

INTRODUCTION

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

The Old Testament, with 39 books, contains books of law, history, poetry, the Major Prophets, and the Minor Prophets. The first five books are called the Pentateuch, or the books of Moses, and they contain the laws that, in his kindness, God gave his people as they established a nation and moved into the land he provided them. It's important to keep in mind that these are not books of science. We shouldn't expect to find answers to all of our technical questions about creation or God's miraculous movement during this period in history. These books serve as a record of God's faithfulness and reveal his character and perfect plan for the redemption of humanity.

In the Old Testament we also see God's covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David. These are important promises that God gave the people of Israel for guidance and faith as they suffered through the trials of life. The prophets, who were men who spoke God's words of warning and love to his people, pointed them toward the time when God would save them from their sin. They reminded the people of God's covenants and challenged them to turn from their sin and remember God's faithfulness.

The New Testament, with 27 books, starts with the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), which are the first-hand documentations of the life of Jesus by the men who followed him during his ministry on earth. Each of these men had a personal story that intersected with the life of Jesus Christ.

Following the gospels is the book of Acts, which is the history of the early church as it was established and grew after Jesus's resurrection. During this time, the early believers began to practice and spread both orthodoxy (what we believe) and orthopraxy (how we live in light of what we believe).

Many of the people who came to faith were Gentiles and didn't know what it meant to believe in Jesus. They were eager to learn how to live their lives in light of their new faith in him. The 21 letters from Paul and other Christian leaders helped establish the early church.

The book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible. It brings together the complete story of Christianity because it assures us that Jesus will return and that his kingdom will last forever.

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Keeping the structure of the Bible in mind when you read will help guide your thinking as you observe, interpret, and apply Scripture.

APPLY IT

Use eight sticky notes or note cards to divide your Bible into these sections. Use this visual to help you consider the different sections and types of literature that you're reading when you read your Bible.

- Section 1: Law (Genesis–Deuteronomy)
- Section 2: History (Joshua–Esther)
- Section 3: Poetry (Job–Song of Songs)
- Section 4: Prophecy (Isaiah–Malachi)
- Section 5: Gospels (Matthew–John)
- Section 6: History (Acts)
- Section 7: Letters (Romans–Jude)
- Section 8: Prophecy (Revelation)

Remember that even though there are many authors, historical periods, original audiences, and types of literature represented in the Bible, they all serve to tell the singular story of God's redemptive plan for humanity ultimately through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus. From Genesis to Revelation, every book points to God's character and plan.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION (IF DESIRED)

1. Have you ever been troubled by a question about life or God that you couldn't seem to find the answer to in the Bible? How does considering the author and historical context of Scripture help shape your view of how to find answers to those questions?
2. What assumptions or beliefs do you think secular culture makes about the Bible? Do you struggle with any of those views? What questions do you hope to get answered in your study of Scripture?