

MAKING SENSE OF THE BIBLE

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MAKING SENSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Seven Stages of Old Testament History

Stage One: Humanity is created but falls in sin (pre 2000BC)

- Genesis 1-11 poetically tells the story.
- Starts with the creation of the world and humanity and culture (1-2). Followed by the fall of the world and humanity and culture (3-11).
- Key people: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah

Stage Two: The Jewish people come into being (2000-1700BC)

- Genesis 12-50 tells the story.
- The story focuses in on the fathers of the Jews, called 'the Patriarchs'. It tells how they came about, and how they landed in Egypt.
- God, through Abraham and his descendants, forms for himself a family of people through which he will bless the whole world.
- Key people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Joseph

Stage Three: The Exodus and the long journey to the Promised Land (1480-1400BC)

- Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy tell the story.
- Through Moses, God powerfully delivers the Jews from slavery in Egypt and then gives them the Law and worship system, which would guide them as a people.
- Because of their disobedience, they spend 40 years in the desert before being allowed to enter the Promised Land.
- Key person: Moses

Stage Four: Settlement in the Promised Land (1400-1050BC)

- Joshua and Judges tell the story. The book of Ruth was written at this time.
- The Jews finally conquer the Promised Land although they have no king and are only a bunch of 12 loosely connected tribes at this stage.
- At first they are obedient, but begin to drift from God.
- Key people: Joshua, Deborah, Ruth, Gideon, Samson

Stage Five: The Jews become a powerful political nation under a king (1050-930BC)

- 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11 and 1 Chronicles tell the story. At this point the poetic books (Job, most of Psalms (mainly by David), Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs (all three mainly by Solomon)) are written.
- Through Samuel, God anoints first Saul (who fails as king) and then David (who succeeds as king).
- Solomon succeeds his father David. The kingdom of Israel reaches its high point of power and glory under him.
- Key people: Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon

Stage Six: The Jewish kingdom divides in two and ultimately both kingdoms are overthrown and are taken into captivity (930-587BC)

- **1 Kings 12-22, 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles** tell the story. **Esther** tells a story of how the Jews experience threat in exile during this time.
- This split of the nation of the Jews into two creates some confusion for Bible readers because we need to know whether the Northern or Southern kingdom is being spoken about. The Northern kingdom (consisting of 10 of the 12 tribes) is called Israel or Ephraim, with Samaria as the capital. The Southern one (two tribes) is called Judah.
- It spans 19 kings of Israel, and 20 kings of Judah. Every king of Israel is corrupt, while 8 of the kings of Judah turn to God. During this time God sends prophets to both the North and the South. In the North the prophetic word is rejected. In the South, at times it is accepted. The prophecies are loaded with warnings of judgment. If they will not turn to God, they can expect to experience destruction at the hands of powerful tyrant nations. If they repent, God will spare them. Sadly, they don't meaningfully return to God.
- Many of the prophets who speak for God also write down their message at this time. Most of the 17 Prophetic Books in the Old Testament are these messages:

- Isaiah - Southern kingdom prophet
- Jeremiah - Southern kingdom prophet
- Lamentations - Jeremiah weeps for the destroyed Jerusalem
- Ezekiel - prophet in exile in foreign land
- Daniel - prophet in exile in foreign land
- Hosea - Northern kingdom prophet
- Amos - Northern kingdom prophet
- Obadiah - prophet of doom to neighbouring people, Edom
- Jonah - prophet sent to save Ninevah, capital of Assyria
- Micah - contemporary of Isaiah in the Southern kingdom
- Nahum - prophet celebrating the fall of the Assyrians
- Habakkuk - prophet of doom toward the cruel Babylonians
- Zephaniah - Southern kingdom prophet

- Sadly, the Northern kingdom, judged by God for its persistent rebellion, falls to the Assyrians in 722BC. It goes into exile and never recovers. Lacking all faith-conviction, it is entirely assimilated into Assyria. The Southern kingdom, also judged by God for its persistent rebellion, falls to the Babylonians 130 years later (587BC), when it falls to the Babylonians. Jerusalem is destroyed. They go into exile (only the poor are left behind), but hold onto their Jewish religion.

Stage Seven: Some of the Southern kingdom exiles begin to return to rebuild Jerusalem (539-410BC)

- **Ezra and Nehemiah** tell the story. The prophecies of **Haggai, Zechariah, Joel and Malachi** are written at this time.
- Following the conquering of Babylon by Cyrus the Persian, many Jews from Babylon return to Jerusalem. Temple rebuilding in Jerusalem is completed and dedicated in 516 BC.
- There is then a 'silence' of Scripture - nothing is written for the 410 years before Christ comes.
- Key people: Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai

Old Testament Overview of All 39 books

<i>Bible Book</i> <i>(underlined if likely to confuse beginners)</i>	<i>Category of Literature</i>	<i>Main Theme</i>	<i>Key Word</i>	<i>Key verse</i>	<i>Which historical stage?</i> <i>See pg 2-3: 'Seven Stages of OT History'</i>
<i>Genesis</i>	Books of Moses / Beginnings	God chooses one nation to bless all nations	Begin-nings	1:1	One (1-11), Two (12-50)
<i>Exodus</i>	Books of Moses / Law	Deliverance from Egypt	Redemp-tion	6:6	Three
<u><i>Leviticus</i></u>	Books of Moses / Law	Approaching a Holy God	Holiness	20:7	Three
<i>Numbers</i>	Books of Moses / Law	Unbelief and disobedience	Wanderings	20:12	Three
<u><i>Deutero-nomy</i></u>	Books of Moses / Law	Do not forget	Covenant	10:12	Three
<i>Joshua</i>	History	Entering the Promised Land	Conquest	11:23	Four
<i>Judges</i>	History	In the Promised Land without a king	Forget	21:25	Four
<i>Ruth</i>	History	Godliness illustrated	Kinsman Redeemer	1:16	Four
<i>1 Samuel</i>	History	Israel's first kings	Rejection	15:22	Five
<i>2 Samuel</i>	History	Israel's first kings	David	7:13	Five
<i>1 Kings</i>	History	Israel divides into two northern and southern kingdoms	Division	11:11	Five (1-11), Six (12-22)
<i>2 Kings</i>	History	The story of two kingdoms - and their going into captivity	Captives	17:23	Six
<u><i>1 Chron-icles</i></u>	History	The reign of David	Covenant	17:13	Five
<u><i>2 Chron-icles</i></u>	History	Solomon and the kings of Judah	Temple	7:14	Five
<i>Ezra</i>	History	Returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple	Temple	1:3	Seven
<i>Nehemiah</i>	History	Rebuilding the Jerusalem walls	Rebuild	6:15	Seven

<i>Esther</i>	History	Jews under threat while in exile	Providence	4:14	Seven
<i>Job</i>	Poetry / History	Suffering man, loving God	Sovereign	13:15	Five
<i>Psalms</i>	Poetry / Song	Hymn book of the Jews	Worship	145:21	Five, Six, Seven
<i>Proverbs</i>	Poetry/ Wisdom	To give moral instruction	Wisdom	1:7	Five
<i>Ecclesiastes</i>	Poetry/ Philosophy	Search for the meaning of life	Meaninglessness	12:13	Five
<i>Song of songs</i>	Poetry /Romance	A love song	Love	8:7	Five
<i>Isaiah</i>	Prophecy	Salvation comes from God	Salvation	40:1	Five
<i>Jeremiah</i>	Prophecy	God's patience and holiness	Obey	31:33	Five (1-24), Six (25-52)
<i>Lamentations</i>	Prophecy	Mourning over Jerusalem's destruction	Weep	3:22-23	Six
<i>Ezekiel</i>	Prophecy	Condemnation and consolation	Restoration	36:26	Six
<i>Daniel</i>	Prophecy	Encouraging exiled Jews	God's plan	2:20	Six
<i>Hosea</i>	Prophecy	God's love for Israel	Return	4:6	Six
<i>Joel</i>	Prophecy	God's judgment	Spirit	2:29	Seven
<i>Amos</i>	Prophecy	Social justice	Judgment	3:2	Six
<i>Obadiah</i>	Prophecy	Judgment on nation of Edom	Judgment	10	Six
<i>Jonah</i>	Prophecy	Salvation for non-Jews	God's love	2:9	Six
<i>Micah</i>	Prophecy	Injustice exposed	Mercy	6:8	Six
<i>Nahum</i>	Prophecy	The fall of Ninevah	Judgment	1:7	Six
<i>Habakkuk</i>	Prophecy	Sin in God's world	Faith	2:4	Six
<i>Zephaniah</i>	Prophecy	The coming judgment	Restoration	1:14	Six
<i>Haggai</i>	Prophecy	Rebuilding the temple	The temple	2:4	Seven
<i>Zechariah</i>	Prophecy	Future blessings for Israel	Vision	9:9	Seven
<i>Malachi</i>	Prophecy	An appeal to backsliders	Return	3:7	Seven

Source for some of table: 'The Bible made easy' (Paternoster Publishing)

MAKING SENSE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

New Testament Overview of All 27 books

<i>Bible Book</i> <i>(underlined if likely to confuse beginners)</i>	<i>Category of Literature</i>	<i>Main Theme</i>	<i>Key Word</i>	<i>Key verse</i>
<u>Matthew</u>	Biography of Jesus' ministry and mission	Words and deeds of Jesus	King	28:18
<u>Mark</u>	Biography of Jesus' ministry and mission	Jesus' mission	Servant	10:45
<u>Luke</u>	Biography of Jesus' ministry and mission	Jesus in detail	Son of Man	19:10
<u>John</u>	Biography of Jesus' ministry and mission	Believe in Jesus	Son of God	3:16
<u>Acts</u>	The story of the spread of the early church	The power of the Spirit and gospel	Mission	1:8
<u>Romans</u>	Paul's letter to a church	God's gift of righteousness	Salvation	1:17
<u>1 Corinthians</u>	Paul's letter to a church	Freedom from compromise	Transformation	1:30
<u>2 Corinthians</u>	Paul's letter to a church	Jesus' death on a cross	Reconciliation	5:21
<u>Galatians</u>	Paul's letter to a church	Freedom from legalism	Liberty	5:1
<u>Ephesians</u>	Paul's letter to a church	Living in unity	Grace	2:8
<u>Philippians</u>	Paul's letter to a church	To live is Christ	Joy	4:4
<u>Colossians</u>	Paul's letter to a church	Christ is supreme	Christ	2:9
<u>1 Thessalonians</u>	Paul's letter to a church	Jesus will return	Imitate	4:16
<u>2 Thessalonians</u>	Paul's letter to a church	Expecting Jesus' return	Day of the Lord	2:2
<u>1 Timothy</u>	Paul's letter to a person	Advice for Christian leaders	Instruction	4:13
<u>2 Timothy</u>	Paul's letter to a person	More advice for Christian leaders	Endure	2:3
<u>Titus</u>	Paul's letter to a person	Advice to a Christian leader	Teach	2:10
<u>Philemon</u>	Paul's letter to a person	Personal reconciliation	Forgiveness	17
<u>Hebrews</u>	Letter to a church	The superiority of Christ	Better	4:14

<i>James</i>	James' letter to a church	Life-changing faith	Active faith	1:22
<i>1 Peter</i>	Peter's letter to a church	Enemies from without - persecution	Endure	4:12
<i>2 Peter</i>	Peter's letter to a church	Enemies from within - false teachers	Be alert	3:8,17
<i>1 John</i>	John's letter to a church	Authentic spirituality	Fellowship	4:8
<i>2 John</i>	John's letter to a church	Beware of false teachers	Watch out	10
<i>3 John</i>	John's letter to a person	Fellowship with Christians	Faithful	8
<i>Jude</i>	Jude's letter to a church	Beware of false teaching	Contend	20
<u><i>Revelation</i></u>	John's seven prophetic letters to churches, and visions from God.	Things that will take place	The Throne	3:20

Source: 'The Bible made easy' (Paternoster Publishing)

Making sense of the Bible is an act of love. Let me illustrate. Recently our baby boy has entered into our lives and home where we speak a certain language. He is trying his best to enter into our code of communication. Slowly but surely he's getting there. Instinctively he knows that the only way to understand us and get closer to us is to learn our language. And of course we're doing all we can to encourage him, because we can't wait for him to be on the same 'wavelength' as us. Similarly, when we become a Christian we quickly figure out that God has a certain code of communication, a language if you wish. It is the Bible, a library of 66 books that detail the story of his loving involvement in the world. As hard as it may be, we must do all we can to understand it. It's the only way to really get onto God's wavelength, and to get closer to his heart. Wonderfully, by his Holy Spirit, he promises to do all he can to encourage us in this quest.

- Julie and Terran Williams

It is common for us to give up the reading of the Bible and daily prayer when our enjoyment is gone; as if it were of no use to read the Scriptures when we do not enjoy them, and as if it were no use to pray when we have no spirit of prayer. The truth is that in order to enjoy the Word, we ought to continue to read it, and the way to obtain a spirit of prayer is to continue praying. The less we read the Word of God, the less we desire to read it, and the less we pray, the less we desire to pray.

- George Muller