

Introduction to the Old Testament — “The First Testament of Jesus Christ”

Come, Follow Me 2026 — December 29–January 4

Scope: Introduction — no specific scripture assigned

← *Start of 2026 Old Testament curriculum* Next: → Moses 1; Abraham 3 — My Work and My Glory

Overview

The Come, Follow Me 2026 curriculum opens not with a scripture passage but with an orientation: *who is this book, and why should we care?* The official title from the Church manual is a claim and an invitation: **“The First Testament of Jesus Christ.”** Before we read a single verse, that framing asks us to see 39 books spanning four millennia not as ancient Near Eastern artifacts but as the earliest recorded witnesses to the Savior of the world.

This is, as Emily Belle Freeman and David Butler (Don’t Miss This) put it, “a story about God and his children and wanting to be in a close intimate relationship with each other.”¹ Jared Halverson (Unshaken) named it more technically: “My greatest hope this year is to help you find Jesus — to help you understand who he is and who you are and how you connect to him.”² The Maxwell Institute’s Joshua Sears adds a methodological layer: approaching the Old Testament well requires learning to hear it as a “chorus of voices” rather than demanding a uniform surface.³

This guide introduces:

1. What “testament” (covenant) means, and why it matters
 2. The structure of the Hebrew Bible (Torah / Nevi’im / Ketuvim)
 3. How the Restoration changes our relationship to this scripture
 4. How to approach the Old Testament effectively — methods and mindset
 5. The “chorus of voices” principle from Sears
 6. Key themes to track throughout the year
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What Is the Old Testament? — “Testament” Means Covenant

The word *testament* is not primarily about a will or a legal document — it is a translation of the Greek *diathēkē*, which in turn renders the Hebrew *berith*: **covenant**. The Old Testament is, literally, the Old Covenant. The New Testament is the New Covenant.

Freeman and Butler underlined this for their audience: “That word *old testament* — that word *testament* can also be translated as *covenant*... the old covenant and the new covenant... we could call those three books the old covenant, the new covenant, another covenant. It’s God trying to help his people wherever they were on the earth and whatever time period [have] covenant relationship with him.”⁴ The Book of Mormon’s subtitle — *Another Testament of Jesus Christ* — fits the same pattern: another covenant, another witness.

This framing immediately changes what we are looking for. We are not reading a history of ancient religion — we are reading the record of **God’s repeated, patient, urgent attempts to draw His children into covenantal relationship with Him**. The structure of the Hebrew canon itself reflects this goal.

The Structure of the Hebrew Bible — Tanakh

The Old Testament follows the order of the *Hebrew Bible*, called the **Tanakh** — an acronym from its three sections:

Section	Hebrew Name	Content
T — Torah	תּוֹרָה	The Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy — the five books of Moses
N — Nevi'im	נְבִיאִים	The Prophets: Joshua through Malachi — prophets applying the Torah in each successive age
K — Ketuvim	כְּתוּבִים	The Writings: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth, Esther, Daniel, Chronicles — poetry and wisdom literature

Don’t Miss This offered a practical reading key for this structure: the Torah establishes the covenant relationship — *who is God and who are we to each other?* The Nevi'im then record prophets trying to live out that covenant under siege, in exile, in restoration, in peace. “Some of them go into exile and it’s like, how do we live the Torah as slaves in exile? Some of them are in building phases — how do we live Torah when we’re in a stage of building or a stage of restoration?”⁵ The Ketuvim provide the poetry and reflective literature of that whole experience. Every book we will study this year fits one of those three registers — covenant-foundation, covenant-living, or covenant-reflection.

The books of the Bible do **not** follow chronological order within these categories; they are organized topically/generically. The timeline the Don’t Miss This team created (one piece per week, built throughout 2026) helps orient events in time while the text itself is read in its canonical sequence.⁶

The First Testament of Jesus Christ

The single most important orientation shift the Come, Follow Me manual offers is this: **every “God” or “Lord” in the Old Testament is almost always Jehovah — the premortal Jesus Christ.** The manual states it plainly: “The scriptural records of words spoken by ‘God’ or the ‘Lord’ are almost always the words of Jehovah, our risen Lord, Jesus Christ.”⁷

This means the Old Testament is not background material for the New Testament. It is **Christ’s own record of His dealings with His covenant people** — His word, His laws, His prophecies, His types, His foreshadowings — centuries before His birth. Halverson’s framework: “Beginning at that scripture, Philip preached Jesus” (Acts 8:35). Philip could find Jesus in Isaiah 53; the invitation of this year is to find Him on any page, in any chapter, at any location in the narrative. “Can we do it from Numbers 14? Can we do it from Leviticus 1? Can we do it from Haggai 2? Can we, no matter what page you happen to be studying, or more personally, whatever page in life you happen to be on, can we start from your location and get to that common destination?”⁸

The types and symbols the manual lists as entry points to Christ in the Old Testament:

- **Manna** — bread from heaven, pointing forward to the Bread of Life (John 6)
- **The sacrificial lamb** — Passover ritual and the Mosaic sacrificial system as types of the Atonement
- **The brass serpent** — Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21; Alma 33:19; John 3:14)
- **Jonah** — three days and nights in the belly of the great fish, type of the death and resurrection of Christ (Matthew 12:40)
- **The temple itself** — every sacrifice, every piece of furniture, every feast pointing to the Messiah

The rest of 2026 will be an extended exercise in learning to see these types clearly.

Restoration Additions — Moses, Abraham, and the JST

Latter-day Saint readers carry a significant interpretive advantage: three Restoration texts restore “plain and precious things” (1 Nephi 13:28) that illuminate the Old Testament throughout. These additions are woven into the 2026 curriculum:

The Book of Moses

Joseph Smith’s inspired revision of the opening chapters of Genesis, given as revelation in 1830–31. Halverson described the opening moment: Joseph opens his King James Bible at Genesis 1:1 and the Lord essentially says, “Actually, Joseph — that’s not quite the beginning. Get out your pen, lay aside the Bible for a moment, because I’m about to give you an entire chapter with no equivalent in the book of Genesis.”⁹ Moses Chapter 1 — Moses’s theophany before the creation narrative even begins —

becomes the prelude and perspective through which all of Genesis must be read. Moses 1:39 (“This is my work and my glory — to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man”) gives us God’s declared purpose before a single human being exists, which reframes the entire covenant story that follows.

The Joseph Smith Translation (JST), of which Moses is a part, was described in D&C 35:20 as “the scriptures as they are had in mine own bosom” — not merely recovering lost manuscripts but conveying what is in God’s *heart* about His children. Halverson: “I’m less concerned about redaction and more concerned with relation — as far as my relationship with God is concerned.”¹⁰

The Book of Abraham

Abraham’s record, translated from Egyptian papyri by Joseph Smith and published in 1842. Abraham 3 provides the pre-mortal council and the intelligence-organizing framework for creation; Abraham 4–5 present creation as the work of “the Gods” in council, using the language of *organization* rather than ex nihilo creation. The Book of Abraham gives us the clearest Restoration record of the pre-mortal life and of Abraham’s own covenant establishment — and the 2026 curriculum pairs it with the parallel Genesis/Moses passages throughout the spring.

The King James Translation and Other Translations

Don’t Miss This traced the thousand-year transmission history of the biblical text: authors, scribes, translators, and “smugglers” who kept the text alive when owning it in vernacular languages was illegal. The KJV translators worked under 15 rules designed to preserve the text as faithfully as possible, including the principle of altering “as little as possible from the original words.”¹¹ Because Joseph Smith used the KJV as the base text for his translation and the JST and KJV are “married together,” Latter-day Saints read from the KJV. But other translations (ESV, NIV) can help clarify difficult English: the Hebrew and Greek are the constant; the English varies.

How to Approach the Old Testament — Method and Mindset

Expectation Calibration

Halverson offered what may be the most practically useful warning of the year: “**Expectation without education leads to frustration.**”¹² The Old Testament is the longest, oldest, and most foreign of the standard works. Readers who come with high expectations and low preparation often crash out of the study early. The solution is not lower expectations — it is **education in how to read**. Every episode of Unshaken, Don’t Miss This, Follow Him, Gospel Talktrine, and The Scriptures Are Real is an attempt to supply that education.

Halverson’s three teaching goals, drawn from the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8):

1. **Recognize the eunuchs** — those who feel like outsiders looking in, who cannot find Jesus in these pages. “My heart goes out to you particularly... a eunuch can be a metaphor for anyone that feels like they’re on the outside looking in.”¹³
2. **Come sit alongside** — engage where people actually are, not where we think they should be.
3. **From whatever page you’re on, preach Jesus** — the teacher’s goal and the reader’s reward.

Finding Principles in “Trivial” Details

At a teacher in-service before beginning the Old Testament for the first time, Halverson administered a fake “pretest” of obscure trivia — names of midwives, tribal lineages — and watched the teachers despair. The answer key: “Who cares?” The question is never “what random fact do you know?” — it is, “What principle is God teaching through this person’s name or circumstance?” Elder Richard G. Scott: principles are “concentrated truths packaged for application.”¹⁴ The seemingly trivial detail almost always carries a moral hiding behind it.

The “Afterlife” of Scripture

Halverson encountered in graduate school the insight that transformed his approach to scripture study: not only should we study the world that *created* the Bible (its historical, archaeological, philological context), we should also study the worlds the Bible *creates* — the communities of faith it has generated and sustained across centuries. The Old Testament was just as important to a Latter-day Saint in 21st-century Idaho as it was to an Israelite in 9th-century Judah, and both encounters with the text are real and valid. Historical background is *means* to a greater end — helping us find application in our own “chariot time.”¹⁵

Water-Skiing, Snorkeling, Scuba Diving

Halverson coined the metaphor for his own approach to the Old Testament’s scale: some passages call for “water-skiing” — a broad narrative overview, keeping oriented across a large expanse. Others invite “snorkeling” — getting below the surface to see the color and life in the text. And occasionally there is “buried treasure” that demands “scuba diving” — deep, slow, word-level attention. Knowing which mode each passage calls for is itself a skill the year of study will develop.¹⁶

A Chorus of Voices — Embracing Old Testament Diversity

Joshua Sears (Maxwell Institute, “A Chorus of Voices”) offered the most directly methodological essay in the BYU Studies curriculum index for this week. His thesis:

“Rather than assuming doctrinal uniformity, readers benefit from acknowledging ‘different perspectives across the books’ reflecting writers’ ‘national or ethnic ties and cultural norms.’”³

The Old Testament comprises 39 books, written by dozens of ancient Israelites across a thousand years. Sears names concrete tensions the text holds:

- **Ezra** demands the divorce of foreign wives; **Ruth** celebrates such a marriage
- **Genesis 1** shows God speaking creation into existence; other texts depict God defeating cosmic chaos monsters
- **Nahum** celebrates Assyria's destruction; **Jonah** emphasizes God's love for the people of Nineveh
- **Psalms** contain both confident declarations of divine mercy *and* anguished questions about it

This is not a weakness to be explained away. It is, Sears argues, modeled on sacred practice: the fast and testimony meeting, where contradictory, confused, questioning voices are all given place at the pulpit because the *act of giving voice* is itself holy. The Old Testament's diversity of perspectives is a feature, not a bug — and Sears invites modern readers to ask, when encountering an unfamiliar or even uncomfortable viewpoint: "Are they wrong? Or do they know something we need to learn?"¹⁷

The Don't Miss This team applied the same spirit differently: "As you think about who those translators were it gives us a little bit of insight into those men — we wanted to honor and give due respect to not just the translators but everybody that was involved in the history and the pulling together of this book."¹⁸ Authors, scribes, translators, smugglers — the cloud of witnesses who handed this text down.

Key Themes to Track Throughout 2026

The following themes will recur throughout the year. Tracking them from the start creates a throughline across 39 books:

1. **Covenant / Testament** — Every story is a chapter in God's covenant relationship with His children. Track when covenants are made, broken, renewed, fulfilled.
2. **God's Character in the Old Testament** — The four phrases from Moses 1 (Don't Miss This): "*I am*" (who God is), "*You are*" (who we are to Him), "*My Work*" (His purpose), "*Your Work*" (our calling). Watch for how each encounter with God establishes these four.
3. **Types of Christ** — Wherever the pattern appears (a chosen deliverer, a sacrifice, anointed king, an atoning figure), ask: how does this point to Jesus?
4. **Promises to Covenant Israel** — President Nelson's challenge: identify and record the covenantal promises God makes to Israel throughout the year. Note the promises, their conditions, and their fulfillments. Don't Miss This dedicates a journal page per week to this tracking.¹⁹
5. **Diversity of Voices** — Let the text surprise you. When a book or verse contradicts your expectations, stay with it rather than resolving the tension prematurely.
6. **The Documentary Hypothesis and Human Fingerprints** — Halverson addressed this directly: there are human fingerprints throughout the biblical text, as there are throughout the Book of Mormon. Seeing divine

and human fingerprints together is not a crisis — it is the incarnational pattern. “By proving contraries, truth is made manifest” (Joseph Smith).²⁰

Source Guide — What Each Voice Uniquely Contributes

- **Don’t Miss This (Freeman & Butler)** — the “why the Bible” frame; translation history and reverence; “testament = covenant”; the Tanakh structure; four phrases from Moses 1 (I AM / You Are / My Work / Your Work); covenant-tracking through the year. → Don’t Miss This — Moses 1 / Abraham 3 (Dec 27–Jan 2)
 - **Unshaken (Halverson)** — the year’s teaching philosophy; expectation without education = frustration; the Philip/Ethiopian eunuch model (find Jesus from any page); the afterlife of scripture; water-ski/snorkel/scuba metaphor; Moses 1:39 as the interpretive key to all scripture; the Documentary Hypothesis and human fingerprints. → Unshaken — Moses 1 / Abraham 3: My Work and My Glory
 - **Maxwell Institute / Joshua Sears** (“A Chorus of Voices”) — the scholarly case for embracing the Old Testament’s diversity; concrete textbook examples of tensions between books; the fast-and-testimony-meeting analogy; the interpretive challenge to stay with discomfort rather than explaining it away. → <https://mi.byu.edu/old-testament-reflections/a-chorus-of-voices>
 - **Don’t Miss This Study Tools** — practical study tool overview: word-of-the-week posters (Hebrew vocabulary), devotional booklet, tip-ins/glue-ins for scriptures, study journal with weekly worksheets and covenant-tracking pages, timeline (one piece per week). → Don’t Miss This Study Tools
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Personal Application & Discussion Questions

1. **What is your relationship to the Old Testament?** Have you tried it before and given up? Have you never opened it? Or is it well-worn but unexplored? What is your honest starting point?
2. **What does “covenant” mean to you personally?** As you think of your own baptismal and temple covenants, how does calling the Old Testament “the Old Covenant” change the way you expect to read it?
3. **Can you find Jesus from the page you’re on?** Think of a time in the Old Testament that confused or troubled you. What happens if you ask: “How might this point to the Savior?”
4. **Where do you feel like a eunuch — an outsider?** In scripture study, in faith, in life? Halverson’s invitation is to bring that person alongside and start from their location. Who in your life needs someone to come sit in their chariot?
5. **What do you expect this year to be like?** And what education will you need to close the gap between expectation and understanding?
6. **Pick one of the four phrases from Moses 1:** “I AM,” “You are,” “My work,” “Your work.” Which one is your entry point into the Old Testament this year, and why?
7. **The Chorus of Voices:** Is there a voice in the Old Testament you’ve previously silenced — a passage you explained away or skipped? What might it teach you if you gave it the pulpit?

8. **Promises to Israel:** Start the covenant-tracking practice. As you read this week, what promises does God make? Write one down. How might it be a promise to *you*, as a covenant child of God?

Key Quotes

"The scriptural records of words spoken by 'God' or the 'Lord' are almost always the words of Jehovah, our risen Lord, Jesus Christ." — **Come, Follow Me 2026 Manual**, Introduction to the Old Testament

"Testament is a word that could be translated as *covenant* — so the old covenant, the new covenant, another covenant. It's God trying to help his people wherever they were on the earth and whatever time period [have a] covenant relationship with him." — **Emily Belle Freeman**, *Don't Miss This*⁴

"Expectation without education leads to frustration." — **Jared Halverson**, *Unshaken*¹²

"Beginning at that scripture, Philip preached Jesus." — Acts 8:35, the model for the year's approach (Halverson)

"I'm less concerned about redaction and more concerned with relation — as far as my relationship with God is concerned. And that's what God is giving us in Moses Chapter 1." — **Jared Halverson**, *Unshaken*¹⁰

"Rejoice in the diversity of the Old Testament and recognize that giving multiple voices their turn at the pulpit is itself a sacred experience." — **Joshua Sears**, "A Chorus of Voices," Maxwell Institute³

"You are numbered unto me... you are mine." — **Moses 1:35**, the covenant affirmation that opens the year

"This is my work and my glory — to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." — **Moses 1:39**, the declarative purpose of all that follows

"I want you to feel that you're not on the outside looking in. God has a place for you, and he's trying to bring you to that place." — **Jared Halverson**, *Unshaken*¹³

Links to Existing Notes in This Vault

- [Unshaken — Moses 1 / Abraham 3: My Work and My Glory](#)
- [Don't Miss This — Moses 1 / Abraham 3 \(Dec 27–Jan 2\)](#)
- [Don't Miss This Study Tools — Old Testament](#)
- [Tanakh — the Hebrew canon structure note](#)
- [Jesus Christ \(Jehovah\) — the Lord of the Old Testament; the Premortal Christ](#)
- [God the Father \(Elohim\) — the Heavenly Father present in council and covenant](#)

- Moses — the prophet whose vision opens the curriculum in Moses 1
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Source Links & Further Reading

Church Resources

- Come Follow Me 2026: Introduction to the Old Testament [↗](#)
- Old Testament KJV — Online [↗](#)
- Book of Moses (Pearl of Great Price) [↗](#)
- Book of Abraham (Pearl of Great Price) [↗](#)

Scholarly

- Maxwell Institute: “A Chorus of Voices: An Introduction to the Old Testament” — Joshua Sears [↗](#) (*BYU Studies Come Follow Me index, Lesson 1*)
- BYU Studies Come Follow Me — Old Testament, Lesson 1 [↗](#)

Podcasts

- Don’t Miss This — Moses 1; Abraham 3 (Dec 27–Jan 2) [↗](#) — Freeman & Butler
 - Unshaken — Moses 1; Abraham 3: “My Work and My Glory” [↗](#) — Jared Halverson
 - Don’t Miss This — Old Testament Study Tools [↗](#) — Freeman & Butler
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Navigation

[← Start of 2026 Old Testament curriculum](#)

Next: [→ Moses 1; Abraham 3 — My Work and My Glory](#)

Footnotes

1. Freeman & Butler, *Don’t Miss This*, Dec 27–Jan 2 episode (2025–26); transcript at Don’t Miss This — Moses 1 / Abraham 3. [↩](#)
2. Halverson, *Unshaken*, “Moses 1; Abraham 3: My Work and My Glory,” ~23:33; transcript at Unshaken — Moses 1 / Abraham 3. [↩](#)
3. Joshua Sears, “A Chorus of Voices: An Introduction to the Old Testament,” *Old Testament Reflections* (Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, December 29, 2025), <https://mi.byu.edu/old-testament-reflections/a-chorus-of-voices> [↗](#). [↩](#) [↩²](#) [↩³](#)

4. Ibid., ~16:00 mark. ↩ ↩²
5. Ibid., ~19:47–20:48. ↩
6. Freeman & Butler, *Don't Miss This Study Tools* episode; transcript at Don't Miss This Study Tools. ↩
7. Come, Follow Me — *For Home and Church: Old Testament 2026*, "Introduction to the Old Testament" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2025). ↩
8. Ibid., ~20:19–23:33. ↩
9. Ibid., ~34:23–34:54. ↩
10. Ibid., ~25:06–26:39 and ~33:53. ↩ ↩²
11. Freeman & Butler, *Don't Miss This*, Dec 27–Jan 2 episode, ~8:20–13:04. ↩
12. Ibid., ~19:16–19:48. ↩ ↩²
13. Ibid., ~18:12–21:55. ↩ ↩²
14. Ibid., ~11:56–12:28. ↩
15. Ibid., ~13:29–15:03. ↩
16. Ibid., ~38:02–39:04. ↩
17. Ibid. — "Are they wrong? Or do they know something we need to learn?" ↩
18. Ibid., ~11:29–12:32. ↩
19. Halverson & Butler, *Don't Miss This* journal description; transcript, ~20:48. ↩
20. Ibid., ~29:15–31:49. ↩