience, God took away his kingship.**Learning Goals:**

- To understand there are consequences for disobedience to God.
- To examine our lives for total obedience to God.
- To be motivated to repent.

Lesson 29: David and Jonathan

Biblical Passages: 1 Samuel 16:12–23, 19:1–7; 20:30–34

Key Question: What does loyal friendship look like?

Biblical Truth: Jonathan and David's friendship was grounded in truth.

Learning Goals:

- To understand what real friendship is.
- To evaluate the role of loyalty, sacrifice, and commitment in my friendships.

Lesson 30: King David (2)

Biblical Passages: 1 Samuel 17:17–22, 32–37, 45–47, 50; 2 Samuel 7:8–29

Key Question: What does it mean to seek God's heart?

Biblical Truth: David sought God's heart by demonstrating steadfast obedience flowing out of a passionate love for God.

Learning Goals:

- To determine the positive character qualities David exemplified.
- To conceptualize the extremely difficult circumstances David remained faithful under.
- To understand God's covenant with David and its fulfillment by Jesus

Lesson 31: King David (3)

Biblical Passages: 2 Samuel 11:5–9, 14–15, 26–27; 12:7–18

Key Question: Is sin a personal, private matter, affecting me alone?

Biblical Truth: The effects of sin are profound and far-reaching.

Learning Goals:

- To realize the far-reaching consequences of our sin.
- To consider how sin within the body of Christ reflects on His name.
- To analyze the relationship between obedience and faithfulness.

Lesson 32: King Solomon

Biblical Passages: 1 Kings 3:5–15; 10:23–25; 11:1–13

Key Question: Do my relationships with other people compromise my relationship with God?

Biblical Truth: Although Solomon was renown worldwide for his wisdom, he allowed his relationships with his foreign wives to compromise his relationship with God.

Learning Goals:

- To understand how the relationships in Solomon's life turned his heart away from God.
- To weigh my relationships in terms of how they affect my walk with God.

Lesson 33: Prophet Elijah (1)

Biblical Passages: 1 Kings 17:1–16

Key Question: Will God provide in the midst of difficult circumstances?

Biblical Truth: God provides for those who trust Him and remain committed to Him.

Learning Goals:

- To identify God as the provider of all we need.
- To appreciate the different and unique ways God provides for those committed to Him.

Lesson 34: Prophet Elijah (2)

Biblical Passages: 1 Kings 19:9–18

Key Question: Why do I sometimes feel low?

Biblical Truth: God is always near even when you feel alone.

Learning Goals:

- To understand God addressed the deepest needs of Elijah's soul.
- To look to God for comfort in the difficulties we face.

Lesson 35: Prophet Elisha

Biblical Passages: 2 Kings 2:1–18

Key Question: How can I be sure I am qualified for God's service?

Biblical Truth: God calls and equips His servants for His purposes.

Learning Goals:

- To acknowledge God as the One who calls and qualifies a person for His purposes.
- To discover the characteristics of a good mentoring relationship.
- To develop a healthy confidence in approaching God-appointed tasks.

Lesson 36: Prophet Hosea

Biblical Passages: Hosea 1:1–3; 3:1–5; 14:1–9

Key Question: Why did Hosea stay with his wife after she committed adultery?

Biblical Truth: God wants to redeem us, not reject us.

Learning Goals:

- To realize that loving someone who has hurt you can be a struggle but is possible by God's grace.
- To appreciate the depth of God's redeeming love for us.

Lesson 37: Prophet Isaiah

Biblical Passages: Isaiah 6:1–8

Key Question: How does worship open us to God's majesty and prepare us for His calling?

Biblical Truth: Intimacy with Holy God leads to God being exalted, the sin of man being exposed, the repentant man being cleansed, and a servant surrendered for service.

Learning Goals:

- To appraise the Lord as the One who is exalted above all the earth.
- To outline the events that led to Isaiah's call by the Lord.
- To compare God's holiness to Isaiah's sinfulness.

Lesson 38: King Hezekiah

Biblical Passages: 2 Kings 17:3–8; 18:1–7, 26–35; 19:14–20, 35–37

Key Question: Why did God deliver Hezekiah and Judah from the Assyrian army when He allowed Israel to be destroyed by them?

Biblical Truth: God miraculously delivered Hezekiah and Judah from the powerful Assyrian army because they humbly turned to the Lord in repentance and prayer.

Learning Goals:

- To identify the factors of intimidation used by the Assyrian commander.
- To pinpoint the responses of Hezekiah to that intimidation, including the basis of his prayer.
- To commit to asking God for help when the odds are impossible.

Lesson 39: Prophet Jonah

Biblical Passages: Jonah 1:1–12, 17; 2:10–4:11

Key Question: Does it really matter if I do what God wants me to do?

Biblical Truth: God expects me to listen and obey what He says.

Learning Goals:

- To acknowledge that I cannot hide from God.
- To appreciate that God loves everyone just as much as he loves me.
- To understand that running from God will only bring me harm.

Lesson 40: King Josiah

Biblical Passages: 2 Chronicles 34:1–7; 2 Kings 22:8–20; 23:3, 21–25

Key Question: What difference can a single youth make?

Biblical Truth: God works wonderful things through those who seek Him faithfully.

Learning Goals:

- To encourage bold expression of faith among youth.
- To consider how the actions of one person can impact many.
- To realize the value of doing what is right before the Lord.

Lesson 41: Prophet Jeremiah**Biblical Passages:** Jeremiah 1:4–10; 20:7–18**Key Question:** Why did Jeremiah continue giving an unpopular message to the people?**Biblical Truth:** Jeremiah's faithfulness to God was stronger than his fear of the people.**Learning Goals:**

- To accept that sometimes doing the right thing will cause people to come against me.
- To learn I can trust God to protect me when I am faithful to Him.
- To realize it is important that I share God's message even when others reject it or me.

Lesson 42: Prophet Habakkuk**Biblical Passages:** Habakkuk 1:2–2:4**Key Question:** Why does life seem out of God's control?**Biblical Truth:** Although we cannot always see God's plan, we must still place our faith in Him.**Learning Goals:**

- To trust that even in the midst of violence, God is in control.
- To learn that talking to God will always bring comfort.
- To have assurance that when trouble comes, God is my source of strength.

Lesson 43: Prophet Ezekiel**Biblical Passages:** Ezekiel 2:3–10; 33:7–12**Key Question:** What was Ezekiel's specific responsibility to the people?**Biblical Truth:** Ezekiel was to warn the people about the danger of their sin.**Learning Goals:**

- To realize that when God gives me a message for others, it applies to me also.
- To understand why it is important that I warn others of their sin.
- To recognize that God is just toward the righteous and the wicked.

Lesson 44: Daniel (1)**Biblical Passages:** Daniel 6:1–24**Key Question:** Why would Daniel knowingly risk his life for the sake of his God and his testimony?**Biblical Truth:** Daniel did not back down from his convictions even when it could have cost him his life.**Learning Goals:**

- To understand the significance of a good testimony.
- To appreciate a life of integrity.
- To value a godly lifestyle that honors God even in the midst of adversity.

Lesson 45: Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego**Biblical Passage:** Daniel 3:1–30**Key Question:** Would God spare these three men who were being faithful to His commandments?**Biblical Truth:** God uses circumstances that are out of our control to test our faith.**Learning Goals:**

- To recognize that being faithful to God is more important than anything else, even preserving your own life.
- To compare the temporary consequences of faithfulness with the temporary benefits of sin.

Lesson 46: Daniel (2)**Biblical Passage:** Daniel 9:1–23**Key Question:** What was Daniel's response toward God's revelation found in Jeremiah's writings?

Biblical Truth: Daniel's prayer of faith demonstrated a God-focused attitude of humility.

Learning Goals:

- To appreciate the attitude of humility Daniel displayed.
- To value the need for repentance in our spiritual walk.
- To recognize the reward for seeking God.
- To understand the importance of a God centered prayer life.

Lesson 47: Esther

Biblical Passage: Esther 4:1–5:3

Key Question: What was God's plan for Esther as she was elevated to royalty?

Biblical Truth: God had strategically placed Esther in a position to provide deliverance for the Jews.

Learning Goals:

- To appreciate the sovereignty of God in each of our lives.
- To realize the circumstances God places us in are for His purposes.

Lesson 48: Nehemiah

Biblical Passage: Nehemiah 4:1–23

Key Question: Would Nehemiah be able to finish the project successfully with such adversity?

Biblical Truth: Those who desire to follow God's plan will suffer persecution.

Learning Goals:

- To develop a life of trust and faith in God despite adversity.
- To identify the valuable qualities of spiritual leadership.
- To appreciate the unity of a passionate vision, an iron will, and cooperation to accomplish God's will.