



Lecture # 1 Part 2

The Structure and Divisions of the Bible

THE BIBLE AND ITS TESTAMENTS: DEFINITIONS

Hence, it is for Christians that the former part of the Bible is called the “**Old**” **Covenant (Testament)**, and the latter is called the *New Covenant*.³

The relationship between the two covenants is well summarized by the famous statement of **St. Augustine**: “... the **Old Testament revealed in the New, the New veiled in the Old ...**”⁴ Or, as another has put it, “**The New is in the Old contained, and the Old is in the New explained.**”⁵ For the Christian, Christ is the theme of both covenants (cf. [Hebrews 10:7](#); [Luke 24:27, 44](#); [John 5:39](#)), as may be seen from the accompanying chart.

Hebrews 10:7 (NASB)

⁷ **"THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'"**

Luke 24:27 (NASB)

²⁷ **Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.**

Luke 24:44 (NASB)

⁴⁴ **Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."**

John 5:39 (NASB)

³⁹ **"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;**

In the Old Testament Christ is:

**in shadow
in pictures
in type
in ritual
latent
prophesied
implicitly revealed**

In the New Testament Christ is:

**in substance
in person
in truth
in reality
patent
present
explicitly revealed**



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THE BIBLE AND ITS ANCIENT FORMS

HEBREW FORM

Probably the earliest division of the Hebrew Bible was twofold: 1) the Law and 2) the Prophets.⁶ That is the most common distinction in the New Testament and is confirmed as well by Jewish usage and the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁷

However, from less ancient times the Jewish Bible was arranged in three sections totaling twenty-four books (twenty-two books if Ruth is attached to Judges and Lamentations is attached to Jeremiah).⁸ This Old Testament contains all thirty-nine of the books of the Protestant Old Testament in English. The basic difference is that the books are grouped differently (see discussion in section # 15).

THE HEBREW OLD TESTAMENT ARRANGEMENT*

The Law (Torah)	The Prophets (Nevi'im)	The Writings (Kethuvim)
1. Genesis	A. Former Prophets	A. Poetical Books
2. Exodus	1. Joshua	1. Psalms
3. Leviticus	2. Judges	2. Job
4. Numbers	3. Samuel	3. Proverbs
5. Deuteronomy	4. Kings	B. Five Rolls (Megilloth)
	B. Latter Prophets	1. Ruth
	1. Isaiah	2. Song of Songs
	2. Jeremiah	3. Ecclesiastes
	3. Ezekiel	4. Lamentations
	4. The Twelve	5. Esther
		C. Historical Books
		1. Daniel
		2. Ezra-Nehemiah
		3. Chronicles

* This is the arrangement in the New Jewish Version of the Old Testament based on the Masoretic Text (MT). See *TANAKH: A New Translation of THE HOLY SCRIPTURES According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*; Rudolf Kittel and Paul E. Kahle, eds., *Biblia Hebraica* and K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. This is not the arrangement as it appears in Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*.



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Some believe a **threefold division** may be implied in the words of Jesus in [Luke 24:44](#): “Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”⁹ Philo, the Jewish philosopher at Alexandria, alluded to a threefold division of the Old Testament, and **Flavius Josephus** divided the twenty-two books of the Hebrew Scriptures into three sections, saying that the twenty-two books “contain the records of all the past; ... five belong to Moses, ... the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life.”¹⁰

Perhaps the earliest testimony to a threefold division, however, comes from the **prologue to Ecclesiasticus**, which reads, “... my grandfather Jesus, after devoting himself especially to the reading **of the law** and **the prophets** and the **other books** of our fathers”¹¹

The modern **threefold classification**, with eleven books in the Writings, stems from the **Mishnah (Baba Bathra tractate)**, which in its present form dates from the **fifth century A.D.**

It is possible that this **threefold division** is based on the official status of the writers in a descending order:

Moses the lawgiver appeared first, with his **five books**; next came **the prophets**, with their **eight books**; finally, the **non-prophets**, or wise men, kings, and princes, appear with their books. In light of that it would seem that the older breakdown of books was **twenty-two** rather than **twenty-four**.

The books of Ruth and Lamentations were probably written by the authors of Judges and Jeremiah respectively and only later removed from their original position to form, with Ecclesiastes, Esther, and Song of Songs, the five books to be read during the festial year. That feature would also leave a more symmetrical arrangement of books in the canon, with three books in each of the three subsections of the **Kethuvim**, namely, **the poetical books**, **the five rolls**, and **the historical books**. The overall number (twenty-two) would thus correspond with Josephus’s count, as well as the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, indicating that the leaders of Israel considered twenty-two books to be a complete collection, as twenty-two letters formed the complete Hebrew alphabet.¹²

GREEK FORM

The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into **Greek** at **Alexandria, Egypt (c. 250–15 B.C.)**. This translation, known as the **Septuagint (LXX)**, introduced some basic changes in the format of the books: some of the books were reclassified, others regrouped, and some were renamed (see the chart at the end of this section). The **Alexandrian tradition** divided the Old Testament according to subject matter, which is the basis of the modern classification of **five books of Law**, **twelve books of History**,



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five books of Poetry, and **seventeen books of Prophecy**. This gives us the **39 books** that we know of today in the Old Testament.

The order of the books varies in the early canonical lists, but the grouping of the books remains the same throughout.¹³ The accompanying chart illustrates this arrangement, which contains the same content **but a different total than its Hebrew counterpart**.

GREEK FORM

The Law (Pentateuch)—5 books

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy

Poetry—5 books

1. Job
2. Psalms
3. Proverbs
4. Ecclesiastes
5. Song of Solomon

History—12 books

1. Joshua
2. Judges
3. Ruth
4. 1 Samuel
5. 2 Samuel
6. 1 Kings
7. 2 Kings
8. 1 Chronicles
9. 2 Chronicles
10. Ezra
11. Nehemiah
12. Esther

Prophets—17 Books

A. Major

1. Isaiah
2. Jeremiah
3. Lamentations
4. Ezekiel
5. Daniel

B. Minor

1. Hosea
2. Joel
3. Amos
4. Obadiah
5. Jonah
6. Micah
7. Nahum
8. Habakkuk
9. Zephaniah
10. Haggai
11. Zechariah
12. Malachi



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To that arrangement the early Christian Fathers added the books of the New Testament, which were classified in **four groups**: **Gospels** (four books), **History** (one book), **Epistles** (twenty-one books), and **Prophecy** (one book). Further, the twenty-one Epistles were subdivided into the **Pauline** (thirteen)¹⁴ and the **General** (eight).

GOSPELS—4 books

1. Matthew
2. Mark
3. Luke
4. John

HISTORY—1 book

1. Acts

EPISTLES—21 books

A. Pauline—13 books

1. Romans
2. 1 Corinthians
3. 2 Corinthians
4. Galatians
5. Ephesians
6. Philippians
7. Colossians
8. 1 Thessalonians
9. 2 Thessalonians
10. 1 Timothy
11. 2 Timothy
12. Titus
13. Philemon

B. General—8 books

1. Hebrews
2. James
3. 1 Peter
4. 2 Peter
5. 1 John
6. 2 John
7. 3 John
8. Jude

PROPHECY—1 book

1. Revelation

LATIN FORM

The grouping of books in the **Latin Bible (the Vulgate)** follows that of the **Septuagint (LXX), or Greek version**. Jerome, who translated the **Latin Vulgate (c. 383–405)**, was familiar with the Hebrew division, but Christendom had come to favor (or be associated with) the Greek version; thus it was only natural for him to adopt its fourfold classification. In fact, any other classification would no doubt have been unacceptable to Latin Christians.¹⁵