Sections of the Bible

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Introduction

The Bible, also referred to as Scripture, is God's Word to us. God's Spirit worked in more than 40 human authors to inspire them to write the Bible. The Bible is not one single book, but rather a collection of 66 books that tell one unified story about God, His relentless love for us, and how we can have a relationship with Him.

The 66 books of the Bible are organized into two main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament comprises 39 books written before the coming of Jesus Christ. These books were written over a period of about 1000 years and are organized into 5 sections: Law, History, Poetry, Major Prophets and Minor Prophets.

The New Testament comprises 27 books written after the coming of Jesus Christ. These books were written over a much shorter period of time - less than 100 years. The New Testament books are also organized into 5 sections: Gospels, History, Letters from Paul, General Letters and Prophecy.

Old Testament

1. Law
2. History
3. Poetry
4. Major Prophets
5. Minor Prophets

New Testament

6. Gospels
7. History
8. Letters from Paul
9. General Letters
10. Prophecy

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Old Testament

1. Law

This first section of the Old Testament, Law, comprises five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It is also known as the Pentateuch which simply means "five books". These are called the books of the Law because they contain the laws and instructions given by God, through Moses, to the people of Israel.

This first section of the Old Testament (and the Bible) begins with the story of God creating the world and everything in it. God made humans in His own image, to live in His presence and rule over all His creation. However, the first humans were not content to live under God's rules. They chose to disobey God, resulting in a broken relationship with Him.

Despite humans' continual rebellion, God set in motion His plan to redeem them and restore their relationship with Him. God chose Abraham and promised not only to make him into a great nation, but also to bless all nations through him.

This section includes many famous stories, such as Adam and Eve, Noah and the Flood, The Call of Abraham, Joseph the Dreamer, The Birth of Moses, The Burning Bush, The Ten Plagues, The Crossing of the Red Sea, and The Ten Commandments.

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Old Testament

2. History

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The second section of the Old Testament, History, comprises 12 books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

This section begins with Israel's conquest of Canaan, the land that God had promised to the Israelites through Abraham. Because God was with the Israelites, they enjoyed great victories over their enemies. They settled down in Canaan but did not completely conquer the land as commanded by God. Instead, they turned away from God, followed the evil ways of the Canaanites and worshipped their idols. This rebellion and idolatry eventually led to their downfall and exile from the promised land. Nevertheless, God remained faithful to Israel. After the exile, God allowed a small remnant of Israelites to return to the promised land to rebuild the temple and restore the city walls of Jerusalem. This section concludes with a mixture of hope and disappointment. After returning from exile, the people unfortunately continued to live in disobedience and idolatry.

Included in this section are stories of many good and bad leaders of Israel. Joshua led the Israelites in their conquest of Canaan. After he died, God raised various leaders, called judges, such as Deborah, Gideon, and Samson, to deliver Israel in times of crisis. When Israel rejected God's kingship and demanded a human king, God gave them King Saul, followed by King David and King Solomon. After King Solomon died, civil war broke out and Israel became divided into the kingdom of Israel in the north and the kingdom of Judah in the south. All the kings of the Northern Kingdom were bad, with King Ahab being singled out for doing more to arouse the anger of the Lord than all the kings of Israel before him. Judah had its share of bad kings as well but also had a few good ones, such as King Josiah, King Hezekiah, and King Jehoshaphat.

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Old Testament

3. Poetry

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The third section of the Old Testament, Poetry, comprises five books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. This section is sometimes referred to as the Books of Wisdom. These books are mostly written in the form of Hebrew poetry.

While the first two sections of the Old Testament (Law and History) are primarily about God and His relationship with the nation of Israel, this third section deals more with God's personal relationship with humans as individuals. The books of Poetry speak of issues of the heart, portraying the thoughts and emotions of humans experiencing various situations in life.

The book of Psalms, which makes up more than half of this section, comprises 150 ancient Hebrew worship songs. Included here are songs that express a wide spectrum of emotions, such as joy, praise, and thanksgiving, as well as sorrow, fear and anger. There are also wisdom psalms which offer instructions for godly living and how to deal with real life issues, as well as psalms about Israel's king and Messiah.

The other four books in this section deal with why good people sometimes suffer (Job), practical guidelines for daily living (Proverbs), the meaning of life (Ecclesiastes) and the joy of romantic love (Song of Solomon).

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Old Testament

4. Major Prophets

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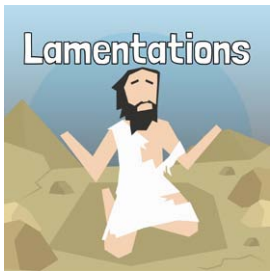

The fourth section of the Old Testament, Major Prophets, comprises five books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

In the section of Old Testament History, we read that after King Solomon's death, Israel split into the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah in the south. During this period, the people persisted in their rebellion against God. God raised prophets to deliver His divine messages to His people and some of these messages are recorded in the books contained in the Major and Minor Prophets sections. God pointed out the sins of His people: they worshipped idols, did injustice, and engaged in evil practices. He called them to return to Him and to a life of holiness and righteousness. God warned that he would send judgment if they continued in their wickedness and idolatry. However, the people ignored God's messages, so He allowed both Israel and Judah to fall to foreign nations.

After this, God continued to speak to the people through His prophets. God explained that the people of Israel were living in exile as punishment for their disobedience, but He promised to deliver and restore them. Although this deliverance and restoration did take place partially through the return of a small remnant of Israelites to Jerusalem, the prophets point to a much greater fulfilment through Jesus Christ. For instance, Isaiah 9:6-7 speaks about the birth of Jesus and His second coming.

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5. Minor Prophets

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The final section of the Old Testament, Minor Prophets, comprises 12 books: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

There is generally no difference between the Major and Minor Prophets sections of the Bible. The books of the Major Prophets are simply longer and the books of the Minor Prophets shorter, but they are all equally important.

Each prophet had a different background and style, and each spoke a specific message at a specific time to a specific audience. But they were all God's messengers, sent by God to deliver His divine messages to the people.

These books were all written during the period stretching from the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, through the time of the Babylonian exile, and the return to Jerusalem after the exile. They share the common themes of calling out the sins of the people, calling them to repentance and covenant faithfulness, warning them about God's judgment, and the promise of God's deliverance and restoration.

Similar to the Major Prophets, while the prophecies of the Minor Prophets often found fulfilment in events of the near future, they also point to a much greater future fulfilment through Jesus Christ. The last book of the Old Testament (Malachi) closes with a command to remember the Law of Moses, and a promise that God's day of judgment was coming.

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6. Gospels

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The first section of the New Testament, Gospels, comprises the Gospels according to the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

"Gospel" means "good news" and refers to the good news of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, we read that regardless of God's relentless pursuit and deliverance of His people, they persisted in their rebellion, wickedness, and idolatry. God had promised to make Abraham into a great nation and a blessing to all nations. But by the end of the Old Testament, the remnant of Abraham's descendants, who had returned to the promised land after the exile, in no way resembled a great nation or a blessing to all nations.

The Gospels go on to show how Jesus is the seed of Abraham and the ultimate fulfilment of God's promise. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the perfect Son of God who came to dwell on Earth in human form as a descendant of Abraham. Jesus took the penalty for all our sins and satisfied God's judgment by dying on the cross. After his death, he was resurrected on the third day. Because of what Jesus has done, people of all nations who put their faith in Him can receive forgiveness of sin and a restored relationship with God.

Included in the Gospels are stories about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, as well as His ministry, miracles and teachings. This section ends with the ascension of Jesus into heaven. One day, Jesus will return in all His glory to execute God's final judgment and establish a new heaven and a new earth.

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7. History

The second section of the New Testament, History, comprises only one book: Acts.

Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke and continues the story from Jesus' ascension into heaven. Although the book is also known as "The Acts of the Apostles", this book is really about the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles and the early Church. A small group of Jesus' followers were gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, descended upon them, marking the beginning of the Christian church. From there, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the church grew rapidly, spreading from "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

The two prominent leaders used by the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts were the apostles Peter and Paul. Apostle Peter was the leader among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, while Apostle Paul was the key missionary to travel across the Roman empire to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, fulfilling God's promise to make Abraham a blessing to all nations.

Famous stories in this book include the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the conversion of Apostle Paul, the raising of Tabitha from the dead by Apostle Peter, the Jerusalem Council and Apostle Paul's various missionary journeys.

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New Testament

8. Letters from Paul

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The third section of the New Testament, Letters from Paul, comprises 13 books: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians,

1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. These books, which are also called letters or epistles, were all written by the Apostle Paul.

Together with the eight general letters in the next section, epistles account for 21 out of 27 books of the New Testament. Epistles are important because they were written from a perspective after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, and after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. While the Gospels focus on the life and ministry of Jesus, the epistles dwell more deeply on the significance and implications of Jesus' death and resurrection. They help to explain the fulfillment of God's promises recorded in the Gospels and the Old Testament.

The first nine letters in this section are addressed to churches and the remaining four to individuals. Four of Paul's letters (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) are known as prison epistles because they were written when Paul was under house arrest in Rome. Three letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) are known as pastoral epistles because they were written to Timothy and Titus to guide them in their pastoral duties as they led their churches.

Even though Apostle Paul wrote these letters to specific audiences, and sometimes in response to specific issues, they remain relevant to us today. For instance, the book of Romans gives a detailed explanation of the Gospel and how we ought to respond to it. Other books deal with practical issues such as how the church should function, spiritual gifts, qualifications of church leaders, the role of women in ministry, and the relationship between law and grace.

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New Testament

9. General Letters

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The fourth section of the New Testament, General Letters, comprises eight books: Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. These are also known as General or Universal Epistles.

These letters are termed "general" because they were neither written by Apostle Paul nor written for a specific audience. While the letters written by Apostle Paul were named after the addressees, these general letters (except for the book of Hebrews) were named after their authors.

The writer and recipient of the book of Hebrews are unknown. It was written during a period of trial, to encourage the believers about the superiority of Jesus over the Old Testament system.

The book of James exposes dishonorable behavior and reminds readers that true faith ought to be demonstrated through actions. 1 Peter was written to comfort and encourage those facing persecution, while 2 Peter warns about falling prey to false teachers. 1 John teaches that true Christians ought to obey God's commands by loving others; 2 John warns against showing hospitality to false teachers; and 3 John affirms the support of Christian missionaries. The book of Jude warns about pretenders who have infiltrated the church and continued to live immoral lives.

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New Testament

10. Prophecy

The final section of the New Testament, Prophecy, comprises only one book: Revelation. This is the last book of the Bible.

Revelation is written in apocalyptic literary style that is highly symbolic, which makes it distinct from all the other New Testament books. The writer, simply identified as John, was given a series of visions and instructed to "write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." (Revelation 1:11)

The visions recorded in the book of Revelation may seem strange, and the letter may be addressed to the seven churches. But, together, with the Gospels and references to the Old Testament, they reveal God's message that is just as relevant to us today as it was to them.

God knows and judges our thoughts and our actions. He commends the good and condemns the bad. He warns us to repent of our sins and makes promises to those who remain faithful to Him until the end.

The book of Revelation tells us how God's plans for the restoration of the human race will finally come into fruition. Jesus has, by His sacrificial death, overcome all evil and paid the ransom for our sins. He will return one day as King to pronounce judgment and punishment over all evil, and to establish the new heaven and earth. Only true followers of Jesus will emerge victorious and inherit the new heaven and earth. They can look forward to living forever as God's children, in God's presence, in a perfect world without sin and death. This is the ultimate fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham.

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