

Introduction to the Bible

I. Books

- Differences between the two testaments
 - Dates: The widest possible range of dates would be:
OT: 1400-200 BC
NT: 40-90 AD
 - Languages: OT = Hebrew and a small bit of Aramaic; NT = Greek
 - Content: Jesus is the focus of the NT; OT is everything pre-Jesus
 - Not two conflicting stories but one unified history and view of God
- Groupings of books
 - See the Bible Books chart
 - Jews divide OT as Torah + Prophets (Former & Latter) + Writings. Former Prophets are the 12 books labeled “History” in the chart.
 - Parallel structure of canon: history → interpretation of history
In the OT, the prophets and wisdom literature interpret and apply the significance of the historical narrative found in the Torah and other books containing historical narratives. In the NT, the epistles interpret and apply the significance of the historical narratives found in the Gospels and Acts.
- Chapters & verses not in original texts
 - Every part of Scripture has an “address,” written [Book] [Chapter]:[Verse(s)], e.g., John 3:16-17
 - Chapters were added in the 13th century by archbishop Stephen Langton.
 - Verses were added in 16th century by printer Robert Estienne in the 1551 Greek NT
 - The first English Bible with chapters & verses: Geneva Bible (1560)

II. Canon Defined

- Canon = Greek word for “rule” or “standard” for measuring something. In Christian theology, the canon is the collection of divinely authoritative and officially acknowledged writings that define Christian beliefs.
- Inspiration: God worked through the human authors without violating their own proper freedom and cultural context in order to produce the words and ideas he sought to communicate. Thus, the Bible has two-fold authorship: divine and human.

III. OT Canon

- The foundation of the OT canon begins with Moses. God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, gave the revelation of the Torah/Pentateuch to him, and publicly confirmed his role as a true prophet in the miracles of the Exodus and the events at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 3-24). Many later biblical writers from all eras acknowledge the revelation received through Moses as God's word (e.g., Josh. 22:5; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs. 14:6; Psalm 119; Ezra 3:2, 9:9-12; Dan. 9:11-13; Neh. 8:1-9:38; Matt. 19:7-8; Luke 24:27, 44; John 1:17, 45; Acts 7; 1 Cor. 9:9; Heb. 8:5; 9:19).
- The Torah establishes criteria for recognizing future special revelation from God after Moses: (1) orthodoxy, i.e., consistency with prior special revelation (Deut. 13:1-5); (2) publicly observable/testable evidence of short-term predictions about the future fulfilled (Deut. 18:15-22). Many later OT writings record people receiving special revelation and identify OT writings as God's revealed word (former prophets: 1 Kgs. 16:34; Zech. 7:12; latter prophets: all describe their work as the "word of the Lord" or "vision" from God). Writings recognized as inspired revelation were stored in the Tabernacle & Temple (Exod. 25:16; 1 Sam. 10:25; 2 Kgs. 22:8).
- The first reference to three groupings of Law + Prophets + other writings appears in the Wisdom of Solomon (180 BC). The first existing evidence of a specific number of books in the OT canon is found in 1st-century works by Josephus (a Jewish historian) and 4 Ezra. The first existing list of particular books is from the Babylonian Talmud (200 AD).
- Catholic & Orthodox Bibles have additional books at the end of the OT (Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical books) that are not contained in Protestant & Jewish canons. They were composed in Greek from 300 BC-100 AD, widely read by Jews and early Christians, and often included in collections of canonical books but also distinguished as not canonical. Disputes about their place in the canon continued until the Catholic Council of Trent (1545-1563) declared 12 of them canonical. Protestants rejected these books as Scripture because they were not in the Hebrew canon of Jews and for doctrinal reasons.
- The oldest complete Hebrew text of the entire OT dates to about 1000 AD. Copies of substantial portions of the OT were found near the Dead Sea in 1947 dating from 200 BC–100 AD, and they match the later medieval manuscripts almost exactly, which proves that the Jewish people were extremely careful about accurate copying and transmission of the text. The text of the OT can also be checked by quotations in other Jewish literature and ancient translations of the OT into Greek, Aramaic, Latin, and other languages from the world of the Roman empire.

IV. NT Canon

- Jesus and the early Christians all accepted the OT canon as Scripture (e.g., Matt. 5:17-20; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

- Jesus claimed to be a prophet and was recognized as a prophet (Matt. 13:57; John 4:19-26; 6:14; Acts 3:22-23; Heb. 1:1-3). He is the incarnate Word and Truth of God (John 1:1-18; 14:6) and a skilled teacher (his title “rabbi”). Jesus laid the foundation and direction for a NT canon by commissioning his disciples as official representatives (e.g., Matt. 10:5-42; John 20:21; Acts 10:41). His teaching had a memorable form (pithy, repeated, filled with practical images), and his disciples included literate men capable of taking notes and writing an account of his life and teaching (e.g., Matthew the tax collector, Luke the doctor, Paul the trained scholar; cf. Luke 1:1-4).
- The NT writers demonstrate an awareness that the apostles are commissioned to teach and pass on a divinely revealed tradition of revelation (1 Cor. 15:1-11) and received special revelation from God (2 Peter 1:16-21). They also quote other NT writings as Scripture (1 Tim. 5:18: Paul quotes Luke; Peter calls Paul’s writings Scripture: 2 Peter 3:15-16).
- Most of the NT books were cited and used as canon by early Christians from the 1st century onward. There were some doubts about Hebrews (due to lack of stated author), James, 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude, and Revelation, and there were a few other books outside the NT occasionally included in lists of canonical books. The first existing evidence of the full list of 27 books in the NT canon dates from 367 AD (Athanasius).
- Nearly universal consensus about the NT canon developed in an organic, bottom-up fashion within the first three centuries, a period when church authority and structure was very decentralized. The church employed several criteria for testing disputed books:
 - (1) Authorship: Was it written by an apostle or by someone directly associated with an apostle? This was an important question because the Christian tradition is founded by upon claims about historical events, and (all other things being equal) the most trustworthy witnesses to historical events are eyewitnesses, i.e., those who had firsthand knowledge of the events themselves and thus are in the best position to know what was true.
 - (2) Orthodox content, i.e., consistency with and fidelity to OT canon and apostolic tradition handed on orally in various contexts (worship, teaching, etc.).
 - (3) Wide circulation and liturgical use by the church.
 - (4) Affirmation by church authorities. This mattered because Jesus called and commissioned a group of apostles to lay the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20) on the person and teaching of Jesus and to commission/ordain pastors and elders to faithfully guard (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 14), teach, and hand on God’s word to succeeding generations (2 Tim. 2:2).
- There are over 5000 manuscripts of the NT in Greek. The oldest complete collection of the NT books in Greek dates to the 4th century, but some fragments and portions date to the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The text of the NT can also be checked against the numerous quotations of the NT that occur in the writings of early Christians. Discrepancies between these copies are frequent but very minor, are often explainable by known scribal techniques, and affect no major doctrinal teaching of the NT. Because we have numerous copies so close to the events they recount, the NT is one of the best preserved and most reliable texts of ancient literature.

III. The Drama of Scripture: The Story of God's Covenantal Kingdom

Period	Key Figures	Scripture
Act 1 Creation	Adam & Eve	Genesis 1-2
Act 2 Fall & Redemption Begun	Noah	Genesis 3-11
Act 3, Scene 1 Israel's Founders	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph	Genesis 12-50
Act 3, Scene 2 Israel's People	Moses	Exodus – Deuteronomy
Act 3, Scene 3 Israel's Land	Joshua, Judges, Samuel	Joshua – 1 Samuel 7
Act 3, Scene 4 Israel's Kingdom: Established, Divided, & Ended (Exiled)	(1) <i>Kings</i> : Saul, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah (2) <i>Prophets</i> : Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah	1 Samuel 8 – 2 Kings 25; Prophets
Act 3, Scene 5 Israel's Kingdom Restored & Expanded	(1) <i>Leaders in Judah</i> : Ezra, Nehemiah, (2) <i>Leaders in the Gentile world</i> : Esther, Daniel	Ezra, Nehemiah; Prophets
Act 4 Coming of King Jesus: Redemption Accomplished & Kingdom Renewed	Jesus, 12 Disciples	Gospels
Act 5 Church: Redemption Continues & Kingdom Grows	Jesus, Apostles (esp. Peter & Paul), Church	Acts, Epistles
Act 6 Return of King Jesus: Redemption Completed & Kingdom Consummated	Jesus, Church (= Humanity)	Revelation 21-22