

THE OLD TESTAMENT: STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE

I. MACRO-STRUCTURE

A. THE OLD TESTAMENT: PROTESTANT:

Our Protestant Bibles have 39 books in the OT, generally divided into four groups:

1. Pentateuch: 5 books

2. Historical Books: 12 books

3. Poetic Books: 5 books

4. Prophetic Books: 17 books
 - a. Major Prophets: 3 books
 - b. Minor Prophets: 12 books
 - c. Lamentations, Daniel

Comments on the different sections:

B. THE OLD TESTAMENT:

ROMAN CATHOLIC AND EASTERN ORTHODOX

Roman Catholic Bibles include the above-mentioned 39 books, in the same four sections and in the same general order, but also with 12 or 14 additional books (or portions thereof). These include the following:

1-2 Esdras; Tobit; Judith; Additions to Esther; Wisdom of Solomon; Ecclesiasticus (Sirach); Baruch, with Letter of Jeremiah; Song of the Three Young Men; Susanna; Bel and the Dragon; Prayer of Manasseh; 1-2 Maccabees.

Some Eastern Orthodox churches accept 4-5 books beyond these 12. These were written between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D., and are found in the earliest manuscripts of the LXX.

These extra books comprise _____, which comes from a classical Greek word, *apókryphos*, meaning (in a strict sense) "hidden, concealed"; later, the term came to mean anything obscure or hard to understand. Its first usage in ecclesiastic circles denoted "esoteric," so that apocryphal writings were those that could be understood only by those in an inner circle.

The present connotation is used among Protestants, referring to a fixed body of texts "outside" the original canon, and it became used in this way at the time of the Reformation.

At _____ (1545-1563), the Roman Catholic Church adopted them as part of its canon, although with secondary status.

C. THE OLD TESTAMENT: HEBREW (JEWISH)

The “Hebrew Bible” (our “Old Testament”) has 24 books, divided into three groups:

1. Law (*Torah*, which means “Law” or “Instruction”): 5 books

Same books as in Christian canons

2. Prophets (*Nebi'im*): 8 books

- a. _____ Prophets: 4 books

Joshua
Judges
Samuel
Kings

- b. _____ Prophets: 4 books

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
“The Twelve”

3. Writings (*Kethubim*): 11 books

Psalms
Job
Proverbs
Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther
Daniel
Ezra-Nehemiah
Chronicles

There was a descending order of authority in Jewish tradition among the three sections: **LAW ---> PROPHETS ---> WRITINGS**

Special Note:

II. MICRO-STRUCTURE

Verse Divisions:

These came into being some time in the early centuries of the Christian Era (the Mishnaic period in Judaism, ca. 200 A.D.).

They corresponded to _____.

There are _____ verses in the OT.

Paragraph Divisions:

In the early, pre-Christian, Hebrew manuscripts from Qumran, we have paragraph divisions, usually corresponding to the natural sense.

In the medieval Masoretic manuscripts, this practice continued, although sometimes with different boundaries for the different sections.

Reading cycles for the Pentateuch sprang up in Judaism, a three-year cycle of 154 lessons (*sedarim*) and a one-year cycle of 54 lessons (*parashiyoth*).

Chapter Divisions:

These are much later, done some time in the 13th century A.D., in Christian manuscripts of the OT (in the Vulgate).

Chapter divisions did not enter Hebrew manuscripts until a century or more later. There are slight differences in the chapter divisions between Hebrew and English traditions.

The verse divisions in English Bibles today goes back to Robert Stephanus, a book printer in Paris, who assigned verse numbers to the Hebrew verse divisions, within the chapter boundaries assigned by Stephen Langton. Stephanus' versification of the OT found its way into the Hebrew Bible printed edition of 1571.

III. THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Ultimately, **GOD** is the chief subject and protagonist of the Old Testament, indeed, the entire Bible.

The Bible is **not** a historical, scientific, sociological, psychological, anthropological, textbook.

It is a **THEOLOGICAL** one. It *may* be studied from these other vantage points, but it **must** be studied from this last perspective, or else it remains no different from Shakespeare or Plato.

It is God's divinely inspired revelation TO humans, containing propositional revelation, revelation through events recorded in historical narrative, and record of humans' response to God.

But, it is *more* than this, too. It points us ahead to something else. It's incomplete by itself.

Luke 24:27:

Luke 24:44:

IV. AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

Ultimately, God was the author of the entire Old Testament. Humanly speaking, he used human agents as the writers of his revelation.

On internal evidence, the Old Testament was written over a period of _____ years (ca. _____ B.C.), by perhaps 30 different human authors.

By contrast, the 27 books of the New Testament, were written over a matter of decades, by only ten authors: ca. 45-60 A.D. for the earliest Pauline letters; 60-100 A.D. for the Gospels and the other letters.

V. LANGUAGES

The Old Testament was originally written in two, related languages:

1. _____
2. _____

Most of it is written in _____.

The Aramaic sections are as follows:

Ezra 4:8-6:18	(official correspondence between Jerusalem and Persia)
Ezra 7:12-26	(official correspondence between Jerusalem and Persia)
Daniel 2:4b-7:28 ¹	
Jeremiah 10:11	(a denouncement of foreign gods, the gods whose worshipers spoke Aramaic)
Genesis 31:47	Two words, which were the Aramaic name for a place that Laban and Jacob named: Laban used <i>Jegar-sahadutha</i> (Aramaic) and Jacob used <i>Galeed</i> ; both names mean “heap of witness).

Aramaic is attested before 1000 B.C., but it became the _____ of the ancient Near Eastern world ca. 800 B.c., and lasted as such into New Testament times. After 332 B.C.—Alexander the Great’s conquests—however, Greek began pushing it aside as the *lingua franca*.

Biblical evidence for Aramaic as a _____:

1 Kings 18:

Biblical evidence for the dying out of Hebrew:

Nehemiah 13:

¹ Dan. 2:4a: “Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic....” (NASB); [*aramith*]