

THE DIVINE STRUCTURE OF SCRIPTURE

[adapted from materials by Mark Minnick & Layton Talbert]

The Bible is not only a book, but a library of 66 books. Although these 66 books were authored by some 40 different writers over a span of about 1500 years, the structure of the Bible is not just some random arrangement. If we are to understand the Bible properly and appreciate its message fully, we need to step back and see how its various parts fit together to make up the whole.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. The Pentateuch: Law (5 books; Genesis-Deuteronomy) [Creation-1400 BC]
 - A. The Contents
 - (1) Laws—to govern fallen man’s relationship to God (248 positive; 365 negative)
 - (2) Sacrifices—for those who could not keep God’s laws
 - B. The Issue: Holiness (Exo. 19:3-6; Lev. 19:1-2)
 - C. The Problem: Sin (Exo. 32 → broken law; Lev. 10 → broken sacrificial system)
 - D. The Purpose: *To show the need for a Perfect Priest who can offer a perfect sacrifice*
2. The Historical Books: History (12 books; Joshua-Esther) [1400-430 BC]
 - A. The Contents
 - (1) Optimism—which rose with each new leader
 - (2) Disappointment—following each leader’s failure
 - B. The Issue: Leadership (1 Sam. 13:14)
 - C. The Problem: Failure (the judges, Saul, David, Solomon, etc.)
 - D. The Purpose: *To show the need for a Perfect King who will never fail or disappoint and whom we can always follow*
3. The Poetical Books: Wisdom (5 books; Job-Song of Sol.) [ca. 1000 BC]
 - A. The Contents
 - (1) Wisdom—skill in living life God’s way
 - (2) Worship—having a proper perspective throughout life’s experiences
 - B. The Issue: The Fear of the Lord (as a consistent way of life)
 - C. The Problem: Foolishness, Profanity, & Injustice (they surround us and affect us)
 - D. The Purpose: *To show the need for One who is greater than David & wiser than Solomon—who practices all that He preached, and whose example we can follow without reservation*
4. The Prophetic Books: Prophecy (17 books; Isaiah-Malachi) [850-430 BC]
 - A. The Contents:
 - (1) Preaching—warning, exhorting, correcting, encouraging, wooing
 - (2) Prediction—some 456 prophecies of the Messiah
 - B. The Issue: Loyalty (to God and to His covenant) (Hos. 4:1; Mic. 6:6-8)

- C. The Problem: Disobedience and Defection (rejected the prophets)
- D. The Purpose: *To show the need for a Perfect Prophet with absolute authority to effect all of God's purposes and, with enabling grace, to effect obedience to His message*

The last-century English theologian, W. H. Griffith-Thomas, in his book *Principles of Sacred Theology*, says that if someone who was a “stranger” to the OT were reading it for the first time, he’d conclude that the OT is a volume full of “unexplained ceremonies, unfulfilled prophecies, and unsatisfied longings.” Dr. Thomas goes on to say, “It’s only when we turn to the New Testament, and take a careful look at what the New Testament has to say that we find the explanation of these questions and problems that the reader of the Old Testament might be given.”

THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The Gospels: Introduction (4 books; Matthew-John) [5 BC-AD 30]

An Introduction to the Person and Work of Christ

The Gospels are a gallery of the portraits of Christ, introducing Him to the reader, showing us who He is, what He is like, how He lived, and what He came to do.

2. The Book of Acts: History (1 book; Acts) [AD 30-61]

A Proclamation of the Person and Work of Christ

Acts presents the early history of the Christian church. In it, we see how the risen and ascended Christ works through His witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.

3. The Epistles: Explanation (21 books; Romans-Jude) [AD 45-95]

The Interpretation of the Person and Work of Christ.

The Epistles provide the theological ramifications of who Christ is and what He did. They explain the transforming impact that a relationship with Jesus has for our lives—not only in terms of eternity, but also in a practical sense for the here-and-now.

4. The Revelation: Prophecy (1 book; Revelation) [AD 95-dissolution of the heavens & earth]

The Consummation of the Person and Work of Christ.

It is clear from the opening vision (Rev. 1:10-18) that this final book is, above all, a “revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1). Many vivid images of future events flash before the reader’s eye, but superimposed over all of them is Jesus Christ—He is in control, He is the subject, He is the one who draws together everything from all history to bring it to its perfect resolution & culmination.

Conclusion

The Bible is not merely a book of theology or doctrine; it is preeminently the presentation of a Person: the Lord Jesus Christ—who He is, why He came, what He has done, and all that He is going to do. That is the theme of the whole Bible. The OT shows the need and prepares the way for Him; the NT displays His Person and His Work—past, present, and future. Whatever else we may gain from reading and studying our Bibles, it should most of all fill our vision with Jesus Christ. “The whole Bible is a scarlet cord on which are strung a thousand pearls of priceless truth that frame a cameo bearing the face of our precious Lord” (author unknown).