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Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament

Jensen's Survey of the New Testament

JENSEN'S SURVEY
OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT

Search and Discover
by
IRVING L. JENSEN

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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1

Introduction to the Old Testament

Many pleasant surprises are in store for the one who embarks on a study of the Old Testament. Not the least of these is the discovery of its contemporary application to everyday life. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to offer some motivation and direction for the reader's survey study of this part of God's wonderful Book. Regular studies in the Bible text begin with the next chapter.

I. WHY STUDY THE OLD TESTAMENT?

There are many compelling reasons why every Christian should study the Old Testament. Consider the following:

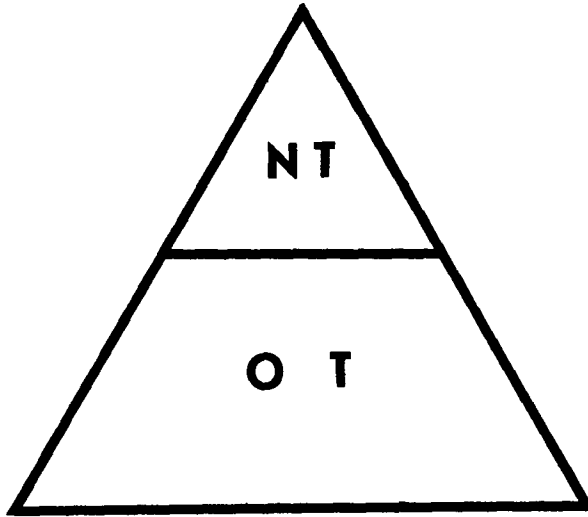
A. THE BIBLE IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT

Both Old and New Testaments make up the inspired Scriptures. The New Testament was never intended to replace the Old Testament. Instead, the New was given to complement the Old, to complete its story. For example, the Old prophesies the coming of the Redeemer; the New reports the fulfillment of that prophecy in Jesus. The New Testament is the sequel to the Old Testament's origins, heir of its promises, fruit of its seed, the peak of its mountain. The diagram on page 16 illustrates various relationships of the two Testaments.

What associations between the Old and New Testaments do you see suggested by the illustration?

B. THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST WOULD BE AN ENIGMA WITHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT

For example, why did Jesus say, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24)? In what sense was Jesus the



promised Messiah and King, long awaited by the Jews?¹ And why did He have to die? Are His cross and crown irreconcilable? Read Isaiah 53:10-12 for an example of how the Old Testament answers such questions.

C. THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF CHRISTIANITY IS FURNISHED BY THE OLD TESTAMENT

Christianity did not emerge mysteriously out of a vacuum. God had been moving among the peoples of the world, especially Israel, for many centuries before Christ. Then, "when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5). Erich Sauer connects the Old Testament with the New in these words:

The Old Testament is promise and expectation, the New is fulfilment and completion. The Old is the marshalling of the hosts to the battle of God, the new is the Triumph of the Crucified One. The Old is the twilight and dawn of morning, the New is the rising sun and the height of eternal day.²

Even though the last book of the Old Testament was written about four hundred years before Christ's birth, our knowing the Old

1. See John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pp. 79-95, for an excellent discussion of the subject, "Christ in Old Testament Prophecy."

2. Erich Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption*, p. 186.

Testament is to know the religious, social, geographical, and, in part, the political setting of the New. Besides, the Old Testament was the Bible of Jesus, the apostles, and New Testament writers. When they spoke or wrote, they often quoted or referred to the Old Testament's history and teaching. This in itself is reason enough for every Christian to be acquainted with the Old Testament.

D. KEY REVELATIONS OF GOD ARE TO BE FOUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament is mainly history, but it is *sacred* history. That is, it reveals especially how God moves in and through the lives of people and the courses of nations. We might also say that the Old Testament is *redemptive* history, for "God actively directs human history for the purpose of redeeming men to Himself."³ The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Old Testament to record what would adequately reveal that redemptive purpose. Thus, the writers have much to say about such crucial facts as these:

1. God is the sovereign Creator.
2. Man is a sinner in need of salvation.
3. God is holy, and He judges sin.
4. God is love, and He offers salvation to sinful man.
5. A Saviour would be born to die for the sins of man.
6. Man is saved by faith, not by works.
7. Israel was sovereignly chosen to be God's channel of the redemptive message to the world.
8. All history will culminate at the throne of the sovereign Lord.

The Old Testament is especially valuable for its inspired record about origins. Consider, for example, the historical record of the first man and woman; the first sin committed by a human; the first communications of God with man; and the first revelation of the way of restored fellowship to God.

Miracles are also a key part of the Old Testament, preparing the reader for the climactic event of the Great Miracle, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. John Raven rightly concludes that "Christ and the Old Testament are so united by mutual testimony that a low view of the credibility of the latter must result in a low view of the credibility of the former."⁴ The factuality of miracles rests solidly on the person of the miracle-worker. This is one of many reasons why so much is revealed in the Old Testament about *who* God is.

3. J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 3.

4. John H. Raven, *Old Testament Introduction*, p. 6.

E. THE OLD TESTAMENT IS SPIRITUAL FOOD FOR THE CHRISTIAN

Paul was referring directly to the Old Testament when he wrote, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). The different parts of the Old Testament reach the reader in various ways:

1. Its indictments bring conviction of sin (Jer 2).
2. Its laws and counsel show the way to please God (Exod 20).
3. Its psalms encourage praise and prayer (Psalm 107).
4. Its testimonies inspire the reader to walk in paths of righteousness (Deut 31:24—32:47).
5. Its historical facts give perspective and direct the reader to learn from the God of all history (Psalm 78).
6. Its prophecies warn of danger and plant hope in the hearts of all believers (Zech 14).
7. Its story of Israel's kingdom gives background for our understanding of the millennial reign of Christ and His kingship (2 Sam 7:4-17; Zech 14:9).

Read the passages cited above to see the relevancy of the Old Testament to the twentieth century.

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT FROM GOD TO US

The plan of writing Scriptures originated with God (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:21). So, from its very source, the Bible is a supernatural book. It is the revelation of God, written by divinely inspired human authors. Through the subsequent stages of transmission, canonization, and translation, God has preserved His Word so that today, as we hold a copy of the Bible in our hands, we may be fully confident of its trustworthiness. Let us look briefly at the overall history of the Old Testament. The starting point of such a history is divine revelation.

A. REVELATION

Revelation is God's communication of truth to man, without which man cannot know God. Before the first Old Testament book was written,⁵ God revealed Himself to man through such media as conscience and nature (*general* revelation) and direct conversation with people (*special* revelation). (Read Rom 1:18-21 for an application of general revelation, and Gen 3:8-19 for an example of special

5. It is not known which was the first Old Testament book to be written. If Moses was the earliest Bible author, then there was no Scripture before around 1500 B.C.

revelation.) But God also wanted to reveal Himself in the form of permanent writing, so that there would be a clear and fixed record of this revelation for all the succeeding generations. So He commissioned chosen men to write on various subjects. In the words of Gleason Archer,

If there be a God, and if He is concerned for our salvation, this is the only way (apart from direct revelation from God to each individual of each successive generation) He could reliably impart this knowledge to us. It must be through a reliable written record such as the Bible purports to be.⁶

B. INSPIRATION

Two crucial questions at this point are: How did the human authors know what God wanted them to write? and Were their writings without error? We cannot explain the supernatural process of inspiration, which brought about the original writings of the Bible. Paul refers to the process as *God-breathing*. (Read 2 Tim 3:16, where the phrase "inspired by God" translates the Greek *theopneustia*, which literally means "God-breathed.") Peter says the Bible authors were undergirded, or carried along, by the Holy Spirit. ("Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit," 2 Pet 1:21, Berkeley.) These verses, along with many others, assure us that when the Bible authors wrote, their words expressed perfectly and infallibly the truths which God wanted to convey to mankind. In the original autographs, all the words were infallible as to truth, and final as to authority. Such accuracy applies to every part of the originals—to matters of history and science as well as to spiritual truths. If the Bible student does not believe this, his study of the biblical text will be haunted by confusing and destructive doubts.

C. THE ORIGINAL AUTOGRAPHS

The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament were written over a period of about a thousand years (c. 1500-400 B.C.), by about twenty-five to thirty different authors. All but a few portions were written in Hebrew.⁷ The writing material of most of the autographs was paperlike papyrus. (Some autographs may have been written on animal skins.) Sheets of papyrus about ten inches high were attached together to make a long, rolled-up scroll, easy for reading. (The page-

6. Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 15. Read this same source for a good discussion of the inadequacies of oral tradition as a sole transmitter of God's special revelation to man.

7. These were the exceptions, written in Aramaic: Genesis 31:47; Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 2:4b—7:28; Ezra 4:8—6:18; 7:12-26.

type codex, or book, did not supplant the roll until the second or third century A.D.) The Bible text was written with pen and ink in vertical columns, with no space between words, sentences, or paragraphs. Only the consonants of the words were recorded.⁸ Read Jeremiah 36 for an example of how a portion of Scripture originated. How did Jeremiah receive the message from God? How did the scribe receive it from Jeremiah?

Practically nothing is known about the history of each individual autograph of the Old Testament. During the years of Solomon's Temple, it is likely that some autographs were among the Scriptures deposited there (cf 2 Kings 22). Probably all of the original papyrus scrolls perished within a century or two after they were written, due to such causes as fire and rotting.

D. TRANSMISSION

Transmission is the process by which the biblical manuscripts have been copied and recopied down through the ages. God allowed each of the original Old Testament autographs to disappear from the scene, but not before copies were already in the hands of His people.⁹ Handwritten scribal copyings of the Hebrew text were made up to the time of the printing press (fifteenth century A.D.).

No ancient writing has been so carefully preserved in the process of scribal copying as have the Old Testament Scriptures. This was due in part to the Jews' almost superstitious veneration of their written Scriptures. During the fifth to sixth centuries of our era, a group of Jewish scholars, now referred to as Masoretes, produced a standard edition of the Old Testament by comparing the existing manuscripts available to them. Minor scribal errors had crept into the manuscripts along the way,¹⁰ and the Masoretes wanted to put into circulation one standard text which would be as close to the originals as possible. When they completed their work to their own satisfaction, this text (later known as the Masoretic text) was the basis of all future scribal copyings, and the existing, not so accurate manuscripts were withdrawn from circulation. Various checkpoints were recorded in the margins of the new manuscripts, to insure that no letter or word would be deleted or added in future manuscripts. The Hebrew Old Testament was so meticulously preserved through the remaining centuries that when the Dead Sea Scrolls (c. 150 B.C.) were discovered

8. Vowels were added to copies of the Old Testament around A.D. 600-800, to help preserve the pronunciation of the Hebrew words.

9. One of God's reasons for not preserving the original autographs may have been man's proneness to worship material objects. Also, even if a genuine biblical autograph existed today, many people would still doubt any proofs offered of its genuineness.

10. Even Bibles printed in the modern twentieth century have printers' errors!

in 1948 and subsequently compared with extant (existing) Hebrew manuscripts of A.D. 900-1000, they were almost identical. Thus was confirmed the dependability of our English Old Testament, which had been based mainly on the Masoretic manuscripts of that tenth century.¹¹ Also, this preservation of the text accounts for the fact that there are relatively few differences between modern versions of the Old Testament, if they are exact translations (not paraphrases).

So although some scribal errors were committed from time to time in the copying process, God has preserved the Old Testament text so that no doctrinal truth is jeopardized by such errors. Archer writes:

Do we have any objective evidence that errors of transmission have not been permitted by God to corrupt and pervert His revelation? Yes, we have, for a careful study of the variants . . . of the various earliest manuscripts reveals that none of them affects a single doctrine of Scripture.¹²

As divine Author, God wrote an infallible Book (inspiration); as divine Protector, He has preserved the text down through the ages from doctrinal error (transmission).

E. CANONIZATION

Canonization is the identification of a writing as being one of the divinely inspired Scriptures. It was not enough that God inspired the *writing* of each book of the Bible. He also gave to His people, in a collective sense, the spiritual perception to *recognize* in each of those books the genuine marks of divine inspiration and authority. With the Holy Spirit's guidance, they knew what spurious writings to reject, as well as what genuine writings to accept. Thus, over the centuries as the Old Testament books were being written, the Old Testament canon (list or group of inspired books) kept growing until it reached its completed form. It was God who foreknew and determined what books would comprise the complete Old Testament. The details of the long human process are veiled in obscurity. But it is clear that God's supernatural hand, working through humans, brought His inspired writings into the canon, while He excluded other writings.

By the time of Christ and the apostles, the Old Testament was a complete set of books that were usually referred to as Scripture(s).

11. Among the major extant Hebrew manuscripts of this period are: Cairo Codex (A.D. 895); Leningrad Codex of the Prophets (916); Aleppo Codex (930); Leningrad Old Testament (entire Old Testament) (1008).

12. Archer, pp. 18-19.

(Refer to an exhaustive concordance to see the many New Testament references to this name.)

The total number of books in the *Hebrew* Old Testament is twenty-four. Actually, those twenty-four books are the equivalent of the *English* Bible's thirty-nine, due to various combinations. For example, the Jews regard the twelve books of the minor prophets as one book, which they call "The Twelve." Also, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are each one book, and Ezra is combined with Nehemiah.

By the time of Christ, the Jews had grouped the Old Testament books into three major sections: Law, Prophets, and Writings. This threefold division is probably what Jesus had in mind when He said that "all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).¹³ Study the groupings shown on Chart 1.¹⁴

CHART 1

THE HEBREW OLD TESTAMENT ARRANGEMENT		
LAW (Torah)	PROPHETS (Nebhiim)	WRITINGS (Kethubhim)
1. Genesis ¹⁵	A. <i>Former Prophets</i>	A. <i>Poetical Books</i>
2. Exodus	6. Joshua	14. Psalms
3. Leviticus	7. Judges	15. Proverbs
4. Numbers	8. Samuel	16. Job
5. Deuteronomy	9. Kings	B. <i>Five Rolls (Megilloth)</i>
	B. <i>Latter Prophets</i>	17. Song of Songs
	10. Isaiah	18. Ruth
	11. Jeremiah	19. Lamentations
	12. Ezekiel	20. Ecclesiastes
	13. The Twelve	21. Esther
		C. <i>Historical Books</i>
		22. Daniel
		23. Ezra-Nehemiah
		24. Chronicles

Note the following concerning the books listed on Chart 1:

13. Psalms was the first and longest book of the Writings, and so the name may have been used to represent the entire section.

14. At times Hebrew Bibles have appeared with minor variations from this arrangement.

15. These book titles originated with the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Bible, however, the books were named by the first few significant words appearing in the text. For example, Genesis is called *Bereshith* ("In the Beginning"); Exodus is *Shemoth* ("Names"); Numbers is *Bedmidhbar* ("In the Desert").

1. The books of "Former Prophets" are historical in content, and yet are classified under "Prophets." The reason for this may be that their authors had the official status of a prophet, or, as F. F. Bruce holds, they reported events "to illustrate the great principles on which the prophets insisted."¹⁶

2. Each of the five "rolls" was read at an annual Jewish feast or commemoration, in this chronological order: Song of Songs at Pass-over (first month); Ruth at Feast of Weeks (Harvest) (third month); Lamentations at the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem (fifth month); Ecclesiastes at Tabernacles (seventh month); and Esther at Purim (twelfth month).¹⁷

3. Chronicles appears last in the Hebrew Bible. This is why Jesus used the expression "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah" (Luke 11:51) to sum up all the martyrs whose blood had been shed in Old Testament times. Abel was the first and Zechariah was the last martyr appearing in this order of the Hebrew Bible. Read

CHART 2

THE PROTESTANT OLD TESTAMENT ARRANGEMENT ¹⁸		
LAW (Pentateuch) 1. Genesis 2. Exodus 3. Leviticus 4. Numbers 5. Deuteronomy	POETRY	
	18. Job	
	19. Psalms	
	20. Proverbs	
	21. Ecclesiastes	
	22. Song of Solomon	
HISTORY 6. Joshua 7. Judges 8. Ruth 9. 1 Samuel 10. 2 Samuel 11. 1 Kings 12. 2 Kings 13. 1 Chronicles 14. 2 Chronicles 15. Ezra 16. Nehemiah 17. Esther	PROPHECY	
	A. Major	B. Minor
	23. Isaiah	28. Hosea
	24. Jeremiah	29. Joel
	25. Lamentations	30. Amos
	26. Ezekiel	31. Obadiah
	27. Daniel	32. Jonah
		33. Micah
		34. Nahum
		35. Habakkuk
		36. Zephaniah
		37. Haggai
		38. Zechariah
		39. Malachi

16. F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, p. 92.

17. Consult a Bible dictionary for descriptions of these feasts.

18. The Catholic Old Testament includes all of these books plus seven apocryphal (noncanonical) writings, as well as apocryphal additions to some of the inspired books.

the account of Zechariah's martyrdom in the last book of the Hebrew Bible: 2 Chronicles 24:20-21.

The books of our Protestant English Old Testament are grouped in a fourfold arrangement, different from the Hebrew threefold format. This fourfold arrangement is traceable back to the Latin Vulgate version (c. A.D. 383-405), which derived its format from the Greek Septuagint (c. 280-150 B.C.). Chart 2 shows this familiar breakdown of the list of thirty-nine books.

The following facts apply to the books listed on Chart 2:

1. The first seventeen books chronologically record selected highlights of man's history from creation to the marriage of Abraham (Gen 1-11), and from the birth of the nation of Israel to its return to Canaan after the Babylonian Captivity (Gen 12—Nehemiah).¹⁹ The section called History may be subdivided into these three groups:

- a) Period of confederacy among the tribes: Joshua, Judges, Ruth
- b) Rise and fall of the monarchy: 1 Samuel through 2 Chronicles
- c) Captivity and return: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

2. The books of Law are so designated because of the prominence of God's Law in the experience of Israel during those centuries. (The name *Pentateuch* comes from the Greek, meaning "fivefold vessel." The name *Torah* is the Hebrew word for "Law.")

3. The five books of Poetry are mainly reflections, hymns, dialogues, and maxims, directed to the reader's inner life. They are classified as poetry because this is the prominent literary style of the books.

4. The distinction between major and minor books of prophecy is based only on length. Although Lamentations is not long, it is in the major group because it could be considered as an appendix to Jeremiah.

5. All of the prophets ministered in the period of about 900 to 400 B.C. Most of their messages were directed to either Israel (Northern Kingdom) or Judah (Southern Kingdom), or to both. More is said about this later in the chapter. Chronologically, Malachi is the last Old Testament voice to speak.

F. TRANSLATIONS

If the Old Testament had never been translated, it could only be read and understood by students of Hebrew. But God intended the

19. The chronological pattern is not always followed in this order. For example, the account of Esther is between Ezra and Nehemiah, and the books of Chronicles parallel much of the books of Kings.

Scriptures to be everyman's Book; hence, the many translations (versions) made over the centuries.

The first translation of any portion of the Old Testament was the Greek Septuagint (LXX).²⁰ It was made for the benefit of Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria, who could not read Hebrew. The Pentateuch was translated around 280 B.C. Before the coming of Christ, the entire Testament was translated, and it became the Scriptures of many people throughout the Mediterranean world. Such timing was according to divine schedule. Greek was the universal language at that time, and because the New Testament was soon to be written in Greek, God was using this Greek Old Testament version to prepare the way for the New Testament. It must have been a very dependable translation, for out of thirty-seven Old Testament quotations credited to Jesus in the gospels, thirty-three are from this Septuagint version.

During the early centuries of the Christian Church, many translations of the Bible appeared as the natural outcome of Christianity's expansion to foreign lands. The Latin Vulgate (A.D. 383-405), the most prominent, was the official Bible of Christendom on the Continent for a thousand years.

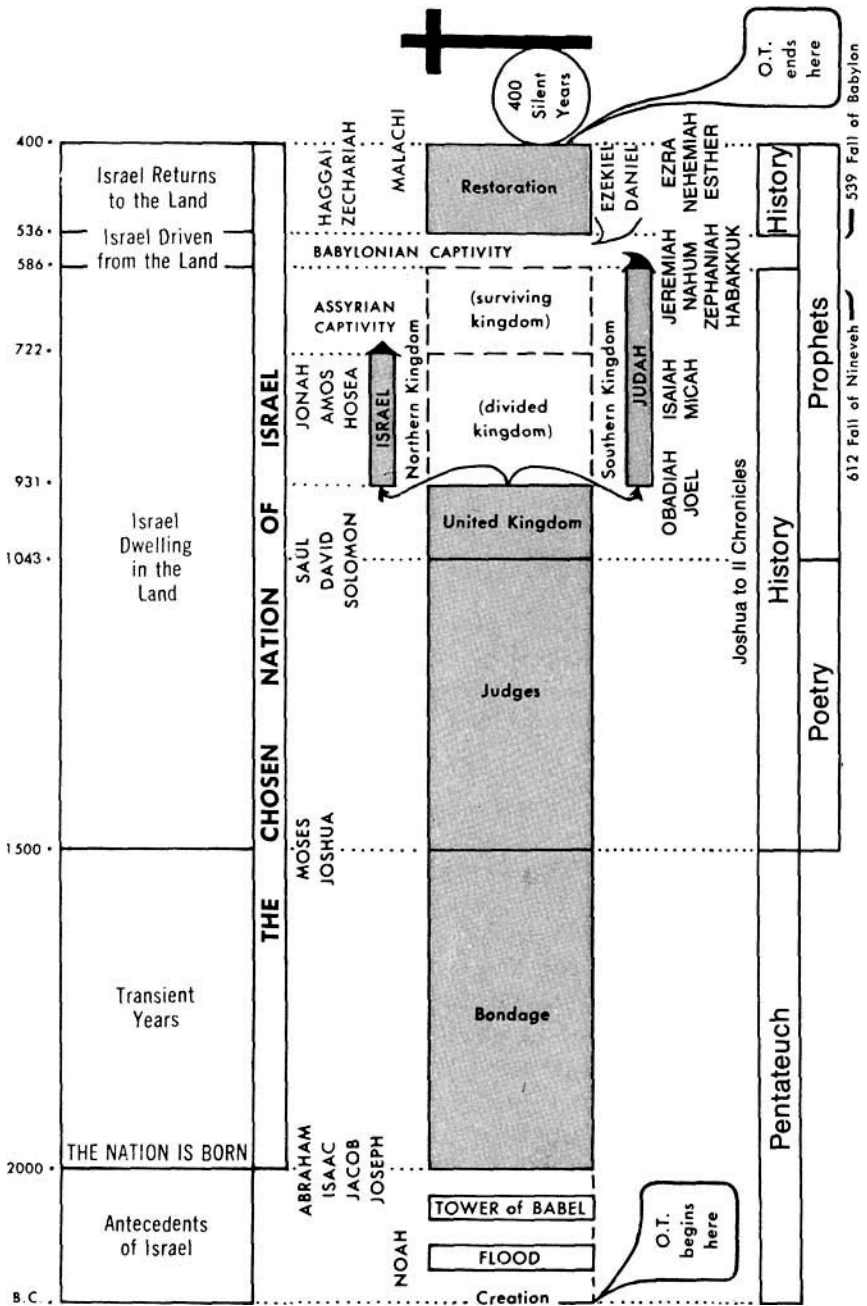
The Reformation brought a revival of translation activity, spurred on by renewed interest in Hebrew and Greek Bible manuscripts, and by the recent invention of the printing press. These were the years when the famous early English versions were appearing, such as Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale, Great Bible, Bishops, King James.

Then came the modern missions era of translation activity, beginning around 1800. It is aptly called *modern* because the era has not yet ended. In fact, one of the brightest aspects of the Christian witness today is the unprecedented production of new Bible translations. Portions of Scripture are reaching people of many languages and cultures in the remotest parts of the world. And in America, new English versions and paraphrases, written in contemporary style, are geared to such needy mission fields as homes without a church, and campuses with drifting youth. For the serious Bible student today who wants to analyze a Bible text which is virtually the same as the originals minus the translation factor, various excellent versions are available, such as the *American Standard Version* (ASV of 1901), the

20. The Roman numeral LXX (seventy) and the Latin word *septuaginta* (seventy) were assigned to this version because of a story which said that seventy-two translators were engaged in the original work. Actually, the name *Septuagint* was not assigned to the whole Greek Old Testament until the time of the Church scholar Origen (early third century A.D.).

CHART 3

OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY



New American Standard Bible (NASB of 1971), and the *New International Version* (NIV of 1978).

Thus, the Bible, with its Old Testament, has come a long way—from God to us. And the most thrilling part of it is that, not counting the translation difference, “we hold in our hands to-day a Bible which differs in no substantial particular from the originals of the various books as they came from the hands of their authors.”²¹

III. THE SETTING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. HISTORICAL SETTING

All the books of the Old Testament are intimately involved in a historical strand that begins with the creation in Genesis 1 and ends with the last prophecy of Malachi (c. 430 B.C.). The first eleven chapters of Genesis report highlights of the beginnings of man and the world. At Genesis 12, the nation of Israel is divinely born at the call of Abraham; and for the remainder of the Old Testament, the nation or individual Israelites are in view.

Chart 3 shows how the different books of the Old Testament are related to this historical strand. Study the chart carefully. You will want to refer to it often as you proceed in your survey study from book to book.

Use Chart 3 to answer the following questions:

1. About when was Israel founded? What four patriarchs are identified with its earliest years?
2. The word *bondage* identifies the first crucial experience of Israel, which took place in Egypt. What words describe the next two periods? 1500-1043 B.C.; 1043-931 B.C.
3. What two men did God use to lead Israel from bondage in Egypt to their homeland of Canaan?
4. The Jews were ruled by judges during the first few centuries in Canaan. Then the Jews demanded to have kings to be like their idolatrous neighbors, wholly independent of God. God let them have their own way, but He warned them of future troubles because of such inroads of idolatry. Read 1 Samuel 8. Who were the first three kings of the united kingdom?
5. What are the names of the two kingdoms that resulted from the split of the united kingdom in 931 B.C.? ²²

21. G. T. Manley, *The New Bible Handbook*, p. 19.

22. In the Old Testament, the name Israel usually refers to all of God's chosen people. During the years of the divided kingdom, however, it more often refers only to the Northern Kingdom. The context will usually indicate which meaning is intended.

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1

History of the New Testament Writings

The last words God ever wrote to man are recorded on the pages of the New Testament. The book is that momentous and precious. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to describe what the New Testament is and how it came to be, so that the reader's appreciation of its value will be enhanced. The principle applied here is, "He uses best what he values most."

I. GOD'S FINAL REVELATION

In the Old Testament God had given a partial revelation of Himself, having spoken through prophets and angels, but the full and final revelation came by His Son Jesus. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1-2a, NIV). Observe how the two eras are compared in the accompanying diagram.

After Jesus had provided purification for sins, "He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," because His atoning death was finished (Heb. 1:3; cf. John 19:30). The revelation was that final. The written Word of the New Testament records the story and revelation of this Son of God.

To say that the New Testament is God's final revelation of Himself is not to say that the Old Testament is obsolete. The New Testament was never intended to replace the Old. Rather, it is the sequel to the Old Testament's origins, heir of its promises, fruit of its seed, the peak of its mountain. The ministry of Christ would be an enigma without the Old Testament. For example, it is the Old

Testament that explains Jesus' words, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). The best preparation for a study of the New Testament is to become acquainted with the foundations of the Old.

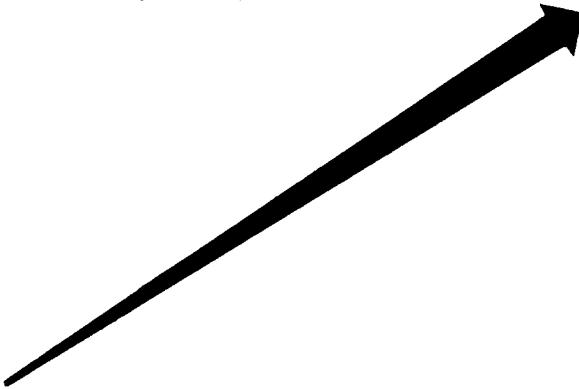
REVELATION THEN AND NOW

-then-

**GOD SPOKE
THROUGH
THE PROPHETS**

-now-

**GOD HAS SPOKEN
BY
HIS SON**



Old Testament

New Testament

As God's final revelation, the New Testament records the fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy, the last words and works of Christ on earth, the birth and growth of Christ's church, prophecies of the last times, and clear statements and interpretations of the Christian faith. Every earnest Christian wants to spend much time studying these final words of God.

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT FROM GOD TO US

There was already a "Bible" when the first New Testament books were being written. Usually that book of God was referred to as the

Scripture(s) (e.g., Matt. 21:42). We now call it the Old Testament; it was the only Bible of Jesus and the apostles. Then, a couple of decades after Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit began to move and inspire chosen saints to write letters and historical accounts that would eventually be brought together in a volume to be known as the New Testament.

Today when we hold a copy of the English New Testament in our hands, it is fair to ask how accurately it represents the original autographs. Involved in the answer is the history of the New Testament — from God (first century A.D.) to us (twentieth century). It is a fascinating story of miracles, involving stages of transmission, canonization, and translation. The starting point of such a history is divine revelation.

A. REVELATION

Revelation is God's communication of truth to man, without which man cannot know God. The word *revelation* (*apocalypsis*) means "uncovering," or "drawing away of a veil."

Before there was any Scripture, God revealed Himself to man through such media as conscience, nature (*general* revelation), and direct conversation with people (*special* revelation).¹ But there was need of a form of revelation that would be permanent, explicit, and retentive of a large volume of revealed truth. For that, God chose the written form of human language to be read, learned, and applied by all the succeeding generations. In the words of Gleason Archer,

If there be a God, and if He is concerned for our salvation, this is the only way (apart from direct revelation from God to each individual of each successive generation) He could reliably impart this knowledge to us. It must be through a reliable written record such as the Bible purports to be.²

Recall the powerful words of Hebrews 1:1-3 (NIV) studied earlier: *God . . . has spoken to us by his Son*. The Son is the Living Word; the Bible is the written Word of the Son.

B. INSPIRATION

All the books of the Bible — New Testament as well as Old Testament — came into being by the Holy Spirit's direct ministry of inspiration. Two crucial questions at this point are: How did the

1. Read Romans 1:18-21 for an example of general revelation, and Genesis 3:8-19 for an example of special revelation.

2. Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 15. Read this same source for a good discussion of the inadequacies of oral tradition as a sole transmitter of God's special revelation to man.

human authors know what God wanted them to write? and, Were their writings without error? We cannot explain the supernatural process of inspiration that brought about the original writings of the Bible. Paul refers to the process as *God-breathing*. (Read 2 Timothy 3:16, where the phrase "inspired by God" translates the Greek *theopneustia*, which literally means "God-breathed.") Peter says the Bible authors were undergirded, or carried along, by the Holy Spirit. ("Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit," 2 Pet. 1:21, NIV.) These verses, along with many others, assure us that when the Bible authors wrote, all their words expressed infallibly and without error the truths that God wanted to convey to mankind. In the original autographs, all the words were infallible in truth, and final in authority. Such accuracy applies to every part of the originals — to matters of history and science as well as to spiritual truths. If the Bible student does not believe this scriptural infallibility and inerrancy, his study of the biblical text will be haunted by confusing and destructive doubts.

As noted earlier, when the New Testament authors were writing their manuscripts, the only complete body of Scripture was the Old Testament.³ The question may be asked, Were the New Testament writers aware that they were composing works that would eventually become part of the total Scriptures of God? This is a valid question, because not everything the authors wrote became part of the New Testament.⁴ We do not know to what extent the writers sensed or discerned the God-breathing or undergirding ministry of the Spirit in their minds and hearts as they wrote. They were surely conscious that they were recording God's truth (see 1 Cor. 14:37), just as they knew they were preaching His glad tidings publicly (see Gal. 1:11,12). Regardless of the nature of their own personal perception that they were authoring *uniquely inspired* manuscripts at the time they wrote, the truth remains unshakeable, based on the Bible's own statements of its origin, that all the Scriptures were inspired, written by chosen authors who were undergirded as they wrote. Just what New Testament books were among those inspired Scriptures is the subject of our later study of canonization.

3. Individual New Testament books were in the process of being recognized as Scripture after their public appearances, but the timing varied from book to book. (This will be studied later under Canonization.) For example, when Paul wrote 1 Timothy (A.D. 62), the gospel according to Luke (A.D. 60) was recognized as part of Scripture. Read 1 Timothy 5:18, where Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 24:15 and Luke 10:7 under the same heading "Scripture."

4. For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:9 Paul refers to an earlier letter written to the Corinthian church. That letter was not intended by God to be a part of inspired Scripture.

C. THE ORIGINAL AUTOGRAPHS

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament were written over a period of about fifty years (c. A.D. 45-95), by eight or nine authors. All but a few words and phrases were written in Koine Greek, which was the marketplace vernacular of the first-century Mediterranean world.⁵ It was written in that universal language to make it initially accessible to world readership.

The writing material of most of the autographs was paperlike papyrus. (Some autographs might have been written on animal skins, such as parchment or vellum.) Sheets of papyrus, usually about ten inches long, were attached together to make a long, rolled-up scroll, easy for reading.⁶ (The paged codex, or book, did not supplement the roll until the second or third century A.D.) The Bible text was written in vertical columns with pen and ink, with no space between words, sentences, or paragraphs, and with no punctuation marks. Verse and chapter divisions were not made until centuries later.

Most of the New Testament books were letters (epistles) written to individuals (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:1-2), churches (e.g., 1 Thess. 1:1), or groups of believers (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:1-2). Luke wrote a gospel and a historical book to share with a friend Theophilus (Acts 1:1), and it is very likely that the other three gospels were written to share with individuals or churches.⁷

The present order (canon) of books in our New Testament is not the chronological order in which the books were written. Chart 1 shows a suggested chronological order of writing for the New Testament books.⁸ Study the chart carefully and try to visualize the growing zeal of the saints during the last decades of the first century as the inspired writings began to circulate from city to city. Answer the following questions on the basis of the information supplied by the chart.

1. What was the first book to be written? the last? How many years transpired between the two?

2. Note when each of the gospels appeared.⁹ One of the reasons the gospels were not the first books to appear was that much of the

5. At about ten places in the originals the authors recorded Aramaic words or phrases and usually gave the translation in Greek. See Mark 15:34.

6. One sheet was used for short books, such as Jude.

7. These background facts will be studied in more detail as each individual book is surveyed.

8. The dates when New Testament books were written are not part of the Bible text. Most dates, however, have been accurately determined, usually by associating the author with historical references in various books. The dates of each of the books will be studied in more detail in the survey section of this book.

9. There are differing views concerning the dates of Matthew and Mark. Some Bible students hold that Mark was the first gospel written.

**A CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF
THE WRITING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS****CHART 1**

BOOK	AUTHOR		PLACE WRITTEN	DATE A.D.	PERIODS				
					PERSONNEL	APOSTOLIC LITERATURE	CHURCHES		
JAMES	James		Jerusalem	45		BEGINNINGS	FOUNDING		
GALATIANS	Paul	JOURNEY EPISTLES	} Corinth	48	FIRST PAULINE PERIOD				
MARK?				52					
1 THESS				55					
2 THESS				55					
1 COR			Ephesus	55					
2 COR	Macedonia	56							
ROMANS	Corinth	56							
MATTHEW	Matthew		Jerusalem?	58	FIRST HISTORICAL RECORDS	CENTRAL	ESTABLISHING		
LUKE	Luke		Rome	61					
ACTS	"								
COLOSSIANS	Paul	PRISON EPISTLES	Rome	61	CENTRAL PAULINE PERIOD			CENTRAL	ESTABLISHING
EPHESIANS									
PHILEMON									
PHILIPPIANS									
1 TIMOTHY	Paul	PASTORAL EPISTLES	Macedonia	62	PAUL'S LEGACY				
TITUS			Corinth?	—					
2 TIMOTHY			Rome	67					
HEBREWS	?					CENTRAL	ESTABLISHING		
JUDE	Jude								
1 PETER	Peter								
2 PETER				68?	PETER'S LEGACY	CENTRAL	ESTABLISHING		
MARK	Mark								
JOHN	John		Ephesus?	85	JOHN'S LEGACY			CLOSING	CONTINUING
1 JOHN									
2 JOHN									
3 JOHN									
REVELATION			Patmos	96					

There are various opinions as to the order of writing. For example, some place Galatians later and Mark earlier.

content, such as the spoken words of Jesus, was already being shared with the people in oral form, having been memorized precisely.

3. Note the three periods of apostolic literature. Approximately how long was each period? There was a fifteen-year interim of "silent years" between the central and closing periods. The destruction of Jerusalem took place in A.D. 70. Is any connection suggested between that event and the hiatus of writing?

4. The books' ministries to the local churches are identified by what three words (for the three main periods)? What is involved in each of the ministries?

5. Note the three Pauline periods. Scan the lists of books written during those times.

6. The gospel according to Mark is identified as Peter's legacy, because the apostle Peter was a key reporter to Mark of the narrative of Jesus' life.

7. Observe the different kinds of writings authored by John (gospel, epistle, vision).

8. The epistle of James stresses good works in the life of the believer. Why would such a message be the first one to be sent out in written form to the people of God?

9. In what sense was the book of Revelation logically the *last* written communication to the church?

D. TRANSMISSION

Transmission is the process by which the biblical manuscripts have been copied and recopied down through the ages, by hand or machine. God caused or allowed each of the original New Testament autographs to disappear from the scene, but not before copies were already in the hands of His people.¹⁰

Copies of the New Testament books were handwritten by scribes until the middle of the fifteenth century A.D. when Gutenberg invented movable type for the printing press. Scribal errors have been made in the copies,¹¹ but God has preserved the text from doctrinal error to this present time. Thousands of Greek and non-Greek manuscripts of all or part of the New Testament text, supportive of the text's purity, exist today. Benjamin B. Warfield says that the purity is unrivalled:

Such has been the care with which the New Testament has been copied,
— a care which has doubtless grown out of true reverence for its holy

10. One of God's reasons for not preserving the original autographs might have been man's proneness to worship material objects. Also, even if a genuine biblical autograph existed today, how could one *prove* that it was an original autograph?

11. Even Bibles printed in the "modern" twentieth century have printers' errors!

works, — such has been the providence of God in preserving for His Church in each and every age a competently exact text of the Scriptures, that . . . the New Testament [is] unrivalled among ancient writings in the purity of its text as actually transmitted and kept in use. . . .¹²

So when you are holding a copy of the New Testament in your hands, you may rest assured that it is a wholly dependable translation, which represents the original, inspired autographs of the first century. As divine author, God wrote an infallible book (inspiration); as divine protector, He has preserved the text from doctrinal error (transmission).

E. CANONIZATION

Canonization is the identification of a writing as being part of the Scripture. It was not enough that God inspired the *writing* of each book of the Bible. He also gave to His people, in a collective sense,¹³ the spiritual perception to *recognize* in each of these books genuine marks of divine inspiration and authority.¹⁴ With the Holy Spirit's guidance, they knew what spurious writings to reject, as well as what genuine writings to accept. It was a long human process over a few hundred years, many of the details of which are veiled in obscurity. But it is clear that God's supernatural hand, working through humans, brought His inspired writings into the canon and excluded other writings.

1. *Order of the New Testament books.* The canon of the New Testament is the list of all the New Testament books that God inspired. Although the last New Testament book was written by A.D. 100, for the next couple centuries questions persisted concerning whether some books, such as 3 John, were inspired. By the end of the fourth century A.D. the canon was solidified, being composed of twenty-seven books.

Five of the New Testament books are historical in content; twenty-one are epistles (letters); and one is apocalyptic (revelation of visions). The order in which they appear in our Bible is this:

History: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts

Epistles: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians,

12. Benjamin B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 12.

13. The canon was not determined by any one person or council, or even at any point of time. The canon kept growing over a period of years, with God's people in *that* collective sense recognizing the signs of inspiration in the books that eventually would be grouped as one covenant (testament) of twenty-seven books.

14. Authority is the basis for canonicity. Since God sealed each book with authority, it is He who originally canonized each book.

CHART 2

CANONICAL ORDER
OF N.T. BOOKS

HISTORY	1. MATTHEW 2. MARK 3. LUKE 4. JOHN 5. ACTS		
E P I S T O L E S	6. ROMANS 7. 1 CORINTHIANS 8. 2 CORINTHIANS 9. GALATIANS 10. EPHESIANS 11. PHILIPPIANS 12. COLOSSIANS 13. 1 THESSALONIANS 14. 2 THESSALONIANS 15. 1 TIMOTHY 16. 2 TIMOTHY 17. TITUS 18. PHILEMON	} to churches } to individuals	P A U L I N E
	19. HEBREWS 20. JAMES 21. 1 PETER 22. 2 PETER 23. 1 JOHN 24. 2 JOHN 25. 3 JOHN 26. JUDE		
	VISIONS	27. REVELATION	

sians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, Jude

Visions: Revelation

We do not know how or by whom the above order was determined, but the locations of most of the books in the list can be justified or explained in a variety of ways.¹⁵ Refer to Chart 2 and observe the following:

a. Doctrine is grounded in fact, so the historical books (gospels and Acts) precede the epistles (where doctrine is prominent).

b. Revelation stands last because it is mainly about the end times.

c. Matthew, written especially with the Jew in mind, is a link between the Old Testament and the New and so appears first in the canon.

d. John is the gospel with much interpretation and reflection, written at the end of the first century, and so it fits best as the last of the four gospels.

e. Acts is the extension and fulfillment of the gospels, the proof that what Christ said and did was true and efficacious. It follows the gospels very naturally.

Acts can be associated with the epistles without overlooking the historical connection with the gospels. The accompanying diagram shows such comparisons.¹⁶

COMPARISONS OF NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

GOSPELS	ACTS & EPISTLES	REVELATION
Past	Present	Future
Christ as Prophet	Christ as Priest	Christ as King
Setting: Israel	Setting: Church	Setting: Universe
Founder of Christianity	Fundamentals of Christianity	Fulfillment of Christianity
Introduction	Application	Realization
The Christ	The Church	The Consummation

15. One writer has proposed the view that there is an orderly progress of doctrine advanced from book to book, as reflected in the order of the New Testament canon. He writes, "As the several books gradually coalesced into unity it might be expected that . . . they would on the whole tend to assume their relative places, according to the law of internal fitness . . ." (Thomas D. Bernard, *The Progress of Doctrine in The New Testament*, p. vii).

16. Adapted from W. Graham Scroggie, *Know Your Bible*, 2:16.